

PREFACE

It may seem odd to begin a publication on “American Détente and German Ostpolitik” by reflecting on Soviet foreign policy in 1969. Given the situation in Europe at the time, however, such reflections are anything but far-fetched. Richard Nixon and Willy Brandt, after all, developed their policies to “reduce the tensions” of the Cold War with Leonid Brezhnev in mind. Moscow, meanwhile, structured its “Westpolitik” along similar lines, i.e., by focusing on both Washington and Bonn. This congruence of calculations was hardly accidental. By the end of the 1960s, all three capitals faced serious challenges: the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968; the Sino-Soviet border clashes in March 1969; the independent policies of France and Romania; the Vietnam War, the German Question. The diplomacy of détente—as practiced by American, West German, and Soviet decision-makers—attempted to meet these challenges. The resulting pattern was familiar to the diplomats—but then largely forgotten by diplomatic historians. Many scholars have written, for instance, about how Nixon’s “opening” to China led to “triangular” diplomacy on a global scale; but few have studied how Brandt’s “opening” to the Soviet Union had a similar geometric effect on European affairs. Due to the availability of documents and former decision-makers, this volume emphasizes the American and West German sides. The contributors, however, have tried to add some dimension to the debate on détente and Ostpolitik. Many of the chapters that follow—in addition to offering Chinese, Polish and East German perspectives—examine the base of triangular diplomacy in Europe: the Soviet Union.

“Triangular relations,” Egon Bahr once observed, “are always complicated.”¹ In diplomacy, as in romance, one side often feels neglected while the other two are preoccupied with bilateral relations. For nine months, while West Germany and the Soviet Union were busy negotiating a renunciation of force agreement, the United States was the “third wheel.” When Brandt and Brezhnev met to celebrate the Moscow Treaty in August 1970, Nixon—who also hoped to visit the Soviet capital—was the “odd man out.” Neither Nixon, nor his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, liked feeling left behind. Kissinger gave vent to his frustration in the summer of 1970 when he warned a West German official: “If there is to be a policy of détente, then we will do it and not you.”² Such outbursts did not go unnoticed. “I gained the impression [. . .],”

Brandt later recalled, “that [Kissinger] would rather have taken personal charge of the delicate complex of East-West problems in its entirety.”³

This was more than a mere conflict of personalities. Although their policies appeared parallel on the surface, the United States and West Germany had two different concepts of *détente*. After the crises of the early 1960s, Washington wanted to reduce the competition between the superpowers to a more manageable level, especially in the race for strategic armaments. Nixon also sought Soviet support for peace in Vietnam. As a regional power, Bonn had more limited goals. Brandt sought to mend historical fences by accepting the postwar borders in Eastern Europe, including the Oder-Neisse Line and the boundary between East and West Germany. He also hoped that “change through rapprochement” would ease the consequences of Germany’s division. The chancellor, in other words, tried to confront the consequences of losing the Second World War, while the president tried to avoid the consequences of losing the Vietnam War. The two men marched under the banner of *détente* but not always in the same direction. The tension in German-American relations was further exacerbated by a divergence in tactics. Both sides sought some leverage over Soviet policy. Bonn linked ratification of the Moscow Treaty to a “satisfactory” settlement in Berlin; and Washington linked an improvement in Soviet-American relations to a “satisfactory” settlement in Vietnam. Brandt moved first before asking the Soviets to pressure the East Germans; and Nixon refused to move before the Soviets agreed to pressure the North Vietnamese. This divergence made all the difference. By playing the hare rather than the tortoise, Brandt won the “race” to Moscow. Nixon and Kissinger, of course, were not on the sidelines for long. The politics behind ratification of the Moscow Treaty soon led to a remarkable round of triangular diplomacy, as a select group of Soviet, American, and West German officials conducted the secret talks behind the quadripartite agreement on Berlin.

Many contributed to the achievements of American *Détente* and German *Ostpolitik*: Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Kenneth Rush, Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Valentin Falin, Vyacheslav Kevorkov, Vladislav Gomulka, Egon Bahr. By all accounts, however, the key figure—the man at the vertex of the triangle—was Willy Brandt. Perhaps the most compelling testimony comes from Kissinger himself, who once described Brandt as “hulking, solid, [and] basically uncommunicative despite his hearty manner.”⁴ During the unveiling of Brandt’s portrait at the German Historical Institute in March 2003, the former Secretary of State painted a different picture: “It was the tremendous achievement of Brandt that he dared to raise the question of German national interests and attempted to relate them—and indeed succeeded in relating them—to the common interests of the West. It is one of the ironies of history that this occurred

when there was an administration in office in Washington whose sympathy for the Social Democrats was limited." As he recalled the highlights of Brandt's career, Kissinger waxed even more eloquent. "No formal statements could have reassured the rest of the world," he remarked, "as much as [...] the visit to the Warsaw Ghetto and the commitment that Brandt represented to the kind of human values that had not been associated with a national Germany policy for much of modern history. It is this quality that contributed to the fact that even though ideologically the leaders of the two countries had different views and were totally different personalities, there has certainly never been a better period in the relationship between Germany and the United States on the issues that mattered."⁵ The reader must judge for himself whether these remarks reflect more hagiography than historiography. The editors believe, however, that Kissinger's eulogy serves as the perfect introduction to a publication on American *détente* and German *Ostpolitik*.

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This volume presents the proceedings of a conference held at the German Historical Institute in Washington on May 9 and 10, 2002⁶—thirty years after ratification of the so-called Eastern treaties or *Ostverträge* by the Bundestag in Bonn. The conference was jointly organized and funded by the German Historical Institute and the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung in Berlin, and co-sponsored by the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact at the National Security Archive and the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center, both based in Washington. For two days, historians and former decision-makers met to discuss their research and recollections on American *détente* and German *Ostpolitik*. The historians included those who have recently conducted research in American, German, Russian, and East European archives; the decision-makers, those who served in the American, German and Soviet governments from 1969 to 1972. Some of the scholarly papers provided the necessary context, including the origins and objectives of *Ostpolitik*, the diplomacy of Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, and the relationship between the Nixon administration and the Christian Democratic opposition. Others documented the details behind Brandt's diplomacy: the Moscow Treaty (1970); the Warsaw Treaty (1970); the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin (1971); and the Basic Treaty between East and West Germany (1972). The decision-makers, on the other hand, gave some important perspectives, offering not only their recollections but also their reaction to the latest scholarship. The volume follows the structure of the conference by publishing first the papers, as revised by the presenters, and then a transcript of the subsequent discussion, as revised by the editors.

The editors wish to express their gratitude to everyone who helped make the concept of the conference a success, in particular, Carsten Tessmer, Wolfram Hoppenstedt and Bernd Rother from the Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung; and Douglas E. Selvage from the Office of the Historian in the US Department of State. This volume would not have been possible without the expert editing of the text by David Lazar, Janel B. Galvanek, Kelly McCullough, Erika Brown and Michael Shurkin at the GHI; the excellent transcription of tapes by Craig E. Daigle from George Washington University—and the essential support of Christof Mauch, Director of the GHI, who decided to make this the first in a new series of in-house scholarly publications. We would also like to thank two other scholars, Karen Riechert and Laura Talley Geyer, not only for their patience with the editors but also for their support of our work. *Maxima debetur noster uxori debitum.*

Washington, DC
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David Geyer
Bernd Schaefer

Notes

¹ Stephan Fuchs, *„Dreiecksverhältnisse sind immer kompliziert.“ Kissinger, Bahr und die Ostpolitik*, (Hamburg, 1999). The author attributes Bahr’s quote to an interview he held with him in 1995.

² “Wenn schon Entspannung, dann machen wir sie.” See Paul Frank, *Entschlüsselte Botschaft. Ein Diplomat macht Inventur* (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 287.

³ Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975*, translated by J. Maxwell Brownjohn, (Boston, 1976), 284.

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Boston, 1979), 99.

⁵ Henry A. Kissinger, Statement on the Unveiling of a Willy Brandt Portrait by Johannes Heisig. German Historical Institute, Washington D.C. 18 March 2003. www.ghi-dc.org/Kissinger.html.

⁶ See Bernd Schaefer’s conference report, “American Détente and German Ostpolitik, 1969–1972” in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 31 (Fall 2002), 111–114.