

## **Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: The European and Global Response**

Conference at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. May 12-13, 2006. Co-Sponsored by the Mershon Center and the German Historical Institute Washington. Conveners: Carole Fink (OSU) and Bernd Schaefer (GHI).

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“Neue Ostpolitik” is usually associated with Willy Brandt and the Federal Republic’s opening toward Central and Eastern Europe. Less well known is Ostpolitik’s profound impact on nations outside Europe. India, China, the two Koreas, South Africa, and Israel were affected to varying degrees by the consequences of Brandt’s Ostpolitik. Simultaneously, Ostpolitik strongly influenced the Western Allies’ politics toward and within Europe, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), China’s position vis-à-vis the West and the Soviet Union, and the policy of non-proliferation associated with détente. The complex interaction between West German Ostpolitik and international politics from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s was the topic of an international conference that took into consideration recently released archival documents shedding new light on many aspects of the Cold War, détente, and the inner dynamics of international history.

The conference’s first panel dealt with “The East European Response” to Ostpolitik. Wanda Jarzabek described Poland’s anxiety about the new policy, an anxiety that stemmed from Polish fear of a German-Soviet agreement – a second Rapallo – and a revision of the Oder-Neisse line. Simultaneously, Poland tried to encourage closer cooperation within the Eastern bloc in order to formulate a cohesive response to Brandt’s Ostpolitik as a means to keep Germany divided and limit its strength.

However, neither the Warsaw Pact members nor the Soviet Union showed particular interest in Poland's proposals. The distrust toward Germany dissipated when generational change set in after 1970, making way for more constructive negotiations with the FRG and, ultimately, the normalization of Polish-West German relations. Improving Czechoslovak relations with the FRG took much longer, as Oldrich Tuma showed in his presentation. This delay was due to the emotionally burdened legacy of the 1938 Munich Agreement as well as to the nationalist stance adopted by the Czech government-in-exile. Negotiations between the CSSR and the FRG therefore proceeded very slowly, even though Moscow lent assistance to both sides. In the meantime, Tito's Yugoslavia, as one of the leading powers within the nonaligned movement, unsuccessfully tried to convince West Germany to construct a common development policy in the Third World, Milan Kosanovic reported. Despite its international standing, Yugoslavia, the first country to which the Hallstein Doctrine was applied after it had recognized the GDR in 1957, remained economically dependent on the FRG even after relations were restored in 1968. Economic interests and fears of German imperial tendencies heavily influenced all Eastern and Southern Central European reactions to Ostpolitik. Rapprochement was facilitated by socialist governments' hopes that a West German Social Democratic administration would better understand their situation. Apart from such common features, national differences within the bloc remained visible throughout. Whereas German responsibility for war crimes complicated rapprochement efforts with Poland, the CSSR was never offered such political symbolism by West Germany.

Overarching the bloc, the Soviet Union was particularly eager to further détente and rapprochement, as Andrey Edemskiy showed on the basis of archival material, some well known and some newly available. After the Soviet sphere of influence had been internationally recognized in the aftermath of the 1968 Prague intervention, the Politburo considered establishing a socialist countries' confederation in order to unify the Eastern bloc. Brandt's Ostpolitik fell on fruitful soil in the Soviet Union, for Gromyko was pleading to accept the realities and Andropov and Brezhnev were working towards normalizing relations with the FRG and the establishment of a European peace conference. Brezhnev developed a close working relationship with Brandt, which was nurtured by the back channel between Bonn and Moscow as well as by Soviet propaganda aimed at calming the Soviet population's fear of a German attack after the signing of the Moscow Treaty. While they succeeded in improving

relations with the FRG on the basis of cultural exchange, Brezhnev and the Politburo increasingly lost faith in the East German government, Edemskiy argued. Brandt's resignation proved a major set-back for Soviet-West German rapprochement. In addition, although the USSR admitted its weakness by accepting the need for détente, it never considered relinquishing its hegemonic control over the socialist countries and proved decisive in making rapprochement happen.

The second panel dealt with cultural and economic relations as well as the impact of the CSCE in "Altering the Divide in Europe." Uta Balbier's paper on German Olympic politics under the waning influence of the Hallstein Doctrine gave an impression not only of the scope of the German-German competition but also of how sports, as soft power, could help to shape national politics and identity. When the GDR's flag was flown for the first time in 1969, this marked the beginning of a new phase of West German policy toward the GDR and thus a new phase of Ostpolitik. David Stone, in his paper on Comecon's International Investment Bank, showed that not everything that happened during the late 1960s and 1970s was a direct result of Ostpolitik. The IIB, which distributed Western loans to the socialist countries, was not the consequence of increasing Western investments but rather grew out of the need for economic reform within the Eastern bloc. Behind that need stood Eastern Europe's fear of Germany and the resulting attempt to prevent German unification by tying in the GDR and integrating the bloc. While fears of German aggression may appear preposterous from today's vantage point, efforts to prevent the implementation of West German revisionism were not entirely unreasonable, as Gottfried Niedhart made clear in his presentation on the CSCE. According to Niedhart, Brandt's Ostpolitik aimed at securing for the FRG the right to peacefully revise its borders, whereas the foremost goal of the socialist countries, including the Soviet Union, was to settle their borders once and for all. This latter point was echoed by Alexei Filitov, who, though unable to attend in person, argued in a paper on the Moscow Treaty that the signing of the 1970 treaty, despite critical differences between West German and Soviet objectives, had been made possible by Egon Bahr's negotiating skills, the lack of efficiency in Soviet decision-making, and the FRG's acceptance of the Brezhnev Doctrine. The discussion centered on the problem of balancing stabilization with subversion as practiced by the SPD vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc. This question arose several times over the course of the conference, as did the question of continuity

between Weimar and Brandt's Ostpolitik, both of which were characterized by peaceful revisionism.

The following panel turned the participants' attention towards global responses to Ostpolitik. Tilman Dederling showed how South Africa actively tried to make use of Ostpolitik's underlying concept of "Wandel durch Annäherung." Portraying apartheid as a multicultural conflict among different nationalities, the South African government tried to improve its international reputation by pretending to aim at a pragmatic arrangement with the "black nation" as well as with other African nations – an effort really meant to entrench apartheid. However, international skepticism increased in the early 1970s, and the artificial division between economic and political cooperation with the apartheid state was called into question. In addition, when Ostpolitik began to reduce tensions between the FRG and the GDR, development aid to Africa lost its former instrumental use. Sara Lorenzini, who could not attend the conference but provided a paper, addressed the impact of this policy change on Africa: beginning in the mid-1960s, competition between East and West in the field of development aid was to be replaced by cooperation in order to help the Third World and to overcome the East-West divide. Despite such early efforts toward détente, Cold War thinking remained prominent, and the Western countries' reluctance to commit themselves to giving a greater share of their GNP to the Third World prevented success. In the meantime, South Africa became increasingly isolated, denouncing détente as a communist plot. In this regard Ostpolitik helped to strengthen Western Europe's integrity. The European community was positively affected by France's efforts toward détente since the mid-1960s, as Marie-Pierre Rey, whose paper was read in her absence, described in her account of France's simultaneous support for the USSR and Brandt's Ostpolitik. Pompidou had started cooperation with Moscow early on and therefore welcomed West German efforts at rapprochement with the East, hoping that this might bolster France's attempts to end the Cold War and extend the Western system eastwards. On the other hand, he feared that the FRG might challenge France's lead in détente politics, become too self-confident, if not nationalist, and tend toward Finlandization. In order not to appear to be copying Brandt's Ostpolitik, France refrained from signing a treaty with the USSR and supported the FRG in the CSCE talks, thereby strengthening the European agenda. European interests also figured prominently in Britain's perspective on West German Ostpolitik, which the

British Foreign Office regarded as heavily burdened by the memory of the 1938 Munich Agreement, the “betrayal” of the CSSR. Great Britain therefore supported Brandt’s Ostpolitik, which set aside the legacy of Munich and Potsdam by acknowledging the Eastern borders, although it did not declare the 1938 agreement null and void, as demanded by the Czechoslovak side. Unlike the Foreign Office, the British public focused less on the past and more on Great Britain’s entrance into the European Community, which seemed to hold the possibility for the UK to become a leader in Europe and a bridge to the United States, especially within the CSCE process. Similar to the French and British position, the United States’ uneasiness about Ostpolitik, which Irwin Wall in his paper characterized as “overdetermined,” was due to fears that the FRG might become too strong or slide into the Eastern bloc by attempting to reach unification. The US administration therefore tried to give the West Germans the impression that the German question was progressing while simultaneously working to secure the status quo. As the panel’s discussion made very clear, the Nixon administration was quite skeptical of Brandt’s activities and would not have regretted his defeat in the 1972 election. At the same time, the extensive use of Kissinger as a back channel and the resulting disadvantage to the Department of State vis-à-vis the National Security Council complicated the formulation of a coherent US position on Germany. Kissinger tried to control détente through the negotiations over the Berlin Agreement, yet he had to acknowledge that American influence on European détente was limited. In this regard, the controversial Nixon Doctrine was related only indirectly to détente, being much more the result of Vietnam and the Third World. Here it once again became clear that Ostpolitik was not the only factor influencing international politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but rather part of a larger shift in priorities and interests that changed relations among the different blocs and alliances as part of global détente and domestic developments. The same phenomenon could also be observed in Asia: The South Korean government regarded West German Ostpolitik as a role model for overcoming partition, and the FRG monitored the Korean case closely. However, strong intra-Korean mistrust combined with ideological divergence to make rapprochement difficult, eventually resulting in the reinforcement of Korea’s division, Meung-Hoan Noh stated. India witnessed grave crises, too, but managed to overcome them more constructively, Amit Das Gupta argued in his paper on South Asia. He showed that, along with good personal relations between Indira Gandhi and Willy Brandt and the

latter's good standing with the Indian public, the discarding of the Hallstein Doctrine provided the basis for improved relations. India was willing to defer recognition of the GDR until the FRG had settled its issues with East Berlin. Likewise, when the Pakistan-Bangladesh crisis of 1971/72 presented India with a major challenge, improved relations with West Germany proved much more useful to India than the GDR's support – a visible sign of the fact that, due to Ostpolitik and détente, international competition for India's favor had lost much of its former intensity. China, according to Bernd Schaefer, perceived Brandt's Ostpolitik in a much different way. Opposing Ostpolitik and favoring German unification was part of China's overall strategy to undermine the Soviet Union's hegemony. This strategy included portraying the GDR temporarily as the USSR's victim – a move the GDR, in need of Moscow's support, did not dare to make. Brandt, in the meantime, never considered a playing the China card in negotiations with the Soviet Union, making rapprochement with the USSR his foremost priority. In Mao's China, this resulted in fears of the Soviet Union starting a war in the Far East now that it was freed from the European burden.

The panel's discussion centered on two questions: The Western European perception of the risk of Soviet expansion, which some thought diminished in the early 1970s, and the Federal Republic's view of other divided countries and its corresponding self-image. Did the FRG not acknowledge the contradiction between recognizing North Korea, Bangladesh, and the People's Republic of China while demanding that other countries not recognize the GDR? This question, posed by Jacques Hymans, led to a discussion about the concept of self-determination – another element that seemed to provide a link from Brandt's Ostpolitik to Weimar. In the last paper on global responses to Ostpolitik, Carole Fink reviewed Israel's relations with the FRG under the Brandt government. She contrasted West Germany's view of Israel as a "special" case until 1969 with the social-liberal coalition's efforts to achieve "normal" relations with Israel. This was based on the FRG's growing self-confidence as a European and international player, the SPD's opposition to Israeli settlement politics in Gaza, and West Germany's awareness of its economic dependence on Arab oil. Contrary to the Federal Republic, whose self-image had undergone important changes since the 1960s, Israel remained heavily influenced by its founding generation and, under Golda Meir's government, became increasingly isolated after the Six-Day War and more and more dependent on the

United States. As became clear in the discussion, Israel, as a by-product of the Cold War, suffered from West German attempts to end the Cold War. In addition, West German-Israeli relations were burdened by the FRG's opposition to the use of force in order to reach national unification and by Israel's demands for reparations and restitution. Ostpolitik played its part in estranging both countries and temporarily ending their formerly "special" relationship.

The conference's last panel focused on "The Nuclear Question" and the problem of non-proliferation within the context of Ostpolitik. William Gray gave an account of West Germany's attempts to take the lead among the non-nuclear powers, which was furthered by Brandt's successful use of his moral credentials. Below that highly symbolic level, the FRG did not hesitate to engage in nuclear trade with other countries, thereby not living up to its own high moral standards. Jacques Hymans, on the basis of Social Identity Theory, argued differently: In his paper on the identity politics of non-nuclear-weapons states (NNWS), he tried to show that West Germany took the lead in supporting the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) because of its feeling of international responsibility. However, the FRG's support of Argentina's demands for nuclear technology and Argentina's failure to join the NPT showed not only the risks of such empathy but of *détente*, too. Despite their different interpretations, both papers spoke of the Brandt government's aspirations to earn the Federal Republic an international standing as a "normal," yet leading European state.

The final discussion attested to the range of problems the conference had addressed: The relevance of individual actors and of different generations; the importance of economic interests; in the case of the FRG, problems of morality, guilt, and the wish for normalcy; continuity between Weimar and Ostpolitik revisionism and the latter's inherent tension between subversion and stability; and the overall connection between Ostpolitik, *détente*, and the end of the Cold War. From an economic point of view, "Magnettheorie," with its emphasis on the FRG's attractive power as a wealthy capitalist state, seemed to have been realized. However, economic success alone was not enough to resolve the enmity between East and West. *Sine qua non* was the consolidation of the West German democracy and its abandonment of revanchism – a task the Brandt government embraced with great determination, even though it thereby ran the risk of "betraying" the Eastern

European dissidents' efforts to undermine Soviet hegemony. In general, Ostpolitik's limits could not be ignored, and Ostpolitik as a whole might have to content itself with existence as a subcategory of global détente. This leads to a new perspective: With Ostpolitik obviously having global consequences, it seems worthwhile to take a closer look at transnational phenomena transcending national borders and political blocs. The range of new insights on Ostpolitik and its global impact offered at this conference have laid the foundation for deeper investigations into many fascinating methodological and conceptual issues of diplomatic, international, and transnational history.

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