Sovereignty or Security? Maintaining Peace and The Ambivalent Relationship Between Europe and Washington, 1945–1991

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Abstract

Among historians, there has been a recurring debate on whether European states lost their de facto sovereignty during the Cold War (1945–1991). While Orthodox Cold War historians claimed that the Europeans were nothing more than chess pieces of the two opposing superpowers, others argued that the continental nations retained autonomy and contributed significantly to the war effort. In response to the academic discussion, this article aims to clarify whether Western European states traded their sovereignty for nuclear and diplomatic protection from the USA. By comparing the policies adopted by Washington and the Europeans – namely the British and French, respectively – I attempt to elucidate the scale of their disagreements and provide a clear analysis of the issue at hand. Upon research, the related literature and first-hand historical sources have demonstrated that: (1) Britain and France played an essential role in initiating the Cold War; (2) Western European states carried out foreign policies that were not in line with Kissinger's direction during the 1960s and 1970s; (3) Transatlantic diplomatic differences remained in certain policy directions during the 1980s and early 1990s. In general, despite being close strategic allies of Washington, the European states retained their decision-making power.

Keywords: The Orthodox School of the Cold War, European Integration, Post-War Europe, European sovereignty in the Cold War, France's role in the Cold War, Cold War Historiography, The Anglo-American Special Relationship

Introduction

Between 1945 and 1991, peace in Europe was maintained through intimidation, diplomacy and deterrence between the Communist bloc and the West. For many Orthodox Cold War historians, this system of 'long peace' was a product of international bipolarity (Hopkins, 2007: 914–20). Nonetheless, according to Michael Cox (2007: 128–29), by understanding world politics only through the perspective of the two superpowers, the Orthodox School essentially implied that European states had become pawns of the superpowers and that they outsourced their defence to the USA or the USSR. In this article, I will argue that although Western Europeans had made some concessions to Washington, they did not trade their sovereignty in exchange for nuclear and diplomatic protection. Instead, in many cases, they took the initiative in maintaining peace. Following Cox's post-revisionist view, which emphasised that complex factors resulted in the development of the Cold War and that the two superpowers were overstated in historical studies, I will provide empirical studies specifically on the reaction of Britain and France when they came into conflict with US interests. The example and cases analysed could then provide further empirical evidence supporting the academic critique of the Orthodox narrative.

To narrow down the scope of analysis, this article will mainly focus on the policies of the USA and two major European states – namely Britain and France. For less militarily and financially robust European countries

such as Italy, Spain and Belgium, the sovereignty–security dynamic was different. However, as this article aims to focus on specific case studies, the conditions of the less political relevant European countries could not be covered as detailed, which is one of the limitations of this research.

In terms of key concepts, Krasner's description of 'Westphalian sovereignty' – that is, 'the exclusion of external actors from domestic authority configurations' – will be used in this article to interpret the modern notion of 'sovereignty' (Krasner, 2001: 6–7). Based on this definition, the loss of sovereignty, then, was when foreign actors intervened in the domestic policy of a sovereign state and affected that state's political, economic or social policy directions. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided loans to Latin American countries under the condition that they implement the neoliberalist 'stabilisation programmes' designed by IMF economists (Pastor, 1987: 249). If the Latin American countries had no way but to accept foreign intervention policy-wise to acquire the funding, this would be a breach of sovereignty as their domestic policies were changed as a result of a direct request of external actors. When put into the context of the Cold War and US–European relations, if the USA – which had been providing substantial financial and military support to Europe – undertook direct action to force the European countries to comply to their Cold War policy, and if the European countries had no way but to obey owing to Washington's power over their internal security and economy, the sovereignty of those European countries would have been breached.

As regards other important concepts discussed in this article, the term 'peace' will be understood as the absence of hot or nuclear war on the European continent through military deterrence or diplomatic efforts. This definition was made to put the concept into historical context of the European experience in a time of ideological conflict.

This article will begin with a brief introduction to the bipolar narrative laid out by the Orthodox School of Cold War Studies. After having established their argument, the article will proceed to re-examine specific viewpoints regarding the role of European countries that I believe the Orthodox School have downplayed. In Section 2, I will provide an analysis of Britain's and France's roles during the start of the Cold War, while Section 3 focuses on the Western European states' increasing independence from Washington as the conflict progressed. Finally, the last section will demonstrate how the European states further stray away from US policy direction towards the end of the Cold War. In summary, by confirming that the Europeans could generally pursue their national interest and carry out distinct peacekeeping efforts regardless of external pressure, it could be evinced that they had not to trade sovereignty for peace.

The superpower narrative of the Orthodox School

The Orthodox School was initially developed by US historians – many of whom were serving in US Government Agencies – during the early stages of the Cold War. For instance, Herbert Feis, a renowned historian who had contributed greatly to the development of the Orthodox School, was part of the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations and served as an economist (Benson, 1981: 15–16). Due to the Orthodox historian's direct involvement in the bureaucracy, the analysis provided by these historians was primarily based on diaries, memoirs and publications of diplomats and politicians, as well as the historian's own political understanding (Hopkins, 2007: 913–34; White, 2000: 35–36).

The use of insider experiences and deep political involvement of the Orthodox historians resulted in a rather realistic way of thinking. Hopkins (2007: 915) observed that the Orthodox historians adopted a 'view of international affairs' in which they considered the Cold War dynamic was run by 'rational decision-makers

acting on national interests'. The Orthodox historians considered Stalin's aggressive personality and the anti-democratic nature of the USSR as the fundamental reason for the outbreak of the Cold War, and they believed that the USA had no choice but to respond strongly in defence of 'universalism' and democracy (Crapol, 1987: 251–52; Hopkins, 2007: 915–16; White, 2000: 35–37). Hence, it could be said that in the Orthodox School's perspective, the USA was the defensive and 'innocent' side, and that the entire Cold War was simply a power struggle between the two superpowers.

If we directly examine the works of Arthur Schlesinger Jr – another figurehead of the Orthodox School – we can understand the claims above more clearly. In his article, 'Origins of the Cold War', Schlesinger (1967: 22–52) contended that the 'Cold War in its original form was a presumably mortal antagonism [...] between two rigidly hostile blocs, one led by the Soviet Union, the other by the United States' (Schlesinger: 22–52). Here, it was evident that Schlesinger used a paradigm of a bipolar world order to characterise the Cold War, even though he did not explicitly use the term. He considered the Cold War as a conflict between two camps, with two superpowers taking the lead, and of course, the superpowers being the spotlight of historical analysis.

Nevertheless, this view had been vigorously criticised as a 'scholarly rationalization for official policies' (Maddox, 2015: 5). William Appleman Williams (1972: 207), for instance, deemed history as 'a way of learning', although 'acknowledg[ing] [...] the facts as they exist without tampering with them', a principle that he argued that the Orthodox School had failed to adhere to. Williams believed that by emphasising the role and moral grounds of the USA in the Cold War, the Orthodox School was using history to serve political purposes. Moreover, Cox (2007: 128–29) argued that the Orthodox School did not simply justify US foreign intervention, but it also downplayed the role of European countries in the Cold War.

This article will follow on the lines of criticism against the Orthodox perspective – especially the way they portrayed a weak European initiative during the Cold War – and attempt to search for a more precise picture to describe the role of the European countries during the second half of the twentieth century.

Britain and France in the early post-war period

In general, the Orthodox School did not provide a detailed examination of the role of European states during the start of the Cold War. For example, when investigating the origins of the conflict, Schlesinger (1967: 23–24) focused on the role of Russian expansionism, which challenged the post-World War II status quo and the 'essential response' against 'communist aggression' from the USA. Even when he was rebutting the revisionist view, he still focused on discussing whether the USA or the USSR instigated the conflict without considering the role of the European countries (Schlesinger, 1967: 24–25). Schlesinger's conceptualisation of the Cold War demonstrated that he, or more broadly, the traditional Orthodox School, had not paid attention to the role of the European countries. Not because they were reluctant to study it, but simply because they deemed it too insignificant a cause of the East–West conflict.

Nevertheless, in the 1940s and 1950s, Britain and France followed their distinct policies to pursue their national interests, which occasionally contradicted the interest of Washington. Britain, according to Deighton (2010: 113, 123), was deeply involved in warning the West about the perils of Communism and establishing an anti-Communist coalition. As early as the 1940s, the British government had already understood that Soviet expansion would threaten European peace (Deighton, 2010: 113–16). They made deterring Communist influence the centre of their foreign policy and 'generated a mindset about Soviet intentions that was to dominate thinking for the next fifty years' (Deighton, 2010: 113, 114–16, 119). British

military documents disclosed that Churchill had drafted a war plan, Operation Unthinkable, which aimed to attack the USSR right after World War II had ended. In the official report, the British Joint Planning Staff considered the objective of the Operation as 'impos[ing] upon Russia the will of the United States and British Empire' (National Archives, 1945). In the document, both the possibilities of engaging in a total war and limited conflicts were considered, with the total 'elimination of Russia' as the most extreme outcome (National Archives, 1945). It was clear that on a strategic level, Britain had actively considered 'contain[ing] the power of the Soviet Union' even before Washington had put forward its Marshall Plan (Deighton, 2010: 117). Moreover, Barnes (1981: 400–01) demonstrated that the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) had aided the newly founded CIA to establish espionage mechanisms and provided them with intelligence about Russia, as the British Empire had prior experience in dealing with Russian intelligence. Based on this information, it could be argued that in the early post-war period, Britain was a partner, not a dependency, of the United States, and it contributed greatly to the creation of institutions and procedures that would play critical roles in decades to come.

Although France was not as assertive as Britain, Paris still played a role in countering Communist expansion and maintaining European security. Initially, wary of German revanchism and troubled with her own domestic recovery, Paris remained neutral in the US–Soviet conflict from 1944 to 1947 (Hitchcock, 1998: 3–4). However, as France became aware of the 'deepening of the East-West rift' and felt threatened by the growing Communist forces at home, it started to devote more effort to countering Communist infiltration (Soutou, 2001: 36–37). Since the early post-war period, Communists had been appointed within the government to hold important posts, most notably with Charles Tillon fixed as Air Minister (Villatoux, 2010: 165–72). The Communist forces only grew stronger in France during early 1947, with Communist François Billoux becoming the Minister of Defence and the continuous infiltration of Communist forces in the French Home Army (Serfaty, 1975: 133; Villatoux, 2010: 165–72). Nevertheless, the gap between the Communist Party line and the French national policy gradually widened, as the Communists did not support military actions against Indochina and the nationalist sentiment of the expansionists (Serfaty, 1975: 135–36). Along with the series of strikes inspired by Communism in November and December 1947, the tolerance of the French Government came to an end (Soutou, 2001: 36). Communists were removed from the French government, and Paris agreed to the formation of a Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to counter Soviet influence from the East (Soutou, 2001: 37). However, despite the decision to counter Communist infiltration with the help of Washington, France still maintained a high level of independence when dealing with foreign affairs.

As illustrated by Hitchcock (1998: 171, 195), in 1952, Paris declined the US proposal for a European Defence Community, which demanded European countries cede their independent military commandership to a united force. Although this rejection led to a 'ferocious outburst of spleen in Washington', Paris maintained its judgement to protect its sovereignty (Hitchcock, 1998: 196). Here, it is evident that France was pressured not by Washington to contain Communist expansion, but by the changing international circumstances. How France had chosen to first ignore and then participate demonstrated that the Anglo-Saxon states were not able to influence her decisions. France was extremely reluctant to give up on her sovereignty. The French distrust towards the USA was further extended in the 1950s when France sought a 'tacit reinsurance' in the USSR and increased commercial contacts with Moscow (Soutou, 2001: 44). Therefore, it was evident that France tried to construct a 'double security' mechanism and maintain peace in Europe through acting as a relatively independent mediator (Soutou, 2001: 38–40).

Nonetheless, despite the fact that many US and Orthodox historians had recognised that the British had taken the initiative in starting the Cold War and that the French had enacted certain anti-US policies, they continued to argue that, in general, Europeans still depended on US assistance for maintaining peace (Sheehan, 2009: 147–55). For instance, Leffler (2010: 83–84) contended that the Soviet atomic testing in August 1949 made the USA and Western Europe realise that 'an adequate military shield' was necessary to protect both regions – this, unfortunately, was something that only the USA could provide. Holloway (2010: 282–84) followed this argument and suggested that Europe was left with little choice but to cooperate with the USA so that they could make use of the US nuclear arsenal to prevent possible European wars. However, when simply viewing the Cold War as a Great Power contest, the Orthodox School might risk overgeneralising the situation. While the USA did own a gigantic atomic arsenal and provided a nuclear umbrella for Western Europe, the European countries still maintained the decision whether to join the US effort or not. According to Deighton (2010: 121), even though US support was 'essential' to 'British's international diplomacy', 'tensions between the UK and the United States' could still be spotted from 1947 onwards, with disputes ranging from the German question to nuclear concerns. London eventually carried out its own nuclear testing in 1952 as negotiations with Washington on nuclear cooperation failed, while France followed suit in 1956 since it distrusted the US guarantee on European security (Deighton, 2010: 121; Soutou, 2001: 38–39). Overall, in the Orthodox tradition, little emphasis was given to the agency or differing experiences of other powers. Orthodox historians, such as Schlesinger and Feis, sometimes overlook or play down the European role, which simplified the power dynamics during the Cold War.

Détente, reconciliation and European autonomy

The Orthodox School's coverage of the détente period was not as strong as its study of the Cold War's origins. Feis, as part of the US administration during the early post-war period, had in-depth knowledge regarding the events of the Second World War. His 2015 book, *Churchill-Roosevelt-Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They sought*, as well as his 1970 study of the Cold War origins, *From Trust to Terror*, all concentrate on studying the events within the period of the 1930s to 1940s (Feis, 2015; 1970). Although the later scholars adhering to the Orthodox School of thought had more access to archives and experienced further academic development on the topic, neo-Orthodox historians such as Gaddis still remained focused on the role of the United States. For instance, Painter (2006: 528) criticised Gaddis's *The Cold War* (2007) for its 'disproportionate focus on the early Cold War (1945–62)' and its failure to 'examine how social, economic, and political conditions in Europe and Asia' led to and affected the course of the Cold War. With reference to the critiques above, the Orthodox School's overemphasis on the early stages of the Cold War and the US viewpoint might limit the scope of their analysis. To provide a wider picture, I will be focusing on the European perspective during the mid-Cold War (1960s–1970s) in the following section, exploring how they worked alongside the USA while pursuing their own national interests.

The growing divergence between European and US policies could be further observed in the 1960s and 1970s when the Western European countries' diplomatic approaches went further apart from the US ones. Britain in particular – despite having a 'special relationship' with the USA – made decisions that were incompatible with US strategies from time to time (Hughes and Robb, 2013: 875–76, 887–88). As certain Orthodox historians had pointed out, Britain's status as a world power was gradually fading during the period. For instance, Reynolds (1985–1986: 13–14) claimed that 'Britain's residual capability as a great power was eroded' and became dependent on Washington for military support since Britain's military power was surpassed by the FRG and excluded from European integration. By depicting Britain's 'imperial collapse' in the 1960s, Reynolds did accurately showcase London's difficulties (Strang, 1994: 278).

Nevertheless, although Britain's military and economic strength had been weakened, it was still relatively independent in terms of foreign policy. Despite relying on US support, Britain practised a defence-cut policy that was vehemently opposed by Washington (Hughes and Robb, 2013: 877–78). Wilson's abandonment of Singapore and the Persian Gulf, Heath's military retreat in Suez East in 1970 and Healey's £50 million cut in defence demonstrated that the British government was gradually cutting down its foreign military commitment and ceding out the imperial territory (Sato, 2009: 99–100; Tan, 1997: 303–04). Washington was dissatisfied with the British decision to dissolve the Empire as that would mean that 'the "ramparts" of the Free World would have to be defended solely by the United States' (Hughes and Robb, 2013: 871). One of the direct impacts of the British military withdrawal was their choice to not continue their involvement in the Vietnam War. While Harold Wilson, the Labour Prime Minister at the time, wished to maintain good relations with the States, he refused the offer from the USA for the British to stay in the conflict in exchange for US support for pounds sterling (Vickers, 2008). Moreover, as McAllister and Schulte (2006: 22–43) pointed out, the arrangement of withdrawal was done without 'counsel[ling] either the Eisenhower or Kennedy administrations' as the British did not believe that there could be a way that they could continue their departure with the Anglo-American 'special relationship' undamaged. This lack of communication concerning the Vietnam affairs could explain the high level of discontentment from the USA. Hughes and Robb (2013: 876) stated that Washington was so dissatisfied with Britain's uncooperating attitude that it had considered 'withdrawing its troops from NATO'. In general, London's intent to shift to a more demilitarised outlook was clearly against the US strategic aim in combating Communism. However, its capability to defy US policies exactly demonstrated that it remained autonomous and had decided to avoid excessive involvement in colonial management and Great Power conflicts.

Nonetheless, as London's influence in both the developing world and Europe declined, its role as the leading European state was gradually being replaced. Unlike the British, who had a long-term collaborative relationship with Washington, France, under de Gaulle, insisted on building a 'European Europe' outside US control (Ellison, 2006: 853–55; Larres, 2000: 214). During the 1960s, Washington's gradual withdrawal from supporting European defence against Soviet nuclear attacks reinforced de Gaulle's distrust of the USA (Hoffmann, 1964: 6–7). This could be demonstrated by de Gaulle's attempt to expand the Fourth Republic's nuclear programme and his resistance to the US proposal for a 'supra-national' Europe (Hoffmann, 1964: 8–10; Segers, 2012: 348, 351–52, 357, 361; Soutou, 2001: 47). Nevertheless, although de Gaulle rejected the US proposal for a United States of Europe, he supported creating a European Political Union under French guidance (Segers, 2012: 348–49). Therefore, what de Gaulle despised was not European unification, but any involvement of external forces that might threaten European sovereignty. As de Gaulle became increasingly irritated by US interference, Paris gradually shifted away from the Atlantic alliance and approached the Cold War differently. Larres (2000: 215–16) contended that de Gaulle's decision to withdraw France's military forces from NATO's integrated military command structure in 1966 was part of his *Ostpolitik à la française*, which aimed to build a 'less bipolar world' and promote European peace in the long term.

At first, de Gaulle attempted to initiate a détente dialogue with the USSR, but the plan was not able to come to fruition because of the Communist crackdown on the 1968 Prague Spring (Rynning, 2017: 267–89). However, as the tension decreased, France, along with Germany, advocated cooperation between the European Community Common Market and the Soviet COMECON (the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). The results came in the form of the Soviet's de facto recognition of the European Community (EC) Commission and the EC's acknowledgement of the 'COMECON's approach through the [EC] Commission' (Yamamoto, 2007: 87). Obviously, the French President did not see US leadership and European

subordinate as a necessity for maintaining peace. Instead, he viewed East–West reconciliation as a way to reunite Europe and forge a long-lasting peace.

In general, France began to reconcile with the East from the 1960s onwards and used détente to promote peace. De Gaulle was not as devoted as Kissinger to the ideas of *realpolitik*, nor did he believe that deterrence was the only way to maintain peace (Humphreys, 2014: 3151–52). The British, similarly, withdrew its military forces and provided less support to the US containment policy. The differences between US, UK and French diplomatic approaches made it impractical for European states to sacrifice their sovereignty and follow US strategy, and the transatlantic differences continued during the 1980s and 1990s.

The end of the Cold War and European integration

As Michael Cox (2007: 112–13) and Campbell (2008: 103) put it, a 'Transatlantic Split' existed in Cold War historiography regarding events from 1975 onwards. While European and constructivist studies started to focus more on how European states exercised their sovereignty, the traditional US story continued to describe Europeans as actors that 'play[ed] a supporting role' in the grand finale directed by Reagan and Bush (Campbell, 2008: 104). Cox (2007: 128) even used the term 'Bound to Lead' to describe how superior the USA was in the 'American "grand narrative"'. To understand how US scholars amplified the role of the USA in the final hours of the Cold War, we could take a look at John Gaddis's *The Cold War: A New History* (2007). When he discussed the 'critical 1989–91 period' in his book, the French and German experiences were nearly omitted (Bozo, 2007: 455). He portrayed the policies of Reagan and Gorbachev, the leaders of the superpowers, as critical reasons that contributed to the collapse of the Eastern bloc (Gaddis, 2007: 304–21). While Reagan's disarm negotiations and Gorbachev's *perestroika* were indeed important factors, it seemed a little baffling that the European's efforts were generally not mentioned (Matlock, 2008: 57–78). While Gaddis did not openly describe Europe as dependencies of the US, his writings nonetheless implied this assumption. Nevertheless, numerous historians and evidence had demonstrated that the EEC, with France, FRG and Britain as its leader, had undertaken independent actions to promote greater peace and cooperation in Europe.

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which functioned as a basis for East–West Europe cooperation, was used by numerous researchers to describe how the Western European states, with France and the FRG taking the lead, gradually took the matter of ending the Cold War into their own hands (Davy, 2009: 1–22; Romano, 2014: 153–73; Suri, 2008: 527–45; Thomas, 2018: 27–54). As demonstrated by Suri (2008: 531–32), the Europeans increasingly ignored Kissinger's 'great power lines' since the 1970s and attempted to break US leadership in managing 'West European problems'. Two factors contributed to this firmness in pursuing Europe's own interest. Firstly, as demonstrated above, détente and the *Ostpolitik* of France, as well as that of the FRG, paved a more relaxed environment for European cooperation, which provided Europe with more autonomy and decreased US influence (Romano, 2014: 156–57). What is more crucial, however, is the growing European push for integration. Daniel C. Thomas's *The Helsinki Effect* (2018) provided a terrific account of how the Europeans slowly developed as a third power in times of bipolar conflict. According to Thomas (2018: 40), the EC, with France and West Germany taking the lead, decided to pose 'itself as a legitimate voice in world affairs' by jointly insisting that human rights and democratic principles should be included in the Helsinki Final Act. The Europeans were trying to establish a liberal European norm – one that could function as political '"dynamite" in Eastern Europe' and corrode the Soviet Empire from within (Davy, 2009: 14–15). It should be noted that the EC's united decision had several significant implications. To begin with, it showcased that the Europeans understood how to operate in the bipolar system by exercising

their sovereignty. Moreover, as Davy (2009: 4) and Romano (2014: 156–57) argued, the Europeans revolutionised the foundation for European peace by recognising 'human rights and fundamental freedoms' as the prerequisite for further cooperation (Judge and Langdon, 2018: 258–60). The focus on dialogues, negotiations and maintaining peace meant that the Western Europeans were also less keen to use military measures or harsh policies to confront their Eastern neighbours.

The diverging reaction towards the Poland martial law declaration in 1981 demonstrated strategic difference between the USA and Western Europe. On 13 December 1981, pro-Soviet General Jaruzelski of Poland declared martial law in the nation as an ultimate strong-handed method to crush Solidarity, the 'Eastern bloc's first-ever independent trade union' (Gebert, 1990: 355). As an immediate response to the event, the USA stopped financial support to Poland to demonstrate its disapproval of the Communist crackdown, and then continued with heavy sanctions, such as prohibiting the supply of pipe-laying equipment and advanced technology to the USSR as well as postponing new trade agreements (Woolcock, 1982: 57). However, the Western European countries were not in favour of confrontation. In the British House of Lords debate on 14 December, one day after the declaration of martial law, Conservative Foreign Secretary Peter Carington stated that the UK 'shall observe a policy of strict non-intervention' and 'expect the same of all signatories of the Helsinki Final Act' (Hansard, 1981). France reacted even more strongly in favour of the East. Paris publicly denounced the Reagan administration for its 'double standards', pointing out that the USA had different diplomatic approaches towards military regimes in Central America and that of Poland (MacDonald, 1982: 42–50). Hence, even though the European states generally agreed that they should 'act in accordance with [their] own situation and laws' without outside intervention, their attitudes and policies towards the superpowers varied (Woolcock, 1982).

To understand why the Europeans were much less willing to come into direct conflict with the USSR, it would be reasonable to look at Western Europe's trade patterns. As Stephen Woolcock (1982: 51–52) pointed out, by 1980, 'Western Europe accounted for no less than 80 per cent of total OECD-COMECON trade', with the nine EC countries occupying up to 60 per cent. If we focus on our main cases of study, Britain and France, France had taken a share of 12 per cent in the entire OECD-COMECON trade, while Britain's proportion amounted to around 6.7 per cent (Woolcock, 1982: 52). The close trading relationship and the geographic approximation made it difficult for Europe to impose sanctions against Poland and the USSR. Moreover, the European countries saw the USSR as less of a threat than the USA. The United States, being 'both the ["]leader["] of the Western coalition and as a global power', had to make more careful strategic calculations when coming against another nuclear superpower with a completely different ideology (Williams, 1982: 376–77). This was something that the European countries did not reciprocate, along with the strong US antagonism against the Marxist ideology.

The differences in dealing with the Polish incident as well as the diversified economic policies demonstrated that the European countries could decide on their diplomatic response towards the East, in both times of crisis and regular commercial exchanges. Nevertheless, the decision of both the USA and the European countries to condemn the martial law demonstrated that the two were still more or less on the same page on issues regarding human rights and democracy, and both acknowledged the political differences between the Communist states and the NATO countries.

Conclusion

In general, while the Europeans had been allies of Washington ever since World War II, and the fact that US influence was looming in Europe in the early post-war period, Europeans generally did not trade their sovereignty for peace. Britain and France followed their own agendas, and the Franco-Germany Alliance, along with the EC, also actively reconciled with the East, which provided an alternative to the US doctrine (Gurney, 1985: 110–13). As Deighton (2010: 126) interpreted, despite the Western European states sometimes 'compromise[d]' in consideration of 'the Cold War balance of power', they did not follow the lead of the USA without hesitation. These findings contribute to the existing academic debate in two ways. On the historiographic aspect, this article used the case studies of Britain and France to support the post-revisionist standpoint in which the Cold War was a complex matter with many different factors in play. Empirically, this article highlighted events and cases that had not been largely discussed in the field of Cold War history studies – for instance, Britain's initial participation in the Cold War and the divergent reactions of the transatlantic alliance towards the Polish incident. Future studies could focus on these historical events and further study their implication on American–European relations.

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Glossary

The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON): A Soviet-led economic body advocating multilateral cooperation among the Eastern Communist bloc, with the target to counter Western European influence.

Détente: The gradual decrease of geopolitical tension between the USA and the Soviet Union during the late 1960s to 1970s, with arms talks and trade deals between the West and the East taking place.

European Community Common Market: Also known as the European Economic Community (EEC), the organisation was founded in 1958 to facilitate economic integration between European states through developing a common market and customs union.

Helsinki Final Act: The document that was signed at the end of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) on 1 August 1975, with terms promoting the mutual respect of sovereignty and human rights among the participating states.

Historiography: The analysis of different methods and interpretations employed to explain historical events and phenomena, with the aim of understanding how historians approached history writing.

Orthodox School of Cold War Studies: A school of thought that conceptualised the Cold War from a realist perspective, with scholars arguing that the Cold War was just a power struggle between the two superpowers, and that the USA was striving to defend its national interest.

Ostpolitik: A series of policies which had been implemented by West Germany and France since the 1960s to normalise relations with East Germany and the Soviet bloc.

Peace: Defined in this article as the absence of hot or nuclear war on the European continent through military deterrence or diplomatic efforts.

Perestroika: Referring to 'reconstruction' in the Russian language, it was a term used to categorise a series of economic reforms in the USSR during the late 1980s, which attempted to reform the stagnated Communist system by introducing market elements.

Realpolitik: A German notion referring to the pursuit of policy goals based on the examination of practical circumstances, instead of acting purely on moral or ideological tenets.

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