

WILLY BRANDT AND THE AMERICAS, 1974-1992

Conference at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Berlin, June 10-11, 2016. Organized by the Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation, with support from the German Historical Institute Washington, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and the Berlin Center for Cold War Studies. Conveners: Klaus Larres (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and Bernd Rother (Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation, Berlin). Participants: Oliver Bange (Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, Potsdam), Andreas Daum (University of Buffalo), Dieter Dettke (Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies, Washington DC), Nikolas Dörr (Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany, Berlin), Mónica Fonseca (Center for International Studies at the University Institute Lisbon), Mathias Haeussler (University of Cambridge), Jan Hansen (Humboldt University, Berlin), Wolfram Hoppenstedt (Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation, Berlin), Scott Krause (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Jürgen Lillteicher (Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation, Lübeck), Judith Michel (Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Berlin), Harold Mock (University of Virginia, Charlottesville), Fernando Pedrosa (University of Buenos Aires), Christian Salm (European Parliamentary Research Service, Brussels), Wolfgang Schmidt (Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation, Berlin), Pierre Schori (Stockholm), Reimund Seidelmann (Gießen, Germany), Konrad Sziedat (University of Munich).

During uncertain times, like those we are experiencing in the present day, people tend to look back to models from the past. One such model is Willy Brandt. The Social Democratic mayor of West Berlin (1957-1966), Foreign Minister (1966-1969) and Federal Chancellor (1969-1974) remained involved in politics as chairman of the SPD (1964-1987) and president of the Socialist International (1976-1992) even after his roles in government ended. This international conference, however, did not simply try to fill the trivial biographical gaps in the life of Willy Brandt. Rather, it sought to explain, in an actor-centered manner, the international and transnational developments of the Cold War starting in the 1970s. Willy Brandt was considered a “bridge-builder” between East and West, and also, importantly, between North and South. As an introduction, Bernd Rother emphasized that the focus of the conference should be on the shift in international relations, because these were increasingly impacted by globalization and the rise of non-governmental actors starting

in the 1970s. Therefore, he called specifically for manifestations of “secondary foreign policy” and back channel conversations, which remain an under-researched field. Brandt, in his role as president of the Socialist International, is an excellent example of this. In addition, Rother asked questions that set the stage for the theme of the conference, such as: Did this “secondary foreign policy” represent a first step toward a new global sphere for politics? What role did German interests play in Central Africa? Or could one argue that the European social democratic welfare state in Managua was being defended against communism and U.S. hegemony?

The first panel, moderated by Andreas Daum, laid the foundation for the conference by shedding light on Willy Brandt’s relations with the United States in the early years of his political career and on his U.S. networks. In “‘Our security stands and falls with the USA’ — Willy Brandt’s Relations with the United States of America 1933-1974” Judith Michel demonstrated the degree to which Brandt sought to present himself as a reliable partner of the United States. In these years he relied heavily on the Americans providing a security guarantee for Germany. This even led to a self-imposed “internal ban on thinking” while he was chancellor and his decision never to openly criticize the Vietnam War. Does his resignation in 1974 thus reinstate the “true” Willy Brandt, who no longer had to look out for German (security) interests?

The presentation by Scott Krause, “Berlin Bonds: Willy Brandt’s American Support Network, 1941-1989,” addressed an earlier era. In his presentation, Krause pointed out that Brandt’s being untainted by a Nazi past made him appealing to the Americans and helped him to gain access to them. Thus, his American friends supported him in the “merger battle” of the Berlin SPD and financially supported his newspaper, the *Berliner Stadtblatt*. Later, this network helped him to spread his image as a cosmopolitan and a reliable anti-communist via its transatlantic channels. Krause’s presentation also brought the conference a strong media response, which incorrectly reported that Brandt had received money from the CIA. The funding had, in fact, been provided through the Marshall plan.

Mathias Haeussler addressed Brandt’s personality and security considerations in his presentation, comparing the cosmopolitan chancellor to the “armament” chancellor in “Two very different Atlanticists? Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, 1974-1992.” Brandt and Schmidt shared the conviction that they did not want to sacrifice either Germany’s security, as guarded by the Americans, or the goals

of *Ostpolitik*. However, they differed in the manner in which they sought to achieve these political goals: whereas Brandt had a vision of a new global political and social sphere, Schmidt preferred to return to the equilibrium of the 1960s.

The second panel, moderated by Wolfram Hoppenstedt, examined the connections between the two common markets that existed at the time, the European Community (EC) and Mercosur. Christian Salm, in his contribution, titled “Willy Brandt, the European Union and the Emerging Mercosur, 1976-1992,” put forward the thesis that nongovernmental actors, in particular Willy Brandt, played a decisive role in the formation of the Latin-American market. He identified a number of factors: networks, such as the Socialist International, serving as transmission channels; the (financial) support of Latin-American institutions by the German government, the Friedrich Ebert foundation, and others; Willy Brandt’s introduction of regional integration into the Latin-American agenda; and the former Chancellor’s personality as a promoter of integration and as a role model. In his research, Salm seeks to determine what the Latin-American actors did and did not adopt from the EC.

This was followed by Harold Mock’s presentation, “A Post-National Europe: Brandt’s Vision for the EC between the Superpowers.” According to Mock, Brandt encouraged a postnational perspective as a result of his personal background during the Second World War: according to this perspective, goals such as peace, freedom, and human rights cannot be achieved within the bounds of the nation state. For Brandt, the European Community could have developed into an autonomous actor and an alternative to the system of superpowers, but had failed to do so.

The following panel, led by Klaus Larres, addressed the discussion of a “third way” between capitalism and communism, not only economically, but also in terms of security policy. Using the example of Italy, Nikolas Dörr, in “How to Deal with Eurocommunism? A Case Study of Dissonance between Willy Brandt and the U.S. Governments of Nixon, Ford and Carter” looked at how the United States and Brandt assessed “Eurocommunism.” The difference could not have been more pronounced: while Brandt had good relations with the Communist Party in Italy, the United States regarded the 1.8 million members of the party and its electoral success as a “red threat” — an enormous security risk. For this reason, they also supported anti-communist movements toward the end of the 1970s. In the

discussion that followed, the point was made that the “Eurocommunism” spectrum extended as far as Chile, where the United States also perceived Salvador Allende to be a security risk.

In this case, it becomes evident how American security interests differed from Brandt’s conceptions of them. In this vein, Jan Hansen made it clear in his contribution, “Say Farewell to the Cold War? Brandt, the USA, and the Euromissiles Question,” that for the Social Democrats the Soviet Union had become a legitimate potential partner by the 1980s. Thus, some in the SPD sought to reactivate their former networks in order to convey their misgivings about NATO’s dual track decision. Naturally, this did not improve relations between the SPD and the United States, which were already cooling.

This was complemented by Oliver Bange’s remarks in his presentation titled “Conceptualising ‘Common Security’: Willy Brandt’s Vision of Transbloc Security and its International Perception 1981-1990.” Brandt’s ideas about a bloc-encompassing “common security” in the 1980s can be framed as two questions: was Brandt’s turn against NATO’s dual track decision, including the stationing of missiles in Germany, at the party congress in 1983 due to his perceptions of security, or did he want to portray himself as the man to keep the party together? Was Brandt, with his vision of a bloc-encompassing “common security” that no longer relied entirely on the United States, acting as the first to understand that other political measures were necessary, or was he proving himself to be “out of touch” with politics and society of the 1980s with these views?

The panel closed with Konrad Sziedat’s presentation, entitled “Social Democrats on a ‘Third Way’: 1989 as a Year of Metamorphosis?” Sziedat’s research is part of a larger project at the Leibniz Graduate School on the history of disappointment in the twentieth century entitled “Enttäuschung im 20. Jahrhundert.” He argued that Brandt himself had a “third way” between capitalism and communism in mind. But what were the implications? Sziedat sees Gorbachev’s reforms and the discussions surrounding these reforms as a key factor. The idea of democratic socialism was very popular in the 1980s. But what followed with the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s? In this context, Sziedat referred to Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, both of whom made new attempts in the direction of a third way.

The concluding panel, chaired by Jürgen Lillteicher addressed the core of the entire conference, Brandt’s relations with Latin America.

Fernando Pedrosa led off with “‘Elastic Cooperation’: Willy Brandt and the Socialist International in Latin America.” In this presentation, he argued that in order to gain a foothold in Latin America the Socialist International had to turn to parties that were not necessarily socialist. This was the case, for example, in Argentina with the *Partido Radical*. In addition, the expansion of the Socialist International to Latin America took place at a time when the European Socialists were in a moment of crisis, and thus welcomed expansion. This example also shows the distrust of the German Social Democrats that the U.S. administration developed by the end of the 1970s, which only grew further.

Mónica Fonseca addressed this point in her presentation, “Brandt’s SI Offensive towards Latin America: the View from Washington.” She first provided an overview of the Portuguese Revolution and the SPD’s strategy to financially and organizationally support the socialists there before the USSR was able to do so. She then came to the conclusion that the Latin-American states could have learnt from the example of the Latin-European states in their own ideas and democratization processes. Though the Socialist International sought the support of the United States in promoting democratization in Latin-America, the Carter administration harbored a noticeable mistrust of its activities.

This was also reflected in Bernd Rother’s contribution, “The Intruder in the Backyard: The Socialist International and the U.S. in Central America.” The U.S. government perceived the Social Democrats to be “friends of communists,” because they supported armed freedom movements with close ties to socialism. He argued that this could be seen in the examples of Nicaragua and El Salvador. This put strains on communication with Americans, but did not cause communication to break down entirely. Yet the Socialist International wanted consensus amongst all involved in this armed conflict: in the case of Nicaragua it had to keep the balance between the Marxist-leaning Sandinistas, the increasing exertion of influence by the Reagan administration in Latin America, and German domestic politics when it came to the question of supporting freedom movements. This case serves as a good example of how international relations can reshape themselves when material, financial, and organizational support of Social Democratic organizations is combined with classic “back channel” conversations.

In the final presentation, Wolfgang Schmidt spoke on the economic aspect, “Willy Brandt’s North-South Commission and the Reactions in the United States.” In the 1970s there was strong demand for a new world-wide financial system. Bretton Woods was becoming

obsolete and North-South relations also needed to be readjusted in this sector. The key request of the North-South Commission, which was chaired by Willy Brandt, was a development fund of more than \$400 million, which was to be available to any country, regardless of ideology. However, the report did not have the desired effects in the late 1970s. Other than in the UN, the report received little attention. The Reagan administration addressed the global economic crisis in the early 1980s with cuts, including cuts in development aid. The so-called “Third World” was forced to serve as the economic battlefield in the renewed Cold War.

The discussion amongst contemporary witnesses, which concluded the conference, ultimately concentrated on the personality of Willy Brandt. The discussions on the panel frequently returned to his personal and emotional side, and to his historical importance. Many political connections could not be explained today without reference to the personal aspect. Dieter Dettke, for example, characterized Brandt’s relationship with the Kennedys as a “gold standard” in relations with American politicians. But criticism was also voiced: Dettke, who was director of the Washington office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the late 1980s, would have liked a clearer position from him in the debate over NATO’s dual track decision. And Pierre Schori, who was the international secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party at the time, referred to Brandt’s problems in the 1980s with the Eastern European dissidents, in particular *Solidarność*, as a lost opportunity.

Overall, the conference achieved its goal of providing an exciting overview of Willy Brandt’s transnational ties during the political events of the Cold War. Due to the presence of former colleagues of Willy Brandt’s, lively discussions and concrete examples supplemented the academic contributions and promoted a genial conference atmosphere. Many questions were answered, but new questions were also raised: for example, the potential for further discussion remained as to whether Willy Brandt, in his conception of security, was “out of touch” or whether he was ahead of his time. Likewise, how Cuba, for example, responded to the activities of the Socialist International in Latin America was not settled. What certainly became clear, however, was that significantly more scholarly attention could be given to “secondary foreign policy” and to North-South relations in the Cold War.

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