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Klaus Larres has written a timely and controversial book about the history of the relationship between the United States and the European Union. Focusing particularly on President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, Larres describes how the United States came to see the movement toward a united Europe as a “Frankenstein monster” that the United States should seek to prevent. In Larres’s view, Nixon and Kissinger’s belief that a unified Europe would not be obedient to American strategic designs was at the heart of their opposition, and in taking this stance, Larres argues that they reversed almost two decades of strong American support for the European project. The Nixon and Kissinger approach was a significant turning point in the postwar history of American foreign policy. When President Donald Trump proclaimed the European Union “a foe” of the United States, he was bringing to fruition the policy that Nixon and Kissinger had inaugurated.

Larres’s book has stimulated a spirited debate in this roundtable. All the reviewers agree that the book is thoroughly researched and well written, and the various highlights of their praise are excerpted by Larres himself in the opening paragraph of his response. While Rolf Steininger’s review is largely uncritical and he expresses hope for a German translation of the book, both Daniel Hamilton and Jussi Hanhimäki raise significant questions about the book’s central argument. Hamilton contends that the Larres narrative “attempts to bend history” in its “unconvincing effort to draw a line from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump.” Ignoring the presidential administrations of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama, Hamilton contends, Larres “overreaches” in his argument, and that overall American policy has been far more supportive of European integration than Larres portrays. He argues further that Larres downplays internal European divisions and writes “as if a unified bloc had already come into being.” Europeans differed on the nature of the European project, and these differences affected American support for European integration.

Hanhimäki’s review, while also acknowledging the book’s scholarship, is also critical, pointing out its relative lack of European sources. He also views the Larres book as part of the “crisis-prone writing” that characterizes accounts of the transatlantic alliance. Hanhimäki makes the case that the entire history of the alliance, even what Larres views as the “golden age” of the 1950s, was replete with conflicts and competition between the United States and its European allies, leading to “a never-ending cycle of crisis and reconciliation.” Yet through it all, Hanhimäki contends, what has been achieved is “an increasingly closer, more dynamic, and more extensively integrated ‘West.’” Even Trump could not overturn the applecart of the thriving transatlantic relationship, and President Joe Biden has renewed it.

In his response, Larres forcefully rejects both the Hamilton and Hanhimäki critiques, pointing to his use of European sources and rejecting the notion that his argument “overreaches” his evidence. Larres argues that in recent years Europeans have indeed come to doubt America’s continuing existence as “democratic country.” In addition, they have witnessed America’s increasing tendency, even under their favorite President, Barack Obama, to “pivot” toward Asia and away from Europe. To Larres, the relationship between the United States and Europe has grown increasingly strained since the end of the Cold War, and Donald Trump’s presidency was the culmination of this trend. Larres expresses a certainty that the US and Europe would have divorced in a second Trump term, and he argues that Hamilton greatly overstates both the Clinton and Obama administrations’ interest in, and support for, European integration. There is something of a psychological element to the Larres view, as he argues that the US has treated Europe in a “master/underling” manner, using its power to bully European countries to follow its lead.

One reviewer takes a different approach. As a diplomatic historian with an expertise in economics, Diane Kunz considers the Larres book with both history and contemporary events in mind. While praising the book

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as “seminal” reading on the Nixon period, Kunz reminds us that Nixon’s primary concern in dealing with the Europeans was his own re-election concerns. His unilateral moves on economic issues, particularly his August 1971 decision to end the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and the link between the dollar and gold, as well as imposing tariffs and other trade restrictions, were designed to help Nixon’s standing at home and boost the American economy during the presidential election year of 1972. Nixon’s unilateralism underlined Europe’s weakness in dealing with the US, and greatly encouraged the Europeans, especially the French and Germans, to drive toward greater European integration and the unity that Larres documents. The development of a strong European Union in economic terms helped to create a political rival to the United States and ultimately drew Nixon and Kissinger’s enmity.

The big problem of course, as Kunz dryly notes in a direct reference to Ukraine, is that “economic issues are vitally important until they are not.” Russia’s brutal military invasion, the largest land war in Europe since World War II, revealed the military impotence of Europe, especially Germany, and reaffirmed the significance of both NATO and the United States for providing leadership and ensuring European security. Will it now encourage Europeans to develop a defense capacity to match or rival the US as the EU once did in economic terms? I would not hold my breath waiting, but it is an important question that Uncertain Allies raises.

Participants:

Klaus Larres is the Richard M. Krasno Distinguished Professor of History and International Affairs at the University of North Carolina. He also runs the Krasno Global Events Series at UNC. Prior to joining UNC in 2012, he held professorships at Queen’s University Belfast and the University of London. He also held the Henry A Kissinger Chair at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and visiting professorships at Yale, Johns Hopkins Univ./SAIS, Schwarzman College/Tsingua University in Beijing, the University of Milan, Italy, and others. He also was Counselor and Senior Policy Adviser at the German Embassy in Beijing and a Visiting Fellow at the German Institute of International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin and the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, NJ. Among his other publications are Churchill’s Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy (Yale University Press, 2002), Politics of Illusion: Churchill, Eisenhower and the German Question (in German, 1995), The Oxford Handbook of German Politics (co-ed., Oxford University Press, 2022), Dictators and Autocrats: Securing Power Across Global Politics (ed., Routledge, 2022), Terrorism and Transatlantic Relations: Threats and Challenges (co-ed., Palgrave, 2022), German-American Relations in the 21st Century: A Fragile Friendship (co-ed., Routledge, 2019), and many others. At present he is working on a book which looks at the different policies of the US and the EU/Germany toward China from the 1980s to the present. Working title: “China as a Cause of Tension in Transatlantic Relations and within Europe from the 1980s to the present.”


Daniel S. Hamilton has been on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies since 2001, and has served as Richard von Weizsäcker Professor, Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Professor, and Founding Director of the School’s Center for Transatlantic Relations. For 15 years he served as Executive Director of the American Consortium on EU Studies. He is Senior Fellow of the SAIS Foreign Policy Institute, co-leading the School’s postdoctoral program on “The United States, Europe, and World Order.” He is also a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He has directed the Global Europe Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center and acted as Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy, and Deputy Director of the Aspen Institute Berlin. He served as US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Associate Director of the Policy Planning Staff for two US Secretaries of State. Recent publications include Paradigm Lost? The European Union and the Challenges of a New World (ed., with Gregor
Kirchhof and Andreas Rödder); *The Transatlantic Economy 2022* (with Joseph P. Quinlan) and *Exiting the Cold War, Entering a New World* (ed., with Kristina Spohr).

**Jussi M. Hanhimäki** is Professor and Chair of International History and Politics at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. He is the author, among other works, of *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and one of the founding editors of the journal *Cold War History*. His latest book is *Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford University Press, 2021). He is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Afterlife: the Cold War’s Long Shadow*.

**Diane B. Kunz** is Scholar in Residence at the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, as well as the Executive Director of the Center for Adoption Policy. She is an historian and a lawyer and is currently working on a history of US international adoption.

**Rolf Steininger**, Professor Emeritus, was from 1984–2010 head of the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Innsbruck; and from 2008–2018 at the Free University of Bolzano; European Union Jean Monnet Professor, Senior Fellow of the Eisenhower Center for American Studies at the University of New Orleans, and is author of numerous books, articles and international award-winning TV and film documentaries.
The early 1970s represented a pivotal moment in the US relationship with Europe. Klaus Larres tells this story in a fascinating and highly readable manner. His tale is strongest when he focuses on his two major protagonists, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, especially their evolving views on the significance and potential consequences of west European efforts to create an ‘ever closer union’ through deeper integration within the evolving European Community. Larres delves deeply into the personal experiences and professional interactions of Nixon and Kissinger with their European counterparts. He draws on unclassified documents, interviews, and extensive reading of the literature to explain how the Nixon administration turned decisively against two decades of relatively benign US support for west European integration, and planted seeds of concern that would influence US administrations over the succeeding four decades.

When Nixon assumed the presidency in January 1969, he and Kissinger, who was originally his national security advisor before also becoming Secretary of State, believed that it was up to the six west European member states of the European Community to decide whether to move forward with deeper integration. They initially treated the issue as a sideshow, focused as they were on domestic economic challenges, the escalating Vietnam War, and great-power relations with the Soviet Union and China, and given ongoing ambivalence among the west Europeans themselves about their integration project.

Over time, however, transatlantic tensions over monetary issues, trade affairs, and approaches to the Soviet Union, the Middle East and energy flows led the Nixon administration to adopt a more confrontational stance. By April 1973, after Kissinger confided that he was “no longer so sure that European integration is all that much in our interest,” Nixon replied, “Oh, I am not so sure of it at all.” He expressed his “opposition to any solution that brought the Common Market countries closer together.” Otherwise, Nixon exclaimed, “we will create in Europe, a Frankenstein monster, which could be highly detrimental to our interests in the years ahead.”

The first and most serious break came in August 1971, when the Nixon administration set its allies adrift by abruptly de-pegging the dollar from gold, which led to the demise of the Bretton Woods system that had framed the international monetary system since the end of World War II. While that tale has been told in great detail elsewhere, Larres adeptly weaves the story into his larger geopolitical narrative. In this book the brutal unilateralist is not Kissinger but US Treasury Secretary John Connolly, who famously told the Europeans that the dollar was “our currency, but your problem.” Other leading members of the Nixon administration, as well as key members of Congress, had also become concerned that reflexive US support for Europe’s economies was beginning to work against US interests.

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It was Kissinger, however, who articulated the essential US concern. For decades, Washington had gotten its priorities backwards. The US had “made the Europeans depend on us in defense, which even works against our economic interest, and given them a free hand in the economic field,” which ran against US interests. “You really got it on the head there,” Nixon replied. “I agree with that.”

They ditched US support for west European unity in favor of divide et impera.

Not everyone on the Nixon team was convinced. Differing views were offered by prominent personalities such as Arthur Burns, the Federal Reserve Chairman, and George Shultz, at the time director of the Office of Management and Budget, and later Connolly’s successor as Treasury Secretary. But Kissinger was Nixon’s Euro-whisperer.

Larres’s tale is less captivating, and less convincing, when it strays from the main story line. “US interest in European integration and the creation of a united Europe would not return,” he claims. “The mutual trust and closeness that had once been taken for granted in transatlantic relations would never come back” (272). In his unconvincing effort to draw a line from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump, Larres’s narrative attempts to bend history. Certainly, Trump’s label of the EU as a “foe” that “treats us worse than China” echoed Nixon’s concern about the “Frankenstein monster.” And the George W. Bush administration’s policy of “disaggregation”—playing European countries off against one another—resembled Nixon administration tactics.

But Larres ignores three other administrations—that of Republican George H.W. Bush, and of Democrats Bill Clinton and Barack Obama—that arguably were far more supportive of European integration. Bush Sr., after all, helped to manage the peaceful end to Europe’s divisions and set the entire continent, not just its western European half, on the road to integration. Clinton built on those decisions, working with EU partners to expand the integrated space of democratic stability in Europe where war simply did not happen, and forging an ambitious US-EU New Transatlantic Agenda that went considerably beyond other frameworks for bilateral cooperation—in terms of ambition, formality, and institutional procedures—than either partner had with any other party anywhere in the world. And while Obama was less personally interested in the arena of EU processes, he clearly expected a more capable European partner to step up to tackle together with the United States a host of challenges ranging far beyond Europe’s borders. He castigated the British for their Brexit decision. Together with EU partners, he began negotiations on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)—arguably the most ambitious US -EU initiative ever. The fact that TTIP was not realized does not obviate the fact that the Obama administration supported a strong, internally coherent and outward-looking European Union. The Biden administration’s approach to European integration is much closer to that of these administrations than to those of Trump, George W. Bush, or Nixon.

Larres is not wrong that the Nixon administration was decisive in terms of Washington’s approach to the European integration process. But in the broader sweep of seven decades of postwar history, it was a sharp turn on what had already been, and continues to be, a long and winding road, not the off-ramp from a deeply intertwined future. In the end, what is problematic about Larres’s account is not the book’s headline story, which he treats with detail and insight, it is how Larres situates the Nixon-Kissinger interlude in this longer and more twisted tale.

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Larres writes nostalgically about a golden age of transatlantic cooperation in which US leaders regarded closer west European integration as an end in itself, worthy of US support. Jussi Hanhimäki’s recent history of the transatlantic relationship offers a useful corrective. He shows how the ‘transatlantic community’ born after World War II was more often than not a community of strife, punctuated by major internal conflicts over President Charles de Gaulle’s diffidence and France’s decision to exit NATO’s unified military command, disputes over burden-sharing, nuclear deterrence, out-of-area engagements, discriminatory subsidies, and trade preferences. Far from threatening the transatlantic alliance, Hanhimäki argues that these disputes were sources of vibrancy and dynamism. The United States and Europe “thrived” on competition and disagreement. Indeed, the West’s success has been “its ability to remain united while being perpetually divided.”\footnote{Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 33-34; See also Jussi Hanhimäki, Barbara Zanchetta and Benedikt Schoenborn. *Transatlantic Relations since 1945: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012).}

Successive postwar US administrations welcomed the idea of west European integration; none regarded it as an unalloyed good. US support for European integration has always been that of conditional acceptance. Broad rhetorical support for the principle of integration has always been accompanied by dogged attention to the implications of any particular European initiative for US interests.

For the United States, the mere fact of integration has always been less important than its nature. And the struggle to define the nature of the European project has been a never-ending drama. Today, the European integration project is seen as driven by Europeans, and the Atlanticist project as driven by Americans. In the 1950s it was arguably the other way around.\footnote{See Hanhimäki; Daniel S. Hamilton, “Creating the New Atlantic Community,” in Jeffrey Gedmin, *European Integration and American Interests* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1997); Ronald D. Asmus, “New Plumbing, New Purposes—Rebuilding the Transatlantic Alliance,” *American Interest*, November/December 2008.} Larres emphasizes how pro-integration Washington was in those early years, and laments how the Nixon administration adopted a more confrontational stance. He devotes less attention to how pro-Atlanticist western Europe was at the beginning, and how this changed before the advent of the Nixon Administration, which in turn affected American attitudes to the European project.

In retrospect, there were two realignments. The first, arguably, came in Europe, not in America. The 1960s were marked by intra-European disputes over the nature of integration—was the budding European Community to be America’s counterpart, or its counterweight? The ongoing clash between Gaullist and Atlanticist visions of an integrated Europe, which is still so evident in contemporary debates, was key to setting in motion an intellectual and political realignment in US policy that took shape during the Nixon-Kissinger era and that ebbs and flows with America’s political tides today.

Larres writes with verve on the realignment of US policy; his book offers less insight into how intra-European debates influenced US views. While parsing the nuances of US interagency debates, Larres consistently refers to “the Europeans” as if a unified bloc had already come into being. Intra-European strains are given relatively short shrift. The reality, of course, was—and is—that Europeans themselves are deeply divided over the nature of their common project, and that ongoing ambivalence affects US approaches to integration’s ups and downs.

Kissinger himself was conflicted, as Larres acknowledges. While railing at times against west European failures to consult, he also acted to tamp down more extreme US reactions. Striking out some confrontational passages in a State Department action memo, he commented that “I don’t want us to push unity but we should not oppose it either.”\footnote{Action memorandum from the Assistant Secretary for European and Canadian Affairs (Hartman), “Your Comment on my EC Talking Points,” April 22, 1974, attached to a memorandum from the counselor (Helmut Hartman).}
In short, US inconsistencies are related to the uncertainties Europeans themselves feel about their grand experiment.\(^\text{10}\) Despite ambitions of unity, Europeans struggle to find a single voice. The European Union remains a work in progress, with uneven capabilities. Deep cleavages among member states can be found on issues large and small. From time to time, US actors do take advantage of those differences to shape outcomes favorable to US interests. Often, however, obstacles to effective transatlantic coordination have less to do with US reluctance to engage or support the EU as a strategic partner than with the limits of European capability, consensus, and political will.\(^\text{11}\)

The result is that the US-EU relationship struggles to be strategic. Priorities are often mismatched: the US looks for efficiency and concrete outcomes; the EU seeks legitimacy and symbolic US validation of the ongoing process of European integration. Relations are beset by competitive impulses, underlying questions of trust, and mutual doubts about relative commitment and capacity—not only across the Atlantic, but within the United States and within the EU as well.\(^\text{12}\)

Robert Zoellick, who at the end of the Cold War played such an important role in the integration of the European continent beyond its western European half, expressed mainstream US sentiment well when he said that while he believed the United States could continue to support the dream of peaceful European integration, he also believed that European integration had “advanced to such a stage that the United States should be increasingly discriminating about the content, form, and resulting outlook” of the European Union.\(^\text{13}\) Klaus Larres’s book helps us to understand why.

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In the massive literature on President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s reordering of American foreign policy priorities, the discussion of transatlantic relations has generally been overshadowed by Vietnam, détente, the opening to China, and the October 1973 War in the Middle East. If anything, the focus has been on the deceptive significance of Kissinger’s ‘Year of Europe’ speech and the crisis it seemingly or unnecessarily provoked. Yet relatively little has recently been published on the ways in which the reinvigoration of European integration was regarded—positively or negatively—and influenced by policymakers bent on reshaping America’s relations with the United States’ major adversaries in the early 1970s.¹

Within this context alone, Klaus Larres’s carefully researched study is a welcome addition to existing scholarship. But beyond filling the specific gap in the literature, Larres has also provided an interpretation that helps us make sense of the acrimony that, over the last five decades, has clouded transatlantic relations, making it seem as though the Atlantic Ocean were becoming wider and wider with every crisis over trade or tariffs and each disagreement about NATO burden-sharing. In short, while focusing on a specific and relatively limited period in transatlantic relations, the implications of Larres’s thesis reach into the post-Cold War era and all the way to the present. This is the one problematic aspect of Uncertain Allies; I discuss it below.

There is a lot to be said in favor of Uncertain Allies. Larres’s main argument is clear enough and the research supporting it is solid. While recognizing the signs of decline in America’s global influence, Nixon and Kissinger were bent on dominating the transatlantic relationship, on making sure that Europeans remained subservient to and supportive of the United States’ broader foreign policy goals. The administration worried that previous decades of US support for European integration had created a Frankenstein monster. With the January 1973 accession of Britain (as well as Denmark and Ireland), the European Economic Community (EEC) was, as a Time magazine cover summed it up on its cover: “America’s New Rival.”² Moreover, within the context of the global turmoil of the early 1970s—the weakening of the Bretton Woods System, the continuing war in Vietnam, the manifold dilemmas related to decolonization, the uncertainty of energy imports from the Persian Gulf—the Atlantic bond was increasingly important for America’s global influence. Yet, as the Nixon administration continued to insist upon American primacy over Europe, and on the overriding significance of strengthened Atlanticism instead of further European integration, the transatlantic relationship deteriorated further, a reality on display when Kissinger grandly announced the ‘Year of Europe’ in April 1973.

It was in the early 1970s, therefore, that the simmering transatlantic distrust turned into a structural fact. From the 1970s onwards, the Europeans became increasingly distrustful of American leadership, while successive US administrations would never return to the unqualified US support for European integration. In other words, on Nixon and Kissinger’s watch, the golden age of transatlantic relations—which Larres places in the 1950s—was lost and replaced by an endless series of ups and downs, recurrent crises over trade and tariffs further clouded by disagreements about NATO’s mission and purpose. The cycle was evidently on display almost five decades later during the Trump administration when the American president declared NATO obsolete and European Union a foe that was cheating the United States on trade. As Larres

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concludes: “It was in the early 1970s that the foundation was laid for the ever-widening rift in transatlantic relations that characterized the subsequent decades and culminated in the twenty-first century” (273).

Although the book provides a readable and well-researched account of Nixon and Kissinger’s transatlantic policy, there are a few problematic issues. I will focus on two. First, the research is unfortunately limited in its perspective. While thorough in his use of American archives, Larres has unfortunately not ventured into the multiple national, EU, or NATO archives that, for the 1970s, are accessible. This may in part be justifiable: the book focuses on American perceptions and decision-making processes. Yet, one is still left wondering: was there anything to the threat of a united Europe? Did Europeans really see the United States as a threat to their much-yearned for unity—and, if so, which Europeans. Was European unity a mirage rather than a threat or challenge to the United States? In short, was there a ‘European’ vision or merely a series of policies that saw integration as a vehicle to serve more narrow national interests? Or, most likely, a never-ending mix of both?

Which brings me to the second point. For all its virtues, the book overreaches in making an analogy between the 1970s and the recent past. Perhaps because of the context in which Uncertain Allies was written (the Trump era), Larres aims to drive home a point of historical continuity between the foreign policies of the president who resigned and the one who was twice impeached. It is, though, difficult to find anything resembling a symmetry if only because of Nixon’s evident acumen on foreign policy and international affairs when compared to Donald Trump’s, well, somewhat less obvious understanding and appreciation of same.

In fact, the analogy that one is tempted to make about the two eras and the state of transatlantic relations is one of ‘crying wolf.’ There was tension and distrust on the American side about Europe in the 1970s, with some analysts predicting that the end of the transatlantic partnership was nigh. Likewise, there was tension and distrust in 2016-2020 with many commentators driven to panic about the imminent dissolution of NATO. Yet somehow the worst—in the form of transatlantic disintegration—did not come to pass in the 1970s. In fact, as Piers Ludlow among others has pointed out, in 1973-75 the United States and its west European allies (and Japan) collaborated in several new frameworks, including the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Group of Seven (G7). NATO countries collaborated closely in the context of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The shift in the nature of the transatlantic relationship in the 1970s reflected the broad transformation that was taking place in inter-allied relations in the 1970s.³

By the same token, no divorce was in the cards during the Trump presidency despite the alarm that spread across the transatlantic space as the White House’s occupant called NATO obsolete and charged Europeans for having taken advantage of America’s good will for much too long. Whether Trump truly wanted to abandon the United States’ commitment to European security or start an all-out trade war with the EU is of course impossible to discern. But when President Joe Biden claimed that America was ‘back’ he was, actually, overstating the point. America had never ‘left’ the majority of the cooperative transatlantic frameworks that were in place when Trump assumed the presidency in January 2017. For example, NATO’s latest enlargement happened on Trump’s watch when North Macedonia joined the alliance in 2020.⁴

Uncertain Allies is in many ways an outstanding work of scholarship. It offers an in-depth account of the reassessment of US strategy towards Europe in the early 1970s, something that has been somewhat absent from the otherwise massive ‘Nixinger’ literature. But the book also continues a long tradition of crisis-prone writing about the transatlantic relationship. In fact, conflict has always been a popular framework among

⁴ For further detail see Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
analysts who write about post-1945 European-American interactions, to the point that we seem to have lost sight of the reality of the other side of the coin: an increasingly closer, more dynamic, and more extensively integrated ‘West.’ If anything, the history of the transatlantic relationship is one of a never-ending cycle of crisis and reconciliation underpinned by enlargement (NATO and the EU), deepening economic ties, and broadly similar political systems and trends.

Ultimately, the coexistence of community and conflict has been and is likely to remain the most enduring characteristic of the transatlantic relationship. It is largely an outgrowth of the success of the relationship and its increasingly complex and multilayered nature that opens infinite possibilities for both cooperation, rivalry, and re-assessment. The recurrence of crises, rather than undermining the transatlantic relationship has, time and again, illustrated its resilience. This, in the end, is what transpired during the period examined in *Uncertain Allies*. In fact, paradoxical as it may seem, the disagreements themselves have been and remain one of the greatest strengths of the relationship between America and Europe.

As Kissinger, probably the most famous European-born American statesman of all time, wrote at the start of the Nixon administration:

> Thus, we face the root question of a multipolar world. How much unity should we want? How much diversity can we stand? These questions never have a final answer within a pluralistic society. Adjusting the balance between integration and autonomy will be the key challenge of Atlantic relations.5

It was thus in 1969 and the years that followed. It remains so in 2022 and beyond.

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In October 1973 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger reportedly said, “I do not care what happens to NATO, I am so disgusted.” Klaus Larres’s new book, *Uncertain Allies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Threat of a United Europe*, provides the key to understanding why America’s top diplomat could be so undiplomatic. Following the oft-quoted dictate of German historian Leopold von Ranke to record “what actually happened,” Larres recounts, in fascinating detail, the history of American and European diplomacy during the formative years of the European Union. Historians and political scientists on both sides of the Atlantic will find this volume seminal reading, not least because of Larres’s excellent use of both European and US sources.

In May 2022, speaking about the Ukraine war, Kissinger opined that “the outcome of any war and the peace settlement, and the nature of that peace settlement, will determine whether the combatants remain permanent adversaries, or whether it is possible to fit them into an international framework.” As Larres amply demonstrates, Kissinger professed, and tried to cultivate, just such a policy during the period between 1969 and 1974, when he and President Richard Nixon guided US foreign policy. But Western Europeans allies did not passively acquiesce to Nixon and Kissinger’s attempts to ‘fit’ them into a changing US foreign policy framework, in which European integration was to play a less favored role. Instead, French President George Pompidou, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, and British Prime Minister Edward Heath not only resisted such molding but, responding to what they saw as American bullying tactics, formed closer economic and political ties among themselves.

When Nixon assumed the office and powers of president, on January 20, 1969, he faced a society that was cracking at the seams. As the *New York Times*’ leading columnist James Reston wrote, the cities were “broke and overwhelmed,” the universities were embroiled by confrontations, there were “dramatic local controversies over race, religion, and education,” and the “question of the day” was how to deal with “militant extremists.” The international situation was, if anything, worse. On inauguration day the United States had 535,000 troops in Vietnam. Although campuses throbbed with anti-war action, broad public opinion was split down the middle. The Democratic Party had lost Congress and the presidency in the 1952 election (when Nixon was elected vice president) because the United States had failed to win the Korean War; Nixon had no intention of falling into the same trap. Indeed, all his actions need to be judged against his obsession with winning the 1972 election. Nixon knew that he needed to shore up his political position. He was a minority president, having only won 43.4 percent of the vote. Moreover, he never forgot that he had quite possibly been cheated of victory in the 1960 presidential election. A major step on the road to electoral victory was ‘Vietnamization,’ a policy enunciated in the eponymous Nixon Doctrine which allowed

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2 The “European Union” or “EU” is used consistently herein, although at various times it was known as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community, and the European Communities, not to mention the “Common Market.”

3 Henry Kissinger, “These are the main geopolitical challenges facing the world right now,” Davos 2022, May 23, 2022, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/kissinger-these-are-the-main-geopolitical-challenges-facing-the-world-right-now/.


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Washington to extricate US forces from Vietnam while continuing to support Saigon militarily and economically.

Nixon and Kissinger, however, understood that domestic considerations had been balanced against the overarching global Cold War. While Western European leaders also answered to their domestic audiences, they had far fewer global constraints. The period after 1969 was one of Western European retrenchment. During the nineteen sixties, Britain and France had shed most of their colonies, while in 1970 West Germany recognized the Oder-Neisse border, thereby accepting the post-Second World War settlement. By contrast, the United States remained burdened with its formal and informal empire responsibilities. It is instructive that Nixon’s introduction of what would become the Nixon Doctrine was made during his whirlwind 1969 global reassurance trip. Larres rightly references former French president Charles De Gaulle’s skepticism about the relationship between Vietnam and the international credibility of the United States (“It would be better to let go than to try and stay”), but that was not the message Nixon heard from southeast Asian and Pacific allies (55). Both the Johnson and Nixon administrations resented the refusal of western European governments to support the American rationale for its Vietnamese war at a time when the United States had stationed in excess of 250,000 troops in Europe. 7

But with the Soviet Union showing no signs of weakening its hold on Eastern Europe, a ‘Europeanization’ of the US NATO commitment was not on the table. Having created this entangling alliance in 1949, Washington could not turn its back on the continent during the tense years of the 1970s. What Nixon and Kissinger were able to do, however, was to construct a Metternichian superstructure, triangulating the Soviet Union against China. Their master stroke was designed not only to stabilize the international order, but to allow them to concentrate on extricating the United States from Vietnam with some semblance of honor. Within this framework, the administration would judge its Western European allies by how much these countries accommodatingly ‘fit in’ with Washington’s policy goals rather than detracting from them.

Nowhere was this dynamic clearer than in the realm of economics. Nixon believed that he needed to jump-start the slumping US economy in 1971 to reap benefits during the 1972 electoral cycle. But the 1944 Bretton Woods international agreements, which had enshrined US economic dominance, only worked insofar as the United States was willing to continue as the system’s banker of last resort. 8 In his opinion, Western European nations were benefiting from artificially low exchange rates, putting tariffs on US goods, and shirking their defense bills, freeloading off of the US taxpayer. As Kissinger put it, “the priorities have been wrong……,” the US had “made the Europeans depend on us in defense, which even works against our economic interest, and given them a free hand in the economic field” (191).

Growing US trade deficits and general economic weakness in 1971 led to intensifying pressure on the dollar and with the electoral clock ticking, the administration unilaterally jettisoned the Bretton Woods agreements and delinked the dollar from gold in August 1971. To the president, the ‘Nixon shock,’ which upended the world economy was a necessary corollary to the Nixon Doctrine. What Nixon and Kissinger failed to consider was how “the brutal unilateralism” of the decisions revealed on August 15, 1971 had, as Kissinger later admitted, “mortgaged relations” with Western European nations “for many years to come” (247). In that regard, Washington gave the French and West German leaders, who were eager for a truly federal Europe, an enormous gift. Nixonomics demonstrated that for West Germany, France, and their neighbors, in order to

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have a meaningful voice in world economic decisions, they would have to further integrate economically and politically and, eventually, create a cohesive federal Europe.

Nixon and Kissinger did attempt to pacify NATO partners by calling 1973 “the Year of Europe.” But as Larres puts it, their “insist[ing] on a great degree of military burden sharing” a “quid pro quo’ linkage between economic and security concerns,” and western European compliance with American demands during the 1973 Yom Kippur war, provided further evidence to West German and French leaders, as if any more was necessary, that only by strengthening internal ties would European nations achieve autonomy (212-213).

Yet as long as the Cold War continued, the ability of European nations to create an independent entity that could compete with the United States would always be limited by geopolitical realities. When it came down to it, the Cold War distribution of military forces dictated that western European nations could not do without US nuclear and conventional military protection. It is instructive that the three times when nuclear war was most imminent, in 1962, 1973, and 1983, West Germany, France, and Britain played no determinant role.

And that raises the question of whether the course of the 1970s would have been appreciably different if the movement toward European integration had begun in the 1980s instead of the 1950s. For all the talk about European unity, in the 1970s Europe was a fragmented and truncated entity. Half of Europe was dominated by the Soviet Union, while West Germany and France, the key players in the European Union, clashed as much as they cooperated. Great Britain, for its part, only became a European Union member in 1973 and even then, its politicians spent the next two years squabbling over whether its membership was a temporary gesture or a permanent decision. As long as the Cold War persisted, western Europe’s steps toward continent-wide unity remained limited, as the timeline of the late 1970s and 1980s demonstrated. That the final dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty on February 7, 1992, occurred within six weeks of each other is instructive. An integrated and enlarged European Union could only safely contemplate brushing off the United States when it faced an emasculated Russia, as opposed to the cold-war era Soviet Union, which included Ukraine and Belarus among its constituent republics, and controlled satellite nations abutting Western Europe.

For its part, the administration of George H.W. Bush encouraged European integration in a manner, as Larres proves, that Nixon and Kissinger did not. One of the reasons that the United States stood aside during the initial disintegration of Yugoslavia and the subsequent Balkan Wars was that European leaders convinced the Bush administration that the EU should be given the lead role in conducting relations with this former Soviet bloc country. Bush and his secretaries of state, first James Baker and then Lawrence Eagleburger, agreed that it was vital to allow the EU nations to use this opportunity to prove their effectiveness as an independent power.

Indeed, in the thirty years since Maastricht, the 27 EU members established an articles of confederation-level European super-nation. In so doing, the original EU founding states greatly contributed to European stability. Eastern European nations would have found shedding their Soviet pasts far more difficult if not for EU technical and financial assistance. The successful introduction of the Euro empowered European nations to expand their outreach efforts to non-European countries as well as to Russia itself. And Germany, Europe’s largest economy and its dominant player, effectively led the EU through the 2008 financial crisis, the Greek economic meltdown, and the 2015 refugee crisis. One can only hope that Larres writes another

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9 In 1975, Great Britain held an unprecedented referendum on whether to remain in the EU. The “yes” vote triumphed until the 2016 Brexit vote reversal.
volume, extending his granular analysis through the first decades of the twenty-first century, when a ‘European foreign policy’ became a reality rather than an aspiration.

The American government, with the exception of the period 2017-2021, looked benignly on the European integration project, remaining willing to fund NATO expenditures at a rate that remained disproportionate to the contributions of other members, especially that of Germany. But the Russian attack on Ukraine upended accepted verities. For one thing, the German government had based much of its post-Cold War economic and foreign policy on the dubious proposition that economic ties with Russia would lead to stronger diplomatic and democratic relations. It was this policy that US Secretary of State Cordell Hull had advocated in the 1930s, with the same dismal denouement that occurred in 2022. Economic issues are vitally important until they are not. And they are particularly unimportant in countries run by dictators; men like Russian president Vladimir Putin can only be convinced to change course by military, not economic, deterrence.\(^\text{11}\)

Moreover, the Ukraine invasion has once again put front and center the NATO alliance, which French President Emmanuel Macron in 2019 labeled “brain dead,”\(^\text{12}\) When Volodymyr Zelenskyy came with his begging bowl to western capitals, his most urgent request was for arms and military support. Only the United States was in the position to meaningfully supply these needs. But with the world economy eerily resembling that of the early 1970s, complete with stagflation and sky-high energy costs, US leaders may soon be walking in the unilateral footsteps Nixon and Kissinger laid down fifty years ago.


At one point before he became US president, Richard Nixon claimed that “he had always supported the idea of a European Community and NATO ever since he had come to Europe as a young Congressman” in 1947 (xi). Twenty-six years later, as president, he concluded that the European Community was a “Frankenstein monster,” hostile to its US creator, and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger gave the advice “to throw a monkey wrench into the Common Market machinery” (252). Was this the “turning point” (251) in Washington’s policy toward the European unity process? This is Klaus Larres’s thesis. How could this have happened? In six chapters of his constructive, succinct and well-researched book, Larres leads us to this point to find an answer to this question.

Chapter 1 explores the “Golden Age,” the years of post-World War II reconstruction, asking the overall question, ‘What to do with Germany?’ US diplomat John Foster Dulles gave this answer as early as 1942: “Germany ought to be integrated into a unified Europe,” but with “no special privileges,” since Germany was a “conquered enemy country,” as President Harry S. Truman put it in 1946 (10).

The Cold War changed everything. There was the Marshall Plan, with Larres offering the different views of Milward, Hogan and van der Beugel. There was no European unity, but there was still the German problem. In June 1949, the State Department put it this way: “Even if there were no reason at all for European unity, Europe would need it anyway, in order to solve the German problem.” German integration into the West was the “most important ultimate goal,” the “ever prime and urgent necessity of the moment,” as future Secretary of State Dean Acheson added.

The first step on this road was the Schuman Plan. Larres shows that Washington “never wavered in its strong support for the further development” of this plan (16): for Acheson it was the last chance to avoid “Russian or German, or perhaps Russian-German domination,” for Dulles it was the way “to solve the most dangerous problem of our time, namely the relationship of Germany’s industrial power to France and the West” (15).

The next step was the military integration of West Germany, first within the European Defense Community, and when that failed, within NATO. The policy is known as ‘double containment,’ i.e., to contain the Russians, and the Germans, so that the Germans “could not break loose” and should never again be in a position to blackmail other states with “meet my terms or else” as President Dwight Eisenhower put it in 1953. The British saw it slightly differently: the sole purpose of integrating Germany was “to prevent, so far as humanly possible, a Soviet-German alignment.” And NATO was there “to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in.”

Even in the early 1960s there was still the German danger. The Western powers did not trust the Germans. As Germany’s influence grew ever stronger within the European Economic Community, the Americans and the British acted. Washington wanted the participation of the UK in the European Economic Community (EEC). This would help “to bind Germany more firmly to the West.” And if the EEC showed signs of breaking up, Great Britain would be able to exert a powerful influence at the critical moment “to prevent

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NATO from disintegration and Germany from throwing in her lot with the Soviet Union.” The Kennedy administration attached “great importance to the political cohesion of Europe and was prepared to put up with discrimination against their own exports as the necessary price.” After reading Larres’s book we can see how this changed with the Nixon administration.

When the UK applied for membership in 1963, French President Charles de Gaulle said no and in his openly anti-US-policy withdrew three years later from NATO’s integrated military command. This angered Washington, but, as President Johnson’s acting National Security Adviser Robert Comer put it: “The real problem is not France, but Germany.” And the Germans still had this “incipient appetite for the nuclear,” as British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan put it. Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson offered the Multilateral Force (MLF) under the US-controlled nuclear umbrella. The MLF failed, de Gaulle called it a “Multilateral Farce.”

In connection with the so-called offset payments, Larres recalls the famous “Johnson treatment”—with Chancellor Erhard the victim. US ambassador McGhee had warned the president that Erhard would “throw himself on the president’s mercy” and “the government will fall: Germany and America will tend to drift apart.” Johnson did not care and demanded from Erhard “You’ve got to keep your commitment to me to reimburse me for every dime I spend.” Larres quotes Kissinger, who later referred to the whole episode as a great “fiasco” (36).

In Chapter 2 Larres tells us something of Nixon’s and Kissinger’s priorities with regard to “Europe and beyond.” This is not particularly new but nevertheless makes for interesting reading. We learn that on Nixon’s list of foreign policy issues Western Europe came fifth after East-West relations, and US policy toward the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe. It is no surprise that Larres’s analysis is particularly strong on Kissinger. Larres was the first to hold the Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Relations at the Kluge Center of the Library of Congress. In eight long interviews Kissinger answered Larres’s questions. It speaks to the objectivity of Larres as a first class historian that he characterizes Kissinger as follows: “initially he was a rather subservient and fawning, if not sycophantic, underling” (47). The former secretary of state will probably not be amused. Kissinger was “very difficult to deal with,” as Brent Scowcroft told Larres in an interview (49).

Nixon was definitely not interested in European integration. J. Robert Schaezelt, US ambassador to the European Community in Brussels from 1962 to 1972, stated: “In its isolation in Brussels the US-Mission might as well have been located on the upper reaches of the Orinoco.” Nixon was not anti-European. And yet, in 1973 he talked of Europe as “a Frankenstein monster, which could prove to be highly detrimental to our interests in the years ahead” (251).

It was all about Germany again, as we learn in Chapter 3, “Special Relationships.” It was a very special relationship with the new Chancellor Willy Brandt and his aide Egon Bahr. Nixon and Kissinger felt nothing but contempt for them. Larres starts off with an unpleasant—to say the least—conversation between Nixon and Kissinger about the tumor on Brandt’s vocal cords. Kissinger: “Unfortunately, it’s not malignant. Now, that’s a terrible thing to say.” Nixon cut in: “I know what you mean...You mean, unfortunately, he’s in very good health.” Kissinger agreed: “Unfortunately, he’s likely to hang on in there, yea.” Nixon added: “Well, I’m afraid, he’s dangerous. I really have to agree with you. I agree” (109). And it goes on like this. For Nixon,

Brandt was more than once a “son of a bitch,” “not too reliable,” “a weak man,” “dumb and presumptuous,” and the government was a disaster, “any non-socialist government would be better.” Kissinger saw it exactly the same way, calling the 1969 election result “the worst tragedy,” “a disaster,” and describing Bahr as “oily,” “a reptile,” “totally unreliable,” “a slippery fellow.” Even the moderate Secretary of State William Rogers called Bahr “a reptilian. I would not trust him as far as I could throw him.” The ‘Dear Egon’ and ‘Dear Henry’ letters were a farce, not even Realpolitik.

It was all very personal. ‘Ostpolitik’ for Nixon and Kissinger was “a disaster.” Kissinger on later occasions explained that he had thought Brandt was no match for the Russians, “gave them everything,” would lose control and thus weaken the Western alliance. But this was not honest. He used Ostpolitik for his Vietnam and SALT-policy. Brandt had started his Ostpolitik without asking Kissinger for permission. That was unforgivable. Ostpolitik was detente, but detente was Kissinger’s job, and only Kissinger’s job. In a rare statement he made this clear to Under-Secretary of State in Bonn’s Foreign Office, Paul Frank: “I tell you this. If there should be, indeed, detente with the Soviet Union, then we do it.” Nixon and Kissinger demanded that the Europeans consult them. But that was a one-way policy. The 1973 Yom Kippur War is a good example: When Nixon made the decision for an airlift of arms to Israel and Kissinger put the US nuclear forces on DEFCON 3, Europe and NATO were kept in the dark. US ambassador to NATO Donald Rumsfeld later explained that there had been no time for consultation (270). When the US Army loaded Israeli ships with armaments in a German port, the Germans were not even informed.

Relations with Nixon and Kissinger were strained. The White House in January 1974 on very short notice invited European leaders for the Energy Conference in Washington to test the spirit of cooperation between the US and its closest allies. When French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert insisted to keep the dignity of Europe alive, Kissinger took it personally; he was “very bitter“ and accused Jobert that France was working day after day all over the world against Washington. When at the same time the nine EC countries arranged a conference with the Arab states without consulting Washington, Kissinger called it “European masochism,” a “stab in the back” to derail his Middle East peace policy, and called German Foreign Minister Walter Scheel a “dope.”

Not everything in this book is new. There are numerous excellent books about Nixon and Kissinger on the market, plenty of documents have been declassified and are available, but the skillful way Larres binds this together to build his thesis that the Nixon era was a turning point in US-European relations, a “watershed” is excellent and makes fascinating reading. All his experience and well-founded insight and archival work come together. Another strength of his book are the almost 50 interviews Larres conducted between 2001 and 2017 with former politicians and officials (see the impressive list on 369), and which are evident at times throughout the book. Altogether a must read book (hopefully in a not too distant future in a German translation).

Does Larres’s thesis hold water? Towards the end of the Nixon administration, European-US relations were in bad shape. There was outright hostility toward Europe on the part of both Nixon and Kissinger. They both had to grapple with the fact that this ‘new’ Europe of the Nine was no longer the Marshall-aid-paid-Europe, and that the “Golden Age” of European integration and the “empire by invitation” (253) had come to an end. There would soon be the infamous “phone number” for Europe that Kissinger rhetorically requested (77). Larres shows in detail why it was hard for Nixon and Kissinger to accept how Secretary of State Dean Rusk had explained US interest in Europe: “Not the Europeans wanted us there but because we

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10 Steininger, Deutschland, 532.
believe our presence is essential to the defense of the U.S.”

In a way the Nixon era was a ‘turning point,’ and a ‘watershed.’ But Europe of course never turned into a “Frankenstein’s monster” that was hostile to the US, as Nixon feared. Of course, there were always problems, but not until President Donald Trump did any US president call Europe a foe of the United States.

Response by Klaus Larres, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

I am much obliged to the reviewers of my book, *Uncertain Allies: Nixon, Kissinger and the Threat of a United Europe*, for having commented so kindly and generously on it. Diane Kunz is impressed by the “fascinating details” and believes the volume is “seminal reading.” Jussi Hanhimäki writes that the “carefully researched study is a welcome addition to existing scholarship.” He thinks that the book “is in many ways an outstanding work of scholarship.” Daniel Hamilton refers to a “highly readable” book and believes that I “adeptly weave” into the volume’s “larger geopolitical narrative” the story of the financial and monetary crisis in the 1970s, which led to the famous August 1971 Camp David meeting and the eventual and highly controversial demise of the Bretton Woods system. Rolf Steininger also talks of a “constructive, succinct and well-researched book.”

Hanhimäki and Hamilton are above all skeptical of my main thesis that the “turning point” of the early 1970s in transatlantic relations which I identify has had a deep impact on European-American relations ever since. I argue that the transatlantic suspicion which developed during the Nixon-Kissinger era, particularly in the years 1971-74, never went away again until it reached its anti-European and anti-transatlantic climax during the Trump years. Both Hamilton and Hanhimäki believe, however, in Hanhimäki’s words, that I overreach “in making an analogy between the 1970s and the recent past.” Obviously I do not agree that I am “overreaching” and I am happy to briefly outline why I profoundly disagree with the two scholars.

First, the current relative harmony in transatlantic relations, which has been mostly brought about by Russia’s war on Ukraine but also to some extent by China’s increasingly assertive policies, should not make us overlook the deep structural suspicion and skepticism among most of the European allies regarding the future of the transatlantic alliance, including NATO. This tendency began to develop in the course of the 1960s, as I make clear in the first two chapters of my book, before reaching a crescendo of skepticism, animosity and even at times outright hostility during the Nixon-Kissinger years.

Despite the Biden administration’s recent moderate success in the November 2022 mid-term elections and the fortunate defeat of most Trumpists, the fear is widespread in Europe that the future of the US as a democratic country is highly uncertain. The huge majority of Europeans, both governments and the general public, also regard it as equally uncertain, perhaps even more so, whether or not the US will stay deeply
engaged in European affairs beyond the Biden presidency. The consensus in Europe is that had it not been for Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, Washington’s turn toward Asia and the containment of China would have been even more pronounced than has been the case so far.

In fact one could argue that it was not the anti-European, semi-isolationist Trump administration but the pro-integrationist and cooperative Biden administration which has become the exception to the rule with regard to US foreign policy and transatlantic relations. A quick look at many of the views expressed in Congress confirms this. And this development truly began in the early 1970s, as I outline in great detail and based on the relevant documents and secondary literature in chapters 4-6 of my book.

Hanhimäki writes that “no [transatlantic] divorce was in the cards during the Trump presidency.” I respectfully and strongly disagree. I share the view held by most analysts on both sides of the Atlantic that a brutal transatlantic divorce was just around the corner during the Trump years. The transatlantic allies only narrowly avoided such a deep split; a second Trump administration in all likelihood would have brought it about, including a US withdrawal from NATO. All the documentation we have already about the Trump presidency, including multiple memoirs and first-hand accounts, point into this direction, as does the real Angst of both abandonment and a seriously damaging transatlantic trade war felt by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, EU leaders Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk and many others.¹

It is of course correct that ‘crying wolf’ has been a pastime of European leaders ever since the Schuman Plan of 1950. But it is nevertheless obvious that the strong pro-European unity policy of the US, which we can see during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations and Washington’s strong support for the Schuman Plan, the failed European Defence Community (EDC) and the 1957 Rome Treaties—the golden age of transatlantic relations as I call it—became increasingly weaker in the course of the 1960s, in particular during the Johnson years. During the Nixon-Kissinger era the US could not care less whether or not there ever would be a united Europe. Once the Russian threat had become much weaker by the early 1970s—not least due to Nixon and Kissinger’s own successful policy of détente—and the EC countries, in particular West Germany and France, were developing into serious economic competitors, US policy toward Europe changed fundamentally and forever. (The renewed Russian threat also explains the realignment, possibly only a temporary one, which occurred recently during the Biden era.)

In the context of the prolonged financial and monetary crises of 1971-73, which seemed to have the potential to undermine Richard Nixon’s re-election in 1973, Kissinger in particular became openly hostile and opposed to the development of a truly united Europe, as I explain in particular in chapters 4 and 5 of my book. For instance, in April 1973 Nixon continued to express his “opposition to any solution [to the western monetary crisis] that brought the Common Market countries closer together,” by for instance the creation of a European monetary system. Kissinger concurred. “What we had to do,” the national security adviser informed the president, as noted in the secret diary of Federal Reserve Chairman Arthur Burns, was “to throw a monkey wrench into the Common Market machinery, for European unity in the economic area would definitely work against U.S. interest.”² Burns and Treasury Secretary George Shultz, however, were alarmed by Nixon and Kissinger’s plan “to corrupt the monetary system because of some scheme of theirs, not clearly thought through, of breaking up—or at least causing difficulties for the Common Market” (193-

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Nixon and Kissinger were clearly no longer thinking of supporting Europe’s unity project.

Second, Dan Hamilton is not persuaded by the line I draw from the skeptical anti-European unity policy of Nixon and Kissinger to Trump. He believes that my “narrative attempts to bend history.” Naturally, I am a little puzzled by this interpretation. It seems to be rather exaggerated, not least as I hardly talk about this issue in my book except in a rather summarizing way in one paragraph at the end of the introduction (7) and in a slightly longer paragraph at the very end of my conclusion (272–73). I refer briefly to the pro-European governments led by presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush as notable exceptions to a generally Euro-skeptic course in US foreign policy after the Nixon years and mention in passing the Euro-skeptic governments of presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and, somewhat more concretely, George W. Bush and Donald Trump as prime examples of the opposite. Hamilton notes that I do not mention the Clinton and Obama administrations in this context. Yet, at the end of the introduction and the conclusion I did not mean to have a detailed discussion about the transatlantic policy of all US governments since Nixon. It hardly made sense to go into the policies of the ‘middle-of-the-road’ administrations led by Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, neither of which were particularly supportive nor hostile to the European unity project. I am happy to expand a little on this now.

But perhaps the obvious also needs to be stated: the anti-European policy of the Nixon administration did not continue in an uninterrupted linear way. History seldom proceeds in such a way. As noted, George H.W. Bush in particular was no less pro-European unity than presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower and he proved this in the tumultuous years 1989/90. While not hostile to the European unity project, the Clinton and Obama administrations were much more skeptical than was the administration led by Bush senior.

Despite Clinton’s US-EU New Transatlantic Agenda which Hamilton refers to, Clinton feared the development of a formidable European economic fortress that would discriminate against US products. He was also fearful, if not highly afraid of—and thus largely opposed to—the creation of a common European currency, the Euro, and feared its consequences for the US and the future of the dollar as the global reserve currency. Clinton also only most reluctantly and much too late became involved in the Yugoslavian civil wars, which began in the mid-1990s, although this first war on European soil since World War II very much endangered the European unity project and severely undermined European stability.

Rightly or wrongly the Clinton administration started by supporting the expansion of NATO while attempting only half-heartedly to make Russia a proper part of Europe and bring about a truly ‘Common European Home.’ It missed a unique opportunity to strengthen the European integration project to the benefit of all Europeans, including Russia.

Obama’s epic financial battle with the Europeans about the right solution to overcoming the ‘Great Recession’ of 2008-12 and ensuring the survival of the Euro and thus the very existence of the EU and the Euro zone are well known. Unlike Trump, Obama was indeed highly opposed to Brexit. And the Obama administration did begin negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), as Hamilton points out. But these negotiations, which commenced in 2013, were conducted so slowly and with such a great lack of enthusiasm that by the end of the Obama years the talks were still continuing with no end in sight. This clearly displayed an obvious absence of pro-EU sentiments. To be fair, changing US domestic views influenced Obama; Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton even turned against TTIP (and more clearly against TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership) in her own presidential campaign. Still, because of Obama’s lack of enthusiasm for vigorously pursuing TTIP it was then fairly easy for Trump to ditch it.

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3 Burns, Inside the Nixon Administration, 95 (diary entry, April 3, 1973). For more details, see Larres, Uncertain Allies, 193-94.
altogether. It is true, of course, that unlike Nixon and Kissinger, Clinton and Obama never set out to deliberately undermine the project of the Europeans to achieve a truly united Europe.

Still, both Clinton and Obama were much more skeptical and less convinced of the value of the European integration project than for instance Truman and Eisenhower had been. It was also in particular during the Obama years that the decision was taken in Washington to focus more on Asia and China than on Europe, which led to deep concerns within the EU.

During the preceding Reagan administration and the George W. Bush administration, transatlantic relations were notoriously bad for a multitude of economic and security-related reasons. During both administrations there was little left of America’s initial pro-European integration policy. In fact, in the context of the Iraq war and its chaotic aftermath, the relations of the George W. Bush administration with the EU—in particular with France and Germany, the EU’s driving forces—were not a great deal better than those during the Trump administration, although they improved in Bush’s second term.

While indeed, as Hamilton writes, the European project “has been a never-ending drama” and “remains a work in progress,” it is a little disingenuous to argue that the US and Europe “thrived on competition and disagreement.” At least from a European point of view, most Europeans would have greatly preferred to have had much more harmonious relations with the US throughout the post-war period. The EC and later the EU needed all their energy to focus on building their own continent and developing their own grand vision for the future rather than on also having to make frequent efforts to appease the ‘Big Brother’ in Washington. The idea of European integration was only welcomed and supported by some US governments—above all by Truman, Eisenhower, Ford to some extent, George H.W. Bush, Joe Biden—while most others were skeptical to varying degrees (Carter, Reagan, Clinton, Obama) or outright hostile (Nixon, Trump).

Moreover, neither the Nixon nor the Trump administration or the other US governments that I refer to in passing in my book had a consistent policy toward the EU; depending on the issues at hand they often wavered between a somewhat more positive and a more skeptical or even hostile policy toward European unity. This also applied to Kissinger. In his mind his famous “Year of Europe” speech of April 1973 was actually a serious attempt to mend fences, even if the incompetent way he went about it badly misfired and led to even more resentment and transatlantic acrimony. As I mention in my book, in his memoirs and in various conversations I was fortunate to conduct with him over the years, Kissinger even largely admits this (210-223).

There was, however, one attitude which was a persisting characteristic of all US governments, one which they were unable to shake off. The US was never able to desist from treating the EC/EU as the underling in a partnership that was clearly dominated by the American master. Hamilton writes quite correctly that American support for the European integration process “has always been that of conditional acceptance.” But this was the problem. It points to the unequal master/underling relationship the US preferred—and perhaps still prefers—in its dealings with the European continent. It deeply annoyed the Europeans and led to much resentment. What gave the US the right to only extend “conditional acceptance” to a friendly continent’s fundamental political vision and strategy for its own future? This high-handed attitude toward Europe is exactly what characterized the Nixon/Kissinger policy toward the Europeans, and it contributed a great deal to the transatlantic animosity in the 1970s and indeed beyond right up to the present day.

Despite differences regarding some of the details I put forward in Uncertain Allies, all the reviewers agree that transatlantic relations both past and present were and are of essential importance to both sides of the Atlantic. I am most grateful to the four reviewers’ engagement with my arguments in my book, their detailed reading of my account and, of course, their overall conclusion that—in the words of Hamilton—I deal with the important transatlantic policies and controversies of the 1960s and 1970s “with detail and insight.”

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Referring to Kissinger Diane Kunz believes that my book also “provides the key to understand why America’s top diplomat could be so undiplomatic.” I do hope, however, that her conclusion that “US leaders may soon be walking in the unilateral footsteps Nixon and Kissinger laid down fifty years ago” may not come true after all.