

The French Factor in U.S. Foreign Policy during the Nixon-Pompidou Period, 1969-1974

Marc Trachtenberg
Department of Political Science
University of California at Los Angeles

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When Richard Nixon took office as president of the United States in early 1969, he and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger wanted to put America's relationship with France on an entirely new footing. Relations between the two countries in the 1960s, and especially from early 1963 on, had been far from ideal, and U.S. governments at the time blamed French president Charles de Gaulle for the fact that the United States was on such poor terms with its old ally. But Nixon and Kissinger took a rather different view. They admired de Gaulle and indeed thought of themselves as Gaullists.¹ Like de Gaulle, they thought that America in the past had been too domineering. "The excessive concentration of decision-making in the hands of the senior partner," as Kissinger put it in a book published in 1965, was not in America's own interest; it drained the alliance of "long-term political vitality."² The United States needed real allies—"self-confident partners with a strongly developed sense of identity"—and not satellites.³ Nixon took the same line in meetings both with de Gaulle in March 1969 and with his successor as president, Georges Pompidou, in February 1970. It was "not healthy," he told Pompidou, "to have just two superpowers"; "what we need," he said, "is a better balance in the West."⁴

This paper was originally written for a conference on Georges Pompidou and the United States which was held in Paris in 2009. A much shorter version of the paper is being published in a volume of conference papers being put out by the Association Georges Pompidou. A version of this article with links to most of the sources cited, is available at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/ffus/FrenchFactor.pdf>.

¹ See, for example, Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., p. 3, Digital National Security Archive (<http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/home.do>), Kissinger Transcripts collection, document KT00742 ([pdf](#)); henceforth documents from this source will be cited in the following form: DNSA/KT00742. Note also Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 8, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)), and Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 919.

² Henry Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), p. 233.

³ Ibid., p. 235. See also Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 86, 106. This had been Kissinger's view for some time. See, especially, his important article "NATO's Nuclear Dilemma," *The Reporter* (March 28, 1963)—an article which President Kennedy at the time referred to as a "disaster." Richard Neustadt notes of a conversation with Carl Kaysen, June 1, 1963, Richard Neustadt papers, box 22, folder "Memcons—US," John F. Kennedy Library [JFKL], Boston.

⁴ Nixon-de Gaulle meeting, March 1, 1969, p. 3, Nixon Presidential Library website, Virtual Library ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)); and Nixon-Pompidou meeting, February 24, 1970, p. 6, DNSA/KT00103 ([pdf](#)). See also Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 81-82, 86, 106, 390, 418, and Kissinger, *Troubled Partnership*, pp. 233-236.

When Kissinger and Nixon argued along these lines, they were thinking above all of France. And indeed, if they were serious about recasting American policy along these lines, ending what Kissinger later called the “brutish quarrel” with that country was bound to be of fundamental importance.⁵ The relationship needed to be rebuilt and they thought this goal was within reach. French foreign policy under Pompidou, in Kissinger’s view, was “serious and consistent.”⁶ The British, in comparison, were no longer interested in playing a major role: “with every passing year they acted less as if their decisions mattered. They offered advice, usually sage; they rarely sought to embody it in a policy of their own. British statesmen were content to act as honored consultants in our deliberations.”⁷ As for the Germans, both Nixon and Kissinger were worried about the Federal Republic, and especially about where the policy of the new Willy Brandt government—its *Ostpolitik*, its policy of improving relations with the East—was leading. They knew they had to go along with that policy, at least for the time being.⁸ But they were worried about German nationalism and German neutralism, about the Germans’ interest in eventually doing away with NATO, about the possibility that the present leaders like Brandt, although personally committed to the West, might be setting off a process they would not be able to control.⁹ This meant that the United States could not

⁵ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 5.

⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 420; see also p. 963.

⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 421.

⁸ As Kissinger put it in a National Security Council meeting in 1970: “We can’t afford to oppose Brandt but we can’t support his policy too strongly either.” NSC meeting, October 14, 1970, DNSA/KT00198 ([pdf](#)). He took a dim view of the agreements that were eventually reached: the German settlement, he told the British in April 1973, was “pernicious”; the U.S. government, he told them that November, had “hair-raising intelligence on what the Germans were saying to the Russians.” Kissinger meeting with British officials, April 19, 1973, p. 4, DNSA/KT00707 ([pdf](#)); Cromer to Douglas-Home, November 24, 1973, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, series III, vol. 4, ed. Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon, CD-ROM (New York: Routledge, 2006), doc. 412 (henceforth cited in the form: DBPO III:4:412). On this general issue, see Stephan Fuchs, “Dreiecksverhältnisse sind immer kompliziert”: Kissinger, Bahr und die Ostpolitik (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1999); Holger Klitzing, *The Nemesis of Stability: Henry A. Kissinger’s Ambivalent Relationship with Germany* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007); and also Klitzing’s article “To Grin and Bear It: The Nixon Administration and *Ostpolitik*,” in Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer, eds., *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁹ See Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 408-409, and Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 146. Note also Nixon’s comments in a meeting with Pompidou, December 13, 1971, in William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: New Press, 1998), pp. 36-37, and Kissinger’s comments in a meeting with Zhou Enlai, November 10, 1973, *ibid.*, p. 175. See also Kissinger-Jobert meeting, May 22, 1973, p. 13, DNSA/KT00736 ([pdf](#)). Kissinger had been aware of those trends for some time. See, especially, his

have the same sort of relationship with Germany that Nixon and Kissinger hoped to have with France: too much independence for Germany would be too dangerous; Germany was viewed more as a problem than as a partner. Kissinger explained U.S. thinking in this area to Pompidou in May 1973. A strong Europe, in the American view, was as essential as a strong China, and in that strong Europe, “France would play a pivotal role. We do not believe that Germany is sufficiently strong psychologically, and we believe it is too open to Soviet pressures to be able to contribute to develop a Europe in this sense.” It was “of great importance,” he told Pompidou, “that you understand our real policy”; “we have never discussed this so openly with another leader.”¹⁰

So France was of central importance, and Nixon and Kissinger tried to develop a close relationship with the Pompidou government. They admired Pompidou as a person.¹¹ They liked the way the French tended to think in cool, realistic, power political terms.¹² They tended to view France as the most “European” of the European allies, saying things that the other European governments did not dare to say out loud—and that meant that in dealing with France as something of a privileged partner, they were really in a sense dealing with western Europe as a whole.¹³ And they were willing, they said, to live with the fact that French and American interests and policies diverged in a number of key areas. In a December 1970 meeting with Hervé Alphand, the top

notes on an April 10, 1965, meeting with Egon Bahr, Brandt’s most important advisor. Bahr told him that in the “scheme he and Brandt were considering,” “a unified Germany would leave NATO” and “foreign troops would be withdrawn from its territory.” Declassified Documents Reference System [DDRS], document CK2349120291 ([pdf](#)). By 1973, Nixon and Kissinger had come to have a very low regard for Brandt: he was in their view a “fool” and a “muddle head.” Kissinger-Shultz-Scowcroft meeting, March 29, 1973(?), p. 1, and Nixon meeting with main advisors, April 12, 1973, p. 4, both in National Security Advisor: Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-1977, box 1, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, available online in the [Digital Ford Presidential Library](#) [DFPL], [Digitized Memoranda of Presidential Conversations: Nixon Administration](#) [DMPC:Nixon] ([link](#) to first document) ([link](#) to second document).

¹⁰ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, p. 7, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)).

¹¹ See Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 389, 419, and Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 129.

¹² See Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 105, 421; and Kissinger, *Troubled Partnership*, p. 58. This basic attitude was reflected in a comment Nixon made in his February 1970 meeting with Pompidou. “What we really need,” he had told his colleagues, “was a healthy dose of French skepticism or cynicism in dealing with the Soviet Union.” Nixon-Pompidou meeting, February 24, 1970, pp. 4-5, DNSA/KT00103 ([pdf](#)).

¹³ See, for example, Kissinger, *Troubled Partnership*, p. 72, and Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 109. The references there are to de Gaulle, but that way of looking at things applied also to the France of Georges Pompidou.

permanent official in the French foreign ministry, Kissinger “remarked that we did not have nervous breakdowns every time a Franco-American disagreement appeared; that was the custom when Alphand was the Ambassador here in another period but it was not so now.”¹⁴

Those attitudes would have had a major impact on relations between the two countries even if de Gaulle had remained in power. As it was, the French for their part had also shifted course in 1969. Pompidou, who also came to power that year, was a Gaullist but he was not de Gaulle. His was a “rationalized Gaullism,” as Georges-Henri Soutou calls it, a Gaullism shorn of the General’s eccentricities. The new president did not want to see the United States play only a peripheral role in European affairs. There needed to be a counterweight to Soviet power in Europe, and in his view only the United States could provide it. On that issue he and the new American leadership saw eye to eye. And on the other great issue in European politics, the German question, they also took basically same line. Neither of them was entirely thrilled by what Brandt was doing, but for now at least neither would stand in his way.¹⁵

Given all this, it would have been amazing if relations between the two countries did not improve dramatically, and in fact in the early Nixon-Pompidou period the two governments were on very good terms. Kissinger, in his memoirs, referred to a “degree of sharing of views unprecedented

¹⁴ Kissinger-Alphand meeting, December 14, 1970, p. 5, National Security Council Files, box 677, folder “France vol. VII,” originally consulted in the Nixon Presidential Materials collection, U.S. National Archives [USNA], College Park, Maryland, but now available at the Nixon Presidential Library [NPL], Yorba Linda, CA. Henceforth cited in the form: NSCF/677/France vol. VII/NPL. Alphand was ambassador in Washington from 1956 to 1965.

¹⁵ On the Pompidou policy, a series of works by Georges-Henri Soutou are of fundamental importance: “L’attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l’Allemagne,” in Association Georges Pompidou, *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe: Colloque, 25 et 26 novembre 1993* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1995); “Le Président Pompidou et les relations entre les Etats-Unis et l’Europe,” *Journal of European Integration History* [JEIH] 6, no. 2 (2000) ([link](#))—an English translation was published in Marc Trachtenberg, ed., *Between Empire and Alliance: America and Europe during the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003); some parts are also [available online](#); and “La problématique de la Détente et le testament stratégique de Georges Pompidou,” *Cahiers du Centre d’Études d’Histoire de la Défense*, cahier no. 22 (2004) ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)). On France’s German policy during this period, see also Andreas Wilkens, *Der unstete Nachbar: Frankreich, die deutsche Ostpolitik und die Berliner Vier-Mächte-Verhandlungen 1969-1974* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990); Markus Bernath, *Wandel ohne Annäherung: die SPD und Frankreich in der Phase der neuen Ostpolitik 1969-1974* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001); and Gottfried Niedhart, “Frankreich und die USA im Dialog über Détente und Ostpolitik, 1969-1970,” *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 31, no. 3 (2004), pp. 65-85 ([link to text](#)); note esp. the final two pages in that article.

among allies,” and some of his meetings with Pompidou were indeed quite extraordinary.¹⁶ But what was going on in the nuclear area was of even greater importance.¹⁷ From the very start, both governments were interested in developing a certain relationship in this area.¹⁸ Nixon and Kissinger wanted to support the French nuclear program. As Kissinger told the French ambassador in April 1973, de Gaulle “was basically right,” it was “too dangerous to have one country as the repository of nuclear weapons. We would like France to be a possessor.”¹⁹ American policy in this area, as Nixon told Pompidou in 1973, had shifted 180 degrees from what it had been in the 1960s.²⁰ And as for Pompidou, he very much wanted to get American help for the French nuclear program. He was not held back by any doctrinaire Gaullist notions that the French could not even talk to the Americans about such matters—that for the sake of French independence, they would have to do everything entirely on their own. When Kissinger asked Pompidou in February 1970 whether he could talk about defense matters on his forthcoming visit to Washington, he said: “I can and I want to.”²¹ On the other hand, the U.S. leadership, knowing how sensitive the French could be on the subject of independence, decided that no political preconditions would be laid down, and that in particular the

¹⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 964. See especially the record of their May 18, 1973, meeting (DNSA/KT00728) ([pdf](#)). Note also Soutou’s discussion of this meeting in his JEIH article ([link](#)), pp. 133-134 (corresponding to pp. 180-181 in the translated version published in *Between Empire and Alliance*). China was the only other government with which Kissinger was so open; on May 30 he in fact gave the Chinese a copy of the record of his meeting with Pompidou. See Kissinger-Huang meeting, May 29, 1973, p. 4, DNSA/KT00740.

¹⁷ On this issue, see especially Pierre Mélandri, “Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine,” in Maurice Vaisse, ed., *La France et l’atome: études d’histoire nucléaire* (Brussels: Bruyant, 1994); Pierre Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale: la France, les États-Unis et l’Année de l’Europe,” in *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, esp. pp. 106-110; Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” esp. pp. 91-92, 97-98 ([pdf](#)), and above all Maurice Vaisse, “Les ‘relations spéciales’ franco-américaines au temps de Richard Nixon et Georges Pompidou,” *Relations internationales*, no. 119 (Fall 2004).

¹⁸ See Vaisse, “Les ‘relations spéciales’ franco-américaines,” p. 360, and also the discussion on p. 3 of the more extensive manuscript version of this article (provided to me by Professor Vaisse).

¹⁹ Kissinger meeting with Ambassador Jacques Kosciuszko-Morizet, April 13, 1973, p. 9, DNSA/KT00702 ([pdf](#)). Note also his comments to a high British official, Sir Burke Trend, on April 19, 1973, in Trend’s memo to the Prime Minister (dated April 24, 1973), pp. 2-3, DNSA/KT00707 ([pdf](#)).

²⁰ Quoted in Mélandri, “Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine,” p. 247.

²¹ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, February 23, 1970, DNSA/KT00100 ([pdf](#)).

U.S. negotiators would “*not* suggest that U.S. assistance” be “tied to greater French cooperation in NATO.”²²

So it is not too surprising, given those attitudes, that a certain relationship did develop. The Americans began to provide some very important information relating especially to France’s existing systems, especially information that would help French missiles penetrate Soviet defenses. The French, for their part, were quite pleased with the information the Americans were giving them.²³ So American policy toward France had shifted in a fairly fundamental way, and what that suggests is that the language the new U.S. leadership was now using has to be taken seriously.

But if all this is true, how then are we to understand what happened in the final year of the Nixon-Pompidou period? For in 1973, as many observers have noted, relations between the two countries took a sharp turn for the worse. What went wrong? Why did the attempt to develop a close relationship fail? My goal here is to look at this issue in the light of a remarkable body of source material—not just French and American, but German and British as well—that has become available in the last few years. What light does that new evidence throw on this question?

²² Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, June 25, 1970, NSCF/677/France vol. VI/NPL. Emphasis in original text. It should be noted that Secretary of Defense Laird had assumed that the U.S. government should ask for something in return for the nuclear assistance it would be offering—for example, “French participation in NATO defense studies.” Laird draft memo for the president, enclosed in Laird to Kissinger, April 2, 1970, p. 3, in the same file. That Laird suggestion was now being overruled. It should be noted, incidentally, that in Kissinger’s view the whole question of French relations with NATO was not very important in any case. “It is clear,” he wrote earlier that year, “that much of the discussion of integration versus national freedom of action is artificial and theological. In the end, all NATO members retain the capacity for unilateral military action; at the same time, in practice, they are unlikely to use them unilaterally except under most unusual and extreme circumstances.” Kissinger memo for Nixon on Military Relations with France, February 23, 1970, NSCF/916/France—Pompidou Visit Feb. ’70 (1 of 3)/NPL. And it is important to note also that the French government, even under de Gaulle, and despite all of the General’s complaints about NATO, did not take the NATO structures too seriously: the only really important question was whether the U.S. president would decide to go nuclear if the alliance ever faced its moment of truth; the plans that had been worked out in the NATO framework and the strategy documents that had been adopted would not have much bearing on the sort of decision that was made. See, for example, Couve de Murville’s comments in a meeting with U.S. ambassador Charles Bohlen, December 2, 1963, *Documents diplomatiques français* 1963, 2:576. For confirmation of the point that the Americans did not ask for anything in exchange for the nuclear help they were offering, see Defense Minister Debré to Pompidou, March 11, 1972, quoted in Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale,” p. 107.

²³ See especially the Debré to Pompidou letter cited in n. 22. For a discussion of how the nuclear relationship had developed, of how matters stood in the spring of 1973, and how things might progress, see the Defense Department response to NSSM 175, May 11, 1973, NSCF/679/France—vol. XI/NPL ([pdf](#)).

The End of Bretton Woods

It is easy enough for two countries to cooperate when they see eye to eye on key issues. But what happens when they disagree on some issue of major importance? The first great test of the new relationship between France and the United States that had developed early in the Nixon-Pompidou period came in 1971 with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. The two countries had very different policies in that area. How well were they able to manage their differences? Some new international monetary system had to be worked out, and in fact a new system of market-based (or “floating”) exchange rates did eventually come into being. What does a study of the story here tell us about the basic nature of Franco-American relations in this period?

The collapse of the Bretton Woods system in August 1971, with the American decision to close the “gold window”—that is, to no longer allow foreign governments to convert the dollars they had accumulated into gold at the official price of \$35 an ounce—came as no surprise. By the time the end came, it was quite clear that the system was in crisis and that the basic problem had to do not with the policy of any particular government but rather with the system itself. The Bretton Woods regime was in practice, if not quite in theory, a system of more or less fixed exchange rates. The dollar was convertible into gold at a fixed rate, and other currencies were convertible into dollars (considered, at the start, to be as “good as gold”), again at fixed rates.²⁴ The problem with such a system is that, given the fact that different governments pursue different policies, especially monetary policies, payments imbalances are almost inevitable. If the U.S. rate of inflation is higher than that of America’s main trading partners, American goods (in a fixed rate regime) would become increasingly overpriced abroad, and foreign goods would become a better deal in the United States. The balance of trade would thus shift, and other key elements in the balance of payments—above all, capital movements—would be affected in much the same way. And as it happened by 1971 the United States was running a large balance of payments deficit, spending more for foreign goods, for foreign

²⁴ See, for example, John Williamson, *The Failure of World Monetary Reform, 1971-1974* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 4.

assets, and for foreign exchange that it wanted for other purposes (most notably to meet the needs of the American armed forces stationed abroad) than it was taking in from the sale of U.S. goods abroad, from U.S. investment earnings abroad, and in other more or less normal ways. That deficit was possible only because foreign governments and their central banks were in effect willing to finance it by holding those excess dollars or their equivalents. In theory, they were entitled to cash in the dollars they were accumulating for gold, but in practice it was clear that the Americans would view that as an unfriendly act; in any case, an unending U.S. gold hemorrhage would lead to an official closing of the gold window, and few foreign governments wanted to bring down the par value system by forcing the Americans to do that.

So the key question then had to do with how those persistent payments imbalances could be dealt with. In principle, under the Bretton Woods system, the parities could be adjusted in such cases. But in practice the surplus countries were reluctant to revalue their currencies upward, mainly because they did not want to hurt their export industries, and the deficit countries were reluctant to devalue, largely because devaluation was viewed as something of a humiliation.²⁵ A devaluation of the dollar, moreover, was especially problematic, given that other countries were holding substantial parts of their reserves in dollars. One of the reasons those countries were holding dollars was that they had been told that those dollar reserves were as “good as gold”; a devaluation of the dollar might be seen almost as a breach of faith, an admission that the surplus countries had been misled and that their dollar reserves were not as “good as gold” after all.²⁶ If the dollar were devalued, their reserves, moreover, would be worth less in terms of gold; those countries might then lose faith in the dollar and cash in their dollar reserves for gold even at the new price. A devaluation, in other words, might actually lead to a run on the dollar, and thus to a collapse of the system. And beyond

²⁵ See, for example, French finance minister Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s characterization of de Gaulle’s attitude, quoted in Benedict Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée: De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963-1969* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), p. 116.

²⁶ “An increase in the official gold price would break faith with all those who have helped us for a decade by holding large amounts of dollars.” Kissinger to Nixon, June 25, 1969, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], 1969-1976, vol. 3, p. 349 ([link](#)).

that there was a certain sense that a devaluation might not have much of an effect on actual exchange rates and thus on the payments imbalance: a top European Economic Community official predicted that if the United States devalued, “all European currencies would be devalued by the same percentage on the same day.”²⁷

This situation was not to anyone’s liking. The United States was in effect living beyond its means, and the Europeans, together with the Japanese, were picking up the tab. This naturally led to a certain amount of resentment on the part of the surplus countries. De Gaulle, of course, was especially outspoken on this issue. But the Americans did not feel they were benefiting from the system.²⁸ They were not happy to be running a payments deficit—quite the contrary. That deficit was for them a burden. It constrained their freedom of action both at home and abroad. They would have preferred, for example, to set policy on troop levels in Europe without having to take balance of payments considerations into account. And they would have preferred to manage the U.S. economy without, say, having to worry about how the low interest rates needed to deal with unemployment might affect the payments deficit. As Nixon put it: “we just can’t have the American domestic economy constantly hostage” to the “international monetary situation.”²⁹ The payments deficit was in fact disliked for all sorts of reasons—not least because of the controls and protectionist pressures it had led to³⁰—and by 1971 the U.S. government was more open to fundamental systemic change than one might think.

²⁷ Hendrik Houthakker, “The Breakdown of Bretton Woods,” in Werner Sichel, *Economic Advice and Executive Policy: Recommendations from Past Members of the Council of Economic Advisors* (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 54. See also George Shultz and Kenneth Dam, *Economic Policy Beyond the Headlines* (New York: Norton, 1977), [p. 114](#).

²⁸ On this point, see the important study by Francis Gavin, [*Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971*](#) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²⁹ Nixon meeting with economic advisors, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, FRUS 1969-76, 31:59 ([pdf](#)).

³⁰ Note for example Paul Krugman’s comment on a paper by Richard Marston about capital controls under Bretton Woods: “The most striking result of the paper is its demonstration that the Bretton Woods system bore very little resemblance to the golden age of financial markets that many people now think that they remember. Capital controls were pervasive, and they led to large, systematic interest differentials.” In Michael Bordo and Barry Eichengreen, eds., *A Retrospective on the Bretton Woods System: Lessons for International Monetary Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 539.

By that point many economists had begun to concern themselves with these problems. Some of them wanted to move to a system of floating exchange rates, where rates would be set by the market.³¹ The major advantage of that system, as the economist Milton Friedman pointed out, is that it “completely eliminates the balance-of-payments problem,” or as the British-born economist Harry Johnson, another champion of the market-based system, put it, it would automatically ensure balance of payments equilibrium.³² The exchange rate would simply be set at the point where demand for a particular currency was equal to the supply—the point, that is, at which payments were in balance with each other.

And it was not just academic economists who tended increasingly to favor a more flexible system. After a decade of chronic balance of payments problems, support for the Bretton Woods regime was no longer rock solid, and some people in business, government and even banking circles were open to the idea of fairly fundamental change. In the United States, the most influential “floater” was George Shultz, an economist by training, a friend, disciple and former colleague of Friedman’s, and in 1971 head of the Office of Management and Budget at the White House. Some key European officials, especially in Germany and Italy, also favored a more flexible regime. But most officials, and probably most economists as well, were not quite ready to go all the way and replace Bretton Woods with a market-based system. There was still a strong feeling that without fixed parities the world might well revert to the chaos of the 1930s, with its competitive devaluations

³¹ Robert Roosa, a leading proponent of the fixed-parity system, thought in 1967 that at least 90 percent of academic economists seemed to accept the “theoretical case for fluctuating rates.” Milton Friedman and Robert Roosa, *The Balance of Payments: Free Versus Fixed Exchange Rates* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1967), p. 177. The real figure was probably not nearly that high, although most economists probably did favor the introduction of more flexibility into the system—for example, a “crawling peg,” or wider bands within which rates would be allowed to fluctuate. See Friedman’s own comments on this issue in *ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

³² Friedman and Roosa, *Balance of Payments*, p. 15; Harry Johnson, “The Case for Flexible Exchange Rates, 1969,” republished in Harry Johnson, *Further Essays in Monetary Economics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 199. It should be noted, however, that it was not just the pro-market monetarist right of the economics profession that disliked the par value system. The Keynesian left was also uncomfortable with a regime that made it more difficult for governments to pursue the monetary and fiscal policies that the domestic economic situation seemed to call for. Keynes himself in the interwar period had pointed out the problems with the gold exchange standard; the term “golden fetters” that Barry Eichengreen used as the title of his book on the “gold standard and the Great Depression” (see the next footnote) was taken from a passage in an essay that Keynes published in 1932.

and pernicious “beggar-thy-neighbor” monetary policies. That view was not based on a serious historical analysis of that period. It ignored the fact, for example, that the world did not have a simple floating exchange rate system in the 1930s; indeed, the very term “competitive devaluations” implied that currencies were still being pegged to a fixed standard.³³ But the myth about the 1930s was very strong, and it was in large part because of a visceral fear that radical change might lead to a 1930s-style disaster that the Bretton Woods system had the support it did.

So the Nixon administration, even in 1971, did not set out to bring down the system. Its primary goal was to deal with the payments deficit, and that meant that it had to get its trading partners to accept a more reasonable structure of exchange rates. It would achieve that goal by not actively defending the dollar if it came under pressure; the United States would also make it clear, either formally or informally, that it would not allow other countries to cash in the dollars they had accumulated for gold at the official price; the surplus countries would then have to choose whether to revalue their currencies upward or go on accumulating dollars. The assumption was that they would probably opt to revalue and the world would get a better system of fixed parities. But if they went the other route, that would not be a major problem for the Americans. The surplus countries would be soaking up dollars because they had chosen to do so, not because the U.S. government had come to them, hat in hand, and had asked them to do so.³⁴

³³ As Ragnar Nurkse pointed out in 1944, the “monetary authorities in most countries” in the 1930s “had little or no desire for freely fluctuating exchanges.” Ragnar Nurkse, *International Currency Experience: Lessons of the Inter-War Period* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1944), p. 122. Scholars incidentally tend to argue nowadays that the historical beliefs that sustained the Bretton Woods system were essentially incorrect. See, for example, Michael Bordo, “The Bretton Woods International Monetary System: A Historical Overview,” in Bordo and Eichengreen, *Retrospective on the Bretton Woods System*, p. 31; Barry Eichengreen and Jeffrey Sachs, “Exchange Rates and Economic Recovery in the 1930s,” *Journal of Economic History* 65 (1985), pp. 925-946; ; and Barry Eichengreen, *Golden Fetters: The Gold Standard and the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 4, 21-22. Thus Eichengreen writes: “According to the conventional wisdom, the currency depreciation made possible by abandoning the gold standard failed to ameliorate conditions in countries that left gold and exacerbated the Depression in those that remained. Nothing could be more contrary to the evidence” (p. 21).

³⁴ Houthakker, “The Breakdown of Bretton Woods,” pp. 50-53; Hendrik Houthakker, “Cooling Off the Money Crisis,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 16, 1973, p. 10 ([pdf](#)). Houthakker was a Harvard economics professor who served on Nixon’s Council of Economic Advisors from 1969 to 1971. Note also Kissinger to Nixon, June 25, 1969, FRUS 1969-76, 3:345-351 ([link](#)); see especially the recommendation on p. 351 that the U.S. should “pursue a passive balance of payments policy while pursuing the negotiations for monetary reform.” (Kissinger obviously did not draft this document; as he often admitted, this was not his area of expertise.) The aim of the

But although an exchange rate realignment was an important immediate goal, a number of key U.S. officials were interested in getting something more than just a one-shot set of revaluations. Some of them were also, from the start, interested in bringing about a fundamental reform of the system—in cooperation with the surplus countries if possible, but unilaterally if those cooperative efforts failed. And those who favored this course were under no illusions that the sorts of reforms they had in mind would be easy to achieve.

The crisis, though long expected, came to a head in mid-1971. The new Secretary of the Treasury, John Connally, laid out the policy in May. The crisis would be allowed to develop “without action or strong intervention by the U.S.” At an appropriate time, the gold window would be closed and trade restrictions would be imposed. This would lead, at least for the time being, to a system of floating rates. The main goal was to get the surplus countries to revalue their currencies, but it would be made clear—both for bargaining purposes and as a fallback position if revaluation negotiations failed—that the United States could live with the floating rate system indefinitely.³⁵ Nixon approved this course of action and in fact wanted to “move on the problem,” and not “just wait for it to hit us again.”³⁶ The new measures were announced on August 15: the gold window was closed, a border tax was imposed. Nixon had gone on the offensive. The whole tone of U.S. policy in this area was quite nationalistic. The emphasis was still on getting the Europeans and the Japanese to accept a substantial realignment of exchange rates, but the goal of systemic change had by no means disappeared entirely. According to Shultz, who was certainly in a position to know, the August 15

June 25 memorandum was to prepare the president for an important meeting on international monetary policy. No record of that meeting has been found (*ibid.*, p. 345 n. 3), but it is discussed in Houthakker, “Breakdown of Bretton Woods,” p. 53.

³⁵ Treasury paper, May 8, 1971, FRUS 1969-76, 3:423-427, esp. p. 425 ([link](#)).

³⁶ Huntsman to Connally, June 8, 1971, *ibid.*, p. 443 ([link](#)). The Nixon tapes provide some extraordinary insights into U.S. policy-making at this point. Some key passages were transcribed and presented in chapter 3 of Luke Nichter, “Richard Nixon and Europe: Confrontation and Cooperation, 1969-1974,” unpub. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2008 ([pdf](#)).

package “was designed to be a signal that the United States was seeking a fundamental change not only in existing exchange rates but also in the monetary system itself.”³⁷

And Shultz’s influence was on the rise. By late 1971, Nixon had evidently come to share the Shultz view that a major structural reform was in order, and that it would be a mistake to go back to the “old system of parities, but with different exchange rates.”³⁸ It was probably for this reason that the question of a devaluation of the dollar in terms of its gold price was now so important: if the price of the dollar could be set in terms of gold, then why shouldn’t all the exchange rates be set by international agreement? That was the old system, and the basic goal now for Shultz and, increasingly, for Nixon as well, was to move on to something better. But Connally, who was being criticized for his rough tactics, was under pressure to settle, and he in effect offered to devalue the dollar as part of a rate realignment package.³⁹ Nixon was angry. He had made it clear that he did not favor devaluation.⁴⁰ But it was too late to go back on the Connally offer. A series of negotiations—between the Germans and the French, then between Nixon, Kissinger and Pompidou in the Azores, and finally in late December 1971 between all the major trading nations at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington—followed in rapid order, leading to an agreement that set new parities, but which did not restore convertibility.

³⁷ Shultz and Dam, *Economic Policy*, p. 115.

³⁸ Editorial note, FRUS 1969-76, 3:521-522 ([link](#)). Note also a September 8, 1971, letter to the Under Secretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs Paul Volcker from Shultz’s Assistant Director Kenneth Dam (he and Shultz later wrote a book together), cited in FRUS 1969-76, 3:179 n. 1, warning (in the editor’s paraphrase) that “focusing on quantitative goals before agreeing on the type of international monetary system the administration wanted might constrain long-term options” ([link](#)). See also Nixon-Kissinger telephone conversation, October 28, 1971, Digital National Security Archive (<http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/home.do>), Kissinger Telephone Conversations Collection, item number KA06727; henceforth cited in the form: DNSA/KA06727 ([pdf](#)).

³⁹ See, for example, Paul Volcker and Toyoo Gyohten, *Changing Fortunes: The World’s Money and the Threat to American Leadership* (New York: Times Books, 1992), pp. 85-87.

⁴⁰ Nixon memo, November 2, 1971, and editorial note, FRUS 1969-76, 3:528 ([link](#)), 582 ([link](#)). See also Nixon-Kissinger phone conversation, October 28, 1971, DNSA/KA06727 ([pdf](#)); Allen Matusow, *Nixon’s Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars, and Votes* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), pp. 173, 176; and Robert Leeson, *Ideology and the International Economy: The Decline and Fall of Bretton Woods* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 140-141.

The Americans, however, did little to “defend” the new rates.⁴¹ Shultz had taken over from Connally as Secretary of the Treasury in early 1972 and that policy choice was in line with Shultz’s basic approach to the problem. His goals were more ambitious than Connally’s had been. He wanted a fundamentally new system, a system where the market would play the central role in setting exchange rates. But he was no Texas cowboy. His methods were subtle and indirect. He thought of himself as a strategist who sought to “understand the constellation of forces present in a situation” and tried to arrange them so that they pointed “toward a desirable result.” The aim was not to dictate the terms of a settlement, but rather “to get the right process going” and allow things to take their course.⁴²

It was thus not Shultz’s style to try to force his views directly on other people. He was a “conciliator and consensus builder” and could “work with almost inhuman patience to bring a group into agreement upon a decision that all could support, at times submerging his own preferences.”⁴³ The most striking example of this was his willingness in mid-1972 to accept a “par value system supported by official convertibility of dollar balances,” provided the burden of adjustment was shared equally by both surplus and deficit countries.⁴⁴ A plan of that sort (which, however, would also allow countries to “float their currencies”) was announced in September 1972.⁴⁵ It was well-received, since it showed that the U.S. government was serious about reform. For Shultz, however, a negotiation based on this kind of plan was not the only way to bring a new system into being. For him, the road to reform had two lanes, “one of negotiations and the other of reality. A conclusion would be reached only when these two lanes merged and the formal system and the system in actual

⁴¹ See Volcker and Gyohten, *Changing Fortunes*, pp. 103-104.

⁴² George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner’s, 1993), pp. 30, 31.

⁴³ Volcker and Gyohten, *Changing Fortunes*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁴⁵ See “Major Elements of Plan X,” July 31, 1972, and editorial note, FRUS 1969-76, 3:646 ([link](#)), 655 ([link](#)). The text of Shultz’s September 26, 1972, speech laying out this proposal was published in the *New York Times* on September 27 ([pdf](#)). It is interesting to compare the accounts of this plan that Shultz and Volcker give in their memoirs; one would hardly think they were describing the same proposal. See Volcker and Gyohten, *Changing Fortunes*, pp. 119-120; Shultz and Dam, *Economic Policy*, pp. [126-127](#).

practice came together.”⁴⁶ A system of floating exchange rates came into being *de facto* with the collapse of the Smithsonian agreement in early 1973; the two lanes converged when the reality of the floating rate system was recognized by the Jamaica agreement of January 1976.

What does this story tell us about U.S. policy toward Europe in this period? Does it give us any insight into the question of why Franco-American relations took the course they did in the Nixon-Pompidou period? The first point to note is that the floating exchange rate system did not come about by accident. It was not as though everyone wanted fixed rates, but just could not agree on what sort of fixed rate system to set up. By early 1972, the Americans had a strategy; key officials like Shultz, backed to a certain extent by Nixon, knew what they were doing. They were not trying to maintain a system in which the United States had special rights. The French had complained, under both de Gaulle and Pompidou, that in the Bretton Woods system the Americans had enjoyed a kind of right of seignorage. They could run deficits and the rest of the world would have to finance those deficits by holding dollars which in effect could not be cashed in for gold. They could pay for what they wanted, they could buy up European firms, with dollars they could create at will.⁴⁷ But in a floating exchange rate system, no foreign government would have to hold dollars if it did not want to. The “privileges” that America “enjoyed” under Bretton Woods would disappear. The dollar would become a more normal currency. And that was the way U.S. leaders wanted it. For them Bretton Woods was a straitjacket. They complained constantly about the “asymmetries” of the system. They wanted, as Shultz put it, “to gain for the United States some of the freedom of action for its own exchange rate that was available to all other countries.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Shultz and Dam, *Economic Policy*, [p. 127](#). Shultz had in fact used the two-track metaphor at the time. See Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, and Nixon meeting with Shultz, Ash and Stein, January 21, 1974, FRUS 1969-76, 31:83, 216 ([pdf](#)).

⁴⁷ See, for example, de Gaulle press conference, February 4, 1965, in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours and messages*, vol. 4 (Paris: Plon, 1970), p. 332; Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1997), p. 77; and Pompidou press conference, September 23, 1971, in Georges Pompidou, *Entretiens et discours*, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1975), p. 40.

⁴⁸ Shultz and Dam, *Economic Policy*, [p. 119](#).

The French were much more committed to the basic idea of a fixed rate system, but they were by no means horrified by the new American policy. They were not too upset even by the nationalistic rhetoric Nixon and Connally adopted when the gold window was closed in August 1971. As a politician, Pompidou appreciated the way Nixon had turned a potential liability—something that could easily be portrayed as practically a confession of national bankruptcy—into a political asset.⁴⁹ As a Gaullist, he could hardly blame the United States for pursuing a policy based on its own national interest. And after complaining for years about Bretton Woods, and especially about the American deficits and the special role the dollar played in the system, the French could scarcely complain now that the Americans were determined to put an end to the deficits and make the dollar a more normal currency. Their president, in fact, recognized that “the reserve role of the dollar is actually a burden”; he agreed that “no currency should have this theoretical privilege.”⁵⁰

Pompidou certainly believed that a fixed rate system of some sort was essential. This was in part because he accepted the conventional view about the 1930s—a view which one of the main French officials involved with these matters at the time, Claude Pierre-Brossolette, later characterized as a “myth.”⁵¹ It was also in part because he wanted to maintain a slightly undervalued franc for domestic economic purposes, something possible only with a regime of fixed, or at least managed, exchange rates.⁵² (The irony here, of course, is that policies that sought to keep exchange rates artificially low in order to stimulate the domestic economy had a certain 1930’s-style “beggar thy

⁴⁹ Pompidou, *Entretiens et discours*, 2:42.

⁵⁰ Pompidou-Kissinger meeting, December 14, 1971, p. 3, DNSA/KT00410 ([pdf](#)).

⁵¹ Pompidou, *Entretiens et discours*, 2:37; Comité pour l’histoire économique et financière de la France, *La France et les institutions de Bretton Woods, 1944-1994: Colloque tenu à Bery les 30 juin et 1^{er} juillet 1994* (Paris: Ministère de l’Économie, des Finances et de l’Industrie, 1998), pp. 111-112. Note also a comment made at that conference by Pompidou’s economics advisor Jean-René Bernard. Pompidou, he said, “éprouvait une très grande difficulté à concevoir un système radicalement différent du système des parités fixes: je pense qu’il s’agit là d’une opinion quasi métaphysique, quasi religieuse...” Ibid., p. 125. Bernard’s own views, as this passage suggests, were probably more moderate at the time. See Soutou, “L’attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l’Allemagne,” p. 311 n. 88.

⁵² See Bernard’s remarks to that effect at another conference: Éric Bussière, ed., *Georges Pompidou face à la mutation économique de l’Occident, 1969-1974: Actes du Colloque des 15 et 16 novembre 2001 au Conseil économique et social* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), p. 109; note also Éric Bussière, “Georges Pompidou et la crise du système monétaire international,” *ibid.*, p. 85.

neighbor” feel.⁵³) But Pompidou and other key French officials were clearly intelligent enough to see that there was something to the U.S. case. The Americans were not just being selfish; the argument that the fixed rate system was fundamentally defective and that radical change might be necessary was perhaps not to be dismissed out of hand. The sense seemed to be growing that maybe France was behind the curve intellectually, that maybe the whole idea of a market-based system deserved to be taken more seriously, that maybe French thinking was a bit too rigid, too locked into the clichés of the past.⁵⁴ So while the French were not thrilled by what the United States was doing in this area, they were by no means prepared (as Pompidou told the German foreign minister in November 1971) to “go to war” with the United States over this issue. The Europeans were neither strong enough nor united enough to pursue a really tough anti-American policy, and even if they had been, it would not have been to their interest to act in that way.⁵⁵

To be sure, French policy hardened after it became clear that the Smithsonian agreement was empty—that the Americans did not intend to defend the December 1971 parities and were thus

⁵³ Note in this context Connally’s reaction when the EEC representative rejected the American proposal to totally end the payments deficit (with the argument that the proposed change was “too ambitious” because the world had gotten used to the situation that had developed). The U.S. government, Connally replied, could not accept the idea that “the export market should be used or can be used for the purpose of providing prosperity at home to the detriment of other nations around the world.” Quoted in Luciano Segreto, “États-Unis, Europe et crise du système monétaire international (1968-1973),” *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Thus, for example, almost certainly referring to the Americans, Pierre-Brossolette said at the time: “la flexibilité n’était pas seulement dans les taux de change; elle était également dans les esprits.” J.-R. Bernard meeting with Pierre-Brossolette, March 30, 1973, quoted in Bussière, “Georges Pompidou et la crise du système monétaire international,” *ibid.*, p. 102. The implication was that the French were still too rigid in comparison. Note also a commentary published at the time by Raymond Aron, who among other things was France’s most distinguished political analyst: “Fin des parités fixes?” September 7, 1971, in Georges-Henri Soutou, ed., *Raymond Aron: Les articles de politique internationale dans Le Figaro de 1947 à 1977*, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1997), p. 982. Aron viewed the whole question of fixed vs. floating exchange rates as very much an open issue, even intellectually. Looking back on the period, Bernard felt that the French had not been prepared intellectually to deal with these issues, and that it was only later that their way of thinking became more like that prevailing in the international financial community as a whole. See his comments in Bussière, ed., *Georges Pompidou face à la mutation économique de l’Occident*, p. 111. It strikes me as quite likely that a vague feeling that this was the case had already begun to take shape at the time. Pompidou was more attached to the par value system, but as he himself admitted, despite his background in banking he had no particular expertise in this area. See Pompidou-Schmidt meeting, February 10, 1973, *Akten zur auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1973* [henceforth cited in the form: AAPD 1973], pp. 223-224. This suggests that he was perhaps more open to the views of other people in this area than one might have thought.

⁵⁵For Pompidou’s comment to German foreign minister Scheel, see Segreto, “États-Unis, Europe et crise du système monétaire international,” p. 40. For the German text, see Pompidou-Scheel meeting, November 19, 1971, AAPD 1971, p. 1767. For the softening of the French view in late 1971, see also McCracken to Nixon, November 24, 1971, 1969-76, 3:567-568 ([link](#)).

reneging on the assurances they had given at the Azores meeting.⁵⁶ That new situation led to certain major changes in French policy. The European countries, generally speaking, were not going to defend the Smithsonian parities entirely on their own by absorbing however many dollars they had to to keep their own exchange rates from rising, and the French in particular would obviously not go along with a pure dollar standard of that sort. If a par value system was desirable, then it made sense, if the Americans refused to be part of it, to try to establish at least a European monetary system of some kind.⁵⁷ And in fact, when the Smithsonian system collapsed in early 1973 and the world moved *de facto* to a floating exchange rate regime, Pompidou accepted the notion, which the Germans had been suggesting for some time, of a joint European float against the dollar.⁵⁸ But he had been slow to accept this idea. He might have agreed in theory that there should be some sort of European counterweight to American power in this area, but in practice he had from the start been reluctant to move ahead too quickly toward the establishment of a European monetary system, and had rejected the idea of a joint float when the Germans had proposed it in 1971 and 1972.⁵⁹ And in deciding to participate in the joint float in March 1973, the French were by no means making an irrevocable decision. They in fact left the European “snake,” as it was called, and floated their own currency in January 1974, just ten months later.

Did the plan fail, at least for the time being, because the Americans disliked the idea of a free-standing Europe, and thus of a monetarily and economically united Europe, and had set out to

⁵⁶ “On a été déloyal avec nous,” Pompidou said in this context in early 1973. See Jobert notes of February 14 and March 7, 1973, cabinet meetings, Association Georges Pompidou, Paris, cited in Laurent Césari, “Les relations personnelles entre Nixon, Pompidou et leurs entourages,” unpublished paper, p. 8. For the U.S. assurances, see Pompidou-Kissinger meeting, December 13, 1971, p. 3, DNSA/KT00407 ([pdf](#)). Nixon-Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, December 13, 1971, 4 p.m., pp. 6, 11, DNSA/KT00408 ([pdf](#)); Pompidou-Kissinger meeting, December 14, 1971, p. 1, DNSA/KT00410 ([pdf](#)).

⁵⁷ See Soutou, “L’attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l’Allemagne,” pp. 292-293.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁵⁹ See Robert Frank, “Pompidou, le franc et l’Europe,” in *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, pp. 348-363, esp. pp. 356, 361, 362; and Pompidou’s comments quoted in Gérard Bossuat, “Le président Georges Pompidou et les tentatives d’Union économique et monétaire,” *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, p. 422. The issue, incidentally, had already come up in the 1960s. De Gaulle had proposed a single European currency to the Germans in 1964—without, according to Giscard, fully understanding its political implications—but the Germans rejected the idea. The French brought up the issue again in 1968-69. See Schoenborn, *Mésentente approuvée*, pp. 116-119, 139.

torpedo it?⁶⁰ This issue is more complex than one might think. On the one hand, the U.S. officials most deeply involved with these monetary problems, and above all Treasury Secretary Shultz, had no objection in principle to “Europe floating against the United States”—certainly not on economic grounds.⁶¹ Shultz, in fact, welcomed the idea, since it would in effect bring a floating exchange rate system into being; his top assistant in this area told the French finance minister in February 1973 that “a joint European float would be fine with the U.S., and it would be consistent with the evolution of international monetary arrangements.” The treasury secretary understood that the joint float would be accompanied by “anti-American rhetoric,” but he was prepared to accept that kind of thing philosophically. He certainly did not think the U.S. government should oppose it for that reason.⁶²

On the other hand, neither Nixon nor Kissinger approached the issue in quite the same way. The president, to be sure, by this point agreed with Shultz about what made sense in purely economic terms.⁶³ But his feeling was that the issue could not be decided solely on that basis, and that the political side of the problem was of fundamental importance. To take the Shultz view—that the United States should not intervene in the foreign exchange markets in any massive way but

⁶⁰ Note, for example, Segreto, “États-Unis, Europe et crise du système monétaire international,” p. 32, where the author refers to the alleged U.S. goal (in 1971) of ending what remained of a “common European position with regard to the problems with the U.S. currency.” On this issue, see also Dimitri Grygowski, “Les États-Unis et l’unification monétaire de l’Europe: bilan d’ensemble et perspectives de recherche, 1968-1998,” *Journal of European Integration History* 13, no. 1 (2007), esp. pp. 119-122.

⁶¹ Volcker quoted in Leeson, *Ideology and the International Economy*, p. 137. Note also Volcker’s account in *Changing Fortunes*, pp. 112-113, of Shultz’s views on the subject, and also the report of a top British official of his meetings with Shultz, Volcker and Federal Reserve Chairman Arthur Burns in February 1973: “they were not opposed to a common European monetary policy including a common float.” Cromer to Foreign Office, February 16, 1973, DBPO III:4:26. One of the arguments for a U.S. policy of suspending convertibility, in fact, was that it might “provide a major impetus toward closer European integration.” Kissinger (but obviously not drafted by him) to Nixon, June 25, 1969, FRUS 1969-76, 3:348 ([link](#)). For the views of a number of leading U.S. economists on the question, none of whom were very alarmed by the prospect of joint European action in this area, see the record of a conference held at the time and co-sponsored by the State Department and the Brookings Institution: Lawrence Krause and Walter Salant, eds., *European Monetary Unification and Its Meaning for the United States* (Washington: Brookings, 1973), esp. pp. 183 (Max Corden), 297 (Henry Wallich), and 309 (Harry Johnson).

⁶² Volcker report of meeting with Giscard, February 11, 1973; Nixon meeting with economic advisors, March 3, 1973, tape transcript; Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript; in FRUS 1969-76, 31:44, 56, 75-76, 81 ([pdf](#)).

⁶³ See, for example, Nixon meeting with economic advisors, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, and Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 7, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, pp. 69, 106 ([pdf](#)).

should basically just let the dollar float—would give the wrong message. That would, Nixon said, be “just too much of a ‘To hell with the rest of the world’” sort of policy.⁶⁴ If the Americans went that route, he thought, the Europeans would “pull together” and say “‘The United States doesn’t care,’ and that hurts our bigger game with regard to Europe.”⁶⁵ A more active policy would mean that the U.S. government would have “a leadership role with the Europeans that we don’t have otherwise”—although he went on to add (quite revealingly, I think): “Now, I don’t [know] what the hell we do with it.”⁶⁶

But Nixon’s basic feeling was that “political considerations must completely override economic considerations” in this area. This, he noted, was “going to be a bitter pill for Shultz to swallow but he must swallow it.”⁶⁷ So the treasury secretary was instructed to “be forthcoming” with the Europeans, more forthcoming than he himself was inclined to be.⁶⁸ This applied especially to the Germans. “We don’t want” German finance minister Helmut Schmidt, Kissinger told Shultz, “to be in a domestic position at home where he turned to the Americans” and “got totally kicked in the teeth,” because if the Nixon administration was blamed for the measures the German government would have to take, that would “shift the whole pattern within Germany.”⁶⁹

This did not mean, however, that Nixon and Kissinger basically wanted to cooperate with the Europeans in this area. It did not mean, in particular, that on the issue of the joint float they wanted America to play a helpful role. There was a “growing tendency,” Nixon thought, for the Europeans to “turn inward” and to distance themselves from the United States.⁷⁰ The policy of

⁶⁴ Nixon-Shultz-Burns meeting, February 6, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 12 ([pdf](#)).

⁶⁵ Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 74 ([pdf](#)). See also Nixon meeting with economic advisors, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 69 ([pdf](#)).

⁶⁶ Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 84 ([pdf](#)).

⁶⁷ Nixon to Kissinger, March 10, 1973 (draft), *ibid.*, p. 119 ([pdf](#)).

⁶⁸ Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 7, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, pp. 106, 111 ([pdf](#)).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110; see also p. 112 ([pdf](#)). What Kissinger probably had in mind here was that if the Americans were not “forthcoming,” the Germans might feel they had to float their currency on a national basis, a move that might lead to a dramatic appreciation of the mark, with devastating consequences for the Federal Republic’s export-oriented economy.

⁷⁰ Nixon meeting with economic advisors, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 69 ([pdf](#)).

“building Europe,” it seemed, was coming to have an increasingly sharp anti-American edge; French policy especially was interpreted in those terms. Paul Volcker, Under Secretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs, was afraid that the French were using the “so-called European solution” for political purposes. The “European solution,” he said, was simply “a euphemism for saying ‘Let’s leave the United States out of the world—and go our independent course.’” That, he said, was the French view. Their goal was “to posture Europe vis-à-vis the United States politically.” But it wasn’t just the French. There was a risk that western Europe as a whole would move in that direction.⁷¹

And Nixon seemed to agree. Both he and Kissinger now wondered whether European integration was in America’s interest.⁷² The president, in fact, thought that there was a risk that Europe would turn into a “Frankenstein monster”; the reason he was interested in an interventionist monetary policy was that “it might serve our interests in keeping the Europeans apart.”⁷³ Kissinger also thought it might be a good idea “if we can force [the Europeans] to deal separately with us.”⁷⁴ And the U.S. government now made it clear to Willy Brandt (who had informed Nixon that the Europeans were considering possible “joint action” that they could take in the monetary area) that European integration was no longer viewed as an end in itself, but only as a “step towards increased Atlantic cooperation.”⁷⁵

So the whole point of an interventionist policy in this area was not to help the Europeans with their monetary problems. The main goal was to keep the Europeans from coming together as a bloc, and the idea was that the United States might be able to achieve that goal by intervening selectively, on a country by country basis. But it was taken for granted that the U.S. government could not oppose the Europeans head on: “We couldn’t bust the common float without getting into a hell of a political fight,” Kissinger said; the Americans had to do what they could “to prevent a

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 62-63, 70 ([pdf](#)).

⁷² Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, pp. 74, 79 ([pdf](#)).

⁷³ Nixon to Kissinger, March 10, 1973 (draft), *ibid.*, p. 119 ([pdf](#)); and Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 83 ([pdf](#)).

⁷⁴ Nixon-Kissinger-Shultz meeting, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, *ibid.*, p. 79 ([pdf](#)).

⁷⁵ Brandt to Nixon, March 2, 1973, and Nixon to Brandt, March 3, 1973, *ibid.*, pp. 49, 92 ([pdf](#)).

united European position without showing our hand.” And he emphasized the point that that policy was not based on an assessment of America’s economic interests: his objection to what the Europeans wanted to do “was entirely political.” He had in fact learned from intelligence reports that all of America’s enemies in the German cabinet “were for the European solution”; it was that information that had pretty much decided the issue for him.⁷⁶ A year later, at a time when America’s problem with Europe was coming to a head, he laid out his thinking on the issue in somewhat greater detail. “We are not,” he said, “opposed to a French attempt to strengthen the unity of Europe if the context of that unity is not organically directed against us. So I am not offended by the float idea as such, or by common institutions. If, however, it is linked to the sort of thing that is inherent in the Arab initiative [i.e., the Europeans’ plan at that point for a “dialogue” with the Arabs, which, as will be seen, Kissinger viewed as a hostile move], as it seems to be, then we have a massive problem. Then we have the problem that we have got to break it up now.”⁷⁷

It is not clear, however, that the U.S. government actually did much to prevent the joint float from working. The Treasury Department controlled policy at the operational level, and people like Shultz had no wish to torpedo the project. It was not as though the point of a European monetary system was to conduct an economic war against the United States (although it was sometimes interpreted in those terms, both by some U.S. officials at the time and by some scholars more recently).⁷⁸ The Europeans were clearly in no position to pursue that kind of policy, and the

⁷⁶ Kissinger-Simon telephone conversations, March 14 and 15, 1973, DNSA/KA09752 ([pdf](#)) and KA09779 ([pdf](#)). Some extracts were also published in FRUS 1969-76, 31:123, 126 ([pdf](#)). The following month another intelligence report about Brandt was circulated to top U.S. officials. “Apparently,” Federal Reserve chief Arthur Burns wrote in his diary, “we know everything that goes on at German cabinet meetings.” Arthur Burns Journal II, p. 60 (entry for April 3, 1973), [Digital Ford Presidential Library](#) [DFPL] ([link](#)).

⁷⁷ Secretary’s Staff meeting, March 22, 1974 (document dated March 26), p. 50, DNSA/KT01079. Note also a comment Kissinger made in a March 6, 1974 meeting with Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger: “I am convinced we must break up the EC. The French are determined to unify them all against the United States.” National Security Advisor: Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-1977, box 3, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, available online in DFPL, [Digitized Memoranda of Presidential Conversations: Nixon Administration](#) [DMPC:Nixon] ([link](#)).

⁷⁸ See Watson to Secretary of State, September 20, 1972, Department of State Central Files [DOSCF], Subject/Numeric Files [Subj-Num] 1970-73, box 2278 [POL FR-US 1-10-72], Record Group [RG] 59, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD [USNA]; and Bossuat, “Le président Georges Pompidou et les tentatives d’Union économique et monétaire,” pp. 425, 427.

Americans did not really object to the European plan on economic grounds. Shultz, of course, could not ignore what Nixon and Kissinger were telling him, but they were saying all sorts of different things; the guidance was far from clear. Shultz was told to “be more forthcoming,” but Kissinger especially had also made it clear that he did not want to joint float to succeed. That latter goal, as the Treasury Department saw it, meant “less intervention,” which was in line with the Shultz position.⁷⁹ So the treasury secretary had plenty of wiggle room; he could select which goals to emphasize, and the choices he made were in line with his own policy preferences. In any event, it was hard to see how a policy of selective intervention could actually achieve the goals Nixon and Kissinger had set for themselves. As Volcker pointed out, “almost inevitably, intervention on our part with appreciating European currencies will contribute to the viability of the snake.”⁸⁰ If the United States, for example, intervened to limit the rise in the German exchange rate, that would automatically reduce pressure on the other currencies tied to the mark in the system—it would make it easier on the French, for instance, to stay in the snake, since the franc would also not have to rise so sharply.

So if the joint float failed, it was probably not because the Americans had been able to sabotage it. As long as the U.S. government was able to regain its own freedom of action, key officials like Shultz did not really care much what sort of monetary system the Europeans worked out among themselves. The effort failed, it seems, for the same reason the Bretton Woods system had failed. Just as Bretton Woods had resulted in an overvalued dollar, so the European snake, by tying the franc so tightly to the strong German mark, had resulted in an overvalued franc.⁸¹ A belief in the importance of a united Europe was not enough to override basic economic realities. This was particularly true, since for Pompidou as for Nixon, political and economic autonomy was from the start what mattered most; the French national interest was more important than “building

⁷⁹ Kissinger-Simon telephone conversation, March 14, 1973, DNSA/KA09752 ([pdf](#)); see also FRUS 1969-76, 31:123 ([pdf](#)).

⁸⁰ Volcker to Shultz, enclosed in Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, March 13, 1973, FRUS 1969-76, 31:122 ([pdf](#)).

⁸¹ See Frank, “Pompidou, le franc et l’Europe,” p. 365.

Europe.”⁸² And from the French point of view there was also a special problem having to do with the central role the German mark played in the European monetary system. The fear was that in a European monetary system too much power might be concentrated in German hands. The French president, as he himself said, did not want to exchange the dollar standard for a mark standard.⁸³

Pompidou certainly did not like the basic thrust of American policy in this area, but it really is an exaggeration to say that the “limited improvement in U.S.-French political relations” that had taken place in the early part of the Nixon-Pompidou period “was overwhelmed by the increasingly poisonous atmosphere created by U.S.-European economic tensions.”⁸⁴ Economic issues played a key role in the story, but in themselves they by no means drove the two countries apart. The United States, for example, did not oppose the joint float for economic reasons; in a different political context, it would have had no objection to the plan. And the French position on monetary issues more generally did not pose any real problem for the U.S. government: the tough line the French took in the negotiations meant that a formal agreement would be harder to achieve, but the Americans were content to live with the existing “floating” arrangements indefinitely. Nor was the French government overly concerned with this set of issues. Indeed, when Pompidou met with U.S. leaders in Iceland in mid-1973, he played down the political importance of these issues. He saw “no great difficulty concerning economic relations between the U.S. and the European Community”; those sorts of problems, he thought, were “easy to solve.”⁸⁵ The real problem lay elsewhere.

The Year of Europe

⁸² Ibid., pp. 349-355.

⁸³ Frank, “Pompidou, le franc et l’Europe,” p. 359, and Soutou, “L’attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l’Allemagne,” pp. 290-291.

⁸⁴ Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Twayne, 1992), p. 173.

⁸⁵ Pompidou-Nixon meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., p. 8, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)). He used the same language in the French record of the meeting, quoted in Éric Roussel, *Georges Pompidou, 1911-1974*, new edition (Paris: J.C. Lattès, 1994), pp. 555-556. He took a very relaxed line, in particular, on the question of the reform of the international monetary system (ibid., p. 564). The original document is in the Pompidou presidential papers, collection 5AG2, box 1023, Archives Nationales, Paris, henceforth cited in the form: 5AG2/1023/AN. On this general issue, see also Pompidou-Heath meeting, May 22, 1973, DBPO III:4:98, pp. 4, 6.

On April 23, 1973, Henry Kissinger gave a major speech called “The Year of Europe.” The Atlantic alliance, he argued, was in trouble. America and Europe were drifting apart. “In economic relations the European Community” had “increasingly stressed its regional personality,” whereas the United States tended to think in terms of a “wider international trade and monetary system.” In the political sphere, one had the same sort of structural problem. The United States was a global power, whereas the Europeans had essentially “regional interests.” The time had come to deal with the tensions this situation had given rise to, and indeed one had to deal with them comprehensively. “The political, military, and economic issues in Atlantic relations,” he said, “are linked by reality, not by our choice nor for the tactical purpose of trading one off against the other. The solutions will not be worthy of the opportunity if left to technicians.” They had to be “addressed at the highest level.” In 1972, Nixon had transformed America’s relationship with her two Cold War adversaries, the Soviet Union and China. In 1973, the main goal would be to reinvigorate the western alliance by working out a “new Atlantic charter,” a “blueprint” for a “revitalized Atlantic partnership.”⁸⁶

Kissinger was worried about the future of the alliance—worries which, as we have seen, were coming into focus in part as a result of what was going on on the economic front. Could the U.S. government just sit on its hands and allow the confrontation with Europe to develop? Maybe it was possible to head it off; maybe some sort of dramatic move was called for. In September 1972 he gave a preview of the policy to Franz-Josef Strauss, the leader of one of the main opposition parties in Germany, the Christian Social Union. It was “absolutely essential,” he told Strauss, that after the U.S. presidential elections in November “we have a fundamental review” of U.S.-European relations. If the basic problems were not worked out, Europe and America would find themselves

⁸⁶ “The Year of Europe,” address by Henry Kissinger in New York, April 23, 1973, *Department of State Bulletin*, May 14, 1973, pp. 593-598 ([pdf](#)). A number of works dealing with the Year of Europe and related issues have appeared in recent years. See Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: Tauris, 2008), esp. chap. 4; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “Kissinger et l’Europe: entre intégration et autonomie,” *Relations internationales*, no. 119 (2004), pp. 319-332; Silvia Pietrantonio, “L’anno che non fu? L’anno dell’Europa e la crisi nelle relazioni transatlantiche, 1973-1974,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Bologna, 2008; and Aurélie Gfeller, “Re-envisioning Europe: France, America and the Arab World, 1973-74,” Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 2008, chap. 1.

“fighting about individual issues year after year. And after a while the economic problems will make it impossible to maintain the security relationship.”⁸⁷

He made the same sort of argument to the French ambassador, Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet, the following March, about a month before the Year of Europe speech:

Our basic thinking is this: We believe that if we go into trade negotiations without a framework, confrontation will almost certainly result. If our President has to make each decision one at a time, on its own merits, he will be motivated by domestic political pressures. We also have defense issues to discuss. It is helpful to get an overall framework to discuss economics, defense and political issues. We cannot have a monetary crisis every six months, and we both have an energy crisis.⁸⁸

He elaborated on the point in another meeting with Kosciusko-Morizet a couple of weeks later, this time laying greater emphasis on the political issues. He knew, for example, that the French were worried “that maybe some sort of condominium between the US and the USSR could emerge.” To make sure that no one would think that something like that was possible, he argued, you had to change the whole tenor of the U.S.-European relationship. Above all, you had to put an end to all the squabbling—you had to avoid getting into a “guerrilla type of situation between Europe and the United States in which the public considers we have endless disagreements and no common action.”⁸⁹ The two sides, in Kissinger’s view, needed to look at the larger picture and deal comprehensively with all the major issues they faced.

The Europeans, and especially the French, did not respond the way Kissinger had hoped. The Americans, it seemed to them, were trying to group the allies around the United States. Their goal was to set policy for the alliance as a whole. The sort of system they were trying to create, Pompidou himself later said, implied a “certain subordination” of the allies to the United States.⁹⁰ Michel Jobert, the foreign minister, used stronger language. Kissinger’s geopolitical vision, he wrote,

⁸⁷ Kissinger-Strauss meeting, September 10, 1972, p. 5, DNSA/KT00553 ([pdf](#)).

⁸⁸ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, March 29, 1973, p. 2, DNSA/KT00690 ([pdf](#)).

⁸⁹ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, April 13, 1973, pp. 6-7, DNSA/KT00702 ([pdf](#)).

⁹⁰ Pompidou meeting with Japanese prime minister Tanaka, September 18, 1973, quoted in Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale,” p. 97.

was quite clear: the whole world would revolve around American power; Europe would be “confined to a purely regional role”; the process the Americans hoped to begin would “consecrate American hegemony over the western world.”⁹¹

Although U.S. leaders had gotten some sense that there might be problems, it was not clear at first that the official French reaction would be so negative.⁹² After Kissinger’s March 19 meeting with Kosciusko-Morizet in which he explained the initiative, the ambassador flew to Paris to brief the head of state in person. “Yes, I agree,” Pompidou said, giving what Kosciusko called the “green light” for the Year of Europe speech.⁹³ And when Kissinger met with Pompidou on May 18, the

⁹¹ Michel Jobert, *Mémoires d’avenir* (Paris: Grasset, 1974), pp. 231-232. Jobert made much the same point in another volume of memoirs published two years later: “Je tournais les pages du discours d’Henry Kissinger: quelle tranquille assurance, dans l’affirmation de la primauté américaine sur le monde occidentale, quelle détermination dans la volonté d’organiser son camp, en répartissant les tâches et en assignant les places, quelle brutalité aussi pour exiger de l’Europe, dans son organisation économique et sa défense, la subordination et une contribution en échange de l’exercice du droit de suzeraineté.” Michel Jobert, *L’Autre regard* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 288. Note also the following comment made in 1994 by Jean de Lipkowski, in 1973 Secretary of State in the Foreign Ministry: “Lorsque Kissinger—qui ne manquait pas d’humour—décréta l’année de l’Europe c’est-à-dire un système qui cherchait à la réduire au silence, il ne trouva sur sa route que la France.” Jean de Lipkowski, “Succéder au Général,” Bernard Pons et al., *Georges Pompidou: vingt ans après* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1994), p. 108. This sort of interpretation, incidentally, can still be found even in the American historical literature. Frank Costigliola, author of the most important U.S. study of Franco-American relations in the post-World War II period, views the speech as a “blunt reassertion of American hegemony.” Kissinger, he says, was asking for a “near veto over the EEC’s economic decisions”; this, in his view, is what the passage in the speech about how economic, military and politics issues were linked really meant. Costigliola, *France and the United States*, pp. 174-175.

⁹² According to Jobert’s later account (*Mémoires d’avenir*, p. 237), he had warned Kissinger when he was in Paris before the Iceland summit conference that France was deeply opposed to the project. The U.S. record of Jobert’s May 22, 1973, meeting with Kissinger, however, has Jobert predicting that Pompidou would take a rather conciliatory line on the issue when he met Nixon in Reykjavik: “President Nixon will have to outline the concrete lines, the framework, of his conception. I don’t think Mr. Pompidou will be opposed to the idea.” Kissinger-Jobert meeting, May 22, 1973, p. 5, DNSA/KT00736 ([pdf](#)).

⁹³ Kosciusko-Morizet comment in *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, p. 209. Kissinger told the British much the same thing at the time. Kissinger meeting with British officials, May 10, 1973, p. 15, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files [HAK OF] /62/HAK London Trip/NPL. ([pdf](#)). Jobert gave a rather different account in *L’Autre regard*, p. 288. The Europeans, he says, had not been consulted and the speech came as a surprise. But factual accuracy was not his strong suit. On the immediately preceding page (p. 287), for example, he made the rather astonishing claim that Eisenhower owed his reelection in 1956 to his establishment of the Berlin airlift. Eisenhower, of course, had little to do with the airlift. He had resigned from the Army in February 1948 and was serving as president of Columbia University at the time the blockade was imposed a few months later. And the Berlin airlift of 1948-49 was not even an issue in the 1956 presidential campaign. But it was not just Jobert who falsely claimed that the Europeans had not been consulted. The British prime minister, Edward Heath, often made the same sort of claim, despite the fact that the Americans prior to the speech had made it quite clear what they had in mind and had asked explicitly for British views. For Heath’s claims, see Armstrong to Acland, June 19, 1973 (an account of Heath’s meeting the previous day with W.W. Rostow), DBPO III:4:133; Cabinet minutes, June 20, 1973, DBPO III:4:137; Catherine Hynes, *The Year That Never Was: Heath, the Nixon Administration and the Year of Europe* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2009), pp. 103, 208; and Heath’s

French president did not seem at all hostile. He was “not particularly shocked” by the much-criticized passage in the speech that referred to the Europeans’ “regional” interests. And he agreed that while it was necessary to consider each specific problem “in its own context” it was also important to keep the broader picture in mind “on all occasions.” “If some were shocked by your ideas,” he told Kissinger, “I personally did not find your ideas so far from reality.”⁹⁴

The French president, as Kissinger saw it, was the key to the whole Year of Europe plan and in his view the main goal of the Nixon-Pompidou meeting that was scheduled to begin in Reykjavik at the end of May was to set the whole process of drafting a new Atlantic charter in motion.⁹⁵ It therefore came as something of a shock to him, after a long late-night talk with Jobert shortly after his arrival in Iceland, that “the French clearly harbor the most deep-seated suspicions of our motives in launching our Atlantic initiative.” It was evident, he wrote Nixon, that “Pompidou is laboring under certain serious misapprehensions regarding our purposes.”⁹⁶ It was therefore important to clear up those misconceptions, and that effort had begun even before the Reykjavik meeting, triggered in all probability by what had appeared in the newspapers.

Above all, it had to be made clear to the Europeans, and especially to the French, what America’s real goals were. “They think we are aiming at a perpetuation of U.S. hegemony,” he told

remarks in a 1990 interview, quoted in Peter Hennessy and Caroline Anstey, *Moneybags and Brains: The Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ Since 1945* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 1990), p. 17. For evidence that the British knew what the Americans had in mind and were in fact consulted in advance about the U.S. initiative, see, for example, Acland to Armstrong, December 19, 1972, DBPO III:4:8, p. 2, and especially Kissinger meeting with, Cromer and Sykes, March 5, 1973, DBPO III:4:44, pp. 24-29; the U.S. record is in HAK OF/62/UK Memcons, Jan-April 1972/NPL. For more evidence, see Hynes, *Year That Never Was*, esp. pp. 65, 88, 124. For the British side of the Year of Europe story, see also Niklas Roszbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1969-74* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), and Keith Hamilton, “Britain, France, and America’s Year of Europe, 1973,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17 (2006)—Hamilton was co-editor of the DBPO volume on the Year of Europe.

⁹⁴ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, pp. 1-2, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)). See also the French account of this meeting in 5AG2/117, where the point is made even more strongly. Pompidou, incidentally, made the same point in a meeting with Heath on May 21, 1973, quoted in Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 548 (5AG2/1015/AN); Heath’s reaction to that part of the Kissinger speech was a good deal more hostile.

⁹⁵ “Proposed Outcome of Meeting Between Presidents Nixon and Pompidou in Iceland,” and Kissinger to Nixon, “Meeting with President Pompidou—Iceland,” both undated, both in NSCF/ 949/Pompidou-Nixon Meeting, May-June 1973, 1 of 3/NPL.

⁹⁶ Kissinger to Nixon, May 30, 1973, NSCF/ 949/Pompidou-Nixon Meeting, May-June 1973, 1 of 3/NPL.

the president and other top officials on May 25. “This is not our objective at all.”⁹⁷ He had taken the same line in a meeting with Kosciusko on May 14. It did not make sense, he said, for someone like him who admired de Gaulle to want to “return to the Kennedy period, and the same for the President. . . . We don’t disagree with your views.” “We have no view or no intention,” he said, “to create one undifferentiated Atlantic Community in which the Europeans have to follow Washington directly.” The passage in his speech about the regional role of Europe had been taken entirely out of context. If Europe wanted to play a global role, America would welcome it. And as for the argument that by linking economic, political and military issues the Americans were trying to “blackmail” Europe—that is, that they were implicitly threatening the Europeans that the security relationship would be put at risk if they did not give way on economic matters—Kissinger said that this too was based on a misunderstanding. If the United States wanted to play hardball, the political leadership would simply leave the economic negotiations to the economic agencies. Putting them in a political framework would lead to a more conciliatory U.S. stance. But the basic point was that America was not pursuing a hostile or confrontational policy. He wanted to pursue the initiative together with the French. “We believe in a strong France,” he said; in particular, the U.S. leaders “would be prepared to listen to your ideas in the nuclear field.”⁹⁸

Kissinger hammered away on these points in subsequent meetings with Jobert and Pompidou.⁹⁹ And Nixon, on his advice, made much the same argument in his May 31 meeting with Pompidou in Reykjavik.¹⁰⁰ The whole notion that in pushing the Year of Europe project the Americans were “seeking hegemony” was just not true, Kissinger told Jobert on May 17. He and Nixon were “not against French autonomy,” he said. Why, given everything they had said and done, would they pursue such a policy? “It would be insane to first humiliate our friends and then face the

⁹⁷ Kissinger meeting with Nixon et al., May 25, 1973, DNSA/KT00738 ([pdf](#)).

⁹⁸ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, May 14, 1973, pp. 2-3, DNSA/KT00723 ([pdf](#)).

⁹⁹ Kissinger-Jobert meeting, May 17, 1973, and Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, DNSA/KT00727 ([pdf](#)) and KT00728 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁰⁰ Kissinger to Nixon, May 30, 1973, NSCF/949/Pompidou-Nixon Meeting, May-June 1973, 1 of 3/NPL; and Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)).

Soviet Union alone,” he said. “That can’t be an American objective.”¹⁰¹ And Kissinger’s meeting with Pompidou the next day was particularly important, because once again he linked the basic concept to the U.S. policy of helping the French nuclear program:

We do not seek to dominate Europe, on the contrary. We want a strong Europe. We have always supported the European nuclear effort. As I recently told your Ambassador, we are not pushing but we are ready to discuss with you, either directly or if you prefer through the British, what we could do to strengthen your military capacity.

And in a Europe of that sort, the French, he said, would play the key role. The fact that the United States was willing to move forward with its policy of helping the French nuclear program proved that these assurances about U.S. policy were not to be dismissed as mere words—this, it seems, was what Kissinger was now suggesting.¹⁰²

The Americans, in fact, were now ready to deepen the nuclear relationship with France. Nixon and Pompidou agreed at Reykjavik to move the discussion into a new area, the “holy of holies,” as Soutou puts it, the design of the nuclear cores themselves.¹⁰³ Kissinger had made it clear in April, even before he gave the Year of Europe speech, that he was prepared to do more for the French nuclear weapons program. Most of the State Department, he said, “would like to throttle” the whole French nuclear program “because they are in the year 1965,” but he was willing to move ahead. The U.S. government was prepared to discuss the issue with the new French armed forces minister, Robert Galley, and “we are waiting for you to approach us.”¹⁰⁴ And after Reykjavik, Kissinger still seemed determined to proceed with that policy. “Some of our experts,” he told Jobert on June 8, “think you don’t appreciate the characteristics of Soviet defenses. If you wanted, you could send quietly some of your technical experts to Washington, so our experts could explain this

¹⁰¹ Kissinger-Jobert meeting, May 17, 1973, pp. 2-3, DNSA/KT00727 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁰² Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, p. 7, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)). On the linkage with the nuclear question, see also Kissinger-Jobert meeting, May 17, 1973, p. 4, DNSA/KT00727 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁰³ Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 97 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁰⁴ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, April 13, 1973, pp. 8-9, DNSA/KT00702 ([pdf](#)).

and how you could deal with it. Warhead design, and some suggestions. Without changing your program.”¹⁰⁵

But the French were not convinced by Kissinger’s arguments about the meaning of the Year of Europe initiative, and even the prospect of a much closer nuclear relationship did not induce them to go along with the Kissinger policy. At Reykjavik, it seemed that Pompidou might be willing to cooperate. He and Nixon agreed on a procedure, more or less. Kissinger would meet with his French, British and German counterparts, but not as a group; eventually the deputy foreign ministers of all the allied countries would meet to see if some statement of principles could be worked out.¹⁰⁶ But then in July the procedure was changed. The Europeans announced (in Kissinger’s words at the time) that “they planned to get together as the Nine to prepare their response and that in the meantime they would not communicate with the U.S.”¹⁰⁷ (This, it should be noted, was in spite of the fact that at Reykjavik Pompidou had said that it was hard to imagine the European Community serving as America’s negotiating partner on this issue because the European Community had no political substance, but was simply an economic entity.¹⁰⁸) When the E.C. had

¹⁰⁵ Kissinger-Jobert meeting, June 8, 1973, p. 17, DNSA/KT00748 ([pdf](#)). For a discussion of some of the problems the French bomber force had in penetrating Soviet air defenses, see Central Intelligence Agency, “French Development of Nuclear Weapons Delivery Systems,” n.d. (but probably written in the late 1960s), available in the CIA’s Electronic Reading Room [CIA/ERR] (http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_options.asp).

¹⁰⁶ Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., pp. 7, 10, 12-13, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)), and Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 3 p.m., pp. 3-4, DNSA/KT00743 ([pdf](#)). See also Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 178-179.

¹⁰⁷ Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 5, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)). See also Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 188-189, 701, and Hynes, *Year That Never Was*, pp. 156-159. A top British official, Sir Thomas Brimelow, had noted in March that this sort of procedure “would, of course, rule out any question of a meaningful dialogue.” Meeting between Kissinger and British officials, March 5, 1973, DBPO III:4:44, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., p. 8, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)). Kissinger was “totally amazed [he told Jobert’s successor Jean Sauvagnargues in July 1974] when your Government decided to oppose” the Year of Europe initiative. “Jobert,” he said, “told me that the one thing France did not want was for the U.S. to talk to the E.C. He said that he preferred for us to deal with the French and not build up the E.C. and make it move faster.” Kissinger-Sauvagnargues meeting, July 4, 1974, DNSA/KT01240 ([pdf](#)). And indeed in the immediate post-Reykjavik period the French were “unwilling to participate in or agree to any common European approach to the trans-Atlantic relationship.” Douglas-Home to Cromer, June 8, 1973, DBPO III:4:116. Note also, in this context, Jobert’s remarks in his meeting with Heath and Douglas-Home, July 2, 1973, DBPO III:4:146, pp. 4 and 10, and Hynes, *Year That Never Was*, pp. 126, 146.

drafted the plan, it would be presented to the United States by the Danish foreign minister, but he was “only a messenger.” He could not negotiate on behalf of Europe as a whole.

The whole situation, as Kissinger saw it, was absurd: “the countries who can negotiate with us won’t talk and those who can talk with us can’t negotiate.”¹⁰⁹ The Americans felt they were being given the runaround. Kissinger was bitter. It was clear that the Europeans, and especially the French, had no interest in cooperating with the United States in this area. To one extent or another, they were hostile to the whole Year of Europe idea. It was particularly galling to him that they were not even willing to use the word “partnership” in the declaration.¹¹⁰ The initiative was supposed to improve America’s relationship with Europe, but it had been “turned almost into a European-American confrontation.”¹¹¹ As a result, no matter what draft was eventually worked out—and Kissinger assumed (correctly as it turned out) that it would “finished in a tolerable way”—the “emotional content” had been “drained from the declaration exercise.”¹¹² But then again that showed how foolish it had been, as he himself later admitted, to try to “base foreign policy on an abstract quest for psychological fulfillment.”¹¹³

So what is to be made of the whole Year of Europe affair? Looking back, the whole episode comes across as a little bizarre. “In Europe,” as Helmut Schmidt later wrote, Kissinger’s proclamation of a Year of Europe “aroused only disbelieving astonishment, mixed with mockery,”

¹⁰⁹ Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 5, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)). Kissinger used this sort of phrase repeatedly to characterize the situation. See, for example, Kissinger-Jobert meeting, September 26, 1973, p. 7, DNSA/KT00815 ([pdf](#)), and also Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 189. For Kissinger’s reaction at the time, see Kissinger meeting with British officials, July 30, 1973, DBPO III:4:179.

¹¹⁰ Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 7, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)). Again, he made this point on many occasions. See, for example, Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, pp. 13, 20, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)); Kissinger meeting with German ambassador von Staden, October 26, 1973, p. 7 (doc. dated Oct. 27), in National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 98, “The October War and U.S. Policy,” doc. no. 81 ([pdf](#)), henceforth cited in the form: NSAEBB98/81/7; Kissinger meeting with British ambassador Lord Cromer, October 31, 1973, NSAEBB98/90/2 ([pdf](#)). The European Community had come up with a draft declaration of September 20, 1973. The sentences containing the word “partnership” were in a revised draft the Americans proposed on September 29. The first document was published in the *New York Times* on September 24, 1973 ([pdf](#)), and the second on November 9, 1973 ([pdf](#)). On French objections to the word “partnership,” see Gfeller, “Re-envisioning Europe,” pp. 69-70, 79-81.

¹¹¹ Nixon to Brandt (drafted by Kissinger), July 30, 1973, Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 191.

¹¹² Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, pp. 5, 7, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)).

¹¹³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 381.

and it is not hard to understand why people reacted that way.¹¹⁴ There were certainly serious problems in the U.S.-European relationship, but could you really deal with them by drafting a declaration of principles? It is hard to see, in fact, how a declaration of this sort, which was bound to be full of platitudes and generalities, would change anything of substance. The inclusion of the word “partnership” in the text, for example, would scarcely have made the United States into more of a hegemon than it would otherwise have been.

On the other hand, for the same reason, the plan for a “new Atlantic charter” was essentially harmless, and the only thing that made the episode important politically was the fact that the Europeans, led by the French, opposed it. A mere declaration would change nothing of substance. If America wanted to pursue a “linkage” policy—if the U.S. government, for example, wanted to force the Europeans to make concessions in the economic area by making it clear that the security relationship was at risk—it would scarcely need a formal “charter” to do so.¹¹⁵ A “new Atlantic charter” would not enable the United States to rule over a bloc of countries it would otherwise not dominate in that way. As Kissinger pointed out to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in March 1974: “the ultimate independence and freedom of action of a country depend on its specific weight, not its declarations.”¹¹⁶

Given that fairly obvious point, it is hard to understand why the French reacted as negatively as they did to the Year of Europe initiative. Looking back, Kissinger was puzzled by the fact that “we found ourselves embroiled with France in the same sort of nasty confrontation for which we had criticized our predecessors.” “The reasons for it,” he wrote, “are not fully clear to me even

¹¹⁴ Helmut Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective* (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 150.

¹¹⁵ Nixon and Kissinger certainly did think that all these issues had to be linked, but for the sorts of linkages they had in mind, see, for example, their comments in a meeting with Shultz, March 3, 1973, tape transcript, and Kissinger-Shultz telephone conversation, August 15, 1973, FRUS 1969-76, 31:84-85, 88, 191-193 ([pdf](#)). Note also the record of Nixon’s farewell meeting with German ambassador Pauls, March 7, 1973, AAPD 1973, pp. 352-354, and Nixon’s discussion of that meeting in a telephone conversation with Kissinger that same day, in which he talked about how important it was to “let these people know that they can’t have it both ways”—meaning that the Europeans could not oppose America on economic issues and still expect the United States to defend them; DNSA/KA09695 ([pdf](#)). See also Hynes, *Year That Never Was*, p. 86.

¹¹⁶ Kissinger-Brezhnev meeting, March 26, 1974, p. 24, DNSA/KT01086. Kissinger and Brezhnev were talking at that point of their conversation about France and the French insistence on retaining a free hand.

today.”¹¹⁷ He blamed Jobert for the conflict. He thought the French foreign minister was pursuing “the old Gaullist dream of building Europe on an anti-American basis.”¹¹⁸ But Pompidou, and not Jobert, was calling the shots on the French side, and Pompidou was not, as he himself put it, an “européen acharné”—that is, he was not fiercely committed to the idea of “building Europe.”¹¹⁹ He certainly wanted the Europeans to develop an identity of their own, and for that to happen he knew that the Americans would have to be kept at arm’s length. But his general view had been that one had to proceed cautiously. It was not wise, as he saw it, to force the pace of that process, or to alienate America unnecessarily as the European countries came together, first economically and then politically.¹²⁰ He understood that for the time being Europe, as a unified political entity, did not really count for much: the European Community, as he told Nixon in May 1973, had “no political reality,” it was “only an economic reality.” He was prepared, however, to live with that situation: “But Europe is what it is; there is nothing we can do about it.”¹²¹

And yet even as Pompidou uttered those words his attitude was shifting. He had already begun to take a more “European” line, a line that suggested that the Europeans should come together by separating themselves more from the United States. In the final analysis, he said, the whole problem of a common European policy came down to “a common attitude toward America”:

¹¹⁷ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 163.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹¹⁹ See Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 338.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Pompidou’s remarks in a meeting with Brandt, January 22, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 84. Note also his comments in another meeting with Brandt, held on December 4, 1971, quoted in Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 650: “Toute la difficulté des années à venir consistera à pousser vers un progrès politique de l’Europe—et économique bien sûr—sans inquiéter les États-Unis, sans se couper d’eux, sans les rendre hostiles, ce qui empêcherait nos progrès” (5AG2/1011/AN). Note also Pompidou’s comment on a November 1972 telegram from Kosciuszko, quoted in Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale,” p. 119. For Pompidou’s thinking on the general issue of the “construction of Europe,” see Roussel, *Pompidou*, pp. 17-21, 494-496.

¹²¹ Pompidou-Nixon meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., pp. 5-6, 8, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)). See also the French record of the meeting, which has Pompidou saying much the same thing: Roussel, *Pompidou*, pp. 555-556 (5AG3/1023/AN). Pompidou’s rather cautious attitude on the issue of “building Europe” comes out over and over again in the documents: on the monetary issue, as Robert Frank has stressed (see n. 59 above); on the military question (see n. 204 below); and on the issue of political cooperation (see, for example, the evidence cited in Gfeller, “Re-envisioning Europe,” pp. 94, 116-117).

“an independent Europe will define itself essentially by its relationship with the United States.”¹²²

Europe would have to pursue its own policy, a policy that differed from America’s, almost as an end itself. As Jobert put the point in a meeting with the German foreign minister in March 1974: “There is no doubt that if we are too obliging with [the Americans], we will count for nothing.”¹²³

Why the shift in policy? It was not that Pompidou’s basic feelings about “building Europe” had suddenly changed. The real taproot lay elsewhere. The United States was now dealing directly and seriously with the Soviet Union, and it was very natural to worry about where that process might lead. Were the two superpowers going to settle major issues, including European issues, by themselves, over the heads of the Europeans? It was obvious, he thought, that the U.S.-Soviet rapprochement might be at Europe’s expense.¹²⁴ Given the kinds of negotiations that were either going on and were planned—the Strategic Arms Limitation talks [SALT], the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks [MBFR], the talks leading to the U.S.-Soviet agreement on preventing nuclear war [PNW]—this was a major source of concern, not just in France but in Germany as well. Pompidou and his top advisors were increasingly worried about the prospect of a U.S.-Soviet “condominium”—of America and Russia becoming too intimate with each other, and of the Europeans being eclipsed.¹²⁵ The Year of Europe project was seen in that context. The

¹²² Pompidou interview with the Italian magazine *Epoca*, reported in *Le Monde*, February 10, 1972, p. 2, and quoted in AAPD 1973, pp. 1241-42, n. 10. Note also the comments of the German ambassador in Paris on this issue, von Braun to Foreign Office, October 11, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 1542.

¹²³ The German document quotes the Jobert comment verbatim: “A coup sûr, si nous sommes complaisants avec eux, nous serons complètement effacés.” Jobert-Scheel meeting, March 1, 1974, AAPD 1974, p. 268.

¹²⁴ “Un tel rapprochement,” he told Helmut Kohl in late 1973, “risque obligatoirement de se faire aux dépens de l’Europe.” Pompidou-Kohl meeting, October 15, 1973, in Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 657 (5AG2/1012/AN). See also Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 92 ([pdf](#)).

¹²⁵ For French fears along these lines, see Jean-Bernard Raimond’s comments of May 1973 quoted in Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 96 ([pdf](#)). See also Marie-Pierre Rey, “Georges Pompidou, l’Union soviétique et l’Europe,” *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, p. 163; Jean-Bernard Raimond, “Georges Pompidou et l’Union soviétique,” *ibid.*, pp. 181-183; and Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 17 and chap. 27. Some American scholars, on the other hand, find it hard to believe that this was seen as a real problem. See, for example, Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, revised edition (Washington: Brookings, 1994), p. 383. The text of the PNW agreement, signed on June 22, 1973, was published in the *Department of State Bulletin*, no. 1778 (July 23, 1973) ([pdf](#)). For the German view, see, for example, the July 1973 document quoted in Andreas Wilkens, “Westpolitik, Ostpolitik, and the Project of the Economic and Monetary Union: Germany’s European Policy in the Brandt Era (1969-1974),” *Journal of European Integration History* 5, no. 1 (1999), p. 89. The NPT was of particular importance in this context: Franz-Josef Strauss, for example,

condominium idea implied that each superpower would dominate its own bloc; the proposal for a more solid western alliance, it seemed, might well be rooted in this kind of thinking.

Over and over again, Kissinger and Nixon denied, as explicitly as they could, that their goal was to bring about a world of this sort.¹²⁶ From their point of view, the whole argument that the Year of Europe initiative was to be understood in such terms made little sense. If the United States wanted to deal with the Soviet Union *à deux*, it would just do so.¹²⁷ If their policy was to ignore the Europeans, why were they trying so hard to develop a stronger relationship with the European allies, and especially with France?

Kissinger, in fact, went to great lengths to explain what the United States was up to in some of the areas that most concerned the French, especially the PNW agreement and MBFR. Contrary to what Jobert suggested, both at the time and in his memoirs, the PNW agreement came as no surprise. The French government had not only been told about the negotiations, but it had been given a clear sense for what the Americans had objected to in the original Soviet draft, why they were insisting on changes, and why they felt it was desirable to reach some agreement with the Soviets in this area.¹²⁸ In his extraordinary May 18, 1973, meeting with Pompidou, Kissinger explained in some

thought that with that treaty a “super-cartel of the world powers” would come into being. Strauss to Kiesinger, February 15, 1967, quoted in Dirk Kroegel, *Einen Anfang finden! Kurt Georg Kiesinger in der Aussen- und Deutschlandpolitik der Grossen Koalition* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997), p. 92.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., pp. 4, 5, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)).

¹²⁷ See, for example, Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, pp. 3-4, 14, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)).

¹²⁸ For the claim that the French kept in the dark, see Jobert, *L'Autre regard*, p. 289. Kosciusko-Morizet later said that Pompidou, at his May 18 meeting with Kissinger, did not conceal the fact that he did not agree with the policy the Americans were pursuing in this area, “parce ce qu’on revenait à l’ancienne politique américaine de domination, tout au moins à l’habitude calculée de mettre ses alliés et amis devant le fait accompli, sans aucune consultation.” Kosciusko-Morizet comment in *Georges Pompidou et l’Europe*, p. 210. Note also Kissinger’s comment at the time about how “the folklore in Europe” was that the PNW agreement “was sprung without any warning.” Jobert, he added, “says this constantly and no one contradicts him.” Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 12, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)). And in fact Jobert did claim in a meeting with British leaders “that the Americans had not consulted the Europeans before reaching their agreements with the Soviet Union.” Jobert-Heath-Douglas-Home meeting, July 2, 1973, DBPO III:4:146, p. 5. Some scholars also claim that the Europeans were not informed. See, for example, Costigliola, *France and the United States*, p. 176. It has, however, been known for some time that that view is incorrect. See especially Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale,” pp. 106, 113. For the U.S. briefings of the French on this issue, see Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, September 6, 1972, NSCF/HAK OF/24/HAK’s Germany, Moscow, London, Paris Trip 9/72—Misc. Cables and Documents/NPL; Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, September 15, 1972, quoted at length in Roussel, *Pompidou*, 524-527; Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting,

detail how the PNW agreement fit into America's larger foreign policy. The détente policy, he said, should not be misunderstood. The United States was not opting for the Soviet Union over China:

There is no sense in choosing the strongest against the weakest. If the Soviet Union managed to render China impotent, Europe would become a Finland and the United States would be completely isolated. It is therefore consistent with our own interests not to want and to try not to permit that the Soviet Union should destroy China. In fact, it is more a question of playing China against the Soviet Union. We have never used such frankness in discussing this with another Head of State. It is extremely important that you understand our real strategy. How can one support China? Today, such an idea would not be conceivable for American opinion. We need several years to establish with China the links which make plausible the notion that an attack directed against China could be an attack on the fundamental interests of the United States. This is our deliberate policy. We have the intention to turn rapidly toward China in the space of two or three years.

It is nevertheless important that this movement not serve as a pretext for a Soviet attack against China. It is consequently necessary that our policy be such that it does not seem to be directed against the Soviet Union and that détente is carried on in parallel with the Soviet Union; that the Soviet Union uses its power in conditions of peace and not of tension; finally that there would be a certain juridical obligation which would be violated if the Soviet Union undertook a military attack against China.

U.S. policy in the PNW affair, he pointed out, was to be understood in this context. "We aimed to gain time, to paralyze the Soviet Union"; the question was not whether the Soviets should be resisted, but rather how it should be done. The Americans knew what they were doing: their strategy might "be complex, but it is not stupid." They were not capitulating to the Soviets; they

April 13, 1973, p. 6, DNSA/KT00702 ([pdf](#)); and Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, May 14, 1973, pp. 4-5, DNSA/KT00723 ([pdf](#)). The British were also kept informed and indeed a British official (Brimelow) played a key role in drafting the agreement—something which made British opposition to the agreement particularly galling. As Kissinger put it at the time, "we are fed up because Brimelow drafted the nuclear agreement and then didn't back it." See Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 286; Hynes, *Year That Never Was*, pp. 120-121; and especially Stephen Twigg, "Operation Hullabaloo: Henry Kissinger, British Diplomacy, and the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 4 (September 2009). For Kissinger's irritation with British behavior on this issue, see, for example, Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, December 5, 1973, p. 3, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)); see also Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, August 9, 1973, in that same collection ([link](#)). For Kissinger's initial briefing of the British on this affair, see Record of Discussion with Dr. Kissinger at Washington on 28th July, 1972, annex, attached to Trend to Prime Minister, July 31, 1972, PREM 15/1362, British National Archives, Kew; also in DNSA/KT00533 ([pdf](#)). Other British documents relating to the PNW affair are in DBPO III:4, numbers 15, 17, 22, 32, 44, 59, 61 and 95.

were trying “to enmesh them,” and it was “absolutely essential” that Pompidou understand what the Americans were up to.¹²⁹

This was a very important statement of American policy and Pompidou understood it as such. He did not object to the policy that Kissinger outlined; from his point of view, there was little to object to.¹³⁰ And indeed, even on the face of it, it is hard to understand why the French (and other Europeans) found the PNW agreement so distasteful. The key provision that people objected to, Article IV in the final June 22 agreement, simply called on the two superpowers to consult with each other if a situation developed that could lead to a nuclear war in which either or both of them might be involved. Was there any reason why they should not talk to each other in such a case? And what exactly would the signing of such an agreement actually change? If it was to the interest of the two governments to talk about any issue, then they would talk. The PNW agreement would not change the fundamental situation one way or the other. So why then was there a problem?

The U.S. government also tried to explain to the French why they should not be troubled by what the Americans were doing on the force reduction issue. The French did not like the idea of an MBFR agreement. It implied that central Europe would have a special military status, and this was

¹²⁹ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, pp. 4-6, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)), and also (for the French record) 5AG2/117/AN, pp. 4-8. Although he was not quite so explicit, Nixon had taken a somewhat similar line in a meeting with the British prime minister in February; see Nixon-Heath meeting, February 2, 1973, DBPO III:4:22, p. 2. Note also Kissinger’s comments about the point of the PNW talks in Twigge, “Operation Hullabaloo,” pp. 692 and 697: “the nuclear Treaty,” in Kissinger’s view, “would be a kind of carrot, dangling perpetually just ahead of the Soviet donkey’s nose until the poor animal was finally lured into some suitable stable where it could not do much harm.” It is important to realize, more generally, that for Nixon and Kissinger the policy of détente was a tactic; the real aim was to deal with what they saw as a growing Soviet threat. See, for example, Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, December 20, 1973, DNSA/KT00968 ([pdf](#)), p. 2, and (for the French record) Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 603. (In the French record, Kissinger referred explicitly to the “tactique de la détente.”) For Kissinger’s account of the PNW affair, see *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 274-286, and also his comment on p. 926.

¹³⁰ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, pp. 7-8, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)). See also Soutou’s account, based on the French record of this meeting in the Pompidou papers, in “Le Président Pompidou et les relations entre les Etats-Unis et l’Europe,” pp. 134-135 ([link](#)) (pp. 181-182 in the translated version in *Between Empire and Alliance*). These remarks were so sensitive that Kissinger was not able to give an accurate account of what he had told Pompidou when he published his memoirs nine years later. Among other things, in introducing the seven-sentence extract from the record of the May 18 meeting that appeared in *Years of Upheaval*, p. 169, he claims he had told Pompidou that the United States would “prefer not to have to choose” between Russia and China, although the document itself does not show him saying anything of the sort, and he deleted the sentence in that passage about “playing China against the Soviet Union.” He obviously did not want to reveal just how anti-Soviet American policy had been in 1973.

viewed as a step toward the neutralization of that area. Pompidou, moreover, did not want a reduction of the U.S. troop presence in Europe.¹³¹ But again Kissinger and Nixon, in confidential talks (not just with the French, but also with the British and the Chinese) explained what American policy in this area really was. The U.S. government was “using these negotiations on mutual force reductions primarily as a device to keep the Senate from cutting our forces unilaterally.”¹³² MBFR was regarded in Washington “essentially as a means of anticipating the domestic pressure for some reduction of United States troops in Europe and of dealing with that pressure on a basis which would do the minimum of damage to the conventional defence of Europe.”¹³³ At Reykjavik, Nixon told Pompidou that neither of them really wanted an MBFR agreement, but that the talks had an important domestic political function: “I keep dangling this in front of Congress to keep them from cutting funds” for the U.S. troops in Europe.¹³⁴

But none of those explanations and assurances had the desired effect.¹³⁵ In France, the fear of an emerging U.S.-Soviet “condominium” remained very much alive. But even if those concerns were warranted, there was more than one way to deal with them. One might, for example, have expected the French to press for greater political intimacy with the United States—for deeper forms of cooperation—so that France and the other European countries would not be marginalized. And some key French officials agreed with the Americans that the U.S.-European relationship needed to

¹³¹ See especially Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” pp. 92-93, 99-100 ([pdf](#)). The Americans were well aware of French feelings in this regard. See Shriver to Secretary of State, December 12, 1969, DOSCF/Subj-Num 1967-69/2103 [POL FR-US 1-1-69]/RG 59/USNA.

¹³² Kissinger-Huang Hua meeting, September 8, 1972, p. 4, DNSA/KT00552.

¹³³ Personal Record of a Discussion [with Kissinger] in the British Embassy, Washington DC, on 19th April, 1973, pp. 7-8, attached to Sir Burke Trend to Prime Minister, April 24, 1973, PREM 15/1362, British National Archives, Kew; also in DNSA/KT00707 ([pdf](#)).

¹³⁴ Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, p. 10, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)). Note also Kissinger’s comments in a meeting with French foreign minister Maurice Schumann on September 22, 1972, pp. 7, 9, NSCF/679/France vol X/NPL; also in DNSA/KT00570 ([pdf](#)).

¹³⁵ Note, for example, Jobert’s sharp attack on the PNW agreement in the NATO Council on December 10, 1973, in U.S. Embassy London to Department of State, December 12, 1973, Department of State Central Foreign Policy Files, Electronic Telegrams (1973), RG 59, USNA, retrieved from the National Archives’ Access to Archival Databases (AAD) website for that file ([link](#)), document number 1973LONDON14640 ([pdf](#)). Henceforth cited in the form: DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973LONDON14640.

be reexamined and that the two sides needed to engage in a serious dialogue.¹³⁶ But Pompidou chose to move in the opposite direction, toward a more Gaullist policy, a policy with a sharper anti-American edge. That choice was probably rooted in a visceral sense that increased self-assertiveness—a greater emphasis on “building Europe” and a greater effort to keep the Americans at arm’s length—was the only real answer to the “condominium” problem.¹³⁷

So by mid-1973 the shift in French policy was quite clear and the Americans were not slow to react. The U.S. government had earlier taken a relatively conciliatory line on monetary issues, but in mid-August Kissinger told Shultz to “hang tough” in this area. The Europeans, he said, had been “bastards”—he was thinking especially of the “Year of Europe” affair—and whatever concessions the U.S. government was prepared to make in the monetary field could only be made “as part of a more global negotiation.” Kissinger did not like the fact that the French and German finance ministers were quite happy about the way the negotiations in this area were progressing. The Europeans were getting a degree of cooperation in this area free of charge; they should be made to give something in exchange in the political sphere. When he had spoken to Giscard d’Estaing, the French finance minister, he had told him: “you know what you people don’t understand is if you made a political concession we could be more generous in the economic field.” And Giscard had answered: “Like what? What could you do that Shultz isn’t already doing?” The Europeans, Kissinger said, were “trying to build their identity in confrontation with us and they are doing it by picking the areas where it is safe. And sucking us dry in the areas where it isn’t and we’ve just got to put a stop to that.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ See, for example, Jean-Bernard Raimond note for Pompidou, May 10, 1973, cited in Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 96 ([pdf](#)).

¹³⁷ Note in this context some remarks he made in a cabinet meeting in 1970: “URSS/USA parlent entre eux plus qu’ils nous disent. . . . Ce n’est pas plaisant pour nous. . . . Il faut durcir notre position et se démarquer de tous. . . .” Jobert notes of April 29, 1970, cabinet meeting, Association Georges Pompidou, Paris, quoted in Laurent Césari, “Les relations personnelles entre Nixon, Pompidou et leurs entourages,” unpublished paper, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Kissinger-Shultz telephone conversation, August 15, 1973, DNSA/KA10631 ([pdf](#)); also in FRUS 1969-76, 31:191-193 ([pdf](#)).

But the most striking change was in the nuclear area. It seemed in the summer that American assistance to France would be stepped up; the French armed forces minister, Robert Galley, came over for talks in late July and again in late August.¹³⁹ But by then the American attitude had cooled. “What we want,” Kissinger told Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger on August 9, “is something which makes Galley drool but doesn’t give him anything but something to study for a while.” The goal was to “lead [the French] on without giving up anything,” “to get a handle on them without [their] knowing it.”¹⁴⁰ Kissinger’s goals in this area are not totally clear. At times it seemed that he wanted to keep a certain nuclear relationship alive—not to “let loose yet” with full cooperation, but to do “something moderate” in the nuclear area in order to drive a wedge between France and the other European countries. The policy of “building Europe” was now directed against the United States; the Americans were therefore “going to try to bust the Europeans”—to “break their unity.” Developing a certain bilateral nuclear relationship with the French was “essential” if the U.S. government was to achieve that goal. The Americans could work with Galley and then at some

¹³⁹ Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 97 ([pdf](#)). It is clear from the notes of Galley’s meetings with top U.S. officials during this period (July 27 and August 31, 1973) that the French government was quite interested in deepening the nuclear relationship. As the French representatives said at the July 27 meeting: “il s’agit donc bien d’échanges d’informations sur la base d’une liste de sujets très classés dans le domaine des missiles et des armes nucléaires” (Balladur Papers, *fonds* 543 AP at the Archives Nationales, Paris, box 32, folder “Etats-Unis”; extract provided by François Dubasque). At about this time, the French were in particular requesting specific information about the locations of Soviet surface-to-air missile and medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missile sites. See CIA Director Colby to Kissinger and Schlesinger, August 6, 1974, “French Request for Data on Locations of Soviet Missile Sites,” [CIA/ERR](#) ([gif p. 1](#); [gif p. 2](#)).

¹⁴⁰ Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, August 9, 1973, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)). For the program that was to be presented to Galley on September 25, see Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, September 24, 1973, and the attached Defense Department “memorandum for the record,” NSCF/679/France—vol. XI/NPL ([pdf](#)). Limited assistance in the area of warhead design was included here, as well as help with strategic warning. On the warning issue (which was linked to the question of a French option for launch on warning), see especially the Defense Department paper summarizing Foster’s talks with the French, drafted May 24, 1973, attached to Kennedy to Hyland, June 27, 1973, NSCF/679/France—vol. IX/NPL ([pdf](#)). The obvious solution here involved tying the French into the U.S. satellite warning system, an arrangement, however, that might have made France more dependent on the United States than she otherwise would have been. But as the Kissinger comment about “getting a handle” on the French suggests, the Americans were not above thinking in such terms, even if getting influence over France was never the main point of the nuclear assistance program. But it was a factor: See, for example, the reference to “opportunities to exert influence” in the May 24 document just cited, or the comment about how allowing the French to test at the U.S. underground testing facility in Nevada “could establish a degree of U.S. control or influence over the pace of French nuclear weapons development,” in Defense Department response to NSSM 175, May 11, 1973, p. 20, NSCF/679/France—vol. XI/NPL ([pdf](#)).

point, he calculated, the other Europeans would say to the French, “you bastards, you talk about unity and then you go this bilateral route” with the United States.¹⁴¹

But although Kissinger in late 1973 and early 1974 occasionally argued along these lines, it seems that the basic thrust of his policy in this area at that time was not that subtle, and that his main goal was to get to French to change their basic policy. On September 5, for example, he told Schlesinger not to “conclude anything with Galley” when he came to America that month. He now thought he could get something in exchange for the nuclear assistance he was prepared to give France: “The real quid pro quo is the basic orientation of French policy. Galley said he understood but it would take them time.”¹⁴² Pompidou, however, was obviously not going to give way on something that basic, and the U.S. government, for its part, was no longer willing to deepen the nuclear relationship with France. “The Americans don’t want to give us anything any more,” Pompidou told Michel Debré in February 1974.¹⁴³ But the nuclear relationship had effectively been put on hold months earlier, in September 1973.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Kissinger-Schlesinger-Foster meeting, August 17, 1973, pp. 1-3, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)); Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, December 5, 1973, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)); and Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, January 8, 1974, p. 3, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)). Note also Kissinger’s comment in a September 5, 1973 meeting with Schlesinger (p. 4): “We want to keep Europe from developing their unity against us. If we keep the French hoping they can get ahead of the British, this would accomplish our objective.” DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)). The notes of Kissinger’s August 31 meeting with Galley in that collection were exempted from declassification in 2008 ([link](#)).

¹⁴² Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, September 5, 1973, p. 1, DNSA/KT00800 ([pdf](#)). A less sanitized version is available online in DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)).

¹⁴³ Michel Debré, *Entretiens avec Georges Pompidou 1971-1974* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), p. 210. See also Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” pp. 97-98 ([pdf](#)), and Mélandri, “Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine,” p. 252. The American evidence also indicates fairly clearly that the relationship was suspended in late 1973. See Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, December 5, 1973, p. 4, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)). One should note, however, that according to Pompidou’s successor Giscard d’Estaing, a nuclear relationship still existed when he took over as president, a point Mélandri notes in his article. Giscard alluded specifically to a breakfast meeting he had with Kissinger on July 5, 1974, in which the Secretary of State asked him if he wanted that relationship to continue. See Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, vol. 2, *L’affrontement* (Paris: Cie. 12, 1991), pp. 186-191. There is, however, no record of that meeting in the DNSA’s Kissinger Transcripts collection. Perhaps the relationship had not been completely suspended, or perhaps Giscard had misunderstood or misremembered what Kissinger said. But the important point is that even if certain contacts continued, the relationship had cooled quite significantly.

¹⁴⁴ This sort of thing, incidentally, had happened twice before, first at the end of the Eisenhower period in August 1960 and then under Kennedy in December 1962-January 1963. For an account of those episodes, see Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 228-229, 365-369. It is interesting to note in this connection that Richard Ullman, in a well-known 1981 article based on interviews, said that the cooperation program *began* shortly after Galley’s

The collapse of that relationship thus has to be understood in political terms. It did not end because the Americans wanted to learn too much about what the French were doing in the nuclear area—it did not end, that is, because the Americans in the final analysis were insisting on terms that would compromise French nuclear independence.¹⁴⁵ It is quite clear, in fact, that the Pompidou government did not feel it had to keep the Americans in the dark in this area as a matter of principle. In June 1971, for example, a U.S. delegation was sent to Paris to work out arrangements for the missile cooperation program; a key U.S. goal was “to obtain a more detailed understanding of French missile programs so that effort to implement the program of assistance could be initiated.” The French had no problem giving the Americans the information they had asked for. In fact, they were “very forthcoming in the technical discussions. They described their land and sea-based systems generally, so as to place matters in context, and went into greater detail on specific problem areas. They took the U.S. delegation to Bordeaux to tour propulsion fabrication and missile assembly facilities. Actual missiles were examined at close hand.”¹⁴⁶ Another document referred to the “frank manner in which [French defense minister] Debré has provided [General Vernon] Walters [the U.S. representative in the talks with the French on Soviet ABMs] with information concerning French military developments.”¹⁴⁷

Even in the area of what Soutou calls the “software”¹⁴⁸—that is, the basic thinking and planning about how nuclear weapons would actually be used—the French government was more willing to work with the Americans than one might have thought. The basic reason was that Pompidou (unlike de Gaulle in the mid-1960s) took the Soviet threat quite seriously. Other key French officials were also worried about what the Soviets were up to. The USSR was clearly

September 1973 trip to Washington. See Richard Ullman, “The Covert French Connection,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 75 (Summer 1989), p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ For a somewhat different view, see Mélandri, “Aux origines de la coopération nucléaire franco-américaine,” pp. 250-251, and Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” pp. 90-91, 97-98 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁴⁶ Laird to Kissinger, July 29, 1971, DNSA/PR00608 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁴⁷ Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, September 7, 1972, HAK OF/24/HAK’s Germany, Moscow, London, Paris trip 9/72, Misc. Cables and Documents/NPL.

¹⁴⁸ Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” p. 90 ([pdf](#)).

increasing its military power; General Maurin, the armed forces chief of staff, thought the whole point of that buildup was to support a “policy of expansion aimed at dominating western Europe.”¹⁴⁹ The defense of Europe, as the French now saw it, depended on a strong American military presence. But there was a danger that U.S. troop levels might be reduced and an even greater danger that American strategic forces might be “decoupled” from the defense of Europe.¹⁵⁰ The great fear was that America and Russia were moving toward a certain understanding, based on the idea that no matter what happened in Europe, neither America’s nor Russia’s homeland would be subject to nuclear attack. But whether that would be possible turned, in large measure, on the question of how a European war would be fought, and in particular on the question of how and when, if it all, nuclear weapons would be used in such a war. Perhaps, French officials were now coming to think, the old strategy of simply threatening massive retaliation was no longer viable; perhaps nuclear weapons, if they were used at all, needed to be used in a more discriminate way, first in the theater and then beyond; perhaps a more subtle strategy of controlled escalation was now in order.¹⁵¹ But since the Americans were bound to play a fundamental role in this area, it made sense to try to work closely with them on these matters—to try to think through with them all of the problems relating to the use of nuclear weapons, and especially tactical nuclear weapons, in a European war.

¹⁴⁹ General Maurin (Chief of Staff of French armed forces) meeting with Ambassador Irwin, November 15, 1973 (document dated Nov. 16), DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS29551 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

¹⁵⁰ Irwin to Kissinger and Schlesinger, October 6, 1973, reporting views of Galley’s diplomatic advisor Seillière, DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS26207 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)). Those French fears were by no means baseless. See the discussion in Marc Trachtenberg, “The Structure of Great Power Politics, 1963-1975,” esp. pp. 8-10 ([text](#)). This is a fully-footnoted and somewhat more extensive version of a paper published in vol. 2 of M. Leffler and O.A. Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Irwin to Kissinger, November 16, 1973, reporting a conversation between Seymour Weiss, an important State Department official involved in nuclear issues, and Jacques Martin, Deputy Secretary General of the French Secrétariat Général de la Défense Nationale, DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS29553 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)). The French official outlined his government’s thinking in this area in some detail; Ambassador Irwin commented that his exposition was “one of the most detailed and authoritative we have received.” On French nuclear strategy in the 1960s, see especially de Gaulle’s note on the “Défense atomique de l’Europe,” May 1, 1963, Couve de Murville Papers, box CM8, Centre d’Histoire, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, discussed in Jeffrey Vanke, “De Gaulle’s Atomic Defence Policy in 1963,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 2 (January 2001).

And Galley made it quite clear that the French government was prepared to discuss these issues. He met with the U.S. ambassador on September 21; he was about to fly to Washington and wanted to let the Americans know what he wanted to talk about, and coordinating policy on tactical nuclear weapons was one of the top items on his agenda. “Nothing can be done seriously,” he said, “in France or Europe in the area of security without extensive discussions with the U.S. Secretary of Defense Schlesinger. As an example of his last point, Minister Galley noted that the French Air Force had received tactical nuclear bombs some time ago and that the French Army was scheduled to receive the Pluton tactical nuclear missile system in May 1974. These developments require that the U.S. and France discuss the new situation because France now finds itself, like the NATO forces, with a broad tactical nuclear capability.”¹⁵² He made the same point a few days later in a meeting in Washington with Deputy Secretary of State Rush and Leon Sloss, an important State Department official who specialized in politico-military affairs. Further talks between French and American military officers, Galley thought, would be “extremely useful. The French were beginning to develop a serious tactical nuclear force. There would soon be a certain number of tactical nuclear weapons for French fighter aircraft and for the French ground forces. This introduction posed problems of cooperation that have to be discussed frankly.”¹⁵³ A couple of weeks later, Galley’s diplomatic advisor Seillière brought the issue up again in a meeting with an American official: “Seillière volunteered that the French High Council of National Defense (nearest French equivalent to the NSC, and normally chaired by the President) is addressing the question of France’s future doctrine regarding tactical nuclear weapons. A decision should be reached ‘in several weeks.’ Once France has established its tactical nuclear policy, Seillière thought they would be in a position to examine the question of discussing with the U.S. the problems of cooperation posed by these weapons.”¹⁵⁴ All of

¹⁵² Irwin to Kissinger, Rush and Schlesinger, September 21, 1973, DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS24957 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

¹⁵³ Rush-Galley conversation, September 25, 1973 (document dated Sept. 26), DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973STATE191313 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

¹⁵⁴ Irwin to Kissinger, October 8, 1973, DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS26222 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)). The NATO commander, General Goodpaster, also wanted to move ahead in this area. The whole question of

this has to be understood in the light of the fact that Galley, as Kosciusko had told Kissinger, was Pompidou's man; what that implies is that the president himself was behind this general policy.¹⁵⁵

The French government, in other words, was quite prepared at this point to work closely with the Americans in the nuclear area. French officials were willing to discuss fundamental strategic issues—"software" issues—with their American counterparts; it seemed that they might even be willing to work out a common strategy for the nuclear defense of Europe. But the nuclear relationship, as important as it was, could not exist in a vacuum, and as political relations deteriorated, a strong defense relationship could scarcely be sustained. The problem, as a U.S. diplomat in Paris put it at the time, was that the French government "regards us as a partner in defense only, while in all other matters the E.C. and the U.S. are to interact as separate, independent entities."¹⁵⁶ But an arrangement of that sort the U.S. government was simply unwilling to accept.

So by September 1973 the nuclear relationship had been put on hold. And the date here is quite significant. It means that political relations had taken a sharp turn for the worse even before war broke out in the Middle East the following month.

The Mideast War and Its Aftermath

In October 1973, war broke out between Israel and her Arab neighbors. The Americans supported Israel (within limits), and the Soviets supported the Arabs, at one point threatening to intervene unilaterally—a threat that led directly to the famous American nuclear alert of October 24.

tactical nuclear weapons, he told Nixon, had "been stagnant for 10 years. He feels we are now at the point where we have done enough preparatory work that we can begin to take a new position of this troublesome issue. Goodpaster also noted that he was trying to extend the areas of cooperation with the French and he felt the French military were very much in favor of closer cooperation." Nixon-Goodpaster meeting, February 15, 1973, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)) And the Defense Department more generally was very much in favor of closer cooperation in this area and been disappointed by French defense minister Debré's reluctance to pursue this issue when we met with his American counterpart in July 1972. See Laird to Nixon, July 5, 1972; talking points memo, p. 4, attached to Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, July 5, 1972; and especially Defense Department response to NSSM 175, May 11, 1973, pp. 7, 30 ([pdf](#)); all in NSC Files, boxes 678 and 679, France—vols. IX and XI, NPL.

¹⁵⁵ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, April 13, 1973, p. 8, DNSA/KT00702 ([pdf](#)). Pompidou himself told German chancellor Brandt in June 1973 that the French and the Americans needed to discuss the TNW issue. Brandt-Pompidou meeting, June 21, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 1026.

¹⁵⁶ Stone to Stoessel, November 29, 1973, DOSCFPF/Telegrams(1973)/1973PARIS30642 ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

If a nuclear war broke out, NATO Europe could obviously not stand on the sidelines, but the U.S. government had not consulted with its allies before ordering the alert.¹⁵⁷ And the Europeans basically did not agree with the United States on the Arab-Israeli issue. They generally took a more pro-Arab line, in large part, as they themselves freely admitted, because of their much greater dependence on Arab oil.¹⁵⁸ The Arabs, in fact, were now openly using oil as a political weapon.

So as the war ran its course, the Europeans by and large sought to distance themselves from the United States. They objected to American efforts to resupply Israel from U.S. stocks in Europe. They refused to permit U.S. transport planes to overfly their territory—even though the Soviets were allowed (as Kissinger notes) to use NATO airspace “without challenge.”¹⁵⁹ And it was not just the French who dissociated themselves from the United States in that way. The German government, for example, publicly announced that weapons deliveries from U.S. depots in the FRG “cannot be allowed.”¹⁶⁰

The Europeans, of course, had their own grievances. They complained above all about inadequate consultation, but “the real trouble,” as Kissinger later pointed out, “was a clash in political

¹⁵⁷ I should note, however, that on the issue of the alert the French were perhaps a bit more understanding than one might have expected. Kosciuszko-Morizet, for example, in a frank exchange with a key State Department official on the general issue of consultations on November 27, said that “France understood [the] need for quick action in calling [the] alert under the circumstances and he felt French had no complaints on that score.” And Armed Forces minister Robert Galley told the U.S. ambassador on October 30 that he personally felt the “US government was right to go on alert in order to keep Soviet paratroopers from inserting themselves along the Suez Canal,” and that that unilateral U.S. action was in line with de Gaulle’s view that the use of U.S. forces would be determined by the Americans themselves, adding: “We French do not object. You are playing your role exactly as we expected. You are Americans first and that is right.” And indeed on Pompidou’s instructions the French put their own forces in Germany on alert and allowed allied warplanes to pass through French airspace. Kissinger to U.S. Embassy Paris, November 30, 1973, and Irwin to Kissinger, October 31, 1973, both in *Richard M. Nixon National Security Files, 1969-1974* (microfilm), Western Europe series (Bethesda, MD: Lexis/Nexis, 2005), reel 10 [the original documents are NSCF/679/France vol. XI (2 of 2)/NPL]; and General Alain de Boissieu account in *Georges Pompidou hier et aujourd’hui: témoignages* (Neuilly: Editions Breet, 1990), p. 221.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Pompidou’s comments to Kissinger in a December 20, 1973 meeting, p. 7, DNSA/KT00968 ([pdf](#)). For a recent overview of French policy in the crisis, see Pauline Peretz, “La France et la Guerre du Kippour,” *Revue d’histoire diplomatique* (2006), no. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 709.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 714. On British policy during the crisis, see Matthew Ferraro, “Tough Going”: *Anglo-American Relations and the Yom Kippur War of 1973* (New York: iUniverse, 2007).

perspectives that no amount of consultation” would have been able to remove.¹⁶¹ He also felt that there was something disingenuous about that complaint. The United States, as he told the German ambassador on October 26, had in the past tried repeatedly to consult with the allies and “work out common positions,” but the Europeans had not been interested. On the Arab-Israeli question in particular, they had instead chosen to dissociate themselves from America and pursue policies of their own. In such circumstances, he said, “when their fundamental attitude was either slightly or openly hostile,” they were hardly in a position to “insist on a right to private briefings.”¹⁶²

It is important to note, however, that Kissinger, who by now was firmly in charge of American policy—power had shifted to him in large part because of the Watergate affair—did not dismiss the European case in this general area as frivolous. A serious argument could certainly be made that America had been too passive before the war, that the U.S. government needed to force the Israelis to withdraw from the areas they had occupied in 1967, and that a comprehensive peace had to be the goal. The U.S. view was different: even a full Israeli withdrawal would not necessarily lead to peace; to tilt toward the Arab side, to give way to Arab oil power, would strengthen the radicals within the Arab camp; the situation was such that a comprehensive peace was unachievable in the near future, and a more modest step-by-step approach was in order.¹⁶³

The Americans had a strategy. The key thing was to capitalize on Israeli dependence on the United States. That meant that the Arabs would have to deal with the United States since only the Americans could influence Israeli policy. The U.S. government could take advantage of that position to build a relationship with the Arab moderates and to marginalize the radicals within the Arab world (and their Soviet supporters). To do that, it would have to show that moderation paid off and that bit by bit a reasonable accommodation could be worked out. And as the Arabs moved toward a reasonable policy, the Israelis would also become more accommodating—or could more easily be

¹⁶¹ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 720.

¹⁶² Kissinger-von Staden meeting, October 26, 1973 (doc. dated Oct. 27), NSAEBB98/81/4 and 6 ([pdf](#)). The German account of this meeting, which generally has Kissinger taking a somewhat softer line, is in AAPD 1973, no. 341; the account of this particular exchange appears on p. 1665.

¹⁶³ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 707-708.

pushed in that direction. In pursuing this sort of strategy, there was some hope that a settlement of this almost intractable conflict could eventually be worked out.

The Europeans, of course, saw things differently, but for Kissinger at this point the issue was no longer who could make the better case. Even if the Europeans had been right about American policy before the war, it made little sense for them to try to sabotage American policy now. They had no viable alternative strategy that they were capable of pursuing themselves. To undercut what the U.S. government was doing—to encourage the Arab radicals, to give them the sense that they, and not the Americans, were in the driver's seat—could not, in his view, be in the interest of the West as a whole.¹⁶⁴

And indeed one would not have expected the Europeans, and especially the French, to have opposed the Americans in this area as strongly as they did. On the core issue the two sides were not that far apart. All the major European countries were committed to the survival of Israel, while the Americans, for their part, did not intend to give the Israelis a blank check. As Kissinger told Pompidou in December 1973, the Israelis had “a diplomacy which leads to suicide.”¹⁶⁵ The implication was that basic Israeli policy had to change. On that point both he and Pompidou agreed. The argument was thus over strategy, not fundamentals. In such circumstances one might have thought that given the basic realities of the situation, the Europeans would not try to sabotage American policy.

And yet that, as Kissinger saw it, was precisely what they did. “Europe, it emerged increasingly,” he said, “wanted the option to conduct a policy separate from the United States and in the case of the Middle East objectively in conflict with us.”¹⁶⁶ This was something the U.S. government could not accept. Did the Europeans really think they could pursue a totally

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 707-708, 711, 716.

¹⁶⁵ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, December 20, 1973, p. 4, DNSA/KT00968 ([pdf](#)). Kissinger was convinced, he told the British that same month, “that Israel would have to withdraw from the occupied territories.” Record of December 13, 1973, Cabinet meeting, CM(73)61st, in CAB 128/53, British National Archives, Kew; also available online at <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-128-53.pdf>, frame 237.

¹⁶⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 716. For Kissinger's views at the time, see Secretary's Staff Meeting, November 20, 1973 (notes dated Nov. 21), esp. pp. 13-21, DNSA/KT00914 ([pdf](#)).

independent and indeed anti-American policy and still expect the United States to defend them? Did anyone really think that “America should be accorded the great privilege of defending Europe, but have no other role” in European affairs?¹⁶⁷ To his mind, and to Nixon’s as well, the European view (as the German ambassador expressed it in a meeting with Kissinger) that it was wrong to link “the Near East issue to broader alliance questions,” and that “these matters should be kept separate,” was absurd.¹⁶⁸ In particular, he felt that it had to be made clear to the main European governments that the line they were taking on the Arab-Israeli question was putting their alliance with America at risk. It had to be made clear to them that there were “limits to our store of good will.” They had to be made to “recognize the abyss before which they stand.”¹⁶⁹ The Europeans, he told the French ambassador on October 26, had behaved in the crisis “not as friends but as hostile powers.” The U.S. government was going to reassess its relationship with the NATO allies in the light of their behavior in the area.¹⁷⁰ And he took certain actions designed to give the allies the impression that America’s commitment to Europe was weakening. He instructed U.S. officials, for example, to stop “the compulsory reassuring of the Europeans on a nuclear guarantee.”¹⁷¹ And he also made it clear that he was no longer interested in the Year of Europe declarations. “They have been drained of any significance,” he told the French ambassador on December 3. He was in fact washing his hands of the entire affair.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, December 3, 1973, p. 2, DNSA/KT00932 ([pdf](#)). Note also Kissinger’s remarks to the NATO Council, March 4, 1974, AAPD 1974, pp. 309, 314.

¹⁶⁸ Kissinger-von Staden meeting, October 26, 1973, NSAEBB98/81/4 (doc. dated Oct. 27) ([pdf](#)); Kissinger in Secretary’s Staff meeting, October 23, 1973, NSAEBB98/63/7-8 ([pdf](#)). For Nixon’s view, see his well-known public comment on March 15, 1974, quoted in Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 932.

¹⁶⁹ Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, pp. 29, 31, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷⁰ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, October 25, 1973, NSAEBB98/75/2-3 (doc. dated Oct. 26) ([pdf](#)); and also Kissinger’s remarks in Secretary’s Staff meeting, October 23, 1973, NSAEBB98/63/7-8 ([pdf](#)). See also Ferraro, “*Tough Going*,” pp. 82-83, 103; Kissinger-von Staden meeting, October 26, 1973, NSAEBB98/81/1 (doc. dated Oct. 27) ([pdf](#)); and especially Secretary’s Staff Meeting, October 25, 1973 (notes dated Oct. 29), pp. 21-24, DNSA/KT00869 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷¹ Kissinger, in Secretary of State’s staff meeting, November 27, 1973, pp. 1, 16, DNSA/KT00927 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷² Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, December 3, 1973, pp. 7-8, DNSA/KT00932 ([pdf](#)). See also Secretary’s Staff Meeting, October 25, 1973 (notes dated Oct. 29), DNSA/KT00869, pp. 21-22 ([pdf](#)), and

The whole problem, Kissinger was coming to think, could no longer be swept under the rug. America needed to have it out with the European allies. It was “morally disgraceful” for the Europeans to be “beholden to the Arabs.”¹⁷³ The Europeans were “craven,” they were appeasers; when one saw the intelligence reports “of what the U.K. and the French are saying to the Arabs, it is worse than it was in the thirties.”¹⁷⁴ “We are aware of French approaches in Arab capitals,” he told the French ambassador on December 3, “and our reports suggest that your position has been critical of the United States. I see no reason under these conditions for a cooperative relationship.”¹⁷⁵ He made much the same point two months later in a telephone conversation with John McCloy: “I cannot tell you on the phone” (again presumably because this information came from intelligence sources) but the French were “pursuing a more active anti-US policy in the Middle East than the Russians.”¹⁷⁶ And again, a month after that in a talk with the German foreign minister: “And let’s not forget what the French are saying in the Middle East as they talk against our policies. If [Soviet foreign minister] Gromyko had said such things we would say it was the end of détente.”¹⁷⁷

The issue, in Kissinger’s view, could not be allowed to fester. He was increasingly inclined to “bring matters to a head” with the Europeans, and especially with the French.¹⁷⁸ In January 1974, the main oil importing countries were invited to a conference in Washington. The goal was to organize the oil purchasers, but the Europeans did not like the idea of a consumers’ cartel. They were afraid that the oil producers, who of course had an active cartel-like organization of their own,

Kissinger meeting with key advisors, March 11, 1974, p. 5, Helmut Sonnenfeldt Papers [USNA entry no. 5339]/4/HS Chron – Official – Jan-Apr 1974/RG 59/USNA.

¹⁷³ Kissinger-Jobert meeting, December 19, 1973, p. 5, DOSCF/Subj-Num 1970-73/2278 [POL FR-US 1-10-73]/RG 59/USNA.

¹⁷⁴ Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 23, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)); Kissinger quoted in C.L. Sulzberger, “United States and France: I,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1974, p. 31 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷⁵ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, December 3, 1973, p. 3, DNSA/KT00932 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷⁶ Kissinger telephone conversation with John McCloy, February 8, 1974, 11:10 a.m., [U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room](#), Kissinger Transcripts series [henceforth: [DOS ERR/KT](#)] ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷⁷ Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, p. 8, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)). Note also the discussion in Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 904, and Kissinger-Rush telephone conversation, March 30, 1974, DNSA/KA12252 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁷⁸ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 901.

would find the notion provocative. The French were particularly hostile to the plan. But the U.S. government wanted a showdown. If the plan for energy cooperation did not work, Kissinger told McCloy, the Americans would “have to take on the French in an all-out confrontation”; “I have reached the point, Jack, where I believe we have to take the French on.”¹⁷⁹

As it turned out, the French were isolated in Washington. The other main consumer countries succumbed to U.S. pressure and supported the American proposal to set up an international energy agency.¹⁸⁰ But that U.S. victory, such as it was, did not settle the issue. A month later there was a new confrontation. The Americans had long wanted to make sure that the European Community did not take action on the Arab-Israeli question that would tend to undermine U.S. policy. To that end, Kissinger thought the European Community should consult with the U.S. government before it made any major move in that area.¹⁸¹ In early March, the Community met in Brussels and adopted a plan for a European-Arab dialogue, to culminate in a foreign ministers’ meeting—a move taken without consultation with the United States, and indeed after assurances had been given (by German foreign minister Scheel) that the “dialogue” would be a more low-key affair.¹⁸² As Kissinger later noted, Scheel (then speaking for the Community) could not have been under the illusion that the U.S. government would be pleased by the EC’s decision.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Kissinger phone conversations with John McCloy, February 8, 1974, 11:10 a.m. and 9:40 p.m., [DOS ERR/KT](#) (orig. links: [11:10](#); [9:40](#)) (downloaded copies: [pdf](#); [pdf](#)). It is interesting to note, however, that Pompidou, in his important May 18, 1973, meeting with Kissinger, actually proposed establishing a western-dominated cartel to control supplies of wheat, another very important commodity: “I think it is possible,” he said, “to reach an understanding among France, the United States, Canada and perhaps Argentina, to constitute a sort of OPEC to direct the [wheat] market.” Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, pp. 2-3, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)). Pompidou, in fact, in a June 1973 meeting with Brandt, said he favored organizing the oil-consuming countries to “resist certain operations by the producing countries.” See Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1974* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976, pp. 272, 466; and Brandt-Pompidou meeting, June 21, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 1030.

¹⁸⁰ As Kissinger later noted, he had told the German foreign minister that rather than be “party to a confusing outcome in which rhetoric obscured failure,” the U.S. government “would rather announce disagreement and draw the political consequences—a thinly veiled threat that this time intransigence would not be free.” Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 907. For an interesting discussion of U.S. tactics for the conference, see Kissinger-Sonnenfeldt telephone conversation, February 8, 1974, DNSA/KA11995 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁸¹ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 899-900.

¹⁸² See Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, p. 7, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)). Kissinger had in particular warned Scheel (p. 6) quite explicitly against the idea of a “Foreign Ministers’ meeting with the Arabs,” which,

Kissinger, in fact, was livid. “We were determined to draw the line,” he later wrote. What had happened was unacceptable. “We now had divergent policies in areas we considered vital.”¹⁸⁴ He had warned Scheel on March 3 about what was at stake. “The Saturday before the Energy Conference,” he told him, “I had a long discussion with the President and for the first time we discussed seriously the possibility of unilateral US troop withdrawal. If Europe pursues this policy toward opposition—if Europe is going to move toward neutralism anyway—we may as well make our decisions unilaterally as well.”¹⁸⁵ He wanted U.S. representatives in the field to be told that the administration intended to take a hard line with the allies: “I want to get it into the system so that our God damned embassies understand that we are deadly serious about this and they are not running a psychiatric social service for distraught Europeans.”¹⁸⁶ The United States, he wrote Scheel shortly after the Brussels decision was announced, would now also feel free to take steps that it considered to be in its own national interest and “to report on them to the Community thereafter”—and the Americans in his view were much better able to pursue that sort of policy than the Europeans were.¹⁸⁷ As he had warned Scheel on March 3: “If we had wanted to be predominant, we wouldn’t consult on such areas as the Middle East but instead we would allow our foreign policy to float. We could achieve domination because of our greater weight.”¹⁸⁸

The issue of the “dialogue” was not in itself of enormous importance, but Kissinger was trying to make a point. He was using this occasion to make it clear to the Europeans that the procedure they had used, of taking action in an area where U.S. interests were affected in a major way

he thought, would be a “catastrophe.” For the European proposal, see *New York Times*, March 5, 1974, p. 6 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁸³ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 930.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 930-931.

¹⁸⁵ See Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, p. 17, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁸⁶ Kissinger meeting with key advisors, March 18, 1974, pp. 3, 5-6, Sonnenfeldt Papers/4/HS Chron – Official – Jan-Apr 1974/RG 59/USNA; also at DNSA/KT01073 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁸⁷ See Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 901-902, 930.

¹⁸⁸ Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, pp. 3-4, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)); see also p. 14.

without consulting with the Americans, “will never be accepted again.”¹⁸⁹ By the end of the month, he thought that goal had been achieved. “I think now,” he told McGeorge Bundy on March 23, “no European government is going to vote on something that affects our interest without getting it to us one way or another.”¹⁹⁰ And France was the main target. “French policy,” he told his advisors, “is not only obstructionist, but antagonistic: in Syria, and other places as well. They are organically hostile to the US and now clearly constitute the greatest global opposition to US foreign policy.”¹⁹¹ And the French were trying to get Europe as a whole to back that policy: in formulating its own Mideast policy, Europe, he thought, would in Jobert’s view be issuing “a sort of declaration of independence from the United States.”¹⁹² But for Kissinger, as he told Scheel on March 3, it was “intolerable to us that the only way Europe seems to be able to establish its identity is in opposition to the US.”¹⁹³ And he did not conceal these views from the French. In a meeting with Kosciuszko-Morizet in late March, just a few days before Pompidou’s death, he laid out his grievances in

¹⁸⁹ Kissinger-Sonnenfeldt telephone conversation, March 5, 1974, [DOS ERR/KT \(original link\) \(pdf\)](#). Note also the line he took in a March 11, 1974, meeting with Sonnenfeldt and other key State Department officials: “The question is what would be the greatest shock to the Europeans?” (p. 5); “They keep saying that if they are forced to choose between France and the US, they will choose the US. Well, maybe we should give them the choice now” (p. 6); “We have never gone for the jugular. Maybe it is time to do it” (p. 7); “I am tired of a crisis with them every six months. Maybe we should push them to the wall” (p. 8); “if we don’t” reaffirm the alliance, “we scare the hell out of them and they show extreme caution before another initiative without consultation” (p. 10); and so on. Kissinger meeting with key advisors, March 11, 1974, Sonnenfeldt Papers/4/HS Chron – Official – Jan-Apr 1974/RG 59/USNA.

¹⁹⁰ Kissinger-Bundy telephone conversation, March 23, 1974, [DOS ERR/KT \(original link\) \(pdf\)](#). A week earlier he had told his staff: “I want our embassies to understand that this is a damned serious process, that we are winning—that in fact we have won because the Europeans have no guts for a real fight. In fact, when I consider how much they screamed when we asked for cooperation and how quiet they are when we are kicking them around, it really makes me wonder.” Kissinger meeting with key advisors, March 18, 1974, p. 3, DNSA/KT01073 ([pdf](#)). And it does seem that the Europeans did in fact essentially give way. See Werner Link, “Aussen- unter Deutschlandpolitik in der Ära Brandt 1969-1974,” in Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Jäger and Werner Link, *Republik im Wandel 1969-1974: Die Ära Brandt* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986), pp. 260-266, esp. p. 265. The more recent scholarship takes much the same line. Note, especially, the interpretation of the Gymnich agreement of April 21, 1974 (ultimately reflected in a “gentleman’s agreement” of June 10, 1974), which Link views as fundamental in this context. “The Gymnich agreement,” Gfeller, for example, writes, “and its enshrinement in a non-paper practically ensured that EC states would no longer bear a joint influence on world events in any way that could antagonize the US.” Gfeller, “Re-envisioning Europe,” p. 280. See also Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War*, pp. 3, 316-322.

¹⁹¹ Kissinger meeting with key advisors, March 11, 1974, p. 4, Sonnenfeldt Papers/4/HS Chron – Official – Jan-Apr 1974/RG 59/USNA.

¹⁹² Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 926.

¹⁹³ Kissinger-Scheel meeting, March 3, 1974, p. 4, DNSA/KT01052 ([pdf](#)).

considerable detail. The bottom line was quite simple: “The Alliance is basic to our policy but the American defense of Europe cannot continue so that Europe is free to pursue anti-American policies.”¹⁹⁴

By that point, French policy had also hardened. The dying president laid out his views in an important document, his “strategic testament” of February 1, 1974. “When our core interests are at stake,” Pompidou wrote, “we must never give way or pull back. Being isolated does not matter, threats and pressures do not matter, France must never give in to anyone, even the most powerful. When the national interest is at stake, it is necessary to display an iron will.”¹⁹⁵ The time had come, in other words, to stand up to America—to return, that is, to a purer more orthodox Gaullist political line. On February 1, the very day it was signed, Pompidou showed a copy of the document to the arch-Gaullist Michel Debré: “Vous voyez, Michel, je ne trahis pas la France!”¹⁹⁶

Making Sense of the Story

So by the end of the Nixon-Pompidou period the relationship which had begun so promisingly in 1969 lay in pieces on the floor. Kissinger was totally baffled by what had happened after mid-1973.¹⁹⁷ “What,” he wondered, “have we done to these people?”¹⁹⁸ From his point of

¹⁹⁴ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, March 22, 1974, p. 10, DNSA/KT01080 ([pdf](#)). On these matters, see also Kosciusko-Morizet to Jobert, March 7, 1974 (titled “La grande colère de M. Kissinger”), Balladur Papers (543 AP), box 32, folder “Correspondance J. Kosciusko-Morizet, ambassadeur de France aux Etat-Unis, à M. Jobert, ministre des Affaires étrangères (classée secret),” Archives Nationales, Paris (provided by François Dubasque). This was a long report based on notes of Kissinger’s (taped) remarks to American journalists during his recent trips to Europe and the Middle East. Note also Kissinger’s comments during the March 1974 meeting of the North Atlantic Council, and especially his threat to “break” France if that country continued its obstructionist policy, quoted in Maurice Vaisse, *La Puissance ou l’influence? La France dans le monde depuis 1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), p. 194; the quotation is drawn from the unpublished memoirs of Paul Carraud, the diplomat representing France at that meeting.

¹⁹⁵ For a discussion of Pompidou’s “testament,” see Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” esp. pp. 105-107 ([pdf](#)), and also Georges-Henri Soutou, “Georges Pompidou et Valéry Giscard d’Estaing: deux réconciliations et deux ruptures avec les États-Unis?” *Relations Internationales*, no. 119 (Fall 2004), pp. 311-312. The quotation is from the extract from the document quoted in de Lipkowski, “Succéder au Général,” pp. 114-115.

¹⁹⁶ Debré, *Entretiens avec Georges Pompidou*, p. 209.

¹⁹⁷ Kissinger-Sauvagnargues meeting, July 4, 1974, DNSA/KT01240 ([pdf](#)). His perplexity comes out in many documents from the period. Note, for example, a comment he made in a meeting with the French ambassador at the end of 1973: “We are rapidly approaching in our bilateral relations the conditions of 1962 and this in an

view, he and Nixon had from the start practically bent over backwards to build a strong relationship with France. They had “always believed,” he told the French ambassador on March 22, 1974, “that Europe must be organized around France.” “The confrontation which has come about,” he said, was “certainly not by our choice.” “The French,” he said, were “the aggressors in this situation.”¹⁹⁹

So what had gone wrong? The two countries had an obvious interest in cooperating with each other. Why then was it so hard for them to do so? In Pierre Mélandri’s view, the answer is simple. The basic policies of the two countries, he says, were essentially “incompatible”: the French sought to develop a distinct European identity, while the Americans were out to reaffirm “Atlantic solidarity” and their own “leadership” within the Atlantic alliance.²⁰⁰ Soutou’s interpretation is somewhat different. The U.S. government, as he sees it, did not really want Europe (and Japan) to play a more independent role in world affairs. In the world of Nixon and Kissinger, he says, only three powers—the United States, China, and the Soviet Union—really mattered. All the rest—all the talk about the allies playing an important role—was essentially just window-dressing.²⁰¹ But that situation, where America would go over the heads of the Europeans and deal directly with the USSR, was something the French in the final analysis could scarcely accept. Those French fears about where the détente policy was leading—the fear of an emerging U.S.-Soviet “condominium”—meant, he argues, that the relationship with America could only go so far.²⁰² When tested, Pompidou’s basic Gaullist instincts were practically bound to reassert themselves.

What is to be made of these arguments? I think, first of all, that the idea that Pompidou’s fundamental goal was to build a Europe with a political personality of its own is a bit overdrawn. He

administration more francophile than any could conceivably imagine.” Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, December 3, 1973, DNSA/KT00932 ([pdf](#)).

¹⁹⁸ Nixon-Kissinger telephone conversation, February 11, 1974 (6:30 p.m.), [DOS ERR/KT](#) ([original link](#)) ([pdf](#)).

¹⁹⁹ Kissinger-Kosciusko-Morizet meeting, March 22, 1974, pp. 8, 14, DNSA/KT01080 ([pdf](#)).

²⁰⁰ Mélandri, “Une relation très spéciale,” p. 124.

²⁰¹ Georges-Henri Soutou, *La Guerre de Cinquante Ans: Le conflit Est-Ouest 1943-1990* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), pp. 524-525.

²⁰² Soutou, “La problématique de la Détente,” esp. p. 92 ([pdf](#)).

certainly wanted Europe to develop a greater degree of political cohesion and independence, but his basic inclination was to proceed slowly and carefully and without putting what he saw as Europe's vital security relationship with America at risk.²⁰³ And too "European" a policy was distasteful for another reason: a policy of "building Europe" might give Germany too much power, and it was in large part for that reason that Pompidou had not been eager to move ahead toward an autonomous European defense structure or even toward a European monetary union.²⁰⁴

In fact, it is important to note that for all the talk about "building Europe," the French were much more interested even at this point in working with the Americans on defense issues than with the Germans. According to a high French official, the Germans had made it clear that they were prepared to work out a "joint defense arrangement" with France "which would include reliance on the French strategic nuclear force. Coupled with this proposal was an offer to make a substantial financial contribution to the further development of the French strategic nuclear forces." But the French were not interested in anything of the sort: they were determined not to allow the Germans to share in any way in the control of their strategic nuclear forces.²⁰⁵ And that was just one of a

²⁰³ See Roussel, *Pompidou*, pp. 486, 496, 650. On the importance of the security relationship with the United States, note especially a comment he made in his May 21, 1973, meeting with Heath, quoted *ibid.*, p. 549: "Nos relations avec les Etats-Unis sont, en réalité, dominées par un fait: la défense européenne dépend avant tout de la puissance américaine." (5AG2/1015/AN).

²⁰⁴ Note especially Pompidou's comments on the issue of a European defense system in a March 19, 1973, meeting with Heath, quoted in Roussel, *Pompidou*, p. 506 (5AG2/1015/AN), and the discussion in Gfeller, "Re-envisioning Europe," pp. 92-93. "Nous ne sommes nullement pressés de parler défense," he noted in August 1972. "Il faut d'abord une base politique à l'Europe et elle est loin d'être en place." Pompidou note on "Grande-Bretagne," August 18, 1972, 5AG2 1014, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 93 n. 91. The French were not particularly interested even in nuclear cooperation with the British, even though it was quite clear that that sort of arrangement would not prejudice their nuclear relationship with the Americans. The U.S. government, in fact, seemed to favor Anglo-French nuclear cooperation, and apparently preferred an arrangement à trois with France and Britain to separate bilateral relationships—but that idea the French dismissed out of hand. See Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War*, pp. 86-90, 216-217, 344 (Nixon's comments about Anglo-French cooperation are quoted on p. 89); and Vaïsse, "Les 'relations spéciales' franco-américaines" (manuscript version—the key passages do not appear in the published version), pp. 23-24, 28. On these and related issues, see also Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War*, pp. 85-91, 213-219, and 342-346. On French policy on the question of a European monetary union, see Robert Frank, "Pompidou, le franc et l'Europe," pp. 349-355, 359.

²⁰⁵ Report of comments made by Achille-Fould, the Secretary of State in the Armed Forces Ministry, in Irwin to Kissinger, September 14, 1973, *Richard M. Nixon National Security Files, 1969-1974* (microfilm), Western Europe series (Bethesda, MD: Lexis/Nexis, 2005), reel 10. The original document is in NSCF/679/France vol. XI (2 of 2)/NPL.

number of nuclear overtures the German authorities were making to the French during this period; the French response was invariably quite tepid.²⁰⁶ French officials, incidentally, were well aware of the fact that their reluctance to allow Germany to play a major role in this area meant that there was a limit beyond which the policy of “building Europe” could not go.²⁰⁷ But defense cooperation with America was another matter entirely.²⁰⁸ As noted above, the French government very much wanted to develop a nuclear relationship with the Americans—a policy that remained intact even as political relations deteriorated sharply in mid-1973.

This whole question of how to organize the defense of western Europe, and in particular the question of how much emphasis to give to “European” as opposed to “Atlantic” structures, was of course of fundamental importance, and indeed throughout the Cold War period, the French had to figure out how to strike the right balance between Germany and America. There obviously had to be a counterweight to Soviet power in Europe; almost as obviously, that counterweight would have to be based in large part on American military power. But Europe could not simply remain an American military protectorate; Europe had to develop a strategic personality, a political personality, of its own. And given the main thrust of British policy for most of this period, that kind of Europe

²⁰⁶See Georges-Henri Soutou, “Willy Brandt, Georges Pompidou et l’Ostpolitik”; Hans-Peter Schwarz, “Willy Brandt, Georges Pompidou und die Ostpolitik”; and Wilfried Loth, “Willy Brandt, Georges Pompidou und die Entspannungspolitik,” all in Horst Müller and Maurice Vaisse, eds., *Willy Brandt und Frankreich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), pp. 147-148, 156, 163, 175-179. Soutou had previously discussed this issue in his article “L’attitude de Georges Pompidou face à l’Allemagne,” pp. 298-304, and again in his book *L’alliance incertaine: les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954-1966* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), pp. 339-341. The German record of the key meeting between Brandt and Pompidou was published in AAPD 1973, esp. pp. 1024-1025. The record of another important meeting (between Scheel and Jobert on November 9, 1973) at which this issue was discussed is also in AAPD 1973, no. 367, esp. p. 1794; see also *ibid.*, docs. 274, 390, and 393.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, André Bettencourt (Ministre délégué auprès du ministre des Affaires étrangères) meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Irwin, October 23, 1972, 5AG2/117/AN: “L’une des raisons fondamentales de la faiblesse de l’Europe,” Bettencourt said, “c’est que les Neuf ne peuvent pas élaborer une politique de défense à cause de l’Allemagne.”

²⁰⁸ Indeed, even under de Gaulle the French had been interested in seeing if something could be worked out: on June 15, 1962, the NATO commander’s French liaison officer told him that the French foreign minister would raise the issue of “coordination of US-French nuclear forces” with Secretary of State Rusk. “US-French Nuclear Cooperation,” n.s., June 18, 1962, Richard Neustadt papers, box 19, folder “Government Consulting—Skybolt/NATO/Atlantic Affairs, 2 of 3,” JFKL. The French did in fact bring up the issue in a meeting with Rusk a year later: Rusk-Couve meeting, April 7, 1963, DDF 1963, 1:371. Another document refers to French interest in the issue in late 1965: Kissinger-Grandville meeting, January 23, 1966, pp. 8-9, DDRS/CK3100490686.

would have to be based on some sort of Franco-German entente. But the French could not tilt too far in that direction: a free-standing Europe meant a strong—perhaps a too strong—German state. A decent relationship with the United States would thus provide a degree of reinsurance, a hedge against the risks of pursuing too “European” a policy. It was not that every French leader in the Cold War period thought in those terms, but Pompidou basically did, at least until the final year of his presidency when he seemed to take a more “European” line. But he did not take that line because he had suddenly become an “européen acharné” (to use his own term); the shift in policy was a result of changes in the global political conjuncture, above all the dramatic improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations and the “condominium” fears that had given rise to.

But did this mean that a confrontation with the United States was unavoidable? Pompidou certainly wanted to do what he could to make sure that the European countries, and especially France, were not just American satellites. He did not really share de Gaulle’s view that the Americans were in Europe simply because they had a basic interest in preventing that key part of the world from being absorbed into the Soviet sphere—and that France could therefore pursue a totally independent policy since whether the United States stayed in Europe or withdrew would be determined by America’s own interests and not by anything the French did or did not do.²⁰⁹ Pompidou’s views were by no means that extreme: for him, Europe’s dependence on America was a simple fact of life that had to be taken into account when the Europeans were working out their own policies. But that did not mean that the Americans had to be followed blindly; within very broad limits, France had to be able to make choices of her own.

²⁰⁹ Perhaps the most striking example of this attitude was de Gaulle’s justification for his refusal in 1964 to take part in the ceremonies marking the twentieth anniversary of the Normandy landings. The Anglo-Saxons in 1944 were pursuing their own interests; the French thus owed them no debt of gratitude for what they had done: “Les Américains ne se souciait pas plus de délivrer la France que les Russes de libérer la Pologne.” See Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, 2:84-87. Jobert saw things much the same way. See, for example, Jobert-Bahr meeting, November 19, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 1862. This basic point about U.S. policy was expressed more elegantly by Maurice Couve de Murville, formerly de Gaulle’s foreign minister, in a number of speeches he gave after leaving office. America, he said, was “too great a nation” not to base its policy on a judgment about where its true interests lay; security for Europe was therefore not a function of the “degree of docility” the Europeans showed toward the United States. See, for example, his speech to the Semaine Européenne de l’Ecole Centrale, January 23, 1974, pp. 4-5, and his Hanover speech of March 11, 1974, p. 18, both in Maurice Couve de Murville Papers, box CM5, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris.

But was that incompatible with American policy? Kissinger said that the U.S. government wanted a strong Europe—that a “strong Europe [was] as essential as a strong China”—and that the only thing it objected to was the “attempt to organize Europe, to unify Europe, on an anti-American basis, or at least on a basis in which criticism of the United States becomes the organizing principle.”²¹⁰ In reality, things were not quite that simple. A strong Europe would be a Europe that could pursue policies that differed from those of the United States in perhaps fundamental ways. But as U.S. leaders saw it, there were limits beyond which the Europeans could simply not go. Even on economic issues, they expected the Europeans to take American interests “fully into account.”²¹¹ Indeed, the basic U.S. view from 1961 on was that the western European countries were in the final analysis dependent on America for their security and in such circumstances could not pursue totally independent foreign policies. If the Europeans wanted to be completely independent politically, they would have to be independent militarily as well—that is, they would have to be prepared to defend themselves. But if they wanted American protection, they could not oppose U.S. policy in any major way.²¹²

Does this mean, however, that the French were right in thinking that the U.S. goal in pressing for a “revitalized” alliance was to create a system in which the policies of the European governments would be subject to American control? Again, things are not quite that simple. Kissinger and Nixon certainly wanted the main western allies to work out what amounted to a common policy, but that does not in itself mean that they thought the U.S. government would

²¹⁰ Kissinger-Pompidou meeting, May 18, 1973, p. 7, DNSA/KT00728 ([pdf](#)); Kissinger in Secretary’s Staff Meeting, December 26, 1973, DNSA/KT00973, p. 2 ([pdf](#)).

²¹¹ See National Security Decision Memorandum 68, “U.S. Policy Toward the European Community,” July 3, 1970, National Security Council Institutional Files, box H-208, NPL ([pdf](#)).

²¹² For U.S. views on this subject during the Kennedy period, see Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 303, 338–339, 376. Note also the U.S. reaction to Mitterrand’s 1991 plan for a “European Confederation.” The U.S. government made it clear that it would not accept “being used by the Europeans for security and held apart from other domains.” German paraphrase of U.S. views conveyed to the French government on March 5, 1991, quoted in Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), p. 356. The Baker and Bush comments quoted in Mary Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 146, 175, point in the same general direction.

essentially determine what that policy would be.²¹³ Kissinger especially did not want to transform the European countries into American satellites; even in December 1973, he still admired France for being the only ally to “have the guts to stand up against us,” and that was linked in his mind to the fact that the French were the only ones making a “serious defense effort.” It was for that reason that he wanted to “back them down without breaking them.”²¹⁴

But even putting considerations aside of that sort, it was simply a fact of life that the United States did not have anything like total control over what the European countries did; from the U.S. point of view, the future of Germany, in particular, was very much up in the air. That meant that what the Europeans did really mattered; the French especially would play a key role, in large part because France could help determine how firmly Germany was anchored in the West. And that in turn meant that the European countries, and especially France, would have a certain amount of bargaining power vis-à-vis the United States—that countries like France could not be treated as satellites, and that their views would carry weight in the western system.

And in institutional terms, the sort of system the Americans wanted to create would scarcely have tended to marginalize the Europeans. The U.S. aim—and this had been a goal of Kissinger’s for quite some time—was to create a kind of “directorship,” a system in which the four main western countries would essentially work out policy for the alliance as a whole. The plan was to create a “very high-level working group,” composed of Kissinger and his French, German and British counterparts (Jobert, Egon Bahr, and probably Sir Burke Trend), which would discuss all the major issues. That group, meeting secretly, would play a key role in the process by which a common policy

²¹³ See [Henry Kissinger], “Proposed Outcome of the Meeting between Presidents Nixon and Pompidou in Iceland,” undated but evidently written in late May 1973, NSCF/949/Pompidou-Nixon Meeting May-June 1973/NPL ([pdf](#)). Kissinger’s name does not appear there, but he is identified as its author in Jean-Bernard Raimond, note for Pompidou, May 29, 1973, 5AG2/1021/AN, which comments on (and follows in the file) a French translation of that document. Note also Nixon’s comment in a meeting with Jobert a month later: “quels que soient les problèmes . . . nous devons parler d’une voix aussi fort que possible à partir d’une position concertée.” Nixon-Jobert meeting, June 29, 1973, 5AG2/117/AN. According to Raimond, Nixon’s remarks to Jobert “se situent au coeur de la proposition Kissinger (concertation avec rôle dirigeant pour les Etats-Unis, directoire, etc.).” Raimond note for Pompidou, July 4, 1973, 5AG2/1023/AN, file “Jobert-Kissinger.”

²¹⁴ Kissinger-Schlesinger meeting, December 5, 1973, DMPC:Nixon/DFPL ([link](#)).

would be worked out.²¹⁵ In that group the Europeans would thus outnumber the American three to one; that fact alone meant that their views would carry a certain weight.²¹⁶

The basic idea behind the plan for a “directorate,” the idea that the allies should try to work out a common policy, was by no means absurd. It is natural that allies should try to work together if they can; indeed, no ally can act as though the alliance did not exist and still expect the alliance to be meaningful politically. An alliance, if it has any substance at all, is bound, to some degree, to constrain the policies of its members. The real issue here was whether, in the U.S. view, the Europeans were expected to essentially rubber-stamp policies that had been decided upon in Washington, or whether, as Kissinger and Nixon insisted, the common policy would be hammered out in serious discussions among the four main allies.

Was it reasonable to think that discussions of that sort could lead to a policy that all the allies could support? The fundamentals were such that an accommodation was not out of the question. Even on the Middle East, the gap between Europe and America was by no means unbridgeable. At the end of 1973, Kissinger was in fact willing to admit that the policy the U.S. government had

²¹⁵ Kissinger laid out his ideas in a meeting with top British officials on April 19, 1973. Trend to Heath, April 24, 1973, p. 2, and Trend’s notes of Kissinger’s meeting with British officials, April 19, 1973, p. 4, both in DNSA/KT00707 ([pdf](#)); note also the official record of this meeting in DBPO III:4:69, p.3, and also Trend’s discussion of the plan in Trend to Heath, May 2, 1973, DBPO III:4:81, p. 3. On May 22, Kissinger brought up the idea with Jobert, who seemed to like it. DNSA/KT00736, p. 6 ([pdf](#)). The plan was presented to the French in a more formal way in the “Proposed Outcome” document, cited in n. 213. The “directorate” concept was then discussed at some length at Reykjavik, and Nixon brought it up again in his meeting with Jobert in late June. Pompidou-Nixon meeting, May 31, 1973, 10 a.m., pp. 7, 10, 12-13, DNSA/KT00742 ([pdf](#)); Nixon-Pompidou meeting, May 31, 1973, 3 p.m., pp. 1-2, DNSA/KT00743 ([pdf](#)); Roussel, *Pompidou*, 555, 558, 559, 562, 563; Nixon-Jobert meeting, June 29, 1973, p. 3, 5AG2/117/AN. Note also Jobert’s comments about the plan in a meeting with German foreign minister Scheel, March 1, 1974, AAPD 1974, pp. 257-258. On Kissinger’s early support for an arrangement of this sort, see Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 171, and Kissinger, *Troubled Partnership*, p. 246. The whole idea of a “directorate” was, of course, by no means new. The proposal de Gaulle had put forth in his well-known September 1958 memorandum is the most famous example, but ideas of this sort had surfaced at various points in the 1950s and 1960s. See Schoenborn, *Mésentente approuvée*, pp. 32, 34, 244, 245, 357; and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 167, 242-244.

²¹⁶ To understand the importance of the proposal, one need only compare it with the main alternatives. On the one hand, the Americans could have proposed that issues of interest could be discussed in a body in which all the allies were represented. But in such a large group, no meaningful give-and-take would have been possible. As a top British official pointed out at the time, “it would be difficult to get down to real business or drafting in such a forum.” Sir Burke Trend in Kissinger-Douglas-Home meeting, May 10, 1973, p. 4, DBPO III:4:89. On the other hand, the U.S. government could have proposed that the issues be discussed with the allies on a purely bilateral basis, but in that case it could certainly have been accused of pursuing a “divide and rule” policy (to use a phrase that crops up in the British documents at the time).

pursued in this area had been a mistake, and he seemed to think that a new policy, much more in line with European thinking, was now in order.²¹⁷

To be sure, the Americans had their grievances. The French, and indeed the Europeans in general, Kissinger often said, wanted to have it both ways.²¹⁸ They wanted America to pursue a détente policy, but were quick to complain about an emerging “condominium” when U.S.-Soviet relations improved. They complained about the agreements that were signed with the USSR, even though they themselves had already signed their own “political cooperation” agreements with that country.²¹⁹ Each major ally wanted the right to pursue an independent foreign policy, but when the United States exercised that same sort of right, the Europeans were quick to complain about American “unilateralism.” France and Germany, Kissinger wrote, while eager to “circumscribe *our* freedom of action were not prepared to pay in the coin of a coordinated Western policy.”²²⁰ The assumption was that in trying to have it both ways, the Europeans were not acting responsibly, and that was why it fell to the U.S. government to make “the ultimate decisions on the most critical issues.”²²¹

But the Europeans, for their part, had more fundamental concerns. The basic problem from their point of view was that the Americans were retreating from the nuclear defense of Europe. If war broke out, U.S. leaders might be willing to use nuclear weapons in Europe proper, but they would not attack targets on Soviet territory, for fear of triggering an attack on the United States. Western Europe, and especially West Germany, would in such circumstances become increasingly

²¹⁷ See van Well to Frank, December 10, 1973, AAPD 1973, p. 2012, and “Dr. Kissinger’s Visit to Europe – A Balance Sheet,” enclosed in Brimelow to Sykes, January 18, 1974, DBPO III:4:513. Note also Kissinger’s comments about the importance of working out a common policy in this area: Secretary’s Staff Meeting, November 20, 1973 (notes dated Nov. 21), pp. 18-21, DNSA/KT00914 ([pdf](#)).

²¹⁸ See Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 94, 387, 963-964; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 135-136, 731; Kissinger, “The Year of Europe,” pp. 593-594 ([pdf](#)).

²¹⁹ See Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1273, and Kissinger meeting with Rusk, Bundy, McCloy, et al., November 28, 1973, p. 10, DNSA/KT00928 ([pdf](#)). On the Franco-Soviet political cooperation agreement of October 13, 1970, see Marie-Pierre Rey, “Georges Pompidou, l’Union soviétique et l’Europe,” p. 155.

²²⁰ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 731 (emphasis in original text); see also Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 387.

²²¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 964.

vulnerable to Soviet power, and increasingly inclined to reach an accommodation with the USSR, on Soviet terms.

These were all serious issues, but they were the sorts of issues that allies should be able to discuss. And the Americans very much wanted to talk with their allies—or at least with the three major European powers—about this whole complex of issues, and above all about the very fundamental problem of the nuclear defense of Europe.²²² Stripped to its essentials, the whole point of the Year of Europe initiative was to get a discussion of this sort started. Did the torpedoing of that initiative serve anyone's interests? One well-placed observer, Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet, the French ambassador in Washington at the time and a man no would ever accuse of being excessively pro-American, thought, looking back twenty years later, that an important opportunity might well have been lost, and that is a view I tend to share.²²³

An alliance, Kissinger wrote, is not just a legal contract. A real alliance, he thought, has to be based on something more fundamental. The western alliance, in particular, had to be “sustained by the hearts as well as the minds of its members.”²²⁴ But emotions are what they are; a government's ability to shape the feelings of its own people is quite limited. So in analyzing these issues, it makes

²²² U.S. leaders brought up the European defense issue repeatedly in meetings with the allies. “We sometimes say,” Kissinger, for example, told the NATO ambassadors in June 1973, “that conventional defense is within reach, and the Europeans say we must use nuclear weapons immediately. And we ask how to use them, but we have only agreed on using three. Does anyone believe that three will stop the Soviets? We have thousands of tactical nuclear weapons, but no rational plan for using them; perhaps the only thing saving us is Soviet uncertainty. We need a realistic discussion; if the decision is for much earlier use, then we need to decide how to do it.” Kissinger meeting with NATO ambassadors, June 30, 1973, DNSA/KT00767, p. 14. In referring to the plan for the use of three weapons, he was alluding to the “Provisional Political Guidelines for the Initial Defensive Tactical Use of Nuclear Weapons by NATO” (commonly called the “PPGs”), which had been developed by NATO's Nuclear Planning Group in the late 1960s. On the PPGs, see especially J. Michael Legge, *Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1983), pp. 17-25. The basic point here—the idea that NATO needed a “rational” defense concept and that a fundamental reappraisal of NATO strategy was in order—was one of the Nixon administration's standard arguments. See, for example, Nixon-Heath meeting, February 2, 1973, 4 p.m., pp. 2, 4, DBPO III:4:20, and Kissinger meeting with British officials, April 19, 1973, pp. 8-9, DNSA/KT00707 ([pdf](#)). And indeed Kissinger continued to complain throughout the 1970s that NATO did not have a rational plan for the use of tactical nuclear weapons. See Trachtenberg, “The Structure of Great Power Politics, 1963-1975,” p. 28 n. 23 ([text](#)).

²²³ Kosciusko-Morizet comment in *Georges Pompidou et l'Europe*, p. 211. Even at the time, Kosciusko thought that a positive response to the Kissinger speech was in order: he saw in this speech an “ouverture faite à l'Europe, et un esprit de concertation.” Quoted in Raimond note for Pompidou, May 3, 1973, 5AG2/1021/AN. Kosciusko's April 23 dispatch is also quoted in Gfeller, “Re-envisioning Europe,” p. 35.

²²⁴ Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 730.

more sense to focus on the intellectual side of the relationship. The members of an alliance are of course sovereign states, each with interests of its own. But they also have an interest in working together, and perhaps even in developing common policies on key political issues. And working things out in that way is in large part an intellectual process. When countries have common interests, they can think those issues through together; in principle, they can try to work out a common course of action. It is perhaps a cause for regret that in 1973-74 no real effort of this sort was made. But that does not mean that it could not have been done at the time, and it does not mean that countries like France and the United States are simply incapable of working together.