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The unnoticed apogee of Atlanticism?: US-Western European relations during the early Reagan era

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The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism?

US-Western European Relations During the Early Reagan Era

The 1980s did not start well for Western Europe. In domestic political terms the era was one of acute polarization, with Britain, France and Germany all riven by intense ideological competition.¹ This left-wing, right-wing battle took place, moreover, against a backdrop of acute economic downturn. In most European economies, the new decade did not bring the end of the problems that had beset the global economy during the 1970s, but instead their prolongation, with growth anaemic or absent altogether and unemployment remaining stubbornly high if not still rising. Western Europe's predicament, furthermore, was made worse by the contrast between its ongoing economic stagnation and the renewed growth of its principal international competitors, the United States and Japan. It may have been 'morning in America', but on the other side of the Atlantic dawn showed no sign of breaking.² For a continent that had grown accustomed in the course of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s to higher growth rates than the Americans this was frustrating indeed, as was the seemingly inexorable rise of the Japanese economy which had overtaken Germany as the capitalist world's second largest in the course of the previous decade.³

The early 1980s are also generally perceived to have been a time of stagnation as far as European integration was concerned. A reasonably strong Commission Presidency under Roy Jenkins was followed from 1980 by a much weaker period of leadership under Gaston Thorn. The Council of Ministers meanwhile still seemed leaden in its decision-making and prone to total impasse.⁴ A greater use of qualified majority voting (q.m.v.) was widely canvassed as the solution to this problem, but there seemed little short term prospect of this happening. Both France and the new member states, Britain in particular, seemed wedded to a rather dogmatic (and

¹ Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: the politics and social upheaval of the Thatcher era* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009); Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, J.L. Bianco (eds.), *Les années Mitterrand: les années du changement, 1981-84* (Paris: Perrin, 2001); Andreas Wirsching, *Abschied vom Provisorium: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1982-1990 - Band 6: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik 1982-1989/90* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006)

² James Patterson, *Restless Giant: the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

³ Dennis B. Smith, *Japan since 1945: the rise of an economic superpower* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995)

⁴ Desmond Dinan, *Europe Recast: A History of European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 177-85

historically questionable) interpretation of the Luxembourg Compromise which greatly limited the scope for q.m.v. and there was no consensus for actual treaty change.⁵ And the European Council also struggled for direction, losing much time over the question of Britain's budgetary contribution.⁶ This row proved highly time consuming and acrimonious, despite the relatively small size of the actual sums involved, and the irrelevance of this dispute to the much broader and more crucial question of what the EC could contribute to Western Europe's recovery. Overall, the European Community of the early 1980s seemed to have little chance of providing the answer to the region's deep economic difficulties.

Nor were Transatlantic relations that much better, according to the traditional account at least.⁷ Part of the discord sprang from a record number of trade disputes between the EC and the Reagan Administration, the subject of Duccio Basosi's contribution to this volume. At a more fundamental level, however, the difficulties reflected a serious divergence between Washington and most European capitals in both economic policy and approach to the cold war. The economic priorities of Reagan's America thus differed markedly from most European governments (Thatcher's Britain would be a partial exception) and a similar gap had opened up in readings of the cold war. Whereas the American priority in the early 1980s seem to be to adopt a newly forceful, if not confrontational, stance towards the Soviet Union even at the expense of a serious increase in East-West tension, most Western European states sought instead to maintain important elements of the European détente of the 1970s.⁸ Reconciling such divergent goals would not prove to be an easy matter. And to make matters worse, Reagan's public image in Europe replete with suggestions that the former actor was an ignorant and dangerous 'cowboy', intent on taking the world to the edge of nuclear war, only increased the pressure on European governments, especially those of the centre-left, to distance themselves from Washington.

⁵ For an attempt to debunk this interpretation by one of the authors of the original compromise, see Rolf Lahr, 'Die Legende vom "Luxemburger Kompromiß"', *Europa-Archiv*, vol.38, no.8, 1983

⁶ Stephen Wall, *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-17

⁷ Geir Lundestad, *Empire by Integration: the United States and European Integration, 1945-1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

⁸ For the US approach, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and The Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007), pp.339-365

This chapter will not seek dramatically to overturn this picture of either European or Transatlantic affairs. Indeed the opening section will confirm the existence of a number of important divergences between the incoming US administration and its principal European allies. It will also confirm Reagan's European image problem. Based on the first crop of archival releases relating to the early 1980s, primarily from the Reagan Presidential Library in California the chapter will, however, seek to add a level of nuance and complexity to this account. It will thus suggest that despite the periodic Transatlantic disputes that punctuate the period, some of the underlying mechanics of the partnership between the United States and their principal Western European allies continued to work surprisingly smoothly, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Unlike some early periods of Transatlantic discord, in other words, disputes over substance did not feed through into rows about how Transatlantic dialogue should be conducted. Second it will argue that the very complexity of interchange and interaction between the two sides of the Atlantic, involving as it did a huge array of different institutional links, makes it vital for any historian seeking to arrive at a balanced judgement of Transatlantic ties to look beyond the headline grabbing personal relationships between Reagan and his European counterparts. And third it will suggest that the structures of Transatlantic cooperation during this period were actually extraordinarily favourable to European influence in Washington during this period. The periodic complaints of European leaders who believed that Reagan's America paid little heed to their interests and was indeed growing away from the 'old world' do therefore need to be taken with more than a pinch of salt.

West-West Tension over East-West Conflict

At the heart of political tensions that characterised Transatlantic relations during the early Reagan years was a basic divergence in cold war tactics. This in turn was aggravated by a mismatch in the general political cycles of several of the key Western powers, with the United States and Britain moving to the right well before West Germany did the same, and France moving in the opposite direction entirely. The replacement of the centrist Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – the 'most pro-American French leader since World War II' according to Helmut Schmidt, the German

Chancellor⁹ – with François Mitterrand whose Socialist led coalition government initially also included several communist ministers was bound to complicate Transatlantic relations.¹⁰ And the degree of West-West misunderstanding was increased still further by the very different levels of trade with Eastern Europe carried out by the United States and its main European partners. Cold war gestures that made political sense in Washington and carried an acceptable level of economic cost, were much harder to swallow for Western European countries intent on increasing their foreign trade outlets not contracting them.

The leaders of Western Europe were not unaware of the rise in East-West tension during the late 1970s and early 1980s. On the contrary, as Schmidt never tired of reminding the Americans, he had been much faster than the Carter Administration to recognise the threat to European security constituted by the deployment of a new generation of intermediate range Soviet nuclear missiles (the famous SS-20s), and had expended a huge amount of political capital in pushing for an effective western response.¹¹ This had eventually arrived in the form of the December 1979 ‘double track’ decision, which committed NATO to deploying a new generation of American intermediate range missiles in Europe (the Cruise and Pershing II missiles) while simultaneously seeking to remove the SS-20s through disarmament talks with Moscow thereby making the Cruise and Pershings unnecessary.¹² Similarly, all of the European governments recognised that Soviet actions in Afghanistan in 1979 and in Poland during the last months of 1981 constituted serious cold war crises to which the West needed to respond.¹³ Where differences arose, however, was in deciding *how* to respond.

In the United States the whole process of détente had become publicly tarnished, viewed by many as relaxation in cold war tension that the Soviet Union had cunningly exploited in order to strengthen itself militarily and seize new opportunities for expansion in the Third World. As a presidential candidate in both 1976 and 1980

⁹ Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California (henceforward RRPL), NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder: FRG (1/20/81-6/30/81) (4), Memcon of Reagan-Schmidt meeting, 21.5.1981

¹⁰ Robert Frank, ‘L’ “Effet Mitterrand” à l’étranger: un “état de grace”, un jeu de miroir et une politique étrangère de l’image’ in Berstein et. al. *François Mitterrand*, pp.119-20

¹¹ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder: FRG (1/20/81-6/30/81) (4), Memcon of Reagan-Schmidt meeting, 21.5.1981

¹² Leopoldo Nuti, ‘The origins of the 1979 dual track decision – a survey’ in Leopoldo Nuti (ed.), *The crisis of détente in Europe: from Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp.57-71

¹³ Douglas Selva, ‘The politics of the lesser evil: the West, the Polish Crisis, and the CSCE Review Conference in Madrid, 1981-3’ in Nuti, *The Crisis of détente in Europe*, pp.41-54

Reagan had been particularly critical of détente, leading President Gerald Ford, for instance, to ban the use of the word in the course of his unsuccessful campaign for re-election.¹⁴ In his very first press conference upon becoming President in 1981, Reagan dismissed détente as ‘a one-way street that the Soviet Union has used to pursue its own aims’.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, therefore, Reagan had no incentive to talk of détente once he began to set the course of US foreign policy. On the contrary, many of his most forthright champions amongst the American conservative movement strongly applauded his critical rhetoric towards the Soviet Union and praised him for not going out of his way to talk to his Russian counterparts. Summit meetings, many US conservatives feared, were simply opportunities for wily Soviet leaders to play upon the many pressures felt by a democratic western leader and to trick the West into unnecessary concessions.¹⁶ It was therefore no accident that there were no US-Soviet summits in the course of Reagan’s first term. In Western Europe, by contrast, there had been much less of a backlash against détente. Indeed the prestige of the *Ostpolitik* process that had normalised the Federal Republic’s relations with Eastern Europe and with East Germany in particular, and of that other apogee of European détente, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), remained generally high. The disarmament talks component of the dual track decision was also seen as being of immense importance.¹⁷ European leaders were hence under pressure to go on talking to the Soviets rather than shunning direct dialogue. Schmidt thus welcomed Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, to Germany in November 1981¹⁸; Giscard d’Estaing visited the Soviet Union in May 1980¹⁹; and Mitterrand travelled to the Soviet Union to meet Konstantin Chernenko, the new Soviet leader, in 1984, did so again less than a year later to attend Chernenko’s funeral and to have talks with Mikhail Gorbachev and other Politburo members, and in October 1985 became the first Western leader to be visited by Gorbachev since he had become General

¹⁴ Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 1994), p. 581

¹⁵ Cited by Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 1994), p.8

¹⁶ Robert Samuel, ‘Conservative Intellectuals and the Reagan-Gorbachev Summits’, *Cold War History*, 12/1, 2012, 135-157.

¹⁷ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder, Germany, FRG (1/20/81-6/30/81) (4), Memcon of Reagan-Schmidt meeting, 21.5.1981

¹⁸ *New York Times*, 26.11.1981

¹⁹ *New York Times*, 19.5.1980

Secretary.²⁰ Margaret Thatcher also attended Chernenko's funeral, having previously met Gorbachev when he travelled to London in December 1984.²¹ And such contrasting attitudes towards top-level dialogue were emblematic of a more general divergence of attitudes towards how to behave vis-à-vis Moscow. Schmidt was representative of a much more generalised European attitude when he told the US Ambassador in December 1981 that 'The way to deal with Moscow is not... by speeches and interviews. These... are not read by the Soviets. Moscow must be dealt with quietly.'²² Face to face dialogue, not long-distance rhetorical broadsides, was the key policy tool in dealing with the Soviet Union.

Actual policy divergence was moreover amplified by the very different public debates on either side of the Atlantic. Personal relations between Reagan and his European counterparts were often quite good. Schmidt for instance was highly commendatory of Reagan's performance in the aftermath of the Ottawa G7 summit in July 1981, letting it be known to the US Embassy in Bonn that 'He likes the President as a person, understands what he is trying to do, and is sympathetic to him.'²³ The same telegram noted that the mood in London about the summit was even more euphoric. And there is plenty of other evidence of the close personal rapport that quickly developed between Thatcher and the President.²⁴ But in neither Britain nor Germany did the personal warmth between the national leader and the US President easily translate into more general public sympathy for the new American leader. Instead, the image of Reagan as a reckless and somewhat shallow former B-movie actor who knew little about international affairs and was prepared to take ill-judged risks with the security of the world in general and Europe in particular, was fortified by the sound-bites from America's own much more hardline debate about the cold

²⁰ *New York Times*, 24.6.1984; *The Guardian*, 14.3.1985; Andrei Grachev, 'From the common European home to European confederation: François Mitterrand and Mikhail Gorbachev in search of the road to a greater Europe' in Frédéric Bozo et al (eds.), *Europe and the End of the Cold War: a reappraisal* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p.208; the author would like to thank Marie-Pierre Rey for her help in identifying the dates of Franco-Soviet summit meetings.

²¹ *The Guardian*, 14.3.1985

²² RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG (9/1/81-12/31/81) (3), Bonn to Washington 24153, 8.12.1981

²³ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG (7/1/81-8/31/81) (1), Bonn to Washington 14425, 29.7.1981

²⁴ See for instance the extracts of Nicholas Henderson's diary about Thatcher's visit to Washington in February-March 1981 reproduced on the Thatcher Foundation website: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110525> (consulted 28.9.2010)

war that drifted over the Atlantic.²⁵ Gaffes such as the President's 1982 comments into what he supposedly thought was an inactive microphone: 'My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes' only made matters worse.²⁶ The famous mock up *Gone With the Wind* poster produced by the peace movement of Reagan as Rhett Butler holding Thatcher as Scarlett O'Hara in his arms against a backdrop of a mushroom cloud, complete with the tag line 'She promised to follow him to the end of the earth. He promised to organise it!' was perhaps an extreme example of European anxieties.²⁷ But as a number of telegrams from both the US embassy in London and that in Bonn illustrate, fears that anti-American sentiment was growing across Western Europe were taken very seriously by US diplomats. A March 1982 dispatch from London summarised the problem: 'The upshot is that we no longer enjoy the benefit of the doubt in Britain – or we suspect elsewhere in Europe. On the contrary, our every move is scrutinized for evidence that we are using our power irresponsibly.'²⁸

In such circumstances, European leaders found it very hard to look favourably upon US urgings that their countries adopt hard line cold war stances, especially when to do so would be both financially and politically expensive. This was true of the debate about NATO rearmament where US pressure for a generalised arms build up was a source of discomfort for those such as Schmidt who were conscious of the high political price that was already being paid within the ruling SPD party in particular in order to get the dual track decision through, and acutely aware of the budgetary constraints faced by even a comparatively well performing European economy like that of West Germany. The pained (if discreet) reaction of the German government to the US announcement that it intended to resume production of neutron bomb warheads underlined the ongoing political sensitivity of the whole rearmament debate in West Germany and Western Europe more generally.²⁹ And European discomfort

²⁵ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG (9/1/81-12/31/81) (3), Bonn to Washington 24153, 8.12.1981

²⁶ See http://www.wavsource.com/snds_2010-09-26_3219538617579815/people/politics/reagan_bomb_x.wav (consulted 28.9.2010)

²⁷ See <http://www.hakes.com/images.asp?ItemNo=21773&ImageNo=001> (consulted 28.9.2010)

²⁸ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom (9/1/81-3/31/82) (1/4), London to Washington 5069, 8.3.1982

²⁹ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG (7/1/81-8/31/81) (1), Bonn to Washington 15861, 18.8.1981. To understand quite why the whole neutron bomb question was quite so sensitive in

was even greater in response to the recurrent US pressure to punish the Soviet Union for episodes such as the declaration of Martial Law in Poland by means of restrictions in economic interchange across the Iron Curtain. The most notorious such controversy, that surrounding the American attempt to impede West European companies supplying components to the gas pipeline running from the Soviet Europe to Western Europe, is the subject of a separate chapter elsewhere in this volume. But the pipeline affair was only one of a succession of Transatlantic rows. In each the US desire to avoid economic transfers that might provide solace to a struggling Soviet economy and the interruption of which would also be a highly visible sign of Western disapproval of Soviet actions, collided head on with not only a European belief that trade was a sign of healthy East-West relations, but also an understandable apprehension about forsaking commercial opportunities at a time when all of the economies of the region were underperforming.³⁰ The fact that most Western European countries had also built up much more intensive commercial ties with Eastern Europe than had the United States also meant that Germany, France or Britain had much more to lose from any recourse to economic sanctions as a form of cold war pressure. As table 1 demonstrates, all four of the larger Western European power did significantly more business with Eastern Europe than did the United States; forfeiting or even endangering such contacts in the name of Western solidarity was hence not an easy step to take at a time of generalised economic gloom.

| US\$ millions | Imports from | % of Total | Exports to | % of Total |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1980 | Comecon | Imports | Comecon | Exports |
| United States | 1483 | 0.59 | 3844 | 1.8 |
| France | 5325 | 3.96 | 4971 | 4.48 |
| FRG | 8575 | 4.61 | 9568 | 4.99 |
| Great Britain | 2133 | 1.8 | 2545 | 2.2 |
| Italy | 5290 | 5.37 | 2824 | 3.59 |

Table 1. Trade with Eastern Bloc. (Based upon *OECD Statistics of Foreign Trade, Series B, 1980* (Paris: OECD, 1981))

Germany, see Kristina Spohr Readman, 'Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb, 1975-1979', *Diplomacy and State Craft*, 21/2 (2010), pp. 259-285.

³⁰ See also Werner D. Lippert, 'Economic diplomacy and East-West trade during the era of détente: strategy or obstacle for the West?' in Nuti (ed.), *The Crisis of Détente in Europe*, pp.190-201.

All told therefore the early Reagan years were an era characterised by a degree of Transatlantic discord. The standard account is therefore largely confirmed by the first wave of archival evidence. But what the archives also reveal is that notwithstanding the multiple tactical disagreements that arose between the United States and its principal European allies in this period, the underlying mechanisms of the Transatlantic relationship continued to run quite smoothly. The second main section of this chapter will thus seek to demonstrate what went on working despite the rows outlined above.

A working relationship

A decade earlier the situation had been very different. Disagreements in the late 1960s and early 1970s between the US and the main Western European powers had helped fuel Europe's quest to develop a multilateral mechanism for coordinating foreign policy amongst the European Community member states and had coloured the initial American response to the launch of European Political Cooperation (EPC).³¹ Washington had not tried to obstruct Europe's attempt to coordinate its members' foreign policy stances directly. But Henry Kissinger had struggled to conceal his disdain for the inevitable slowness of multilateral foreign policy coordination and had made clear his annoyance at being obliged to speak to European spokesmen who not only came from small countries (Denmark held the EC presidency when the first EPC positions on Transatlantic affairs were communicated to Washington) but were also not empowered to negotiate, only inform.³² Kissinger had also been involved in a heavy-handed attempt to insist that the US be consulted at an early stage of EPC deliberations, and had reacted with anger to the initial European attempts to outline a policy towards the Middle East.³³ Disagreement about substance – in particular the belief that most European governments were too pro-Arab and too committed to

³¹ Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); for a slightly different take on large parts of the same process, see also Aurélie Gfeller, *Building A European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-74* (New York: Berghahn, 2012).

Aurélie Élisabeth Gfeller.

³² Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp.140-183

³³ Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 184-247

multilateral détente with the Soviets – had thus blended dangerously with US disapprobation of Europe’s fledgling foreign policy coordination mechanisms. Kissinger’s famous and tactless Year of Europe speech in which he differentiated between the United States and its global concerns, and Europe and its purely regional ones, was only the most public manifestation of a strongly held belief that Europe should not seek to involve itself collectively in matters that were best handled unilaterally by the United States.³⁴

By the early 1980s, however, the United States seemed to have come to terms with the EC’s attempts to exercise some influence in the field of foreign policy and to have established a pattern of practical, day-to-day cooperation with the EPC structures. The change was perhaps most obvious in the case of Middle Eastern diplomacy – the field in which, a decade earlier, the Americans had been most outspoken in their criticism of European intervention. Thus, in the autumn of 1981, the US Embassy in London kept in close touch with the British EC Presidency about the discussions underway in the EPC about the involvement of four European countries in the planned Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) designed to oversee the Egyptian-Israeli peace accord signed at Camp David.³⁵ Eight years earlier by contrast Kissinger had gone out of his way to ensure that no European Community countries were invited to participate in the UN Emergency Force established to police the 1973 cease-fire.³⁶ The American documents do suggest admittedly that some level of Israeli discomfort remained about the overall European approach to the situation in the Middle East. But whereas in the early 1970s such Israeli misgivings had only magnified the United States’ own unhappiness at the European role, in the early 1980s the Americans were actively involved in seeking to calm Israel’s anxieties and arguing strongly for a European role.³⁷ In similar fashion, Washington welcomed European activism in some of the most contentious East-West issues of the era, Alexander Haig, the Secretary of State, briefing the President before his meeting with Peter Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary that ‘We strongly support the British-

³⁴ On the Year of Europe episode, see also various contributions to Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. part III.

³⁵ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 9/1/81-3/31/82 (2 of 4), London to Washington 20842, 27.10.1981

³⁶ Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, p.202

³⁷ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 9/1/81-3/31/82 (3 of 4), Haig to Carrington 6631, 23.11.1981

led EC initiative on Afghanistan.³⁸ And even over Poland where undoubted differences of approach did emerge between Washington and many of the Western European countries involved, this divergence did not reflect a US failure to engage with the complex machinery of European foreign policy making. Rather the reverse: in the weeks immediately after the declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981, the United States government not only lobbied each of the four largest EC states directly but also invited all ten EC ambassadors in Washington to a lunch with the Secretary of State designed to stiffen the collective position of their countries.³⁹

All of this does rather suggest that historians working on Transatlantic relations in the 1980s need to move beyond the usual consensus that the EPC process was disappointing and largely ineffective. The first decade of foreign policy coordination amongst the Nine (and then the Ten) had not had the revolutionary effects that some of the early rhetoric about European emancipation from the United States had suggested. The apogee of belief that Europe might soon be able to behave in a tightly coordinated fashion on a global level, and maintain its unity whether dealing with cold war enemies or close allies like the US, which had been reached at Copenhagen at the end of 1973, had not endured.⁴⁰ Instead the realisation had sunk in that in matters Transatlantic especially, bilateral exchanges with Washington would remain as important if not more so than any internal-European coordination.⁴¹ But neither had it been a total failure. Instead, the European member states had built up a pattern of low-key, but useful cooperation on many of the key foreign policy issues of the day – and this manner of working had been accepted as part of the diplomatic landscape by most of Europe's international interlocutors, and the United States in particular. In many instances, admittedly, the EPC process resulted only in words of condemnation rather than action. But as examples from the early 1980s ranging from the Polish crisis to the Falklands War demonstrate, the mechanism could at times enable the EC to flank strong words with limited economic sanctions and other punitive measures.

³⁸ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 1/20/81-8/31/81 (3 of 6), Haig memorandum for the President, 16.7.1981

³⁹ For the *démarches* to Carrington and Genscher (which refer to similar messages being sent to Cheysson and Colombo) see RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 9/1/81-3/31/82 (3 of 4), Haig to Carrington 668, 1.1.1982 and Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (2), Haig to Genscher 669, 1.1.1982; for the reference to the lunch for EC ambassadors, Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (2), State Department to Bonn 714, 2.1.1982

⁴⁰ Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp.240-7

⁴¹ Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, esp. 316-22

From a US perspective the emergence of the EPC process did not require too sharp a change in its *modus operandi* towards Europe. Washington had always tried to conduct most of its diplomacy towards Western Europe through bilateral discussions with the leading European powers. This remained a largely effective tactic under EPC rules, since frequent US exchanges with Europe's three largest powers (Britain, France and Germany), plus sometimes the Italians and whichever state held the EC's rotating Presidency, would normally suffice to remain fully in touch with whatever was being talked about amongst the Nine or Ten, and to enable the Americans to exercise quite a strong degree of influence over the outcome of the multilateral European discussions. Furthermore, at a time like the 1980s when the principal US concern about Europe was not the danger of overactive European diplomacy – the issue that seems at times to have worried Kissinger - but rather the prospect of too anaemic a response by the Europeans to the key foreign policy issues of the day, any mechanism that might help encourage Europe to do more in the foreign policy field was generally to be welcomed. The whole tone of an October 1981 message from Haig to Carrington was highly revealing in this respect, since the US Secretary of State was quite open about the differences that existed between the US and European positions vis-à-vis the Middle East, but emphasised the American desire to see Europe engaged in the process: 'Let me assure you, Peter, in handling this issue we will be very careful in our public and private comments not to characterize EC participation as anything over than support for the treaty of peace. We certainly will not characterize it as an EC underwriting of the whole Camp David process. Let us agree to disagree about the essential if there is to be a peace process in any form.' But the key was that the EC reached a position which would enable European member states to participate in the MFO.⁴²

The first wave of archival releases does therefore suggest a greater role for the EPC in Transatlantic dialogue during this era than might perhaps have been expected. Europe had certainly not acquired the single telephone number of which Kissinger was reputed to have spoken. On the contrary, bilateral relationships between the US leadership and the governments of each of the main European countries continued to matter greatly. The American need to exercise influence over multilateral European deliberations had indeed only added yet one more subject to the already lengthy

⁴² RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 9/1/81-3/31/82 (3 of 4), Haig to Carrington 285070, 26.10.1981

agenda of transatlantic dialogue between Washington and the principal European capitals. But the Americans clearly did pay some heed to what emerged from the EPC process and regarded the mechanism as having some utility in terms of fostering Western unity. A comprehensive review of Transatlantic relations during this era will therefore have to flank its discussion of evolving US-German, US-French or Anglo-American relations, with an investigation of how much influence the Americans were able to wield over Europe's laborious but sometimes surprisingly effective search for foreign policy coordination.

A very multi-layered relationship

A second general point that needs to be made about Transatlantic relations in the early 1980s and which emerges partly from the analysis above, is to emphasize the enormous institutional complexity of links between Western Europe and North America during this period. International historians of the post-1945 period have long grown accustomed to navigating their way across a Western terrain full of those multiple institutions established in the first decade and a half after the end of the Second World War. Some of these institutions were global, like the United Nations structures. Others encompassed just the western world: the Bretton Woods institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). And still others were specifically Western European such as the Council of Europe, the European Communities, and their looser outlying rival and shadow, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). An extensive historiography has grown up about many of their origins.⁴³ There is also a smaller, less well-known, literature which charts the course of an earlier wave of international institution building which occurred during the interwar years, primarily although not exclusively centred on the

⁴³ The best way into the historiography about European institution building is probably through Antonio Varsori and Wolfram Kaiser (eds), *European Union History: Themes and Debates* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, 2010); the historical literature about more global bodies is less developed but see Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: the United Nations and the Quest for World Government* (London: Allen Lane, 2006); Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Armand van Dormael, *Bretton Woods: birth of a monetary system* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Harold James, *International Monetary Cooperation since Bretton Woods* (Washington D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1996); Thomas Zeiler, *American Trade and Power in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Douglas A. Irwin et al (eds), *The Genesis of GATT* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

League of Nations.⁴⁴ A number of these bodies had survived the demise during the Second World War of their parent institution. Only just beginning to be seriously studied by contrast is a third major wave of institution building that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s and which saw fairly extensive change at global, Western and European levels. Thus at a global level, international economic power relationships were challenged, if not yet fundamentally altered by the rise of a southern challenge to the global predominance of the industrialised powers of the northern hemisphere. This was expressed through new structures such as United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), better known as the North-South dialogue.⁴⁵ In Western terms a new, more hierarchical series of structures developed during much the same period, reflecting a desire by the larger powers to increase their control amidst severe global economic crisis. The most formalised of these new entities was the G5, later G6, and then G7, which brought together the world's major western economies⁴⁶; less structured, but equally significant, was the emergence during the Ford administration period of a pattern of routine consultation on most foreign policy issues between Washington and the three largest European powers, West Germany, France and Britain. Kissinger referred to this at one point as 'a *de facto* political steering group', but for reasons of tact, few other chose to use this name or the still more inflammatory term of 'directorate'.⁴⁷ The pattern of meetings and multiple four-way exchanges of telegrams and messages, however, persisted from the short-lived Ford Presidency, through the Carter years, and into the Reagan era. And at a European level, this era of institution building saw the development not just of pan-European bodies, spanning the cold war division of the continent, like the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), but also of a whole new generation of European Community connected structures. Most important of these was the birth of the

⁴⁴ F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: its life and times, 1920-1946* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986); Carl Bouchard, *Le Citoyen et l'ordre mondial, 1914-1919 : le rêve d'une paix durable au lendemain de la Grande Guerre en France, en Grande-Bretagne et aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: Pedone, 2008); Patricia Clavin, *The failure of economic diplomacy : Britain, Germany, France and the United States, 1931-36* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995)

⁴⁵ See Giuliano Garavini, *Dopo gli imperi: integrazione europea nello scontro Nord-Sud* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2009)

⁴⁶ See Robert Putnam & Nicholas Bayne, *Hanging Together: the Seven Power Summits* (London: Heinemann, 1984) and Johannes von Karczewski, "*Weltwirtschaft ist unser Schicksal*" *Helmut Schmidt und die Schaffung der Weltwirtschaftsgipfel* (Bonn: Dietz, 2008)

⁴⁷ Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, NSC Country Files, Box 3, France (6), Henry Kissinger brief for President's meeting with Jean Sauvagnargues, 27.9.1975

European Council in 1975, but also of some significance for Transatlantic interchange was the development of the EPC process alluded to earlier, not to mention the start of institutionalised monetary cooperation in Europe through the European Monetary System (EMS).⁴⁸

All of this meant that by the 1980s, cooperation between Western Europe and the United States was carried out through an unprecedentedly thick layer of multilateral structures. To take but one practical example, the western reaction to the December 1981 imposition of Martial Law in Poland brought into play a plethora of institutions, traceable back to all three waves of international institutionalisation. At perhaps the most obvious level, both NATO and the Community structures, including the various EPC fora, sprang into action, as western powers sought, not without difficulty, to devise a common stance.⁴⁹ Formal meetings of this sort were flanked not just by Haig's attempt to lobby more informally the assembled ambassadors of the Ten, referred to above, but also by an extensive mobilisation of the pattern of US exchanges with the European big four (the Italians were included on this occasion). In mid-January for instance Haig despatched broadly similar, but subtly different messages to Genscher, Carrington, Claude Cheysson and Emilio Colombo.⁵⁰ The British and German messages for instance started rather differently, with Carrington being praised for his efforts to stiffen the stance of the Ten, and Genscher criticised for the hesitations which his country had shown about too firm a line on Poland, but soon converged on an identical text underlining the importance of continuing Western forcefulness on this issue. A subsequent State Department telegram also referred explicitly to the US hope that 'that quadripartite consultations and cooperation will

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, 'Filling the EEC Leadership Vacuum? The Creation of the European Council in 1974', *Cold War History*, 10/3 (2010); *ibid.*, 'The Emergence of a European Bloc? A trans- and supranational history of European monetary cooperation, from the failure of the Werner Plan to the creation of the European Monetary System, 1974-1978', PhD European University Institute, Florence, 2010; Peter Ludlow, *The Making of the European Monetary System: a case-study of the politics of the European Community* (London: Butterworth, 1982)

⁴⁹ For the NATO response, see <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c820111a.htm> (accessed 5.1.2011); for the text of the initial British Presidency démarche made on behalf of the EPC, see RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, United Kingdom Folder 9/1/81-3/31/82 (1/4), London to Washington 4895, 23.12.1981; for the text of the EPC statement in January 1982, see Bulletin EC 12 – 1981, p.12, available online at http://aei.pitt.edu/5584/01/002282_1.pdf (accessed 5.1.2011)

⁵⁰ The Carrington telegram is in RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 20, Folder United Kingdom 9/1/81-3/31/82 (1/4), Haig to London 668, 1.1.1982; that to Genscher in RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (5/11), Haig to Bonn 669, 1.1.1982. It is clear from the text that similar messages were sent also to the French and Italian foreign ministers.

continue to be a key element in determining Western policy in the Polish situation.⁵¹ Outside the confines of purely Western coordination, meanwhile, American and European representatives took full advantage of global structures like the UN and pan-European bodies such as the CSCE follow-up conference underway in Madrid publicly to denounce General Jaruzelski's move and to condemn the Soviet Union as primarily responsible for the crack down. At IMF level meanwhile, Poland's hopes of joining the organisation were deep frozen because of the declaration of Martial Law. And even some of the surviving interwar creations were mobilised to the cause, the Americans and West Europeans agreeing to try to use the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as a channel through which to retain links with the *Solidarnosc* trade union in Poland and thereby make possible an ongoing dialogue with opposition forces within the Eastern bloc.⁵²

Few of these multiple Western actions seem to have proved particularly effective in the short term at least. Martial law would eventually be lifted in January 1983. But a full restoration of dialogue between the ruling Communist party and the opposition would have to await the second half of the decade. Nor is it at all clear how important a factor international pressure proved in bringing about these developments.⁵³ Of rather greater relevance to a chapter focusing on the West-West dynamics of the period in question, though, is the hugely multi-faceted and complex nature of the international response. In the type of crisis which would once have triggered purely unilateral reactions by individual great powers, the Western response by the early 1980s had become something that was organised, coordinated and mediated through a wide array of interlinked and overlapping international structures.

As a result any historian seeking to reconstruct completely the international political history of this period cannot restrict themselves just to the key bilateral relationships, however fascinating these might be. Nor is it safe to study one single international institution in isolation, focusing solely on NATO for instance or the IMF. Instead, the historian needs to be aware of the interplay between all these

⁵¹ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (5/11), State to Bonn, Paris & London 714, 2.1.1982

⁵² The use of all of these fora is discussed in RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (5/11), State to Bonn, Paris & London 714, 2.1.1982; see also Selvage, 'The politics of a lesser evil' & Sarah Snyder, 'The CSCE and the Atlantic Alliance: Forging a new consensus in Madrid', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 8/1 (2010), pp.61-2

⁵³ See Gregory F. Domber, 'Rumblings in Eastern Europe: Western pressure on Poland's moves towards democratic transformation' in Bozo (ed.), *Europe and the End of the Cold War*, pp.51-3

different layers of diplomacy and interdependence, to take account of how rows in one forum might or might not spill over into other seeming unrelated discussions in a different institutional setting, and to trace action and inaction from one type of international organisation to another. They also need to develop both a strong stomach for seemingly arcane rows about why one institutional forum might be preferable for a given action than another – witness for example the lengthy debate between Haig and Genscher in 1982 about whether the Americans' campaign to limit the export credits Western governments accorded to companies wishing to sell to the Soviet Union should be something dealt with inside or outside of the OECD⁵⁴ – and good antennae as to how a seemingly innocuous decision to change the institutional setting might in fact be a serious change of policy.

Traditional big personality history connected to the ups and downs of relationships between Reagan, Thatcher, Schmidt, Kohl, Mitterrand or Giuliano Andreotti will continue to have both its relevance and its obvious appeal. Indeed in an era when summitry, both bilateral and multilateral had become more realistic and more frequent thanks to easy air travel and a greater readiness by many of the key leaders to speak to one another by telephone, such personal relationships arguably mattered more than ever before. But those who are drawn to the good quotes and the intriguing personalities of the top level encounters need at very least to be aware of the way in which the patterns of change that can be observed at summit level could be both magnified and tempered in all of the other different levels of interconnection amongst the principal Western powers. Harmony or discord at the highest level did not, in other words, necessarily translate directly into similar patterns at all levels of each intergovernmental relationship, nor did alterations in the bilateral relationship inevitably feed through unchanged into the many multilateral fora within which the major powers interacted. Rather, Transatlantic relations had become ever-more complicated, with somewhat different dynamics at work in each of the different contexts within which Western governments interacted. To a large degree this was of course a source of strength, not one of weakness. It meant, for instance, that even a very poor relationship between leaders was unlikely entirely to undermine links between each Western power. But the depth and the multifaceted nature of Transatlantic ties and the complexity of the institutional web that bound the West

⁵⁴ RRPL, NSC Country Files, Box 14, Folder FRG 1/1/1982-30/9/82 (4/11), State to Bonn 67025, 13.3.1982

together does make the task of any historical analyst seeking to chart the evolution of US-European relations immeasurably more challenging.

European over-representation

A third point that becomes evident once the full degree of interaction between Western Europe and the United States is considered is that the repeated European complaints about their lack of influence in Washington during this period need to be viewed with a degree of scepticism. The Reagan administration certainly did not always act as Europeans would have wanted it to. And as the opening section of this chapter underlined, there were no shortage of spats and disputes between Washington and its main European allies during this period, whether over economic policy or the conduct of the cold war. But such misunderstandings were not the product of an alliance that was becoming structurally less conducive to European influence in Washington. On the contrary, the institutional architecture of the early 1980s was such as to give Western Europeans a greater voice in America than in any previous post-1945 period of Transatlantic relations.

The potential scope for European influence was probably most obvious at the level of G7 global summitry. In an era much characterised by doom and gloom about Europe's economic weakness, it was already perhaps remarkable that four out of the seven participants at such meetings were European leaders, representing Germany, France, Britain and Italy. But the European presence was not limited to just these four, since from 1977 onwards the President of the European Commission won the right to be present also, lifting the number of Europeans to five.⁵⁵ And by 1982, the practice had developed of the European Community Presidency also being represented, which meant that at those times when the rotating six month post was not held by one of the big four leaders who attended global summits in their own right – i.e. about half of the time in a Community of Ten - yet another European leader would be added to the roll-call.⁵⁶ It was hence often the case that US President and the Japanese and Canadian Prime Ministers would be flanked by no fewer than six European counterparts, turning supposedly global summits into surprisingly European affairs.

⁵⁵ Giuliano Garavini, 'The Battle for the Participation of the Community in the G7 (1975-1977)', *Journal of European Integration History*, 12/1 (2006); the struggle is also a major theme in the first part of Roy Jenkins, *European Diary, 1977-1981* (London: Collins, 1989)

⁵⁶ Putnam & Bayne, *Hanging Together*, p.63

The prominence of European representatives was replicated in a range of other international organisations. Britain and France remained the most valuable allies of the US in any UN based discussion, given their status as the ‘other two’ Western permanent members of the Security Council, and their ongoing links with their former colonies scattered across the globe. At least one further Western European country was also likely to feature on the roster of elected Security Council members at any given moment. Western Europe supplied the majority of members to the OECD. Most major rounds of discussion within the GATT had been dominated by an American-EC duopoly since the Kennedy Round of the 1960s.⁵⁷ The Uruguay Round which began in 1986 would only confirm this pattern. And the IMF, although re-inventing itself in the new era of floating exchange rates as a body which was more likely to intervene in debt crises in the developing world than to host discussions of economic coordination amongst the leading richer nations, retained both a scale of European voting weight and an unwritten convention that its Secretary General should be a Western European that harked back to an earlier era and its earlier role.

There was a similarly pronounced European flavour to US consultations with its allies about major foreign policy issues during this period. A detailed study of the Reagan files would no doubt reveal quite an intensive pattern of bilateral exchanges with major partners in East Asia, Oceania or Latin America. It is unlikely, however, that any such dialogue matched the intensity, complexity and range of subject of American-West European exchanges, and particularly the systematic pattern of consultation with the Britain, France and Germany (plus sometimes Italy) that was mentioned above. In part this reflected the fact that developments within Europe still mattered greatly, whether economically or geo-strategically, to the United States. Washington still cared about what happened in Europe and had to engage with the region’s principal actors as a result. In part, it sprang from the European role in the various international fora listed earlier. If the US was to accomplish anything within the world’s assorted collective bodies, recruiting the major European powers as allies and co-sponsors made good tactical sense. Likewise, avoiding a situation in which US actions were actively opposed by the leading European players was a strategic necessity in the UN, GATT, IMF or whatever. But most fundamentally of all it

⁵⁷ Zeiler, *American Trade and Power*; Lucia Coppolaro, ‘Trade and Politics across the Atlantic: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States of America in the GATT Negotiations of the Kennedy Round (1962-1967)’, PhD thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2006

reflected the reality that in the 1980s no group of countries other than Western Europe combined the basic similarity of values, ideology and economic outlook to the US, the wealth and diplomatic willingness to play an active role outside their own region, and the resources and the self-confidence to trade ideas about how global politics should be conducted. Whether the issue was how to consolidate the fragile peace between Egypt and Israel, how to mobilise resources for the stabilisation of southern Africa, or how to isolate and denounce a country such as Sandinista-led Nicaragua, Washington's desire for and efforts to mobilise Western European support emerges with great clarity from the Reagan library files.

Naturally neither the intensity of the bilateral consultations between Washington and its European partners, nor the over-representation of Europe in many global institutional settings guaranteed that the Americans would heed European advice, counsel or special-pleading. The first half of the 1980s thus featured repeated instances of Reagan's administration acting in a fashion that entirely disregarded what America's European allies had called for. This was as true in the economic field – as over interest rates or the value of the dollar – as it was over cold war issues, from regional crises over Libya and Grenada to Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, or 'Star Wars' programme.⁵⁸ Nor was there any certainty that the Western Europeans would be able to maximise the effectiveness of their bilateral and multilateral linkages by coordinating their positions and speaking with similar voices in their exchanges with Washington. Again there are many examples from the period of Western Europe allowing itself to be marginalised partly because the coordinating mechanisms of the EC and the EPC proved unable to reconcile highly divergent national stances. It was often the case that Washington did not have to resort to *divide et impera* tactics even had it wanted to, since European countries were all too prone to squabble amongst themselves over economic or foreign policy issues even without an outside superpower encouraging such divisions.

As the decade progressed, however, and the European integration process moved from the doldrums of the early part of the 1980s to the post-1985 relaunch and revival, the ability of Western European countries to coordinate their stance, on

⁵⁸ On this last see Sean Kalic, 'Reagan's SDI announcement and the European reaction: diplomacy in the last decade of the Cold War' in Nuti, *The Crisis of Détente in Europe*, pp.99-110

economic issues especially, improved significantly.⁵⁹ Furthermore, throughout the period, Western European countries continued to enjoy an unrivalled network of informal contacts and linkages with the United States, of the sort discussed in Giles Scott-Smith's contribution to the volume. This Transatlantic web of personal ties, informal networks, and multiple levels of social and commercial interaction, also increased the likelihood of European view-points being heard, if not necessarily heeded, in policy debate within the US capital. Informal persuasion and pressure complemented the multiple official mechanisms through which Western Europeans could seek to influence the western Superpower. As a result, it is reasonable to identify the 1980s as a period when Western Europe enjoyed a level of influence and representation within Washington that was vastly disproportionate to the continent's size (or even its global share of wealth) and that was entirely out of step with the mood of self-doubt and self-deprecation that often characterised European rhetoric of the era. Regretting Western Europe's global powerlessness was a characteristic widespread amongst Europe's political and intellectual elite; the objective realities of the era, however, suggest that the 1980s were instead a time when Western Europe continued to enjoy a remarkable and in many ways aberrant level of influence over Washington.

Conclusions

Able to look back at the period as a whole, the historian does thus need to avoid being wholly taken in by the torrent of European lamentation about global marginalisation. Western Europe did not always get its way with Reagan's America. Indeed, as the first part of this chapter recalled, the 1980s were to see multiple policy disputes between the two sides of the Atlantic over global economic governance as much as about the conduct of the East-West conflict. It is also the case that the period did see Western Europe's competitive position eroded in vital economic sectors, vis-à-vis both the US and Japan. Over time this would lessen Western Europe's global centrality and its ability to influence US policy, although it was a trend that would be powerfully counteracted in the latter half of the 1980s by the revitalisation of the

⁵⁹ Although the relaunch awaits an archivally based treatment, it is already the subject of a copious literature. See e.g. Andrew Moravcsik, 'Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community', *International Organization* 45/1 (1991). The debate about Europe's global role that this triggered is discussed in David Buchan, *Europe: the strange superpower* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1993)

European integration process and the deepening and widening of the EC. And in the long-run a series of deeper cultural, demographic, economic and geopolitical factors could also be identified that were gradually leading the Americans to look towards the Pacific as much as they looked to Atlantic. The contemporary economic strength of Japan and the Asian 'tigers' and the longer term potential of China both pointed in this direction. But at the same time 1980s Western Europe retained a huge degree of leverage over the Americans and was able to bring its viewpoint(s) to the attention of US decision makers in a fashion scarcely dreamt of elsewhere and hardly replicated in earlier periods of the cold war. For all the alarmism about Western and Atlantic decline and for all the rhetoric about deep misunderstanding between Reagan's America and his European counterparts, the 1980s were in a sense the apogee of Atlantic cooperation. It was therefore perhaps appropriate that they were a decade that would culminate in a major geo-political transformation, the ending of the cold war, which was profoundly European and Atlantic in character.