Journal of Transatlantic Studies (2022) 20:274–296
https://doi.org/10.1057/s42738-022-00094-5

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Between détente and the shock of the global. The late Franco regime and its meaning for transatlantic relations (1975)

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Accepted: 9 March 2022 / Published online: 18 May 2022

Abstract
This article examines how the Franco regime influenced transatlantic relations in 1975. The imminent death of General Francisco Franco, seen as part of the transnational Southern Flank crisis, represented an intellectual challenge for the West. As such, it forced US and Western European policymakers to test their divergent understandings of détente. Yet this new divide did not strain transatlantic relations. Happening in parallel to the world recession and the international energy crisis, it instead served to highlight transatlantic interdependency during a time of major global transformations. Thus, the Spanish dictatorship contributed to moving Western countries towards new forms of multilateralism.

Keywords Détente · Globalisation · Transatlantic relations · Franco Spain · Southern Europe

Introduction

It is impossible to understand the meaning of the late Franco regime for transatlantic relations without first reflecting upon the structural forces that shaped the globe in the year General Francisco Franco died. And the first thing to observe about the international arena in 1975 is that it was in the midst of profound changes. Post-war economic recipes had started to lose appeal in an era in which the industrialised countries had reached the limits of their extensive-growth model. Western societies

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had grown overly complex, both culturally and economically, while technological advancement, decolonisation, and the porosity of capital restrictions had made global markets not simply appealing, but accessible to international investors.[1] Globalisation was taking a new, more convulsive form.

The word 'shock', in this sense, appeared in the early 1970s as a handy expression to describe the suddenness and unexpectedness with which the West came to experience these global transformations. The Nixon *shock* in 1971, which unilaterally put an end to the international convertibility of US dollars to gold, exacerbated transatlantic mistrust.[2] The 1973 oil *shock*, for its part, triggered an international energy crisis that pushed both sides of the Atlantic not only into the uncharted waters of stagflation, but also towards divergent approaches vis-à-vis an increasingly empowered Global South.[3] 'The shock of the global', along with the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, were, in short, taking their toll on transatlantic relations by 1975.[4]

Détente added a crucial layer of complexity to the international scene. The relaxation of East–West tensions had helped lower the bellicose tone of bipolarism. But blurring the dividing line between 'good' and 'evil' entailed, on the other hand, important paradoxes, most notably the inevitable legitimisation of communist movements within the Western bloc.[5] This was nowhere more so than in Southern Europe, where gloomy predictions of a 'Southern Flank crisis' had captivated the minds of Western policymakers since the beginning of the decade. By the beginning of 1975, the Portuguese transition was entering its most radicalising phase, as communist-leaning military figures within the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* had tightened their grip on the transition program.[6] Meanwhile, the Greek transition looked threatened by the Greco-Turkish conflict over Cyprus, which in 1974 had provoked the downfall of the Junta, Greece's withdrawal from the North Atlantic

[1] Vanessa Ogle, 'Funk money: The end of empires, the expansion of tax havens, and decolonization as an economic and financial event,' *Past and Present*, no. 249 (Nov. 2020): 213–249; Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Barry Eichengreen, *The European Economy since 1945. Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 225–293.

[2] Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed. The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 100–130.

[3] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War. Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 249–300; Federico Romero, 'How OPEC made the G7. Western coordination in the wake of the oil shock,' in *Handbook of OPEC and the Global Energy. Past, Present, and Future Challenge*, Dag Harald Claes and Giuliano Garavini eds. (London: Routledge, 2020), 111–120.

[4] Niall Ferguson, 'Introduction: Crisis, What Crisis? The 1970s and the Shock of the Global,' in *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*, Niall Ferguson et al. ed. (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–24.

[5] Frédéric Heurtebize, 'Eurocommunism and the Contradictions of Superpower Détente,' *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 4 (2017): 747–771.

[6] Mario Del Pero, 'La transizione portoghese,' in *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature*, Mario Del Pero et al. eds. (Florence: Le Monnier, 2010a), 95–172.

Treaty Organisation (NATO), and Turkey's partial international isolation.[7] Italy, finally, appeared locked in a complex political crisis, which the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was starting to skilfully exploit to publicise its revisionist (later known as 'Eurocommunist') political agenda.[8]

Yet the biggest problem of the shock of the global, détente, and their multiple ramifications was that they seemed too large, too new, and too complex to fully grasp and solve. A sense of perplexity dominated the minds of the main Western leaders in the mid-1970s, as, in the words of Federico Romero, 'thorny issues crowded in, combining in a kaleidoscopic jumble of gloomy predictions, fractured meanings, and indistinct fears'.[9] In a not-distant future, these same leaders would make their way out of the crisis by embracing new forms of cooperation and neoliberal policies, though this was by no means clear by early 1975.[10] The year of Franco's death, in brief, started with the West mentally at a crossroads, in a world where, to paraphrase Antonio Gramsci, 'the old was dying and the new could not yet be born'.[11]

The Franco regime inside the Southern Flank crisis. A pericentric case

It was against this background that Western policymakers regarded Spain entering the Southern Flank crisis, all the more so as Franco's health severely deteriorated in 1974. To a certain extent, these fears usually went along with and reaffirmed stereotypical visions of 'the Spaniard' as an ill-suited people to the arts of democracy. The US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, often described Spanish history as being trapped in a tragical fluctuation 'between authoritarianism and anarchy'; a comment not that far from the French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's description of Spain as 'irremediable' (*L'Espagne, c'est foutou*).[12] At lower levels in the Elysée, specialised studies praised Spain's recent extraordinary economic development, but they also highlighted 'the individualistic nature of the Spanish people',

[7] Eirini Karamouzi, *Greece, the EEC, and the Cold War, 1974–1979. The Second Enlargement* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 23, 28.

[8] Giovanni Bernardini, 'Stability and socialist autonomy: The SPD, the PSI, and the Italian political crisis of the 1970s,' *Journal of European Integration History* 15, no. 1 (2009): 95–114.

[9] Federico Romero, 'Refashioning the West to dispel its fears: the early G7 summits,' in *International Summitry and Global Governance. The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974–1991*, Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero eds. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 117.

[10] For an excellent study of the 1970s as a period of improvisation for Western policymakers at the international stage, see again Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed*.

[11] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks: State and Civil Society* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), 556.

[12] Kissinger's quotation: Memorandum of Conversation between Ford, Kissinger, Juan Carlos, Areilza, 2 June, 1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976* (FRUS), Documents on Western Europe 1973–1976 (DWE), doc. 213, footnote 1. For Giscard's words, see 'Entretien avec le Prince Juan Carlos', 16 November, 1974. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de la Courneuve (CADC), Paris, 187QO/442, p. 65.

'their tendency to anarchy', and how 'the relative misery of its Portuguese neighbour could cause difficulties in Spain's political, economic, and social orders'.[13]

Fears of Spain sliding into the Southern Flank crisis were not only the result of Western musing, though. Nor were they simply a consequence of the octogenarian dictator's fragile health. Part of the responsibility also laid on the shoulders of Spanish leaders.[14] As a typical example of what Tony Smith has termed 'pericentrism', the Franco regime tried its best to exploit the highly unstable international arena in the spring of 1975 to increase its demands vis-à-vis Washington during the renegotiations of the US-Spanish base agreements.[15]

Spanish demands focused on an old flaw of the agreements: The coordination of US-Spanish defence relations with the Western defence system. At no cost to itself, the Spanish negotiators stressed, NATO had benefited for decades from Spain's strategic position, as the United States had been using Spanish facilities in broader NATO manoeuvres in the Mediterranean. Spain was an essential contributor to Western defence and, even so, it did not receive any public recognition from the Atlantic Alliance. Given the unbalanced nature of the relation, the Spanish negotiators concluded, it was necessary 'to establish an appropriate relationship with NATO': The United States had to make sure that Spain and the Alliance developed 'closer links' or, otherwise, 'US-Spanish defence cooperation would be adjusted accordingly'.[16]

These demands happened in parallel to high-level conversations, wherein figures like the Spanish foreign minister, Pedro Cortina, would complain to the US vice-president Nelson Rockefeller about the gloomy picture in Portugal and how it could affect Spain's imminent post-Franco transition. These parallel commentaries should not be underestimated, for they contributed to reaffirming Ford and Kissinger's catastrophist projections in Spain. After hearing Cortina's message through Rockefeller, for example, Ford affirmed that Washington 'should do whatever [it] need[ed] to in Spain'.[17] Kissinger supported Ford's views, not the least because to him the base agreements were much more than a simple reinforcement of US strategic position in the Mediterranean. It was, all in all, the best card that Washington had to

[13] 'L'importance stratégique de la Péninsule Ibérique', Comité Interministériel du Renseignement, 2 June, 1972. CADC, 187QO/409, p. 29.

[14] It has not been possible to use Spanish sources for this article. Protected by standing legislation from the dictatorship era, Spanish authorities are precluded from providing open access to diplomatic and military records. See more in Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares and Carlos Sanz Díaz, 'Todo secreto. Acuerdos secretos, transparencia y acceso a los documentos históricos de Asuntos Exteriores y Defensa,' *Ayer*, 97, 1 (2005): 243–257.

[15] Tony Smith, 'New bottles for new wine: A pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War,' *Diplomatic History*, 24, 4 (Fall 2000): 591.

[16] 'Briefing on Spain for April 9 NAC', telegram from the Department of State to the US embassy in NATO and Brussels, 9 April, 1975. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, Electronic Telegrams, Central Foreign Policy Files, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=14003&dt=2476&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[17] Memorandum of conversation between Ford, Kissinger and Rockefeller, 28 March, 1975. Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (GRFPL), Ann Arbor, Foreign Affairs and National Security Digital Collection (FANSDC), National Security Adivser – Memoranda of Conversations (NSA-MC), https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553010.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

influence the Spanish military, a collective that, as the Portuguese case had demonstrated, could well play a crucial role in post-Franco's Spain. The Portuguese transition had caught the United States and Western Europe by surprise, and Kissinger did not want to repeat the same mistake twice.[18]

The Spanish demands represented a major change in US-Western European relations with regard to Spain. Although the Americans had pressed in the past for closer links between Spain and the Atlantic Alliance, the new strategy from Madrid accentuated Washington's need to find some common ground with Western Europe in Spain. The prospects of a transatlantic solution looked dim, however, and not only because of Franco's troublesome relationship with the West since World War Two. More importantly, Spanish demands came at a time in which Washington was becoming increasingly disappointed with the Alliance's adequacy to deal with the challenges of the shock of the global. As Donald Rumsfeld, then the US permanent representative at the NATO headquarters, put it at the end of 1974:

> We [the US government] recognize that [out-of-area issues] have always been the most difficult for the allies on both sides of the Atlantic to carry out. This will clearly be the case with some of the issues that threaten the Alliance interest today. The future of Spain, Portugal, Greece and Yugoslavia, the entire southern littoral, the Middle East, inflation, unemployment, the supply of energy and food, terrorism — these are today's concerns that increasingly preoccupy allied capitals. These issues bear directly on Alliance security, but are outside the traditional East-West focus of the Alliance.[19]

An opportunity for Kissinger's transatlantic agenda

In this way, the new strategy of the Franco regime pushed Ford and Kissinger further towards two interrelated objectives, one aiming at the broader reformation of the Alliance, and the other particularly at Spain.

On 22 April, Ford approved the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 222, which called for a 'review of US and Allied security policy in Southern Europe'. The study was expected to analyse 'the viability and effectiveness of US and Allied security aims, arrangements, forces and bases in light of changes in the area', and to provide short- and mid-term options for Western involvement there. More specifically, the new analysis should pay particular attention to the specific security threats, the political and military implications of changes in Southern European membership in NATO, the consequences of elimination or curtailment of US

[18] This reasoning by Kissinger appears multiple times across US records. See, for example, the Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Teng Hsiao-p'ing on 21 October, 1975. FRUS, China 1973–1976, doc. 123.

[19] Telegram from the US embassy in NATO to the Secretary of State, 15 October 1974. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=232257&dt=2474&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

and allied facilities, and 'the prospects for an increased Allied and Western European political and military role in the area'.[20]

The document is in itself a proof of Ford and Kissinger's mixed feelings towards the Atlantic Alliance and its dealing with the Southern European crisis. On the one hand, they saw NATO as their best (or probably only) instrument to unify the West against the Southern Flank crisis. Yet, on the other hand, they still did not know how, or to what extent, the Alliance had to change its course to fully demonstrate its value. In a high-paced international arena, events thwarted design.

On the very same day that Ford gave the green light to the NSSM 222, Kissinger sent new instructions to the US embassies in Europe regarding Spain. Pushed by the evolution of US-Spanish negotiations and the Portuguese scene, the secretary of state ordered the ambassadors to test in Western Europe the prospects for transatlantic cooperation. In particular, Kissinger was interested in knowing whether the allies would be willing to join 'in some public endorsement of Spain's importance to Western defence, perhaps in the form of a recognition of the value of the US-Spanish relationship' during some of the NATO events scheduled for May. Within the same telegram, the secretary of state attached some extra indications to the embassies in London and Bonn, where Kissinger wished to see 'more thorough consultation'.[21]

Kissinger's telegram had in itself many lines in common with the action memorandum that the National Security Council (NSC) had prepared on Portugal a month earlier. As with Spain, the memorandum understood that the Atlantic Alliance had a crucial role to play on the Southern European crisis, although to do this—and here contrary to the Spanish case—it required NATO to move away from Portugal. In a worst-case scenario, the Alliance would have to be ready to cooperate with Franco's Spain and terminate 'Portugal's active role in NATO', although the NSC recognised a wide range of alternative measures to avoid such extreme situation.[22]

The second, perhaps more crucial, similarity between the NSC memorandum and Kissinger's telegram was their common emphasis on the need to cooperate 'in NATO' with the main European governments: Britain, West Germany, and France. This is especially revealing, not the least because it shows the extent to which a crucial idea shaped Kissinger's policy towards Spain and the broader Southern European crisis: The formation of an intimate circle with the largest transatlantic states. This informal 'Executive Committee' had been in Kissinger's thoughts since the 1960s, and it stemmed from two main personal convictions. Firstly, his adherence to great power politics and his belief in 'the heroic nature of the statesman', both of which made the secretary of state wary of diplomatic bureaucracies and smaller Western states. And secondly, his visions of globalisation, the Vietnam War, détente,

[20] National Security Study Memorandum 222, 22 April, 1975. FRUS, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, 1973–1976, doc. 45.

[21] Telegram from the Secretary of State to all NATO capitals, 22 April, 1975. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=13766&dt=2476&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[22] 'Telegram 61,177/Tosec 726 from the Department of State to the Consulate of Jerusalem', 19 March, 1975. FRUS, DWE, doc. 147.

and the world recession as driving the West into the pitfalls of cultural relativism, crisis, and decline.[23]

In this vein, the Portuguese and the Spanish cases, as parts of the Southern European and the world crises, were in the process of reaffirming Kissinger's belief in the need for a 'new era of creativity' within the West, as he once announced in his infamous 'Year of Europe' discourse in 1973.[24] For only the strongest among the strongest, as Kissinger liked to imagine, had the capacity to transcend the structural, historical, and cultural limits that surrounded them. Yet Kissinger's plans had many limitations.

Uncoordinated responses. Détente and the waning disciplinary capacity of bipolarism

It only took eight days for the White House to learn the answer of most European capitals to Kissinger's call for cooperation in Spain. The general allied response, as the secretary of state recognised, had been 'lukewarm at best'. With the exception of Turkey, West Germany, and partially France, all Western Europeans shared their opposition to any rapprochement between the Alliance and Spain 'so long as the Franco regime continued'.[25]

This general rejection was hardly a setback for Kissinger. The secretary of state's hyper-masculinised understanding of diplomacy had long made him inattentive to true prospects of dialogue with 'minor' European states, much less to their critiques. The problem was, however, that the limitations seen in the smaller European states were even starker amongst the European 'major' powers. The main reason for this, I argue, is because the imminent death of Franco, seen through the lenses of a Southern Flank crisis, carried in itself a much deeper meaning. As Mario Del Pero has argued in his works on Portugal, transatlantic divergences in *perceptions* and *assessment* on Spain was but the tip of the iceberg; the most visible part of a much larger issue separating both sides of the Atlantic: Their different conceptions of détente.[26]

[23] Jeremi Suri, 'Henry Kissinger and the Geopolitics of Globalization,' in Ferguson et al. eds., *The Shock of the Global*, 177–180; and Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist. Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010b), 67.

[24] Unknown author, 'Text of Kissinger's Speech at A.P. Meeting Here on U.S. Relations with Europe.' *The New York Times*, 24 April, 1973, https://www.nytimes.com/1973/04/24/archives/text-of-kissingers-speech-at-ap-meeting-here-on-u-s-relations-with.html [last consultation on 28 October, 2021].

[25] 28 April, 1975. GRFPL, National Security Adviser's Files (NSAF), NSC Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff Files, 1974–78 (NSC-ECOASF), box 21.

[26] Mario Del Pero, 'The Limits of Détente: The United States and the Crisis of the Portuguese Regime,' in *The Making of Détente. Eastern and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965–1975*, Wilfried Loth and Georges Henri-Soutou eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 221–240.

Détente, the Southern Flank crisis, and the 'European answer'

For the United States—especially for Kissinger—détente was based upon a conservative motivation, which was the *preservation* of the bipolar order. Given the Soviet nuclear parity and the hostility of a world increasingly untouched by bipolar ideology, recognising the Eastern superpower and engaging with it through pacific bilateral talks was the safest way for the United States to maintain its relative global supremacy. This strategy rested upon two basic principles. First, that détente was mostly the dominion of the superpowers. And second, that Europe's division had to remain in place, as that was the cornerstone that made the Cold War a pacific (albeit highly inflammable) international order. Bipolarism thus had to evolve, so it could remain the same.[27]

Western European leaders, for their part, had different priorities and understandings when it came to détente. Events like the Berlin Wall and the Cuban missile crisis had been especially traumatic for figures like Willy Brandt, as they had highlighted the extent to which Europeans had no voice in those situations that not simply concerned them, but put them at the centre of threats of nuclear retaliation. Blurring the borders between East and West, therefore, was a way for Western Europe to recover part of their lost sovereignty. An instrument to overcome, in the words of Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'the shadow of superpowerdom'.[28] Détente, in this vein, was a means to *challenge* the Cold War order, rather than to preserve it.[29]

These different understandings had at least two main implications. At the most general level, it paved the way for a genuinely US-independent 'European answer' to the Southern Flank crisis. By the time Kissinger had called for European assistance in Spain, Western Europe—increasingly organised around the European Communities and their socialist party networks—were finding their own voice in Greece's stabilisation.[30] Furthermore, the fact that this growing responsibility happened while Greece reduced its connections with the United States and NATO reaffirmed Western European convictions in their centrality at the international stage as a civilian power.[31] It was no longer possible, in other words, for the United States to dictate

[27] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'Conservative Goals, Revolutionary Outcomes: The Paradox of Détente,' *Cold War History*, 8, no. 4 (2008): 503–511.

[28] Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'Détente in Europe, 1962–1975,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Vol. 2, Melvyn Leffler and Arne Westad eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),199.

[29] See the works in Piers Ludlow ed., *European Integration and the Cold War. Ostpolitik-Westpolitik, 1965–1973* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Gottfried Niedhart, 'US détente and West German Ostpolitick: Parallels and frictions,' in *The Strained Alliance. US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, Thomas Schwartz and Matthias Schulz eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 41–43.

[30] Christian Salm, *Transnational Socialist Networks in the 1970s. European Community Development Aid and Southern Enlargement* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

[31] On EEC foreign policy as a civilian power, see Ulrich Krotz, 'International History meets International Relations,' in *Europe's Cold War Relations. The EC towards a Global Role*, Ulrich Krotz, Kiran Klaus Patel, and Federico Romero eds. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 271–275.

what Europeans could or should do in their own backyard. After all, why should they listen when they already had their own approach?

For there was indeed a Western European formula, and this constitutes the second implication of having two different interpretations of détente across the Atlantic. Like Angela Romano has demonstrated in her work on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, European *distinct* projections of détente were intrinsically intertwined with the wish for a *distinct* Western European foreign policy.[32] To a large extent, this argument can also be applied to the Southern Flank crisis. For the European allies, the situation in these countries was complex, which in turn implied a great deal of patience and middle-of-the-road solutions. The West, in their view, had to grant to Portugal the benefit of the doubt, and work through party networks to guarantee the victory of Portugal's moderate political forces, especially the Portuguese Socialist Party. After all, this was the motto of West Germany's *Ostpolitik*: 'Change through approximation', or *Wandel durch Annäherung*.

For Kissinger, on the other hand, the presence of communist forces in a NATO country could never be allowed: It attacked the bulk and core of Western identity, and therefore one of the pillars sustaining the Cold War order. That was why Kissinger did not care whether the communists were in truth a minority in the Lisbon government, or whether the Portuguese Communist Party was Soviet-controlled or not. Its *symbolic* damage to the nature of the Atlantic Alliance would be the same. At a more practical level, this conservative understanding of détente was fed by Kissinger's fears of possible defections within the Western camp: Portugal's example could show other allies with a communist-friendly electorate—most notably Italy, and to a certain extent also France and Spain—the path towards bipolar disobedience.[33] There was, in essence, no room for grey in a black-and-white world.

The British answer

When applied to Spain, this meant that cooperation with the United States was to a great extent impossible, even for those European leaders that tried their best to do so. That was at least the case of the British prime minister, Harold Wilson, and his foreign minister, James Callaghan, for whom the shock of the global had had paradoxical repercussions. The international economic crisis had brought the Labour Party back in office in 1974, but it had done so by forcing its leaders to forge a common front with the extremely influential labour unions. Labour support and the promise of a 'Social Contract' had become both Wilson and Callaghan's tickets to Downing Street *and* their only straws to grasp at.[34]

[32] Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European détente: How the West shaped the Helsinki CSCE* (Brussels and New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

[33] Del Pero, 'Which Chile, Allende? Henry Kissinger and the Portuguese Revolution,' *Cold War History* 11, no. 4 (2011): 637–638.

[34] Vernon Bogdanor, '1974. The crisis of Old Labour,' in *New Labour, Old Labour. The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974–1979*, Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson eds. (London: Routledge, 2004), 5–17.

The prospects of a British rapprochement to the Franco regime were, in this light, severely reduced. Most notably because it would hinder the government's relations with their trade unions, especially in a time in which both government and labour had to engage at painstaking negotiations about the regulation of salary increases and unemployment rates.[35] On the other hand, however, Wilson and Callaghan were equally anxious to satisfy Kissinger's demands, not the least because a large part of their foreign and economic policies rested upon expectations of a smooth relation with the superpower. Indeed, it would only take a few months for London to apply for loans to the International Monetary Fund and the Federal Reserve to sustain their economic program. And as London knew too well, only Washington held the main keys to such doors.[36]

That was why on 7 May Callaghan offered to help Kissinger in Spain, albeit not in the way the secretary of state expected. The minister repeated the British position that it was 'premature' to press for Spanish inclusion in NATO, adding that this would only be possible after the Franco succession. In the meantime, however, Callaghan 'felt' that more work could be done between Britain and the United States, suggesting that the two governments collaborated via their ambassadors in Madrid and 'put together a joint assessment' for a post-Franco scenario.[37]

Alas, this diplomatic exercise amounted to nothing. Like in the parallel discussions on Portugal, the problem resided in the fact that Britain and the United States had different viewpoints, and therefore solutions, with regard to Spain. On the one hand, the British ambassador emphasised the importance of widening contacts with as many actors as possible from the Spanish opposition, even if that implied the opening of back-channels with the most moderate voices of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). The US ambassador, on the other hand, could not accept this last measure—undoubtedly due to Kissinger's objections—and stressed the importance of not giving up in their faith in the regime.[38] Given this crucial difference, along with others—such as Kissinger's disdain for bottom-up diplomatic solutions—it should not come as a surprise that the US secretary of state decided to side-line the bilateral exercise.[39]

[35] On Labour party-labor relations during this time, see Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 671–680; and Jack Jones, *Union Man. An Autobiography* (Glasgow: Collins, 1986), 265–302.

[36] For the idea of the IMF and Fed loans as a pivotal motivation in British rapprochement to the United States, see Thomas Robb, *A Strained Partnership? US-UK Relations in the Era of Détente, 1969–1977* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 175–200.

[37] 'Conversation with Secretary Kissinger and UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs James Callaghan', 8 May, 1975. Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), Washington, The Kissinger Transcripts. A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969–1977 (TKT).

[38] 'Anglo-American talks on Spain', telegram from the British embassy in Madrid to the FCO, 13 May, 1975. National Archives of the United Kingdom, London, FCO 9/2314, doc. 34.

[39] Telephone conversation between Sonnenfeldt and Kissinger, 8 May, 1975. DNSA, The Kissinger Telephone Conversations.

The French answer

The French government, likewise, was resolved not to cooperate with the United States in Spain. Probably with good reasons, since there were many internal reports that called for a wait-and-see approach. At the most basic level, the French Southern European Direction considered it extremely unwise to get closer to Spain for basic security and political reasons. Given the precarity of the power in place, the Direction observed, it seemed preferable 'not to invest' in the present regime a great deal of France's energies, recommending instead to 'reserve' to General Franco's successor 'that effort and support'.[40]

More crucially, however, reports from the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs found much less links between the Portuguese and the Spanish scenarios than those Kissinger imagined. A recent exploratory visit to Madrid by the French military, for example, concluded that the PCE was the strongest political force in the territory, and that Spain might soon go into an 'increasing cycle of tensions'. But in light of the multiple differences between Spain and Portugal, that did not mean that Franco's death would *forcefully* give way to a Portuguese-like scenario.[41]

At the same time, as the Quai d'Orsay advised, the French government had to consider not only the effects that Portugal was having on Spain, but also the other way around. Bringing Spain closer to NATO could strain the already-fragile Portuguese relation with the Alliance, as Lisbon would (understandably) see such a move as a protective mechanism against their own transition. It could well be the case, as one political advisor put it, that NATO would have one day to consider such 'counter-assurance' against Portugal, but that option still laid far on the horizon. The situation in Portugal was alarming, but not yet critical.[42]

The West German answer

Bonn's reaction was of utmost importance for Washington, as well. All things considered, West Germany had everything for being America's closest ally: It had the largest and solidest economy in Europe, their transatlantic fidelity had remained beyond doubt for decades, and since 1974 it counted with a government that seemed more than prepared for the challenges of the mid-1970s. Kissinger concentrated all these factors in his personal admiration for the chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who in a way summarised all the attributes Kissinger liked in a statement: 'Schmidt is the only stable leader left. He is aggressive, nationalistic. He is a socialist by accident'.[43]

[40] 'Espagne: rapports bilatéraux et CEE', Analysis from the Southern European Direction, Direction of European Political Affairs, French Foreign Affairs Ministry, 29 July, 1975. CADC, 187QO/430, p. 104.

[41] 'Compte rendu de Mission. Effectuée par le Capitaine de Lanlay à Madrid', analysis from the General Secretary of National Defense, French Prime Ministry, 5 February, 1975. CADC, 187QO/412, p. 63.

[42] 'La France et les problèmes liés au renouvellement de l'accord d'amitié et de coopération entre l'Espagne et les États-Unis'. Analysis from Service of Pacts and Disarmament, Direction of Political Affairs, French Foreign Affairs Ministry, 15 April, 1975. CADC, 187QO/442, p. 20.

[43] Memorandum of conversation of Ford, Kissinger, and Scowcroft, 18 October, 1974. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1552829.pdf [last consultation on October 4, 2021].

Yet much to the secretary of state's dismay, it was precisely these very virtues that made Bonn a very undocile ally to cooperate with in Spain. The Germans were the leading voice of the distinct 'European answer' to the Southern European crisis, and their actions exacerbated the two contradictions we have seen in détente and transatlantic cooperation: Europe's autonomy of action and the development of their own assessments and strategies.

That is why, by the time Kissinger called for transatlantic coordination in Spain, the Federal government was already at work. On April 3, the West German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, went to Madrid to meet Cortina. Although theoretically based on the regular meetings that the two governments held once a year, there was no doubt that the minister's arrival came in support of the Franco regime in times of international turmoil. Cortina knew his cards too well, and so he did not hesitate to play them when he said to Genscher that 'without the Iberian Peninsula, the southern flank of Europe would be open; without Spain, Europe as such would be incomplete'. A plea that certainly received Bonn's support, since, as the German minister answered, 'local conflicts no longer existed' in the new and complex era: 'Your [Spain's] security is ours, and vice versa'.[44]

West German plans seemed therefore in resonance with those of the United States. Nevertheless, and as this article has been trying to argue, this was only (and it could only be) to a limited extent. Bonn shared US concerns about a Southern European crisis in general, and about Spain's fragile position within this in particular. But as it was often the case, the Germans had their own way of assessing the solutions that were needed. Genscher's visit, for example, had been not only an effort to publicly sustain the regime in times of need. It had also been accompanied by a parallel visit to some Spanish opposition groups, to which the Germans attributed a prominent role for the post-Franco era.[45] For the Federal government, therefore, it was equally as important to satisfy the dictatorship's needs as to encourage its eventual downfall. This double task was, as Genscher would later put it to NATO's Secretary General Joseph Luns, 'almost a European duty'.[46]

With all these factors in mind, the Federal government was in basic agreement with the US on the need for closer Spanish-NATO ties, but not as much with the *terms* and *tempos* that Washington was choosing. While accepting to improve its bilateral relations with Spain, and even to support 'pragmatic steps' to deepen Spanish-NATO links, the Germans stressed that it was too early to 'formalise' a new relationship between the Spain and the Alliance.[47] Above all, Bonn feared that Washington's actions at the Atlantic Council and Ford's subsequent visit to Madrid would end up hurting NATO's internal coherence and cohesion.

[44] 'Aufzeichnung des Botschafters von Lilienfeld, Madrid', 3 April, 1975. *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschalnd* (AAPBD) 1975, doc. 69.

[45] Telegram from the French embassy in Bonn to the French Foreign Affairs Ministry, 7 April, 1975. CADC, 187QO/434, p. 56.

[46] 'Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit NATO-Generalsekretär Luns', 5 May, 1975. AAPBD 1975, doc. 102.

[47] 28 April, 1975. GRFPL, NSAF, NSC-ECOASF, box 21.

At the heart of the matter laid, again, the distinct understandings that the Europeans had of the dangers and limits of détente. At a superficial level, as Genscher recognised to Kissinger, abandoning Portugal and embracing Spain would help protect the Alliance, but that was only part of the problem. The United States should not look at the situation in both countries simply in military terms, but rather from the broader *symbolic* meanings that these actions would carry. Kissinger and Ford, Genscher warned, should not 'expose themselves to the suspicion' that they wanted to support the forces around Franco against the moderates.[48] What the Americans did or did not do mattered a great deal in a time in which the Vietnam War, the increasing delegitimisation of bipolarism, and the arrival of new ideologies were damaging America's and NATO's public image in Europe, especially amongst the youngest generations. An argument that the Dutch prime minister, Jan den Uyl, succinctly exposed to Kissinger:

> I think the change in Portugal has contributed to greater willingness to cooperate with Europe. Particularly young people in my country want to see NATO as a force for democracy. My Cabinet also wants to aid Portugal, and recognizes the risk of its becoming Communist-dominated. But we think we should strengthen the democratic elements which showed such strength in elections. We fear an American policy which has supported totalitarian regimes, and support the situation in Spain which would make NATO less acceptable.[49]

It was in this way that Western European self-confidence and their distinct views hampered Kissinger's plans in Spain. It illustrated, all in all, the extent to which détente had reduced what Del Pero has termed the 'disciplinary capacity of bipolarism'.[50] Applied to Spain, this meant that transatlantic coordination would have to be negotiated, or it would never be. The NATO events in May, as we shall see, became the clearest test of the limits of Western cooperation in Spain, in Portugal, and in the broader Southern European crisis.

The power of détente. Transatlantic divergence at the Atlantic Council

It is hard to tell whether the US government listened to the European answer or not. Or maybe the question is whether the Americans had much room for manoeuvre to change what they had planned for May.

We know for example that Kissinger ordered his ambassador in Madrid to prepare an official rendezvous between Ford and twenty members of the Spanish opposition. Considering the intensive transatlantic exchange seen above, as well as the lack of

[48] 'Aufzeichnung des Bundesministers Genscher', 22 May, 1975. AAPBD 1975, doc. 129.

[49] Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Johannes den Uyl, 14 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553075.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[50] Del Pero, 'Which Chile, Allende?,' 647.

references to such a measure in former US records, there are grounds to suggest that this was a way for Kissinger to take Genscher's advice to improve Ford's public image in Spain and in Europe. Be that as it may, the meeting never took place. Cortina strongly opposed Kissinger's initiative, claiming that this was something 'new' in the US approach to Spain, and 'inappropriate' for a chief of state. Washington would have to reconsider their plan or otherwise, as the Spaniard signalled to his counterpart, 'it would be very bad for [their] negotiations'. Kissinger immediately dropped the idea.[51]

Another effort by the US government to avoid transatlantic frictions was the toning down of their demands at NATO. Instead of aiming at a public communiqué at the Atlantic Council, the US government shifted its efforts to the Defence Planning Committee (DPC), a more restricted and military-oriented space within the Alliance.[52] Nevertheless, the DPC debates between May 22 and 23 turned out to be precisely what Kissinger and Ford had wanted to avoid at all costs: A transatlantic mud fight. At first expected to be nothing more than a small incision within broader discussions about the Mediterranean, the Spanish issue became the centre of more than four hours of 'Homeric discussions', according to French records.[53] On one side of the spectrum stood the US defence secretary, James Schlesinger, who pressed for the inclusion in the DPC's public communiqué some sort of recognition of Spain's active contributions in Western defence. The proposal received the support of a 'reluctant majority', but it had nonetheless to confront the bitter opposition of the Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian ministers.

The debate raised so much the spirits amongst the allies that the Secretary General of NATO was forced to clear the room of all but ministers and permanent representatives for the final discussion of the communiqué formulation. In the end, recognising that the topic had got out of hand, and even mounted excessive attention by the news media, the DPC agreed to include in its communiqué that the US secretary of defence had 'informed' his colleagues of the 'present state' of the US-Spanish negotiations, 'it being understood that these arrangements remained outside the NATO context'.[54]

US efforts at the DPC were insufficient for the Franco regime. Cortina recognised to Kissinger that the communiqué 'was always a start', but also that it fell short of the regime's expectations: 'If NATO members are so obstinate and want nothing with Spain,' Cortina said, 'they will leave the southern flank exposed and the US-Spanish relationship will proceed of its own accord and have nothing to do with the

[51] Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Cortina, 28 May, 1975. FRUS, DWE, doc. 203.

[52] Telegram from the State Department to the US embassy in NATO, 17 May, 1975. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=232990&dt=2476&dl=1345 [last consultation on. 4 October, 2021].

[53] Telegram from the French embassy in NATO to the French Foreign Affairs Ministry, 26 May, 1975. CADC, 187QO/410, p. 50.

[54] Telegram from the US embassy in NATO to the State Department, 24 May, 1975. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=233126&dt=2476&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

rest'.[55] What the cryptic Spanish minister meant by the latter part of this statement Kissinger did not know, but it confirmed his idea that Ford had no other option but to make a public reference to Spain at the Atlantic Council on 29 May.[56]

The Council proved to be a major failure for US transatlantic plans not only in Spain, but in the broader Southern Flank crisis. As if fulfilling Rumsfeld's gloomy predictions, it showcased the Alliance's internal limitations as an instrument to tackle those out-of-area issues that so crucially shaped the international scene in the mid-1970s. Happening right after the dramatic fall of Saigon, and in a context of growing US domestic hostility towards détente policies, the Council had become for Ford and Kissinger the perfect scenario to reaffirm their commitment to Europe's defence. More than that, it was their opportunity to encourage new forms of Western cooperation in areas such as the monetary reform, the energy issue, and the Southern Flank crisis.[57]

The problem was, however, that the Southern European crisis was precisely one of the main obstacles that prevented NATO from becoming the Western toolbox that Ford and Kissinger hoped for. At the Council, for example, the Turkish and Greek prime ministers welcomed Ford's call for transatlantic cooperation, but also acknowledged the existence of crucial 'difficulties' between their two countries that made them step aside from Ford's suggestions. The Portuguese prime minister Vasco dos Santos Gonçalves, for his part, affirmed Portugal's 'fidelity' to NATO, while also insisting on 'his country's right to carry out its independent foreign policy'.[58]

It was in this awkward atmosphere that Ford made his declaration on Spain. Connecting with his general remarks on the need for increasing Western cooperation, the president declared that:

> We should begin now to consider how to relate Spain with Western defense. Spain has already made, and continues to make, an important contribution to Western military security as a result of its bilateral relationship with the United States.[59]

[55] Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Cortina, 23 May, 1975. GRFPL, NSAF, NSC-ECOASF, box 21.

[56] Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Ford, 24 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553084.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[57] Conversation memorandum between Ford, Kissinger, and Rumsfeld, 24 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553084.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[58] Telegram from the Us embassy in Madrid to the State Department, 31 May. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=237604&dt=2476&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[59] Quotation in Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London and New York: Phoenix, 1999), 633.

These words, which some Spanish scholars have highlighted as representing a climax of transatlantic tensions with respect to Spain,[60] were in truth quite self-restrained and ordinary. Firstly, because they did not go beyond recommending (rather than pressing) the Europeans to review their own attitudes towards the Franco regime. And secondly, because they actually did not differ that much from Kissinger's reference to Spain at the 1974 Atlantic Council, when the Spanish issue did not raise any particular grievance amongst the allies.[61] In this light, the fact that the Dutch and the Scandinavians opposed for the umpteenth time to any approximation to Spain so long as Franco lived was irrelevant. And as was often the case in Kissinger's diplomatic mental map, it was not those voices that the secretary of state was most interested in.

Perhaps it is more telling the fact that the pre-Council bilateral conversations that Ford and Kissinger held with their 'privileged' allies had not gone much further. More to the point, the Spanish topic became a source of friction between the Americans and Helmut Schmidt, with the chancellor going so far as to demand a redraft of Ford's reference to Spain 'so as not to ask too much of [the] allies'. Given the observations in the paragraph above, it might well be the case that Ford and Kissinger agreed to this petition, although this did not bring Washington and Bonn any closer towards both Spain and Portugal. The dividing line between the United States and the Europeans remained the same, as Kissinger said: 'The policy that the Europeans are applying to Portugal we would apply to Spain, and the policy Europeans are applying to Spain, we think it should be applied to Portugal'.[62]

The conversation that the two US leaders had with President Giscard did not give way to optimism either. The French president shared Ford and Kissinger's concerns about the Iberian Peninsula, and even confessed his personal doubts about the European mainstream approach towards Portugal: 'We shouldn't ostracise them, but we shouldn't give them support'. The prospects in Spain were equally grim, according to the French president, since Giscard regarded Prince Juan Carlos as a weak leader, too scared to contest Franco's authority. There was simply nothing to be done: 'We can't help. They [the Spaniards] are a proud country and other people can't help'. In any case, it seemed unlikely to Giscard that the Alliance could play in the medium term a decisive role at the international stage, at least when it came to gathering Europeans around political decisions. European defence relations would remain the

[60] Charles Powell, *El amigo americano. España y Estados Unidos: De la dictadura a la democracia* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011), 219–220; Encarnación Lemus, *Estados Unidos y la Transición española. Entre la Revolución de los Claveles y la Marcha Verde* (Cádiz: Sílex, 2011), 51–54; Víctor Gavín, 'The Nixon and Ford administration and the future of post-Franco Spain, 1970–1976,' *The International History Review* 38, no. 5 (2016): 931–934.

[61] Telegram from the US mission in NATO to the State Department, 5 July, 1974. NARA, https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=156908&dt=2474&dl=1345 [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[62] Memorandum of conversation between Ford, Kissinger, and Schmidt, 29 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553091.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

same for now, the French president reckoned, 'but politics would be done more and more on a unified basis in Europe'.[63]

Thus, the NATO events in May seemed to confirm a crucial lesson not only about Spain, but most notably about the overall evolution of transatlantic relations. It was not that the West was losing control over Western Europe and its proximities, but rather that this part of the globe was moving towards a new, different trend. One that made Western Europeans more assertive in their new international role, and one upon which the Atlantic Alliance (and by extension the United States) would have a lesser impact.

Consequently, unable to form a common front with the Europeans allies, Kissinger had little choice but to keep on conceding to Spanish demands in the bilateral negotiations. A few days after returning from Europe, the secretary of state gave the green light to changes in the US negotiating stance vis-à-vis the regime. From now on, the US position would have to be open to consider the signing of a new agreement with the Spaniards (instead of simply extending the one agreed in 1970), the increase of credit funds, and, if necessary, the reduction or elimination of those US installations considered less essential to retain.[64] It was in this way that détente was creating a weaker American superpower, a self-confident Western Europe, and therefore (and paradoxically) a self-confident Spanish dictatorship.

The shock of the global. Transatlantic convergence at the Atlantic Council

Yet one should not jump to conclusions and overstate the reach of this new trend. Bitter though the Southern Flank crisis topic were for transatlantic relations, one should not forget that Giscard, Ford, Schmidt, and Wilson would soon intensify their personal contacts by creating new channels of multilateral cooperation, most notably the Group of Six (G6, later extended to G7). Indeed, this new kind of multilateral fora was essential for the stabilisation of some of the crises here described: The G6 was, for example, instrumental in politically marginalising the PCI in Italy, stabilising the Greco-Turkish dispute over Cyprus, and supporting Portugal's moderate political forces from the fall of 1975 onwards.[65] Indeed, by the time Franco had

[63] Memorandum of conversation between Ford, Kissinger, and Giscard, 29 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553090.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[64] 'US-Spanish bases negotiations', Memorandum for the Deputy Secretary of State, signed by Kissinger, 12 June, 1975. GRFPL, NSAF, US National Security Council. Institutional Files, box 69.

[65] Karamouzi, 'Telling the Whole Story. America, the EEC, and Greece, 1974–1976,' in *Europe in the International Arena During the 1970*, Guia Migani and Antonio Varsori (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), 355–374; David Castaño, 'A Practical Test in the Détente: International Support for the Socialist Party in the Portuguese Revolution (1974–1975),' *Cold War History*, 15, 1 (2015), 20–24; Duccio Basosi and Giovanni Bernardini, 'Between Cold War and Neo-Liberal Globalization: The Rise and Fall of Eurocommunism,' in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985*, Leopoldo Nuti ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 256–67.

passed away on November 20 1975, the 'big four' had only recently finished their first G6 summit at Rambouillet.

The reason behind this notorious shift to big power politics, I argue, lies in the broader evolution of the international arena. As this article has tried to demonstrate, *détente* was the main reason behind the projections of Western fears of a Southern European crisis in general, and of a Spanish turmoil in particular. And it was precisely *détente*—or rather, its different understandings on both sides of the Atlantic—that shaped the ways and tempos the West chose to deal with these crises, or visions thereof. *Détente*, to put it bluntly, set the bases of transatlantic frictions over Spain and Southern Europe, and underscored crucial flaws in US supremacy in Europe. But détente did not mark every single aspect of the international arena, nor was their southern flank everything Western Europeans cared about. Let us return to the larger picture.

The Atlantic Council in May, which showcased US limitations vis-à-vis its European partners, unfolded nearly at the same time as another crucial multilateral summit, that of the International Energy Agency (IEA). Created under Washington's direction in the wake of the oil shock, the IEA was succeeding by the spring of 1975 in gathering the West under US leadership, progressively convincing the rest of industrialised countries about the need to form unified consumer front against the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The Agency was being so successful by the time of the Council that, as a matter of fact, it was putting a strain on European alternatives like the Euro-Arab dialogue. Most notably, the IEA's advancements especially marginalised the only Western country that had declined to take part in their project: France. All this happened while the surge of energy prices and the global monetary instability exacerbated crucial differences across the Atlantic. The more energy-dependent Western European economies were dipping into recession, whereas the United States managed to keep its head above water thanks to a stronger dollar and a drastic reorientation in its balance of payments.[66] US leadership, in other words, was waning in Western Europe, but it was recovering its full strength at the global economic stage.

This global picture was something that some key Western figures bore in mind, especially during the Atlantic Council in May. A superficial reading of the Atlantic gatherings reveals (as it was indeed) a Western community divided upon crucial issues such as democracy and even NATO's core identity. Yet a more careful observation of some of the conversations during those days allows us to bring to the forefront other aspects that might go unnoticed at first sight.

Sometimes the most prominent fact in a discussion is not its content, but its context. In this sense, returning to the conversation between Giscard, Ford, and Kissinger, it is telling not only what these leaders discussed, but also the fact that this discussion *actually* took place. Giscard, after all, was the first French president to return to an Atlantic event since de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO's integrated

[66] Andreas Wenger and Daniel Möckli, 'Power shifts and new security needs. NATO, European identity, and the reorganization of the West, 1967–1975,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Transatlantic Security*, Jussi Hanhimäki et al. eds. (London: Routledge, 2010), 117–118.

command. However small this gesture might seem—the French president went to a dinner with the allies but declined to participate at the Council—it was a crucial step in the plans of the 'liberal and centrist' Giscard to break with Gaullist creeds and forge a closer partnership with Washington.[67] It is only in this light, therefore, that we manage to better contextualise some of the comments by the French president to his US counterpart. Giscard's reference to an independent European foreign policy, or even his gloomy projections over Spain and Portugal, added in true little to what the Americans and the French already knew about their own relationship. Giscard's presence at the NATO headquarters had a rather symbolic meaning, as he himself admitted at the beginning of his conversation with Ford and Kissinger: 'I wanted to come to show you an expression of my regard for you and the United States'.[68] This was not (or not only) a diplomatic formality, but a genuine trust-building gesture.

One can also extract similar lessons from a closer look at the discussion between Schmidt and the two US leaders at the NATO headquarters. The German chancellor, as we have seen, paid great attention to the Southern Flank crisis and its impact on Western internal coherence and cohesion. But he also identified himself as 'an economist', which made him regard the international economic crisis as the biggest challenge of his era.[69] Indeed, this was probably Schmidt's major concern at the Alliance at that time, as he even devoted a great part of his efforts in having a general discussion at the Council of the monetary, energetic, and economic issues that threatened the West. That this happened at the Atlantic Alliance (in theory a military organisation) seems anecdotic, but it is representative of the chancellor's sense of urgency, as well as of his belief in NATO as an instrument for bringing the West together.

Of course, Schmidt understood that no global solution would be possible without close cooperation with the United States, something that he himself confirmed to his American counterpart in Brussels. The United States, as he reminded Kissinger and Ford, was not only the world's largest economy, but also the only country with the power to psychologically shape the expectations of the global markets: 'What your New York boards expect trends to be are the expectations of the rest of the world'.[70] Seen in this light, statements like these hardly give the impression of a European leader holding US superpowerdom at bay. On the contrary, they were a direct call on the United States to take on the responsibility of their global power.

Yet perhaps it was Kissinger who best understood the intricacies of the global crisis, or at least in what referred to its impact on Washington's relations with its allies. Probably since his 'Year of Europe' speech, as we have seen, the secretary of

[67] Georges-Henri Soutou, *La guerre froide de la France, 1941–1990* (Paris: Pluriel, 2018), 418–419.

[68] Memorandum of conversation between Ford, Kissinger, and Giscard, May 29, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553090.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[69] For Schmidt's self-portrayal as an economist, see his own testimony in Serge Berstein and Jean-François Sirinelli eds., *Les années Giscard. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing et l'Europe, 1974–1981* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 90.

[70] Memorandum of conversation between Ford, Kissinger, and Schmidt, 29 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553091.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

state had been reflecting on the ways to create new channels of cooperation across the Atlantic, though these efforts had often led to dead ends. The IEA, for one, was starting to bear fruit, but it was far from turning into the political entity that Kissinger had once hoped for.[71] And older expectations in NATO becoming an up-to-date alliance, ready to move beyond traditional military Cold War issues, seemed to go overboard as the Southern Flank crisis showcased this Organisation's institutional limitations.

However, as Kissinger put it, the key difference between all former efforts and the Atlantic Council in May 1975 was that the energy and the economic crises now created a window of opportunity for US leadership: 'I am not reliable on economic matters,' Kissinger said to Ford in their preparation for the Council, 'but these issues are not basically economic'. Above all, Kissinger stressed the summit's importance for Ford to 'confirm his close cooperation' with Schmidt, who Kissinger saw as the most indispensable leader to, for example, forge a common front in the energy crisis. To do this, he recommended accepting some of the chancellor's requests, most notably the organisation of a future international conference—the one that turned out to be the Rambouillet summit. Ford would find opposition, Kissinger admitted, but the benefits outweighed the costs: 'He [Schmidt] wants to work with us. If you can reassure him on the economic facts… If we will work with him on the economy, he will support us on everything else'. Kissinger, in this vein, was starting to fully grasp (and take benefit from) the interweaving facet of the shock of the global: 'The trick in the world now is to use economics to build a world political structure'.[72]

Conclusion

Hence, and for all its quarrelling, what we see at the Alliance, and throughout most of 1975, is actually a converging scene. On the one hand, détente drove the United States more attentive to European demands, more concretely in the dealing of the Southern Flank crisis. On the other hand, global economic factors turned key Western Europeans closer to Washington. The imminent creation new forms of multilateralism, such as the G6, could therefore hardly be understood without this Southern European dimension.

Spain and the Southern Flank crisis, in this vein, served as indirect drivers of not only Cold War issues, as it is often held,[73] but of much broader questions. As high-speed events hindered the possibility of any grand design, it was precisely these very concrete moments, and these very concrete issues, that helped Western policymakers to better visualise their respective strengths and weaknesses. More

[71] Wenger and Möckli, in Hanhimäki et al., *The Routledge Handbook of Transatlantic Security*, 119.

[72] Conversation memorandum between Ford, Kissinger, and Rumsfeld, 24 May, 1975. GRFPL, FANSDC, NSA-MC, https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553084.pdf [last consultation on 4 October, 2021].

[73] A recent example of this could be Sotiris Rizas, 'Henry Kissinger and the transition to democracy in Southern Europe,' *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 17 (2019): 61–80.

than that, precise events helped statesmen to reach precise conclusions, namely, that cooperation in one area would have to be later recompensated in another. In this respect, what the Spanish and the broader Southern European scenarios did was to force Western leaders to give concrete form, and concrete application, to their abstract understandings of power, the West, détente, and the Cold War. And this was of inestimable value in a time of fractured meanings and shaken certainties. For that was how the main Western leaders understood the world, and Spain, in the year General Francisco Franco died.

Funding Open access funding provided by European University Institute - Fiesole within the CRUI-CARE Agreement.

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