

“Trust but Verify”: Confidence and Distrust from Détente to the End of the Cold War

Conference at the GHI Washington and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, November 7-9, 2011. Conveners: Martin Klimke (GHI), Reinhild Kreis (University of Augsburg), Sonya Michel (United States Studies, Woodrow Wilson Center), Christian Ostermann (Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson Center). Participants: Noël Bonhomme (Sorbonne University), Jens Boysen (GHI Warsaw), Laura Considine (Aberystwyth University), Andreas Daum (University of Buffalo), Ute Frevert (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin), Jens Gieseke (Center for Contemporary History, Potsdam), Joseph P. Harahan (U.S. Department of Defense), Rinna Elina Kullaa (University of Jyväskylä), Deborah Welch Larson (University of California, Los Angeles), Jan Logemann (GHI), Aryo Makko (University of Oxford), Michael Cotey Morgan (University of Toronto), Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol (University of Glasgow), Effie G. H. Pedaliu (University of West England, Bristol), J. Simon Rofe (University of Leicester), Bernd Schäfer (Woodrow Wilson Center), Arvid Schors (University of Freiburg), Sarah Snyder (University College London), Patrick Vaughan (Jagiellonian University, Krakow), Nicholas Wheeler (Aberystwyth University).

This conference sought to shed new light on the years following détente by investigating the role trust and distrust played in foreign as well as domestic politics during a time when the guiding principle of foreign policy was to avoid the worst case scenario—a “hot war” with the possibility of nuclear annihilation between the superpowers. It drew on the role of trust both as an object of historical analysis and as an independent analytical category based on the wide application of notions of trust in the fields of sociology, economics, media studies, and political science. Interpreting trust as a form of political and social capital, the conference explored the dynamics of trust or distrust as an interplay of factors such as risk assessment, strategic self-interest, shared values and goodwill, highlighting the significance of historically grown trust regimes, symbolic actions, the effective staging of trust, and trustworthiness. Participants thus set out to reevaluate the final decades of the Cold War by investigating the strategies of trust and confidence-building employed to enforce certain political aims, the communication and representation of trust, the crucial role of the media, as well as the complex interaction of trust, fear, risk of betrayal, and verification mechanisms.

In their introduction, Reinhild Kreis and Martin Klimke stressed that the issue of trust and confidence in international affairs during the final years of the Cold War might yield new ideas about the evolution of international relations during the Cold War both between and within the blocs. Kreis and Klimke maintained that the idea of the conference was not only to trace the importance of active trust and confidence-building between the superpowers from NATO’s 1967 Harmel Report until the end of the Cold War, but also to show how trust and distrust impacted international relations, and to highlight the dynamic entanglement between foreign and domestic affairs. Investigating the role that individuals

played in trust-building processes, the first panel focused on the connection between trust on a personal level and the control or verification mechanisms that were part of these processes. Patrick Vaughan analyzed the role of Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security advisor, in mediating between the United States, Poland, and the newly formed Polish labor union Solidarity. In his paper, Vaughan demonstrated how the Polish-American Brzezinski used his unique connection to Poland to lobby for the importance of a peaceful negotiation among all parties involved. Vaughan emphasized the importance of both sides' trust in Brzezinski, which had a substantial impact on the success of his strategy of "peaceful engagement." J. Simon Rofe then examined the significance of trust and trustworthiness in the George H. W. Bush administration, emphasizing that trust was an integral element of the Bush presidency, including interactions with advisors, allies, and the Soviet Union. Rofe underscored that personal trust and the paradigm of "order over justice" were the guiding principles Bush followed throughout his career and particularly drew on in the final phase of the Cold War.

In her keynote lecture "Emotions in History," Ute Frevert provided a comprehensive introduction to recent research on the history of emotions. For Frevert, emotions play an active role in history not only by influencing moral judgment and collective behavior. They should also be seen as deeply historical, meaning that their perception, interpretation, and handling are subject to historical change. Frevert argued that trust is a distinctively modern concept linked to notions of profound uncertainty, and she particularly highlighted the personal character of bonds of trust in modern societies. In her view, the concept of trust cannot easily be applied to international relations since these are primarily driven by national interests and thus lack the high personal investment characteristic of trust. Instead, she favored the concepts of confidence and reliance to describe these relationships.

Deborah Welch Larson began the second day's proceedings with a keynote lecture on "Trust and Mistrust during the Cold War." Larson defined trust broadly as the "belief that the other has benevolent intentions towards us," which also implies vulnerability. For her, trust exists in a continuum; that is, a lack of trust does not mean distrust. In the context of the Cold War, she argued, trust was an integral part of communication and international cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Michael Cotey Morgan, in his paper "The Closed Society and Its Enemies: Confidence and Distrust at the CSCE, 1969-1975," contended that trust and distrust played a central role at the CSCE conference, functioning both as a tool and an objective. At the same time, however, the proclamations of "trust" were partially "lip service" as both sides had entered the negotiations mainly to achieve domestic political gains, and not chiefly to develop a relationship of mutual trust. Sarah Snyder's paper "No Crowing: Reagan, Trust, and Human Rights" focused on the role of trust in Reagan's promotion of human rights, particularly religious freedoms. Snyder examined Reagan's efforts to secure exit visas for two Pentecostal Soviet families who sought refuge in the US embassy in Moscow in 1982. Reagan, Snyder claimed, was able to personally empathize with the individuals in question and, moreover, his "quiet diplomacy" and

assurances toward Gorbachev not “to crow” over any steps taken by the Soviets on this issue helped establish a greater degree of trust in Soviet-American relations.

The following two panels explored the mechanism of trust inside the ideological blocs. Drawing on opinion polls and on intelligence reports, Jens Gieseke outlined East Germans’ attitudes toward their own government and that of the Federal Republic during the 1970/80s. Gieseke identified ideological, official, and bottom-up trust regimes in the GDR and showed how the intelligence apparatus became increasingly worried about the positive attitude and rising trustworthiness West German parties and politicians such as Willy Brandt began to enjoy among East Germans. However, in light of the NATO Double-Track Treaty, Gieseke argued, these attitudes partially shifted, with East Germans experiencing increased fear of war, alienation from Western policies, and the feeling of helplessness in the renewed superpower confrontation. Jens Boysen then further complicated the notion of a homogeneous ideological bloc among the Warsaw Pact countries by looking at a series of changes in the relationship between East Germany and Poland that showcased the fissures between these official allies. Boysen noted that mutual dependency and trust was a litmus test for East German leaders to determine how far allies would subordinate their national interests to the common cause. He highlighted how both countries’ officials interpreted their respective turns to West Germany for economic support differently, and yet they similarly viewed the Federal Republic as an external anchor. Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol asked whether G7 and European Council summit meetings could be seen as efforts to institutionalize trust. He explained how they served to show the public unity of the member states to specific national audiences and how the informality of these meetings was supposed to help foster trust among the Western leaders. Noël Bonhomme, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of codes and rule-making for the G7 meetings and interpreted the meetings’ function as a means of “socializing” Western leaders that had recently come into office. Bonhomme posed the question of whether, as the G7 summits became institutionalized, trust helped or hindered them.

The final panel of the day turned its attention to the role of small and neutral states in the Cold War. Effie G. H. Pedaliu elaborated on “‘Footnotes’ as an Expression of Distrust? The U.S. and the NATO ‘Flanks’ in the Last Two Decades of the Cold War,” focusing on several NATO episodes in which Denmark and Greece dissented against the organization’s policies. Pedaliu argued that it was not short-term domestic political advantages that spurred both countries to dissent but rather a growing sense of insecurity and a decline of trust within NATO. In Pedaliu’s view, their behavior was an expression of a new type of confidence, in which member countries felt able to oppose their allies without fear of serious consequences. Aryo Makko then explored the nature of Swedish neutrality in the final decades of the Cold War. Exploring accusations of Sweden having been the “seventeenth member of NATO,” Makko looked at the mechanism of trust between Sweden and the international community as well as how trust (particularly the lack thereof and the levels of secrecy among a small political elite) operated between the

Swedish government and its population, leading the latter to feel profoundly betrayed after the end of the Cold War. Rinna Elina Kullaa examined the role of Finland during the 1970/80s, challenging the notion that Finland was merely a convenient location for international talks. Instead, Kullaa emphasized that Finland's neutralism should not be confused with neutrality. Finland did not want to be in the "Third Bloc" of the Cold War, although its position was similar to that of Yugoslavia and Egypt, and it chose to keep quiet on a number of key issues, thus arriving at official neutralism from a point of self-interest and from the government's view of trust as political capital.

The conference's third and final day began with a panel entitled "Implementation and Verification." Arvid Schors provided another perspective on the complexity of trust by focusing on the reduction of strategic arms leading up to the SALT I treaty. Schors emphasized that the US did not necessarily initiate the SALT I talks out of a desire to foster trust, but that trust did eventually emerge over the course of the negotiations. Schors also underscored the significance the rhetoric of distrusting the Soviet Union had for U.S. domestic politics, specifically when selling these negotiations to the public by pointing out to the essential element of verification. Following up on this, Laura Considine and Nicholas Wheeler explored the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty as a case study for the relationship between trust and verification, arguing that accepting verification—in particular in the form of on-site inspections—is already an act of trust. The INF Treaty, Considine and Wheeler posited, shows that trust and verification are inexorably linked on a conceptual level. Practical actions that stimulated mutual trustworthiness between Reagan and Gorbachev were thus an important element of ending the Cold War. Joseph P. Harahan then focused on the technical implementation of the INF Treaty, namely, on the perspective of US and Soviet/Russian weapons inspectors. Harahan argued that the trust between Reagan and Gorbachev was not sufficient to explain the success of the treaty but that the military and technical personnel executing the treaty provisions also have to be taken into account. Trust was achieved through personal relations between the military on both sides that eventually yielded a method for implementation. Advanced technology such as satellite-based techniques, Harahan asserted, always served as a fallback option in these negotiations.

The concluding discussion chaired by Martin Klimke brought together a multitude of methodological issues related to the introduction of the notion of trust in the history of the Cold War. It explored, for example, the fine analytical line between confidence and trust, its domestic, transnational, and international dimensions, as well as its performative, rhetorical, and ritualistic nature. Both Klimke and Kreis stressed the need for a differentiated perspective within the ideological blocs of the Cold War, taking into account the significance of historical relationships, tensions, and asymmetries with regard to political and military power. On a domestic level, they pled for a greater contextualization of trust and its cultural representations by looking at the political decision-making process as a whole, including the role of various branches of government, political advisors, and expert cultures. Along those lines, they also

underscored the importance of broadening the source base to transcend a focus on personal testimony and to incorporate gender perspectives when investigating trust in international relations. Concluding remarks also pointed out the linguistic bias when it comes to trust that rendered the discussion potentially very Anglo-specific. In French and German, for example, the concepts of “trust” and “confidence” can be expressed with a single word, making finer differentiation difficult. It was also suggested that scholars pay closer attention to the mechanisms that create trust, such as transparency, promise-keeping, and small-step agreements.

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