The London School of Economics and Political Science

The origins of the post-Cold War order in the Middle East: France, Britain, the European Community and transatlantic relations, 1978-1982

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DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 108,871 words

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on Western Europe's diplomatic engagement in the Middle East between 1978 and 1982 and shows how and why the member states of the European Community (EC) decided to launch their first diplomatic initiative outside of the European continent. To do so, it uses as a case study the European Council declaration of 13 June 1980, which called for the recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination and the association of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to the peace process. It starts the analysis from a detailed study of both French and British Middle East policy in the late 1970s, which then informs the analysis of a collective European foreign policy towards the region. Because the definition of Middle East policies in Western Europe during the Cold War era were heavily dependent on the Americans, this dissertation systematically embeds European actions within the larger context of transatlantic relations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This dissertation argues that, contrary to what the literature has so far assumed, at the time, the Community's primary objectives was not to promote peace between Arabs and Israeli, but to contribute to the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the Middle East. It reveals that the Europeans managed to go beyond declaratory diplomacy and play a significant role in the international politics of the region. And, finally, it demonstrates that by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Community was much more than an economic entity and, in fact, had a significant political component. Ultimately, it reaches the conclusion that the Europeans played a significant role in the Middle East in the early 1980s, and that they helped shape the post-Cold War order in the region.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANL – *Département d'Afrique du Nord et Levant*

BBQ – British Budgetary Question

CAP – *Centre de Prévision et d'Analyse*

CFP – *Compagnie Française des Pétrole*

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

EAD – Euro-Arab Dialogue

EC – European Community

EPC – European Political Cooperation

EU – European Union

FCO – Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FLA – Free Lebanon Army

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

LAF – Lebanese Armed Forces

MFO – Multinational Force and Observers

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NENAD – Near East and North Africa Department

NSC – National Security Council

OPEC – Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

PDRY – Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organisation

RDF – Rapid Deployment Force

SACEUR – Supreme Allied Commander Europe

SCR – Security Council Resolution

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UN – United Nations

UNIFIL – United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

YAR – Yemen Arab Republic

INTRODUCTION

On 23 September 1981, British Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington, then holding the rotating presidency of the European Community (EC), gave a speech to the Foreign Policy Association in New York, which he turned into an article for *International Affairs* a few months later. In it, he addressed the question of whether or not the development of European Political Cooperation (EPC) – the EC's mechanism for foreign policy coordination – was in America's interest. Throughout his speech, he referred to the great advocate of close transatlantic ties that was President Dwight Eisenhower. And, in his concluding remarks, he said that 'Eisenhower might be a little disappointed if he could read today the articles in the media on both sides of the Atlantic about policy differences between our governments or about divergent trends in public opinion.' Over the past two years or so, very public disagreements between Europe and America on international issues as varied as Iran, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Latin America or security policy in Europe had made the front page of many newspapers worldwide. It is therefore in that particular context that the British Foreign Secretary decided to discuss the rise of Europe as an international actor and how America should welcome it.

In his speech, Carrington toned down the rather bleak picture of transatlantic relations being depicted in the media. He observed that 'America and Europe inevitably have a difference in perspectives,' and that '[t]he only way to deal with such differences is the traditional way of consultation.' According to him, this was being given a 'high priority in Washington nowadays,' and he urged his audience 'not to exaggerate our differences, least of all in public.' He then added that 'we should not look for a total uniformity of views which, thank God, can never exist on this side of the Iron Curtain.' Carrington saw the expression of differences within the Western bloc as one of its great advantages in the Cold War conflict. He believed that 'European activity can give the West greater flexibility and diversity in its international efforts,' and that '[n]ot to deploy this flexibility with energy and imagination would be to waste our opportunities.' He ended his impassioned defence of the benefits of the rise of a European foreign policy for the West by saying: 'What I have been suggesting is diversity without dispute in our methods, unity without uniformity in our policies, and identity in our aims and our ideals.'[1]

[1] Peter Carrington, "European Political Cooperation: America Should Welcome It," *International Affairs* 58, no. 1 (1981): 1-6.

Beyond the lyricism of Carrington's concluding remark, as we shall see in this dissertation, this was exactly what the Europeans envisaged when on 13 June 1980 the European Council issued the Venice Declaration on the Arab-Israeli conflict. On that occasion they defended the Palestinian right to self-determination, called for the association of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to the Middle East peace process, and announced their intention to launch their first collective diplomatic initiative outside of the European continent[2]. With this declaration, the EC member states offered a different approach to peace in the Middle East than the one at the core of the American-led Camp David peace process, and naturally, many contemporaries saw this as a frontal opposition to US policy. This perception went beyond the media and reached deep into academia. On 18 September 1980, for instance, Harvard professor in political science Stanley Hoffmann participated in a National Intelligence Council seminar at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) dedicated to 'policy issues between the US and Western Europe in the 1980s.' He then explained to the intelligence community that 'to the extent that [EC] policies have become more coordinated or unified, it is in opposition to US policies,' and as an example he proceeded to mention the 'EC Mid-East initiative.'[3] As this thesis reveals, however, Hoffmann's assessment was significantly off the mark.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Before going any further, it is necessary to define some of the main terms which this dissertation uses. The following analysis refers to the EC member states interchangeably as the Europeans, Europe, the Community, the EC, the Six, the Nine and the Ten. There is obviously a problem with using the 'Europeans' and 'Europe' only to refer to a portion of a much larger group of people and states. This is not meant to marginalise the other countries of the continent or to overstate the importance of the Community. Instead, these terminologies are used here because it reflects how, at the time, the Americans, the Arabs, and the Israelis referred to the EC member states as a collective actor.

When this dissertation uses the term of 'Middle East policy,' it refers to a policy issue that engulfs both the Arab-Israeli conflict and the security of the Persian Gulf area. Here, the 'Middle East' is understood as a geographical area comprising the Arab world, Israel, Turkey, and Iran. And, the reference to Arab 'moderates' and 'radicals' follows the terminology often used by the Atlantic

[2] For the text of the Venice Declaration see: Christopher Hill and Karen E. Smith, eds., *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), 302-04.
[3] CIA Record Search Tool (hereafter CREST), Memorandum for Joe Zaring, 'Notes on the Seminar on Policy Issues Between the US and Western Europe,' 23 September 1980.

allies. There are also numerous mentions of the 'Arabs' as a coherent political unit. This is not meant to downplay the many differences that exist within this particular ethnic group. But, in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it make sense to talk of the Arabs as a collective actor as there was a basic common understanding of how to approach the dispute with Israel. Besides, Europeans and Americans often referred to the 'Arabs' in this particular context, and the existence of the Arab League, with which the Community often dealt, meant that the Arabs also understood themselves as a coherent political unit.

Finally, it is worth saying a word about the many references to the 'Palestinian question.' In the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute, this term refers to the issue regarding the Arab inhabitants of the former British mandate of Palestine who were displaced during the war of 1947-9, which led to the creation of the state of Israel. In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day war, Israel seized control of the remaining Arab territories of the Palestine mandate. United Nations Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242, which put an end to the war and set the diplomatic basis for the Arab-Israeli peace process, treated the Arab population now under Israeli control as refugees and thus ignored their nationalist aspirations. The contested issue of whether the Palestinians were just refugees or if they had legitimate irredentist claims over some of the territories of the former mandate of Palestine is what came to be referred to as the Palestinian question. It became the focal point of both the Arab-Israeli dispute – also referred to in this dissertation as the Middle East conflict – and the transatlantic disagreement over the best way to negotiate a peace settlement.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WESTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE 1970S AND EARLY 1980S

There are three main perspectives to integrate in any studies of Western Europe's rise as a collective actor in the international politics of the Middle East from the 1970s onward: the collective dimension of foreign policy making within the EC, the dynamics of transatlantic relations over the Middle East, and how and why national governments made use of the various levels of foreign policy making available to them. The collective, transatlantic and national perspectives have so far mostly been studied separately and as a result the literature is highly fragmented. This section offers an overview of these three historiographies, highlights some of their respective shortcomings, and outlines this dissertation's various contributions.

The quest for a collective and independent foreign policy in Western Europe has been one of the main underlying motives behind the process of European integration and cooperation in the postwar era[4]. After several failed attempts in the 1950s and 1960s[5], in the early 1970s the EC member states finally agreed to start coordinating their foreign policies[6]. Yet, scholarly interest in this topic is relatively new. The traditional understanding of the 1970s as a lost decade for European integration played a major role in this initial lack of attention[7]. Another important factor is that initially the literature exclusively focused on the areas of collective European activities which are prescribed by the EC treaties[8]. In that respect, the fact that EPC did not become part of the Community's legal framework until 1986 also explains its initial dismissal in the historiography. In addition, until recently, the Community has been studied in isolation to the other historical processes which shaped the world around it. In particular, the merging of Cold War and European integration history has been instrumental in revealing EPC's relevance[9]. And, recent attempts to historicise the EC's evolution within the larger context of rising interdependence in the 1970s, also refined our understanding of Europe's role in the world[10]. This dissertation contributes to these various historiographical trends by focusing on the largely overlooked issue of the Community's attempt to become a diplomatic actor in the Middle East. In doing so, it further reveals the extent

[4] See in particular: Wiflried Loth, "The EC and Foreign and Security Policy: The Dream of Autonomy," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019); Wiflried Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, trans. Robert F. Hogg (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 1-8.
[5] Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, 36-52, 101-17.
[6] Simon Nuttall, *European Political Cooperation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Simon Nuttall, *European Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Maria Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980* (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012), 41-96, 307-76; Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, 204-12; Lorenzo Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979* (Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2016), 41-64.
[7] For this interpretation of the 1970s see: Desmond Dinan, *Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration*, 4th ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2010), 53-72.
[8] For this criticism see: Kiran Klaus Patel, "Provincialising European Union: Co-Operation and Integration in Europe in a Historical Perspective," *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 4 (2013): 649-73.
[9] For the call to merge European integration and Cold War history see: N. Piers Ludlow, "European Integration and the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For the latest iteration see: N. Piers Ludlow, "The History of the EC and the Cold War: Influenced and Influential, but Rarely Center Stage," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019).
[10] See for instance: Antonio Varsori and Guia Migani, *Europe in the International Arena During the 1970s: Entering a Different World* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2011); Claudia Hiepel, ed., *Europe in a Globalising World: Global Challenges and European Responses in the "Long" 1970s* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014); Johnny Laursen, ed., *The Institutions and Dynamics of the European Community, 1973-83* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014); Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, "Steering Europe: Explaining the Rise of the European Council, 1975–1986," *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 03 (2016): 409-37.

to which, by the end of the 1970s, the EC was much more than an economic entity, and in fact already had a significant political dimension[11].

Until very recently, the historiography of European foreign policy mainly focused on EPC and the analysis essentially relied on two main case studies: the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which highlighted its potential, and the Middle East – or more accurately the Community's diplomacy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict – which revealed its limitations. These were the first two international issues that EPC dealt with and they played a central role in the definition of a European identity in world affairs.

The EC member states' performance at the CSCE was groundbreaking. They managed, for the first time, to act collectively in the international arena, and succeeded in shaping the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which defined the basic terms of *détente* in Europe[12]. Thereafter, they continued to engage the Socialist bloc through the CSCE until the end of the Cold War[13]. Recently, historians have also looked beyond EPC into the role of the EC in developing economic relations with Eastern Europe. In the process, they present a more meaningful picture of Europe's Cold War relations, whereby the Community member states consistently promoted collective actions in their dealings with the Eastern half of the continent. This combination of intergovernmental and supranational activism reveal the complex functioning of a European polity capable of defending national and collective interests against the threat of the superpower condominium over Europe. Ultimately, through a blend of political and economic strategies the EC member states managed to establish an efficient and multi-levelled Eastern policy to navigate the Cold War environment on their own terms[14].

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[11] For this argument see for instance: N. Piers Ludlow, "More Than Just a Single Market: European Integration, Peace and Security in the 1980s," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 1 (2016): 48-62.

[12] Angela Romano, "The Nine and the Conference of Helsinki: A Challenging Game with the Soviets," in *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1975*, ed. Jan van der Harst Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2007); Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente: How the West Shaped the Helsinki CSCE* (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009).

[13] Angela Romano, "The European Community and the Belgrade CSCE," in *From Helsinki to Belgrade: The First CSCE Follow-up Meeting and the Crisis of Detente*, ed. V. Bilandzic et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012); Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 245-306, 477-532; Angela Romano, "More Cohesive, Still Divergent: Western Europe, the United States, and the Madrid CSCE Follow-up Meeting," in *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, ed. Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Angela Romano, "The EC and the Socialist World: The Ascent of a Key Player in Cold War Europe," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019).

[14] Angela Romano, "Untying Cold War Knots: The EEC and Eastern Europe in the Long 1970s," *Cold War History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 153-73; Sara Tavani, "The Détente Crisis and the Emergence of a Common European Foreign Policy. The "Common European Polish Crisis" as a Case Study," in *Europe in a Globalising World: Global Challenges and European Responses in the "Long" 1970s*, ed. Claudia Hiepel (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014); Benedetto Zaccaria, *The Eec's Yugoslav Policy in Cold War Europe, 1968-1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Angela Romano, "Re-Designing Military Security in Europe: Cooperation and Competition between the European Community and Nato During the Early

By contrast, the literature presents a bleak picture of the Community's attempt to set up a common policy towards the Middle East. It shows that coordination and cohesion proved more difficult, and it concludes that the Europeans never managed to go beyond declaratory diplomacy, largely because of US opposition, and thus failed to make any sort of concrete contribution to Arab-Israeli peace[15]. In comparison to the EC's Eastern policy, there is remarkably little historical research on the Middle East, and political science studies from the 1980s still dominate the historiography[16]. The initial scholarly interest in this topic highlights the contemporary enthusiasm about the possibility of a collective European role in negotiating peace between Arabs and Israelis. And, the lack of engagement by historians reflects both the great disappointment at Europe's failure to live up to expectations and the unanimously defeatist conclusions of the political science literature. As a result, the Middle East barely features in the various books about the rise of a European foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s, which historians have published in recent years. And when it does, it is generally subsumed within the larger geographical area of the Mediterranean and the analysis largely confirms previous conclusions[17]. As it stands, therefore, the historiographical picture of European Middle East policy is that of an unmitigated failure.

1980s," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 24, no. 3 (2017): 445-71; Romano, "The EC and the Socialist World: The Ascent of a Key Player in Cold War Europe."

[15] On the Middle East see: Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Daniel Möckli, "The EC-Nine and Transatlantic Conflict During the October War and the Oil Crisis, 1973-4," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Aurélie Élisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012); Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 163-216, 417-76.

[16] See for instance: Françoise de La Serre, "L'europe Des Neuf et le Conflit Israélo-Arabe," *Revue française de science politique* 24, no. 4 (1974): 801-11; Dominique Moïsi, "L'europe et le Conflit Israélo-Arabe," *Politique étrangère* 45, no. 4 (1980): 835-47; Sergio I. Minerbi, "Israël et L'europe," ibid.46, no. 2 (1981): 437-51; Adam M. Garfinkle, *Western Europe's Middle East Diplomacy and the United States* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1983); David Allen and Alfred Pijpers, eds., *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1984); Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Anders Persson, *The Eu and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1971-2013: In Pursuit of a Just Peace* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015). See also the relevant chapters in: David Allen et al., eds., *European Political Cooperation: Towards a Foreign Policy for Western Europe* (London: Butterworth Scientific, 1982); Panagiōtēs Hēphaistos, *European Political Cooperation: Towards a Framework of Supranational Diplomacy?* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1987); Alfred Pijpers et al., eds., *European Political Cooperation in the 1980s: A Common Foreign Policy for Western Europe?* (London: M. Nijhoff, 1988).

[17] One exception that deals with the Middle East in its own right but still in conjunction with the Mediterranean is: Elena Calandri et al., *DéTente in Cold War Europe: Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016). Otherwise the following volumes largely ignore the Community's Middle East policy as a topic worth studying in its own right: Jan van der Harst, ed., *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1975* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2007); Varsori and Migani, *Europe in the International Arena During the 1970s: Entering a Different World*; Hiepel, *Europe in a Globalising World: Global Challenges and European Responses in the "Long" 1970s*; Ulrich Krotz et al., eds., *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). Two recent monographs on EPC in the 1970s and 1980s overlook the Middle East as well: Gabriele Clemens et al., *Europäisierung Von Außenpolitik: Die Europäische Politische Zusammenarbeit (Epz) in Den 1970er*

There are currently two monographs which focus specifically on EPC and the Middle East: Daniel Möckli's *European foreign policy during the Cold War* and Aurélie Gfeller's *Building a European identity*. They both deal with the heated 1973-4 period, which witnessed the first attempt by the Community to get actively involved in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, and reach very different conclusions. On the one hand, Möckli argues that after a promising start, which saw the Community issue its first foreign policy declaration, European efforts to play a role in the Middle East collapsed in the face of American obstructionism. From the start of his analysis, he posits that '[b]ereft of any common defence identity, Europe remained unable to engage in power politics in any traditional sense.'[18] He then carries this point through the book and, based on his narrow case study, reaches the sweeping conclusion that after 1974 'no European foreign policy ever took shape during the remainder of the Cold War.'[19] Most problematically, Möckli adopts a very restrictive conception of international relations whereby military power is the only measure of effectiveness. In that respect, he presents the CSCE as 'a rather uncommon kind of policy challenge,' whose 'multilateral' nature made it particularly well suited for EPC. He recognises the signing of the Helsinki Final Act as 'Europe's biggest foreign policy success during the Cold War.'[20] But, in the context of his overall argument, EPC's performance at the CSCE does not even appear as a meaningful exception in international politics but rather as an anomaly or as the exception that proves the 'realist' rule.

On the other hand, Gfeller offers a more sophisticated and positive assessment of the same episode. She acknowledges the great challenges that the Community faced to hold its ground under intense American pressure. But, she presents these difficulties 'as the normal pangs of birth' instead of an unsurmountable obstacle as Möckli does[21]. Ultimately, she sees this two year period as a crucial formative experience for EPC[22]. Importantly, she reaches contrasting conclusions because she adopts a different methodology. Contrary to Möckli, she does not start her analysis from the collective European perspective but from that of France. Admittedly, this makes her book primarily a study about the French approach to European foreign policy towards the Middle East. That said, it allows her to focus on the complex and often paradoxical relationship between the national and the collective dimensions of foreign policy making in Western Europe by the early 1970s. And, in so doing, she systematically highlights the new importance of EPC for France's

Jahren (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019); Maria Eleonora Guasconi, *Prove Di Politica Estera. La Cooperazione Politica Europa, L'atto Unico Europea E la Fine Della Guerra Fredda*Mondadori Università, Forthcoming).

[18] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, 1.

[19] Ibid., 354.

[20] Ibid., 363-4.

[21] Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*, 11.

[22] Ibid., 202-03.

Middle Eastern diplomacy. By starting from the national perspective she avoids the general historiographical tendency to reify the highly ambiguous and ill-defined term of 'European foreign policy.'[23] And, ultimately, it allows her to present a more nuanced and meaningful assessment of the Community's first attempt to get involved in the search for Arab-Israeli peace. In addition, Gfeller fully integrates into her analysis the fact that the emergence of EPC was a slow moving and non-linear process that calls for the adoption of a long-term perspective. Methodologically speaking, it is indeed problematic to conclude, as Möckli does, that it was an unqualified failure solely based on the analysis of a two-year time span, during which the EC member states tried to use for the first time their mostly untested mechanism for foreign policy cooperation in a highly adversarial transatlantic context. In her conclusion, therefore, she points to the Venice Declaration as an area for further research.

The European Union (EU) looks back at the Venice Declaration as the earliest formulation of the two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute currently at the core of its diplomacy. In that respect, this episode constitutes a milestone in the evolution of the European stance on the Middle East conflict. As of now, though, there is still no dedicated archivally-based study of the Venice Declaration[24]. One major reason for this state of affair is that Möckli's conclusions seem to have been largely accepted in the historiography. In his recent survey of the EC's external relations in the 1970s, for instance, Lorenzo Ferrari fully adheres to the idea that EPC had failed by 1974[25]. This naturally constitutes one of the main motivations behind his argument that one needs to look beyond EPC to get the full picture of the Community as an international actor in the 1970s. This is an important point that the most recent and sophisticated accounts of European foreign policy fully integrate[26]. But, in Ferrari's case the result is the complete marginalisation of EPC. This means that he decides to stop his narrative in 1979, thus dismissing the Venice Declaration as a

[23] In the early 1980s, a group of political scientists had already identified the methodological problems that came along with studying EPC primarily from the collective perspective: Christopher Hill, ed., *National Foreign Policies and European Political Cooperation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983). Since then, however, EPC has mostly been studied from the collective perspective and political scientists moved on with this methodological approach to deal with the post-Maastricht era: Reuben Yik-Pern Wong and Christopher Hill, eds., *National and European Foreign Policies: Towards Europeanization* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). There are a few exceptions that integrate EPC in their analysis of national foreign policies: Aurélie Élisa Gfeller, "A European Voice in the Arab World: France, the Superpowers and the Middle East, 1970–74," *Cold War History* 11, no. 4 (2011): 659-76; Nicolas Badalassi, "'Neither Too Much nor Too Little" France, the USSR and the Helsinki CSCE," ibid.18, no. 1 (2017): 1-17; Muhamad H. Zakariah, "Oil, War and European Initiatives for Peace in the Middle East 1973–74: British Attitude and Perspective," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 4 (2012): 589-611; Muhamad H. Zakariah, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue 1973-1978: Britain Reinsurance Policy in the Middle East Conflict," *European Review of History* 20, no. 1 (2013): 95-115.

[24] As part of her historical overview of EPC in the 1970s, Maria Gainar deals with the Venice Declaration but, inevitably, due to the nature of her book she can only present a general account: Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 444-60.

[25] Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979*.

[26] Krotz et al., *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*.

meaningless episode in the Community's rise as a diplomatic actor. And, most problematically, while he claims to present an 'extensive and dedicated historical account of the EC's international activity as a whole' he does not even engage with EPC's performance at the CSCE[27]. As for the very few accounts that touch on the Venice Declaration, they basically present it as a repeat of 1973-4, and confirm both Möckli's and the political science literature's conclusions[28]. There is, therefore, a broad historiographical consensus that American obstructionism systematically prevented the Europeans from going beyond declaratory diplomacy in the Middle East, and the Venice Declaration serves as the ultimate example. This dissertation, therefore, makes a useful contribution to the literature by focusing on this overlooked episode.

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Any studies of Europe's Middle East policy in the 1970s and early 1980s must deal at length with the Americans. By that time, Washington had become the exclusive guarantor of European interests in the region and this dependence meant that the EC member states had no choice but to factor in US policy into the definition of their own strategy. Cooperation with the US was therefore key to the Community's ability to play a role in the region. At the moment, though, there is a dearth of studies on transatlantic relations over the Middle East, and the American angle overwhelmingly dominates the historiography. The one exception which seeks to integrate both perspectives is an edited volume by Victor Mauer and Daniel Möckli. This cooperative effort largely embeds the emergence of a collective European Middle East policy within the long-running narrative of a transatlantic clash since the 1956 Suez crisis, and naturally it appears that from the 1970s onwards Washington systematically obstructed the Community's ambitions[29].

More generally, the history of transatlantic relations during the Cold War era reads as a succession of crises, which essentially stemmed from European security dependence on Washington and resentment of US hegemony within the Western Alliance. Despite these recurring tensions and the often heated rhetoric that accompanied them, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Atlantic partners managed to overcome their differences without ever seriously challenging their basic commitment to each other[30]. But, according to the traditional understanding of transatlantic relations, this

[27] Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979*, 18.
[28] Allen and Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89."; Elena Calandri, "The EC and the Mediterranean: Hitting the Glass Ceiling," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019).
[29] Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer, eds., *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
[30] In the 1950s, tensions revolved around German rearmament and European participation in its own defence: Brian R. Duchin, "The "Agonizing Reappraisal": Eisenhower, Dulles, and the European Defence Community," *Diplomatic*

changed in the 1970s and early 1980s. During this time, tensions within the Atlantic Alliance seemed to be no longer contained to particular issues but rather to call into question the structural basis of the West-West partnership itself[31]. In that respect, Europe's ambition and increasing ability to play a more active and independent role in the international arena often appears as one of the main reasons[32].

The establishment of EPC together with the first EC enlargement in the 1970s and the creation of the European Council certainly increased Europe's potential weight within the Atlantic Alliance and in world affairs, and changed the dynamics of transatlantic relations. But, this evolution took place within a larger process of mutation, whereby the rise of globalisation in the 1970s profoundly transformed virtually every aspect of the postwar/Cold War settlement. The US surrendered their regulatory responsibility for the international economy market forces by the early 1970s[33], the oil shock of 1973 revealed the rising importance of the Global South for the Western economies, and the retreat from Vietnam dealt a major blow to American power and confidence, to name just a few manifestations of this major shift in the international order[34]. All of these transformations had an unprecedented impact on transatlantic relations. US monetary policy antagonised the Europeans who, by the end of the decade, responded by creating their own collective instrument to mitigate the economic challenges of globalisation[35]. The rise of superpower *détente* was at least in part the result of America's relative decline in this globalising world order, and stemmed from Richard Nixon's desire to reduce the material cost of the East-West competition[36]. And, there

History 16, no. 2 (1992): 201-22, 36-52; Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*. In the 1960s, tensions crystalised around de Gaulle's challenge to the Cold War order and the place of Europe within the West: Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); N. Piers Ludlow, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-68* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[31] See for instance: Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From 'Empire' by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168-225.

[32] See for instance: Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, eds., *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[33] On the transformation of the US economy in the 1970s which transition from an 'empire of production' to 'an empire of consumption' see: Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[34] For analyses of the transformation that occurred in the 1970s by leading experts in their fields see: Niall Ferguson et al., eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2010).

[35] For an analysis that embeds the creation of the 1979 European Monetary System (EMS) within the context of globalisation see: Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, *A Europe Made of Money: The Emergence of the European Monetary System* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[36] For this interpretation of *détente* as a function of globalisation see: Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 41-67.

again, this shift in US Cold War policy allowed the Europeans to carve an independent international role for themselves by defining and pursuing their own brand of *détente* in Europe[37].

In sum, it seems that one of the major trends in transatlantic relations during the 1970s was that the US adaptation to the challenges of globalisation encouraged European integration and cooperation, albeit unwillingly this time. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, Washington had championed unification in Western Europe largely for Cold War purposes, by the 1970s it came to see this process more as an economic and political challenge, and its once vigorous support waned[38]. The 1970s also marked a break with the two previous decades as the Community was forced to come out of the 'transatlantic cocoon' that had done so much to facilitate its development. In the 1950s and 1960s an array of economic, political, and military institutions under US leadership had created a propitious environment largely shielded from the dynamics of the Cold War, which would have otherwise challenged the integration process. But, as some of these institutions disintegrated in the early 1970s, and as the Europeans sought to expand their cooperation in other fields, most notably foreign policy, it appeared that this 'transatlantic cocoon' transformed into a transatlantic straightjacket[39].

One important factor to take into consideration when studying transatlantic relations during this period is the sense of panic that prevailed on both side of the Atlantic. As Daniel Sargent explained in his book *A Superpower Transformed*: 'The 1970s initiated a phase of uncertainty, and the unpredictability and improvisation that ensued recalled the disintegration of earlier international orders.'[40] This lack of clear vision to deal with these new global challenges compounded the overblown rhetoric that usually comes along with American-European disagreements. As a result, the discrepancy between words and actions was even more pronounced than normal. Unsurprisingly, therefore, as the 1970s and early 1980s have been subjected to closer historical scrutiny, a different picture of transatlantic relations started to emerge. A series of recent studies, for instance, present a more nuanced and sophisticated interpretation. They all acknowledge the many tensions and crises that characterised transatlantic relations during this period, but they do not see them as a threat to the very existence of the Alliance, and even identify moments of intense cooperation[41]. In fact, despite the very real policy divergences that emerged, there were also clear

[37] See the literature on Europe and the CSCE quoted above.
[38] For the dynamic between the US, European integration and the Cold War see: Ludlow, "The History of the EC and the Cold War: Influenced and Influential, but Rarely Center Stage."
[39] For this notion of a 'transatlantic cocoon' facilitating the European integration process see: Ludlow, "European Integration and the Cold War."
[40] Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, 3.
[41] See for instance: N. Piers Ludlow, "Transatlantic Relations in the Johnson and Nixon Eras: The Crisis That Didn't Happen – and What It Suggests About the One That Did," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2010): 44-55; N.

signs that the Western allies sought closer coordination of their policies. Most telling, perhaps, was the rise of summitry in the 1970s[42]. The creation of the G-7 summit in 1975-6 and the increasing use of the four-power forum comprising the US, France, Britain, and West Germany from the time of the Ford administration onward were prime examples of that common desire for cooperation[43]. If the dynamics of transatlantic relations were profoundly transformed by the numerous challenges of the 1970s, the latest studies demonstrate that both sides still sought to overcome their differences and define new ways of working together. In that sense, there was remarkable continuity with the 1950s and 1960s.

As for the late 1970s and early 1980s more specifically, the standard account argues that West-West relations during this period went 'from bad to worse.'[44] After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the Americans supposedly reverted to a traditional policy of containment and naturally demanded solidarity of their European allies. If it has traditionally been assumed that the collapse of superpower *détente* irremediably compromise Europe's independence in Cold War politics, the latest research presented here suggests otherwise. From their refusal to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics to their pursuit of the Soviet pipeline deal in the face of explicit US opposition, or else divergences over the 1982 Polish crisis and more generally their continued push to develop their Eastern policy, it appears that the Europeans did not actually relinquish their emerging foreign policy independence as Cold War dynamics came back to the fore of international relations[45]. This further challenges the still popular understanding that the

Piers Ludlow, "The Real Years of Europe?: U.S.–West European Relations During the Ford Administration," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, no. 3 (2013): 136-61; N. Piers Ludlow, "The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism? US-Western European Relations During the Early Reagan Era," in *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, ed. Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also the other chapters in Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode, eds., *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[42] Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero, eds., *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991* (London: Routledge, 2014); Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds, eds., *Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970-1990*, First ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[43] On the rise of the G7 see for instance: Federico Romero, "Refashioning the West to Dispel Its Fears: The Early G7 Summits," in *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991*, ed. Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero (London: Routledge, 2014). On the use of the four-power forum see: Ludlow, "The Real Years of Europe?: U.S.–West European Relations During the Ford Administration."

[44] Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From 'Empire' by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, 201.

[45] For the transatlantic dispute over the Soviet pipeline deal see: Ksenia Demidova, "The Deal of the Century: The Reagan Administration and the Soviet Pipeline," in *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, ed. Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On the polish crisis see: Tavani, "The Détente Crisis and the Emergence of a Common European Foreign Policy. The "Common European Polish Crisis" as a Case Study." For the EC's Easter policy in the 1980s see for instance: Romano, "The EC and the Socialist World: The Ascent of a Key Player in Cold War Europe."

early 1980s marked the beginning of a 'Second Cold War,' and further reveals the extent of the international order's transformation during 1970s[46].

If recent historical studies are changing our understanding of Europe's role in world affairs during the 1970s and early 1980s, a similar historiographical trend has also emerged on the other side of the Atlantic[47]. In that respect, Sargent probably offers the most comprehensive reassessment of US foreign relations during the 1970s[48]. Surprisingly, he presents Henry Kissinger as an early architect of Washington's shifting strategy from managing *détente* to managing interdependence by the middle of the decade. He argues that this set the ground for Jimmy Carter's attempt to transcend the Cold War, most notably through the pursuit of economic interdependence, the defence of Human Rights, and a new focus on trilateral cooperation with Europe and Japan. He also offers a fundamental reinterpretation of the end of the Carter presidency, which has traditionally been understood as a sudden and radical policy shift towards a conventional containment strategy[49]. Instead, Sargent suggests that '[w]hat unfolded during 1979-1980 was not a sharp pivot so much as a diffusion of the administration's initial focus on post-Cold War priorities.'[50] Ultimately, while he acknowledges that Carter failed to transcend the Cold War, he concludes that American power had nevertheless adapted to the new realities of increasing interdependence, even though US foreign policy makers had actually failed to implement their designs[51].

This conclusion has major implications for our understanding of the last decade of the Cold War. As archival research is now expanding into the 1980s, an historical reinterpretation of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy is also emerging. Hal Brands, for instance, sees the remaking of US foreign relations in the 1970s as 'building blocks' for Washington's anti-Communist counter-offensive in the 1980s instead of a parenthesis in US foreign policy during the Cold War[52]. This new

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[46] For an understanding of the 1980s as a second Cold War see: Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1986).

[47] For a useful historiographical overview of US foreign policy in the 1970s see: Craig Daigle, "The 1970s: The Great Transformation in American Foreign Relations," Review essay, *Reviews in American History* 46, no. 1 (2018): 168-76.

[48] For an alternative account of US foreign policy in the 1970s, which fully embeds its analysis in the Cold War context see: Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[49] For the traditional interpretation see for instance: Jerel A. Rosati, "Jimmy Carter, a Man before His Time? The Emergence and Collapse of the First Post-Cold War Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1993): 459-76; David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996); Thomas M. Nichols, "Carter and the Soviets: The Origins of the US Return to a Strategy of Confrontation," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21-42.

[50] Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, 291.

[51] Ibid., 310.

[52] Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 38. For the traditional interpretation see for instance: Raymond L. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press,

understanding naturally has consequences for the historical analysis of Europe's role in the world during this same period. Both sides of the Atlantic simultaneously went through a similar process of transformation for essentially the same reasons, namely the disintegration of the postwar settlement and the many resulting uncertainties that contemporaries naturally could not fully grasp. It is, therefore, in that particular context that transatlantic relations during the last decade of the Cold War needs to be reassessed.

As explained above, on the European side, one foreign policy area which is conspicuously absent from this ongoing reinterpretation is the Middle East. This historiographical gap is all the more striking since this region became the centre of all Western concerns in the 1970s. The Community made it one of two policy issues to be dealt with within EPC, and the US operated a fundamental strategic reorientation towards the Middle East and the Persian Gulf[53]. By the end of the decade, Soviet expansion into the Horn of Africa and Southwest Asia convinced Washington that Moscow was getting ready for a larger offensive into this oil-rich region vital for the Western economies. And, the loss of Iran as a strategic asset after the fall of the Shah led to the collapse of the US security framework in the region precisely at the time when Western interests appeared most vulnerable. Moreover, the emergence of Political Islam as a revolutionary force in the Middle East became a serious threat by the 1980s, and further compounded Western anxieties about the security of their regional interests[54]. Admittedly, ever since the 1960s, the Americans had started to replace France and Britain as the dominant power in the region. They did so mostly through massive economic and military aid to Middle Eastern countries and the exclusive diplomatic role as peace brokers between Arabs and Israelis that they came to assume[55]. The Europeans could obviously not compete and, by the 1970s, it was clear that they had lost most of their traditional influence in the region.

That said, the historiography simply assumes that Europe had become irrelevant in the international politics of the Middle East by the 1970s. At the moment, though, there are no solid explanations of how the Europeans – most particularly France and Britain – dealt with this

1994); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, Rev. and expanded ed.New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[53] On this most important geopolitical shift see: Olav Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (2004): 21-55; Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*, 261-95.

[54] Amin Saikal, "Islamism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For the geopolitical earthquake in the Middle East at the end of the 1970s see: Hamit Bozarslan, "Revisiting the Middle East's 1979," *Economy and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 558-67; Salim Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[55] On this topic see: Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East."; Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and US-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

situation. As it stands, our understanding is that their disagreement with US policy led them to try to intervene along with their Community partners in 1973 and again in 1980, and that they utterly failed both times. However, if Europe did play a role in the Middle East from the 1970s onward, it most certainly was not in opposition to the US. Problematically, our current understanding of European Middle East policy still significantly relies on the highly misleading rhetoric of opposition so often characteristic of transatlantic relations. It is, therefore, worth going beyond rhetoric and looking into how the transformation of both European power and the international order in the 1970s redefined France's and Britain's role in the Middle East before assuming Europe's irrelevance. By focusing on 1978-82 period, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing reassessment of transatlantic relations by merging the new understandings of both American and European foreign policies against the highly confusing background of a shifting world order.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF FRENCH AND BRITISH MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The 1970s witnessed an astonishing reversal of roles between Americans and Europeans in the Middle East. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was France and Britain, as colonial powers, which had a negative reputation in the Arab world, and the US which stood as a bastion of anti-colonialism. By the 1970's, however, the Arabs were denouncing Washington's imperialism, and Paris and London found their international identity profoundly transformed. They were now perceived, along with their European partners, as a potential anti-imperialist force in the region. By the 1970s, France and Britain thus had to define a new post-colonial policy towards the Middle East and the growing importance of the EC in the international arena proved to be a fundamental asset in this remarkable transformation. In that process, the two former colonial powers benefitted from two main European policies: the EC's economic engagement with the Global South and the definition of a common stance towards the Arab-Israeli conflict through EPC. In the first instance, the Community seized the opportunity of the Global South's call for a new international economic order in the 1970s to introduce itself to the world as a 'force for good' and as 'the most progressive actor among industrialised countries.'[56] In the second instance, the EC member states positioned themselves as advocates of the Palestinians in the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute. This

[56] Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979*, 168. On this topic see also: Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires. European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957-1986*, trans. Richard R. Nybakken (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For an interesting discussion of the new international economic order see the special issue of *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): *Towards a History of the New International Economic Order*, and most specifically: Nils Gilman, "The New International Economic Order: A Reintroduction," *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 1-16.

collective stance resonated throughout the Global South as by the 1970s the Palestinian cause had become the worldwide symbol of 'the struggle against oppression everywhere' as one historian puts it[57]. Europeans and Americans thus found themselves on opposite sides of the Middle East conflict, something that played a major role in the redefinition of France's and Britain's post-colonial international identity.

As the EC member states collectively and self-consciously sought to present themselves in opposition to US imperialism in the Global South, it is not surprising that contemporaries and scholars alike have essentially understood the rise of European Middle East policy primarily as a source of transatlantic tensions. However, there was an astounding degree of discrepancy between Europe's emerging international identity and the fact that the EC was fundamentally an instrument designed to defend the interests of its member states[58]. This is a crucial element to take into consideration when assessing Europe's Middle East policy. Naturally, the promotion of peace was at the core of the European discourse to justify their involvement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Problematically, though, the literature only assesses the Community's performance in the Middle East against this stated goal. One of the major reasons for this state of affairs is that there is a complete lack of systematic inquiry into *how* and *why* national governments sought to make use of EPC in the Middle East[59]. This is an indispensable element to understand the nature of Europe's bid for diplomatic involvement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, and this is one of this dissertation's major contributions to the historiography.

Conversely, studies of national Middle East policies, which still overwhelmingly dominate the historiography of international relations, pay only passing attention to the collective dimension of foreign policy making in Western Europe from the 1970s onwards[60]. In part, this is due to the fact that the nation state is still largely regarded as the basic unit of the international order to the virtual

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[57] Paul Thomas Chamberlin, "The Struggle against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2011): 25-41; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[58] Ferrari for instance notes that in its economic engagement with the Global South the Community's 'deeds fell short of words': Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979*, 146.

[59] In the case of France, Gfeller is the one exception. For Britain see: Zakariah, "Oil, War and European Initiatives for Peace in the Middle East 1973–74: British Attitude and Perspective."; Zakariah, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue 1973-1978: Britain Reinsurance Policy in the Middle East Conflict." Möckli's *European foreign policy during the Cold War* does focus on the French, British and West German perspectives, but as explained other major methodological problems with this study.

[60] On the French side the exception is: Gfeller, "A European Voice in the Arab World: France, the Superpowers and the Middle East, 1970–74."; Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*. On the British side see: Zakariah, "Oil, War and European Initiatives for Peace in the Middle East 1973–74: British Attitude and Perspective."; Zakariah, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue 1973-1978: Britain Reinsurance Policy in the Middle East Conflict."

exclusion of all other actors. This tends to indicate that the reinterpretation of the 1970s as a decade of fundamental transformation in international relations still remains to be fully integrated into the study of specific foreign policy issues during this period. At the moment, though, there is a dearth of detailed studies of national Middle East policy for this period. One important reason is the general assumption that the Europeans no longer mattered as regional diplomatic actors by that time. For instance, much less attention has been paid to British Middle East policy in the 1970s than in the 1950s and 1960s. This is also true of France although, in this case, the main reason is the restricted access to the archives[61]. In fact, there are currently no archival based studies of French Middle East policy in the 1970s and early 1980s, which means that our current understanding largely relies on non-historical accounts[62]. As it stands, therefore, the study of French and British policies towards the Middle East in the 1970s and early 1980s is still very much in its infancy. Tellingly though all of the current historical accounts that focus on the national perspective refer to the EC dimension[63]. This dissertation suggests that one of the key elements for filling this major historiographical gap is the merging of the national and collective perspectives into one coherent analysis.

One of the problematic results with this lack of historical engagement with Europe' Middle East policy is that the American perspective ends up overwhelmingly and unduly dominating the literature on the international politics of the Middle East. The standard account of the Middle East peace process, for instance, does not make any reference to the Europeans and the very few studies

[61] Most problematically demands for derogations are still required to access the presidential papers of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand, and many are still being denied on grounds of national security. As for the archives of the Foreign Ministry, documents from the various departments are mostly accessible, but the papers of the Minister's cabinet are still classified.

[62] For account not based on archival research see for instance: Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts, eds., *La Politique Extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985); Samir Kassir and Farouk Mardam-Bey, *Itinéraires de Paris à Jérusalem: La France et le Conflit Israélo-Arabe, 1958-1991*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Washington DC: Institut des études palestiniennes, 1993); André Nouschi, *La France et le Monde Arabe depuis 1962, Mythes et Réalités D'une Ambition* (Paris: Librairie Vuibert, 1994); Jacques Frémeaux, *Le Monde Arabe et la Sécurité de la France depuis 1958* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995); Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); David Styan, *France & Iraq: Oil, Arms and French Policy Making in the Middle East* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006). For treatments of the Middle East within overviews of French foreign policy in the postwar era see: Maurice Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence?: la France Dans le Monde depuis 1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2009); Frédéric Bozo, *La Politique Étrangère de la France depuis 1945* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

[63] See for instance: Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*; Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence?: la France Dans le Monde depuis 1958*; Bozo, *La Politique Étrangère de la France depuis 1945*; Geraint Hughes, "Britain, the Transatlantic Alliance, and the Arab-Israeli War of 1973," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008): 3-40; Nigel J. Ashton, "Love's Labours Lost: Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein and Anglo–Jordanian Relations, 1979–1990," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 4 (2011): 651-77; Nigel J. Ashton, "'A Local Terrorist Made Good': The Callaghan Government and the Arab–Israeli Peace Process, 1977–79," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 1 (2016): 114-35; Azriel Bermant, "The Impact of the Cold War on the Thatcher Government's Middle East Policy," *Israel Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2013): 623-39; Azriel Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

that do only integrate the British perspective[64]. Admittedly, Britain had retained greater influence than France in Arab-Israeli diplomacy, and its willingness to follow an American lead certainly helped preserve its ability to take action. Most emblematic, perhaps, was the key British role as a bridge between the Arabs and the Americans in the drafting of SCR 242, which set the diplomatic basis of the Middle East peace process in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War[65]. But, this diplomatic achievement is generally regarded as the last meaningful British intervention in the search for Arab-Israeli peace. Still though, when it comes to foreign policy making towards the Middle East in Western Europe, the British perspective largely dominates, and from an American standpoint often represent the European position at large.

The problem is not simply that the French perspective is missing, but that it is a particularly relevant one to include. France had a particularly disruptive form of foreign policy that forced its European partners as well as the Americans to adapt to its many challenges, and the Middle East certainly was no exception. With the growth of interdependence in the 1970s, and the establishment of EPC, the definition of foreign policy in Europe became much more than a national affair, particularly when it came to the Middle East. At the time, there were two main ideological frameworks through which to make European foreign policy, which can loosely be labelled Atlanticism and Gaullism[66]. Broadly speaking, the former, usually identified with Britain, accepted the lopsided nature of the Atlantic Alliance and made do with American hegemony. The latter, obviously associated with France, conceived of the transatlantic partnership as a dumbbell with equal weight on each sides. Foreign policy making within the Community was a constant compromise between these two ideological frameworks. The struggle between Atlanticists and Gaullists within EPC was a near-constant one, if often low-key, and seldom produced a clear winner. In that respect, the dominance of the British and American perspectives in the historiography is problematic as it presents a reading of history that tends to overemphasise one ideological framework over the other.

It is precisely because of France's readiness to oppose American foreign policy, that historians need to include its perspective when writing the history of Western Europe and the Middle East.

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[64] For the standard account see: William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2005). For a recent account which uses British archives see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[65] Nigel J. Ashton, "Searching for a Just and Lasting Peace? Anglo-American Relations and the Road to United Nations Security Council Resolution 242," *The International History Review* 38, no. 1 (2015): 24-44.

[66] For a good discussions of the tensions between Atlanticism and Gaullism/Europeanism see for instance: Kenneth Weisbrode, "The EC and the United States: Partners in Search of Diplomacy," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 10-12.

One can dismiss the French rebellious attitude within the Atlantic Alliance as essentially posturing, as a sign of a former great power that refused to accept its new status as a middle power, and there is obviously some truth to that. But, the Gaullist discourse of independence and *grandeur*, which came to underpin France's foreign policy in the postwar era, did carry with it a particular understanding of world politics different from the 'Anglo-Saxon' one, as the French collectively refer to the British and the Americans[67]. This discourse made France particularly popular in the Arab world, and it sometimes translated into concrete political and economic advantages. Besides, Gaullism and its conception of a 'European Europe' – that is an independent *Western* actor – had a major impact on the definition of the EC's international identity as despite all of its challenges it often resonated with the rest of the Community, even with Britain. Bringing in the French perspective into the historical study of Western Europe and the Middle East is therefore a priority and this dissertation offers a first attempt.

Because of their historical role in the Middle East, France and Britain were naturally at the centre of European efforts to make their voice heard in the international politics of the region during the 1970s and early 1980s. Unlike the case of the EC's Eastern policy where all member states were equally and directly concerned, the situation was different for the Middle East. France and Britain had much larger interests to defend and their ability to weigh in on events, although severely diminished by the 1970s, was still much more significant than that of their EC partners. This is not to say that the rest of the Community did not matter of course. If France and Britain wanted to use EPC to reassert their influence in the region, they needed to listen to the other member states, and work to create a stable enough consensus to allow them to implement a coherent collective policy. In that sense, while for the two former colonial powers the emergence of EPC was a painful reminder of their declining influence, for the rest of the Community it essentially constituted an opportunity to enhance their stature in the Middle East. The rise of the EC as an international actor was thus much more disruptive for the already well established French and British roles in the region. There is therefore a firm logic in starting the reassessment of European Middle East policy in the 1970s from these two national perspectives as it will more clearly reveal the complex relations and tensions between the various levels of foreign policy making in Western Europe during this period. Ultimately, this approach reveals the extent to which French and British diplomacies were transformed during the 1970s, thus bringing a useful contribution to the historiography of their respective national Middle East policies.

[67] For an overview of Gaullism during the Cold War see: Frédéric Bozo, "France, "Gaullism," and the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The first methodological point on which this dissertation pivots is Mark Gilbert's challenge to the teleological story of European integration whereby the nation state is being progressively replaced by supranational structures, with a view of creating the United States of Europe[68]. Following in his footstep, the following analysis refrains from approaching EPC as the basis for the foreign policy of an emerging European super-state. Instead, it goes beyond the lofty rhetoric of pro-European political figures that envisaged a European foreign policy as a substitute to national ones[69]. In that respect, it takes the Community's rising capability to coordinate its member states' foreign policies as only one facet of European foreign policy making alongside the transatlantic, bilateral and national dimensions. These all played a significant role in Europe's involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and thus have to be integrated into one coherent analysis. At the time, EPC essentially was an intergovernmental mechanism for foreign policy coordination and not a fully-fledged European foreign policy. Therefore, only focusing on this aspect reveals only a partial picture of foreign policy making in Western Europe. The term of 'European foreign policy' here is used in its broadest sense, that is the desire of the EC member states to work together in the pursuit of a common goal in the international arena by using any of the means at their disposal. Unlike most previous studies, therefore, this one does not try to address the issue of whether or not the particular episode of the Venice Declaration constituted a step towards the emergence of a genuine European foreign policy. Instead, it only seeks to identify the role that Europe played in Middle Eastern diplomacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This leads to the second methodological point at the centre of this analysis, namely how to assess Europe's role and influence in international affairs. A recently published volume on the EC's external relations during the Cold War era tackles this issue in perceptive ways. It first acknowledges the inherent difficulties involved in assessing the Community's role as an international actor. It remarks that its hybrid nature, which falls somewhere in between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, makes any comparisons with other traditional international actors very difficult. And, it warns against using the nation state as the only yardstick of the EC's performance in foreign policy. Furthermore, the editors note that the defeatist picture of Europe's role in the world generally relies on two problematic assumptions about international

[68] Mark Gilbert, "Narrating the Process: Questioning the Progressive Story of European Integration," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 46, no. 3 (2008): 641-62.
[69] See for instance: Max Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager, eds., *A Nation Writ Large? Foreign-Policy Problems before the European Community* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973).

relations: first, that hard power is the indispensable means of diplomacy, and second that the lack of it renders an actor irrelevant[70].

This dissertation embraces this approach and pushes it a step further. Another widespread measure of European foreign policy is its capacity to act independently, which in the context of the Cold War inevitably means its ability to confront the superpowers, most particularly the US. Independence is naturally one important measure of power. That said, there are several problems with this one-sided approach. The first is that Europe's impact in world affairs ends up being compared to that of actors with unparalleled means of hard power. Inevitably, in that context, Europe's influence paled by comparison. Moreover, it is doubtful that even with a fully integrated foreign policy and defence system, a European super-state could have actually mounted a geopolitical challenge to the superpowers. Therefore, the common conclusion according to which the EC's lack of hard power prevented it from playing a meaningful role in world affairs is methodologically flawed and misleading[71]. The second is that it automatically frames the analysis of European foreign policy in an adversarial context. However, when it came to transatlantic relations over the Middle East, for instance, Americans and Europeans sought to defend the same interests. Given the asymmetrical reality of power between the two sides of the Atlantic, it was clear that the Europeans could never impose their views on the American hegemon. This necessarily forced them into a strategy that would fundamentally rely on transatlantic cooperation, and it is within that particular context that European foreign policy should be assessed.

Finally, the history of international relations during the Cold War was not simply the story of a struggle between the US and the Soviet Union, especially not from the 1970s onward. Tony Smith, for instance, has argued for a pericentric framework for the study of the Cold War, which would focus on the myriad of influences that many actors have had on the superpowers and in the shaping of international relations[72]. This is another one of the methodologies that this dissertation adopts, which it embeds into the new understanding of the 1970s as a decade where the international order was profoundly transformed by the rise of globalisation.

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[70] For this discussion see: Kiran Klaus Patel and Federico Romero, "Introduction: EC External Relations - Towards a Global Role," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[71] For the most forceful formulation of this argument see: Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*.

[72] Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 567-91. For an adaptation of this argument to the study of the Cold War in the Middle East see: Paul Thomas Chamberlin, "Rethinking the Middle East and North Africa in the Cold War," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 02 (2011): 317-19.

This dissertation makes three interrelated arguments. First, it contends that the Venice Declaration was not primarily about bringing a concrete contribution to Arab-Israeli peace as the literature has so far assumed. Instead, the main objective was to contribute to the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the Middle East. During the last two years of the Carter presidency, the Europeans grew concerned about the shifting priorities in US foreign policy. With the fall of the Shah in Iran in January 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December, and the 1980 presidential election, the Cold War came back to the fore of US strategic thinking. As a result, the search for Arab-Israeli peace, which had been at the core of Carter's Middle East policy since his election, lost its centrality. During his last year in office, Carter started to focus on building up US military capabilities in the Persian Gulf area to protect the region against what he saw as Moscow's expansionist intent. The Europeans agreed that Western defence needed beefing up, but they firmly believed that it had to go hand in hand with continued efforts for progress towards Arab-Israeli peace. Unlike the Americans, after the events in Afghanistan, they still regarded the Palestinian question as the biggest threat to regional stability. At the time, though, because of its lack of proper representation for the Palestinians, the Camp David peace process had antagonised large swaths of the Arab population, and as a result anti-Americanism had reached unprecedented heights in the Middle East. Problematically, a Western military build-up was contingent on Arab cooperation. The Europeans therefore argued that in order to achieve that, the Americans needed to change tack on the Palestinian question and go beyond Camp David. Hence, the Venice Declaration should be understood as an attempt to offer an alternative Western strategy for the Middle East, albeit one that was premised on transatlantic cooperation.

Second, this dissertation contends that in 1980-2, the Community managed to go beyond declaratory diplomacy and played a significant role in the international politics of the Middle East, one that the historiography has completely overlooked. By becoming the first Western actor of any significance to support the Palestinian right to self-determination and the association of the PLO to the peace process, the Europeans became part of the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation. As a result, they came to play an important role as a Western pole of attraction in the Middle East at a time when the US strategy for the region was crumbling, and when Washington was struggling to define and implement a new policy. In so doing, they became a political actor capable of rivalling the Soviet Union for the Arabs' ear. In that respect, there was an important Cold War dimension to the Community's diplomatic activism in the Middle East in the early 1980s, and this unprecedented collective engagement helped smooth the way for the advent of American

dominance in the region. Ultimately, the Europeans might not have succeeded in implementing their design, but neither did the Americans. That said, this transatlantic strategic confrontation, which the Europeans approached primarily in a spirit of cooperation, reshaped Western security in the Middle East, and set the basis for the emergence of a post-Cold War order in the region.

Third, this dissertation sees the Community as having acquired a significant political dimension by the end of the 1970s. It reveals that EPC was an integral part of French and British foreign policy making towards the Middle East, and that diplomacy in Western Europe had become much more than a national affair. By this time, Arabs, Israelis, and Americans alike regarded the Community as a coherent international actor alongside the more traditional French and British roles in the region. This dissertation suggests that what the literature refers to as 'European foreign policy,' most often without giving a clear definition of what it means, was not simply about the EC member states' ability to speak and act as one. Instead, it shows that the collective dimension went hand in hand with national foreign policy making and that the two were not mutually exclusive. In that respect, the episode of the Venice Declaration further reveals the emergence of a complex and multi-levelled European polity, which had certainly not evolved according to the design of its creators, but which nevertheless profoundly transformed the making of foreign policy in Western Europe during the 1970s. Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to the emergence of a more sophisticated understanding of the EC's role in the world, and reconstructs a more historically relevant picture of European integration and cooperation in the period following the Second World War.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

This dissertation is the result of multi-archival research in Europe and the US. On the European side, it focuses on France and Britain specifically. If most of the British documents for the period 1978-82 were accessible, research proved more challenging in the French case. The declassification process of the foreign ministry's archives allowed for the consultation of departmental files but not those of the Foreign Minister's cabinet. As for the presidential papers of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand, a lengthy process of applying for derogations is required and many requests are still being denied on grounds of national security. Moreover, as of now, the relevant volumes of the *Documents diplomatiques français* are still not available. Bringing in the French perspective was therefore no easy task. But, if ultimately this dissertation still makes greater use of British sources, enough French documents have been used to build a solid first account of French Middle East policy, and include France's perspective in the intra-European and transatlantic debate

over the region. In addition, this dissertation does not only deal with the EPC files from the *Quai d'Orsay* and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It also uses documents pertaining to bilateral relations between the two countries, the Middle East, and the US. In doing so, it reveals how the French and British national dimensions of foreign policy making respectively relate to their particular engagement with EPC.

On the American side, this thesis makes use of the presidential papers of both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. In addition, useful documents were found in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), and the relevant *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) volumes. Unfortunately, the *FRUS* volumes on transatlantic relations for the late 1970s and early 1980s are not yet available, and neither was the one on the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. That said, enough sources were available to bring in the American perspective in greater depth than usual in studies of European foreign policy.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided in two parts. The first one focuses on the period 1978-80, and explains how and why the Community member states issued the Venice Declaration. Chapters one and two deal with Britain and France respectively. They give a new account of their national Middle East policies at the end of the 1970s and reveal the reasons for the emergence of Franco-British leadership within EPC, which proved indispensable in the formation of a new European consensus on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Chapter three reconsiders the Community's road to the Venice Declaration and debunks the popular perception according to which the Americans obstructed European ambitions. And, chapter four uncovers the unstated objective behind the Community's decision to launch, for the first time, a diplomatic initiative outside of the European continent. What it reveals is that the Nine primarily sought to contribute to the reconstruction of the Western security framework in the Middle East in order to secure their interests in the region. Taken together, these four chapters set the ground for a reassessment of European diplomatic activism in the Middle East in the early 1980s.

The second part of this dissertation deals with the impact of the European initiative on the international politics of the Middle East between 1980 and 1982. Chapter five deals with the Nine's first diplomatic mission and shows that at this stage their priority was to fill the diplomatic vacuum left by the American retreat from the peace process during the presidential election campaign. It concludes that as a result the Europeans became an integral part of the Arab-Israeli diplomatic

equation. Chapter six focuses on the Community's second mission to the Middle East and clarifies the nature of European objectives at the time. In addition, it further demonstrates the significance of the Ten's activism, most notably the fact that by acting as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world they played a significant part in thwarting the Soviet attempt to return to the centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy. Chapter seven explains that with the Venice Declaration, the Europeans had in fact defined a different strategy for the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the Middle East than the one promoted by Washington. And, it shows that the emergence of a Euro-Arab front challenged the implementation of Reagan's Middle East policy. Finally, chapter eight offers a reinterpretation of the Community's diplomatic activism in the year before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and redefines the current understanding of what is meant by the 'European initiative.'

CHAPTER 1

THE BRITISH ROAD TO THE VENICE DECLARATION, MAY 1979 – JUNE 1980

THE EUROPEANISATION OF BRITISH MIDDLE EAST POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Britain has long been regarded as the American Trojan Horse within the European Community (EC). This damaging reputation for British European interests, however, was often undeserved and the episode of the Venice Declaration is a prime example of that. It shows that in the battle between London's Atlantic and European allegiances, by the end of the 1970s, London's Commitment to Europe had grown significantly. As a new Community consensus on the Arab-Israeli conflict was emerging in the spring of 1980, there was a remarkable degree of cohesion within European Political Cooperation (EPC). London and Paris had managed to overcome their differences on the Community's Middle East policy, something which the literature generally identifies as the most important intra-Community factor for the Venice Declaration of 13 June 1980. However, there is currently no explanation as to how this happened[1]. By focusing on Britain's perspective, this chapter begins to offer an answer to that fundamental question. It primarily deals with how the interaction between national, European and transatlantic dimensions set the ground for the Venice Declaration, leaving the issue of why the EC member states decided to intervene in Middle Eastern diplomacy for chapter 4. Studies on British Middle East policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s usually recognise London's leading role in pushing for a European Council declaration that would advance the Community's stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and they all emphasise the central role of Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington[2]. It seems, therefore, that the election of Margaret Thatcher in May 1979, which marked the return of the Conservatives –

[1] See for instance: Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 44-47; David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 98-100; Maria Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980* (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012), 447.

[2] See for instance: Anthony Parsons, "The Middle East," in *British Foreign Policy under Thatcher*, ed. Peter Byrd (Oxford/New York: Philip Allan/St Martin's Press, 1988); Nigel J. Ashton, "Love's Labours Lost: Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein and Anglo–Jordanian Relations, 1979–1990," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 4 (2011): 651-77, 659; Azriel Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11, 44-56.

traditionally Britain's pro-European and pro-Arab party[3] – to power largely explains the Franco-British *rapprochement* on the Middle East.

Upon her election, however, Thatcher stood out within the Conservative party because of her affinities with Israel. Together with her renowned Atlanticism, this led some scholars as well as many contemporaries to believe that there was a split between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Downing Street on the Middle East[4]. In recent years, however, historians have revised this interpretation, and argued that, despite some early differences on the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Thatcher was in fact very much in line with her Foreign Secretary's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The reasons for her support of FCO policy were threefold: first, her conviction that Britain's Cold War and economic interests rested with the Arabs; second, the influence of both Carrington and King Hussein of Jordan; and third, her instant dislike of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin after their first meeting on 23 May 1979[5]. In that respect, Thatcher's endorsement of the Venice Declaration has been regarded as evidence of her general agreement with Carrington's thinking. And, most specifically, it also reflected her belief that European support for the so-called 'moderate' Arab states was essential to defend the Middle East against the Soviet threat[6].

This chapter, however, argues that there were two other major factors that explain Thatcher's eventual acceptance of the Venice Declaration, and which were arguably more important than those mentioned above. The first one was that US President Jimmy Carter sent clear signals in the second half of 1979 that he would welcome a British involvement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. The second one was the re-definition of British policy towards the EC in the early months of her premiership. Ever since Britain joined the Community in 1973, it had faced a particular foreign policy dilemma, namely how to reconcile its Atlantic and European allegiances. Membership came along with participation in EPC and one of the main international issues that it dealt with was the Middle East conflict. The European tendency to oppose US policy by giving increasing support to the Arab camp throughout the 1970s often put the British in an awkward situation. The problem was not that they disagreed with their EC partners, but that European Middle East policy risked putting a strain on transatlantic relations. In that respect, American openness to a European role

[3] On the role of the Conservative party in Britain's approach to European integration see: Nick J. Crowson, *The Conservative Party and European Integration since 1945: At the Heart of Europe?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).
[4] Jonathan Rynhold and Jonathan Spyer, "British Policy in the Arab–Israeli Arena 1973–2004," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 137-55.
[5] For these arguments see: Ashton, "Love's Labours Lost: Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein and Anglo–Jordanian Relations, 1979–1990."; Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East*, 1-6.
[6] Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East*, 51-53, 217.

in the Middle East together with the extent of Community interdependence by the end of the 1970s are essential elements to take into account to understand the British road to the Venice Declaration. The rise of EPC in the 1970s gave the FCO an extra argument to convince Thatcher to support European policy since a refusal on her part would compromise her government's new commitment to the Community. And, ultimately, this Europeanisation of British Middle East policy constrained the country's traditional Atlanticism, something that proved fundamental in the constitution of the Franco-British leadership.

THATCHER'S EUROPEAN POLICY

Thatcher's election had a considerable impact on the course of events in the months leading up to the Venice European Council. Most significantly, it marked a change in Britain's approach to the Community, which in turn affected the conduct of its Middle East policy. The 1970s had been a trying time for Britain, even more so than for most of its Western European counterparts. At the beginning of the decade, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath had sought to join the Common Market, partly as a means to boost his country's economic performance. Unfortunately, on the heels of British entry on 1 January 1973, the first oil shock occurred, bringing with it an unprecedented set of economic challenges that profoundly destabilised the Western economies. As a result, the Common Market's economic performance steadily declined throughout the 1970s, and Britain did not benefit as much as expected from its Community membership. Already, during the October 1974 general election, Harold Wilson's Labour party had campaigned on the promise of a referendum on continued EC membership, which eventually took place in June 1975. While 67% of the British people voted to remain, it did little to settle Britain's relationship with the Community, and Eurosceptic sentiments continued to grow[7]. Even with the return to power, in 1979, of the Conservatives, the situation did not seem to improve. Thatcher upheld her predecessor's decision not to participate in the European Monetary System (EMS)[8], which was the most ambitious and promising EC policy designed to infuse new energy into the Common Market[9]. And, most problematically, her plan to remedy national economic decline through

[7] Robert Saunders, *Yes to Europe!: The 1975 Referendum and Seventies Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Linday Aqui, *The First Referendum: Reassessing Britain's Entry to Europe, 1973-1975* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

[8] See for instance: Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, *A Europe Made of Money: The Emergence of the European Monetary System* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012).

[9] For two recent accounts that deal extensively with Britain's relationship with the Community in the 1970 see: N. Piers Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980: At the Heart of Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Mathias Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

austerity policies further intensified the row over Britain's campaign to have its contribution to the EC budget reduced[10].

THE BRITISH BUDGETARY QUESTION

The British Budgetary Question (BBQ) had an unexpected influence on the definition of London's Middle East policy. In order to reveal this connection, it is important to understand, first, how pervasive this matter was in Community politics at the time, second, how much of a challenge it was perceived to be to the Community, and third, just how damaging it ended up being to Britain's reputation. Roy Jenkins, the then British president of the European Commission, for instance, tellingly came to refer to the BBQ as the 'Bloody British Question', and wrote in his diary that 'the whole Community was rarely allowed to think about anything else' during the first half of 1980[11]. In a similar vein, Carrington recalls in his memoirs how eager he was to settle the BBQ as it 'was neutralising everything the Community should be trying to achieve.'[12]

This dispute was much more than a simple disagreement on the level of the British contribution to the EC budget. At the time, it was perceived as a fundamental attack on one of the Community's core principles, namely that the EC budget was meant to serve the collective interests above those of its individual members. In order to uphold this objective, the six founding EC member states had decided that the Commission should have control of its 'own resources.' To this foundational principle, the British opposed the idea of 'broad balance,' according to which the overall benefit that member states derived from Community policies should roughly be proportional to their respective contribution. For the rest of the Community, this concept, which successive British governments defended, was inherently incompatible with the idea of a common market[13]. In that context, as Thatcher's economic policies and rhetoric escalated the dispute, the BBQ became the perfect illustration of Britain's lack of *esprit communautaire*, and reinforced its reputation as an 'awkward partner.'[14]

In reaction to Thatcher's very vocal campaign to 'get her money back,' as she provocatively put it, the French circulated a paper in early 1980 that sought to define the general Community principles

[10] On the British Budgetary Question see for instance: Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980: At the Heart of Europe*, 199-229.
[11] Roy Jenkins, *European Diary, 1977-1981* (London: Collins, 1989), 545.
[12] Peter Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1989), 316.
[13] For a good overview of what the BBQ was all about see for instance: Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980: At the Heart of Europe*, 208-16.
[14] For the 'awkward partner' narrative see for instance: Stephen George, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

more clearly, and get a renewed commitment to them. This led to a long debate within the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper[15]) on 24 April, which clearly exposed the nature of this dispute. It showed that all the EC member states understood Britain's predicament and were willing to help. There were of course divergences among them regarding the specific shape of an eventual corrective mechanism, but there was a strong consensus that, whatever the solution, it could only be temporary. The British, on their part, feeling that they were paying too much into the EC budget for what they were actually getting back, wished to make it permanent. This debate, therefore, revealed the extent of British isolation as a result of what came to be perceived as a fundamental challenge to the EC's functioning[16]. By early 1980, the entire Community had grown frustrated with the British attitude. Hence, under Thatcher, Britain appeared to be more than ever before the odd woman out in Europe.

This dispute came to a head at the gathering of the European Council in Luxembourg on 27-28 April. Initially scheduled for 31 March, the Italians, who were holding the rotating EC presidency, had postponed this Council meeting to the end of April. The hope was that a satisfactory agreement might have been reached in time to avoid a very public confrontation between Britain and its Community partners[17]. When, in spite of this preventive measure, the European Council failed to reach an agreement, the general feeling amongst EC member states was that Thatcher's intransigence was to blame for this failure. In his press conference, for instance, French President Valéry Giscard-d'Estaing did not hesitate to point the finger at Britain for this fiasco[18]. The most revealing reaction, perhaps, came from the Germans, who until then had been the most sympathetic to Britain's situation. The *Auswärtiges Amt* severely criticised Thatcher's mistaken assumption that the Community's willingness to compromise meant that she could expect ever-bigger concessions by simply holding her ground[19]. Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, was especially irritated since he had gone out of his way to make a very generous offer that went beyond what he had agreed with his cabinet beforehand[20]. In fact, so severe was the perception of the situation that the Director of the European Organisation Department in the Belgium Foreign Ministry, Philippe de Schoutheete de Tervarent, went as far as to compare it to the 1965 empty

[15] Coreper was composed of the member state's Permanent Representatives to the European Communities and was in charge of preparing the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers.
[16] *Archives du Minitère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (hereafter MAE), 4090, 'Préparation du Conseil Européen (II): commentaires de nos partenaires sur notre document relatif aux "principes généraux"', 24 avril 1980; MAE, Direction Europe, 1976-1980, carton 4090, 'Préparation du Conseil Européen (III): commentaires de nos partenaires sur notre document relatif aux "principes généraux"', 24 avril 1980.
[17] MAE, 4090, 'Premières réactions au report du conseil européen', 25 mars 1980.
[18] MAE, 4090, 'Conférence de presse de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Président de la République à l'issue du conseil européen à Luxembourg le 28 avril 1980'.
[19] MAE, 4090, 'Conseil européen', 29 avril 1980.
[20] MAE, 4090, 'Réactions allemandes au conseil européen, 30 avril 1980.

chair crisis[21]. By the end of April 1980, therefore, it seemed that the Community was going through a major crisis, but this time, unlike in 1965, it was Britain not France, which was the disruptive element.

It was, however, precisely the situation that Thatcher had wished to avoid as she took office. While she was instinctively uncomfortable with some aspects of the European integration process, she understood the economic and political benefits of a Community membership. Upon her election, she had sought to revamp Britain's European policy, and started off by sending clear signals that she wanted to improve relations with the Community. Carrington's nomination as Foreign Secretary, for instance, was clearly meant to convey the extent of this renewed British commitment[22]. A man with impeccable European credentials, he had been a senior member of Heath's cabinet when Britain negotiated its entry into the Community, and enjoyed an excellent reputation in most European capitals[23]. The French ambassador to the UK, Jean Sauvagnargues, for instance, held Carrington in high esteem, and often presented him as the man to deal with on the BBQ[24]. This became a widely shared opinion by early 1980. For example, in January, Jenkins used his own home as a means to bypass Thatcher and arrange a private meeting between Schmidt and Carrington to discuss Community matters in a more serene environment[25]. And, from the Luxembourg European Council onward, the Community decided to deal with the BBQ at ministerial level only, thus making Carrington the principal British interlocutor[26]. Still, Thatcher's abrasive negotiating style seriously compromised her genuine intent to improve Britain-EC relations.

COURTING FRANCE

Under Carrington's leadership, the FCO elaborated a new strategy to tackle Britain's problems with the Community. To this end, David Gladstone, the head of the Western European department, drafted a paper in the summer 1979, which perfectly sums up British anxieties. This document basically depicts the EC as a structure designed to serve French economic interests. As Gladstone put it, France had 'exploited its moral advantage to secure concessions, above all from the Germans,' and he blamed Paris for zealously defending the *acquis communautaire* – such as the

[21] MAE, 4090, 'Suites du conseil européen', Vaurs, 3 mai 1980.
[22] On Thatcher's initial intention towards the Community see: Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980: At the Heart of Europe*, 205-08.
[23] For Carrington's role in Britain's approach to the Community see: Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington*, 308-26.
[24] MAE, 4449, 'Sommet franco-britannique', Sauvagnargues, 14 septembre 1979.
[25] Ludlow, *Roy Jenkins and the European Commission Presidency, 1976-1980: At the Heart of Europe*, 219.
[26] MAE, 4090, 'Réactions italiennes après le conseil européen de Luxembourg', 30 avril 1980.

principle of 'own resources' – simply because it was in line with its own national interests. After portraying a Community under French domination, Gladstone logically argued that 'the successful prosecution of British EEC objectives against the inertia of the *acquis communautaire* therefore depends crucially on winning French support or at least neutralising their obstruction.'[27] In order to do so, Gladstone advised that 'it [was] worth going out of our way to signal to [the French] that we wish to intensify our dealings across the board, starting at the top.'[28]

London, therefore, embarked on a sustained diplomatic campaign to win Paris over. For her first official visit as Prime Minister, for instance, Thatcher went to France. During her talk with Giscard on 5 June, she explained that her government would fundamentally change Britain's approach to the economy and to Europe. She emphasised that she was the leader of a party 'dedicated to the idea of the European Community and determined to pursue a policy of genuine co-operation.' To that end, she signalled her interest in more frequent consultation with France, along the lines of what already existed between Bonn and Paris[29]. This visit occurred shortly after the Anglo-German summit in London, where she had also professed Britain's new European commitment[30]. When, a month later, Carrington met with French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet in London on 3 September 1979, the Foreign Secretary pledged his country's commitment to closer cooperation with the Community once again, and naturally the BBQ dominated their talks[31]. Similarly, the Anglo-French summit of 19-20 November in London, provided yet another opportunity for the British government to pursue its new European policy[32]. Courting France had thus become a central British objective in the early months of Thatcher's premiership.

By the end of 1979, however, the British remained doubtful about the prospect of winning over French support. In his annual review for 1979, British Ambassador to France Reginald Hibbert concluded that '[i]n general, Anglo-French relations in the old fashioned sense are good, but in the modern sense of close bilateral collaboration, within multilateral frameworks they leave much room for improvement.' He therefore advocated a continuation of the new European strategy,

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[27] The National Archives, London (TNA), FCO33/3939, 'Paper on Anglo-French relations', Western European Department, 3 August 1979.
[28] TNA, FCO33/3958, 'Possible bilateral meeting between the Secretary of State and the French Foreign Minister', Gladstone to Fretwell, 18 june 1979.
[29] TNA, FCO33/3956, 'Record of the Prime Minister's conversation with President Giscard d'Estaing at the Elysée', 5 June 1979. On the intensification of bilateral relations between France and Britain, and the role it played in the multilateralisation of international relations in the 1970s see: Laurence Baratier-Negri, *Valéry Giscard d'Estaing & le Royaume-Uni: le Rendez-Vous Manqué Avec L'europe Ou le Brexit Annoncé* (Paris: Sorbonne université presses, 2018).
[30] MAE, 4441, 'Visite du Chancelier Schmidt à Londres', Sauvagnargues, 12 mai 1979. On Anglo-Germany relations in the Community context in the 1970s see: Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding.*
[31] TNA, FCO33/3958, Extract of talks between Carrington and François-Poncet at Bledlow, 3 September 1979.
[32] TNA, FCO33/3951, 'Note of meeting held at 10 Downing Street', 19 November 1979.

and urged the FCO to bear in mind that a Franco-British *rapprochement* in the 'modern sense' will take time and should not be measured on the basis of 'quick practical results'[33]. Carrington agreed with this analysis. Reporting back to Thatcher on his round of informal meetings with François-Poncet on 2-3 February 1980, he pleaded for the continued intensification of bilateral contacts with both France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). And, he argued that this should 'enhance' Britain's European credentials, 'improve the chances' of a satisfactory settlement on the BBQ, and 'minimise the danger of a rift' in transatlantic relations over Afghanistan[34]. However, despite having been impressed by Carrington's pro-European intervention at his first meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 12 May 1979, the French remained suspicious about British intention. At this point, it seemed that for them, Britain's European litmus test was a change in its approach to the BBQ. But, on that front, Thatcher's demands remained essentially the same as those of her predecessors, and her rhetoric only made things worse[35].

EUROPEAN POLITICAL COOPERATION TO THE RESCUE

Beyond the BBQ, which had direct implications for Thatcher's economic and political agenda, she left diplomacy firmly in the hands of her Foreign Secretary. She had arrived at Downing Street with little knowledge of international affairs, and Carrington's nomination to head the FCO was meant to compensate her inexperience. Tellingly, before her election, she was reported to have said: 'I'm going to have a very good Foreign Secretary and I shan't go on any foreign trips at all. My job is to turn the economy around.'[36] As she would rapidly learn, it was part of the Prime Minister's duty to travel abroad and meet with other world leaders, but until the 1982 Falklands War, Carrington had a firm grip over the definition of British foreign policy. The two issues that dominated the FCO's agenda early on in Thatcher's premiership were mending fences with the Community partners, and the Middle East. Both a convinced pro-European and an Arabist, Carrington played a central role in Britain's road to the Venice Declaration[37]. In particular, he managed to skilfully handle the traditional British foreign policy dilemma, which consisted in maintaining the Anglo-American 'special relationship' without damaging relations with the continent.

[33] TNA, FCO33/4383, 'France: Annual Review for 1979', Hibbert to Carrington, 3 January 1980.
[34] TNA, FCO33/4394, 'Anglo-French Relations', Carrington to Prime Minister, 4 February 1980.
[35] MAE, 4448, 'Note de synthèse: entretiens franco-britanniques, Paris, 5 juin 1979', 30 mai 1979.
[36] Quoted in Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, vol. One: Not For Turning (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 429.
[37] On Carrington's role in the definition of British Middle East policy in the early Thatcher years see: Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East*, 21-24.

When, in 1963, General de Gaulle vetoed Britain's first EC application, one of the reasons was his concern that London would act as an American Trojan horse within the Community[38]. This perception of Britain was quite popular on the continent at the time, and when the British finally joined ten years later, they were often met with suspicion in that regard. The French in particular cultivated this view. In his report to the *Quai d'Orsay* prior to Thatcher's visit to Paris on 5 June 1979, for instance, Sauvagnargues warned that London's privileged relationship with Washington was a constant of British foreign policy. He argued that this trend could only gain in importance given Thatcher's conviction that the West had gone soft on the Soviet Union and that it urgently needed a more incisive Cold War policy[39]. On the utility of *détente*, Thatcher was at odds with both Giscard and Schmidt. Her initial reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of December 1980, was, in line with the Carter administration, much more vigorous than that of her European partners. Together with her backing of Washington's call for a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, Britain's Atlanticist reputation was further strengthened[40]. Carrington, therefore, faced an uphill battle to convince France and the rest of the Community of British good intentions towards Europe.

The FCO had very little room to manoeuvre. By then, the British had enough experience of Community politics to know that it was often difficult to successfully play France and Germany against each other. And, this was especially true at the time since, under Giscard and Schmidt, the Franco-German partnership proved particularly strong[41]. Unable to confront France frontally, British officials identified EPC as a privileged means to demonstrate Britain's *esprit communautaire*. In a note to Julian Bullard, the Political Director for Europe at the FCO, for instance, Hibbert stressed that EPC was 'the most important of the areas in which Britain can be more European than any other partner,' particularly because of French reticence towards it. Interestingly, by the time of this communication in March 1980, it seemed that the British ambassador to France had had a change of heart regarding the strategy to follow. While he had previously been one of the main advocates of a *rapprochement* with the French, he was now arguing in favour of openly opposing them in EPC. According to him, pointing the finger at their obstructionism on political

[38] Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, vol. 4: Août 1962 - Décembre 1965 (Paris: Plon, 1970), 69. For an account of this episode see for instance: Wiflried Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, trans. Robert F. Hogg (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 108-17.
[39] MAE, 4448, 'Visite à Paris de Mme Thatcher', Sauvagnargues, 1 juin 1979.
[40] For an account of transatlantic and intra-Community tensions over Afghanistan see: Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding*, 161-67.
[41] On the Franco-German relationship during the Giscard presidency see: Michèle Weinachter, *Valéry Giscard d'Estaing et L'allemagne: le Double Rêve Inachevé* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004).

cooperation would divert attention from the BBQ and strengthen the relationship with Bonn, whose views on foreign policy were closer to London than Paris[42].

There was a consensus among FCO officials regarding Hibbert's recommendation that EPC should become the main channel through which Britain could prove its *esprit communautaire*. However, his more radical idea of opposing the French frontally did not convince in the same way. For instance, the British Ambassador to Bonn, Oliver Wright, while agreeing that 'we should capitalise' on Britain's positive attitude towards EPC, argued against 'coming out too strongly' against the French because of the common view in the Community that 'the UK was trying to use political cooperation as a cover for its reluctance to cooperate in those areas of activity which are actually prescribed in the Community treaties.' But, more importantly, he did not believe that the Franco-German partnership could be broken[43]. This was also Gladstone's opinion. He explained that Bonn and Paris had been 'through fire together on more than one occasion' and that they would not 'accept us as full partners until we have been through a little fire too'[44]. That said, most British officials closely involved with EPC were well aware that 'there is no automatic balancing factor' between the EC and EPC[45]. For example, the head of the European integration department, Giles Fitzherbert whose thinking was similar to Wright and Gladstone, wrote to Bullard that 'good will accumulated in Political Cooperation rarely spills over the Community side'. He nevertheless concluded that, given Carrington's personality and pro-European reputation, 'at the level of Ministers the two do meet' and therefore it was worth proceeding with using EPC for Britain's Community interest at this level[46]. Hence, in the months leading to the Venice European Council, foreign policy cooperation became a central means to implement Britain's revamped approach to the Community.

By early 1980, the Middle East was at centre of all EPC discussions, and the FCO started to play a particularly active role. On the Afghan crisis, for instance, despite Thatcher's vocal anti-Soviet declaration, Carrington pushed hard behind the scenes for the development of a common European stance[47]. On the Middle East conflict, FCO officials also became increasingly interested in joint European action. They pushed for a European Council statement that would condemn Israel's settlement policy, and make a gesture towards the Palestinians. In addition, they wanted

[42] TNA, FCO98/884, 'The French attitude toward European Political Cooperation', Hibbert to Bullard, 17 March 1980.
[43] TNA, FCO98/884, 'European political cooperation and the French', Wright to Bullard, 24 March 1980.
[44] TNA, FCO98/946, 'Tripartite consultation', Gladstone to Fergusson, 4 March 1980.
[45] TNA, FCO98/884, Wright to Bullard, 24 March 1980.
[46] TNA, FCO98/884, Fitzherbert to Bullard, 1 April 1980.
[47] Haeussler, *Helmut Schmidt and British-German Relations: A European Misunderstanding*, 167-73.

the Community to envisage taking action at the United Nations (UN) to amend Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian rights[48]. The French, however, did not believe that the timing was right. François-Poncet, for instance, told Carrington that the Nine would not be able to say much of any significance until after the deadline of the Egyptian-Israeli talks on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories had passed on 26 May[49]. Moreover, at this juncture, the Dutch were still opposing any reference to Palestinian self-determination[50]. In this context, the French suggested instead that the Nine further study the possibility of Community action on the Middle East ahead of the next European Council meeting to be held in Venice[51]. Paris eventually managed to rally the EPC partners to its plan. And, in Luxembourg, on 28 April, the Community Heads of States and Governments, 'conscious that Europe may in due course have a role to play,' mandated the Foreign Ministers to draft a report on the Arab-Israeli conflict[52].

In the first half of 1980, therefore, Britain had become a driving force in the search for a European role in the Middle East. Interestingly, Thatcher's abrasive attitude on the BBQ had led to a particularly strong British commitment to EPC. This FCO strategy demonstrates the extent to which interdependence both among Community member states and between the EC and EPC had grown by the end of the 1970s. Ultimately, it reveals that foreign policy cooperation in Europe had evolved to become much more than a simple intergovernmental affair. This is a most crucial point to integrate in any analysis of the road to the Venice declaration.

BRITAIN'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY AT THE TURN OF THE DECADE

THATCHER, THE FCO AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

Thatcher's election marked a return to a more traditional British policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. The previous Labour government headed by James Callaghan had drawn closer to Israel, and abandoned the more balanced stance characteristic of British diplomacy in the postwar era. It supported the Camp David Accords of 1978, which had provoked outrage in the Arab world, and operated a *rapprochement* with Begin. At first, the American-led peace process appeared to be

[48] TNA, FCO98/916, European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, Rome, 22-23 April 1980, 'Item 9 (a) Arab/Israel,' Near East and Africa Department.
[49] TNA, FCO98/936, From Walden to Bullard, 21 March 1980.
[50] TNA, FCO98/936, Tel. No. 797, 'European Political Cooperation: European Council, Luxembourg, 27/28 April 1980,' Carrington, 29 April 1980.
[51] TNA, FCO98/916, Tel. No. 152, 'Middle East and Euro-Arab Dialogue,' Carrington, 15 March 1980.
[52] *Bulletin of the European Communities* (hereafter *Bull. EC*), 'Declaration on international situation', 4-1980, 145-6.

making significant progress towards a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of March 1979 was instantly hailed as an event of historic proportion. And, in its wake the negotiations on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories between Egypt and Israel started. In the first half of 1979, therefore, Britain had some hopes that US policy might be on the right course[53].

Initially, British support for Camp David was based on the hope that it would lead to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute[54]. As the Autonomy talks got underway, however, it became increasingly obvious that this format for negotiations was inadequate. There was no proper representation for the Palestinians, and other Arab states refused to join. Most problematically, Jordan, which had been made an integral part of Camp David's second phase, even though it had not been consulted, declined to participate[55]. Under such circumstances, Britain's support for US policy started to dwindle. In a paper for the incoming Thatcher government, for instance, the FCO identified the Palestinian question as 'the main threat to our interests and to peace in the area.' It, therefore, suggested that British 'interests were best protected by continuing to work for a comprehensive settlement.' The main challenge for British diplomacy, it remarked, will be to consider how to 'effectively support' Camp David while 'maintaining the confidence' of the other Arab states. The FCO was now anxious that 'disillusion' with US policy in the Middle East had reached a breaking point, and had thus grown eager for the Europeans 'to keep open their lines of communication' with the Arab world[56]. By that stage Britain's support of Camp David had damaged its standing in the region, hence the Callaghan government's late advocacy for a reorientation of British policy.

Traditionally, the Conservative party had always had more affinities with the Arabs than the Israelis, and, therefore, after May 1979, a shift in British Middle East policy was to be expected. Thatcher, however, had a particular attachment to Israel. Her constituency of Finchley had a relatively large Jewish population, and, at least at the beginning of her premiership, she was often uncomfortable following the FCO's pro-Arab inclination[57]. One striking example of Thatcher's uneasiness with Carrington's Middle East policy occurred during her state visit to the US in

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[53] For Callaghan's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict see: Nigel J. Ashton, "'A Local Terrorist Made Good': The Callaghan Government and the Arab–Israeli Peace Process, 1977–79," *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 1 (2016): 114-35.

[54] Camp David's second accord was about setting up a multilateral framework for negotiations aimed at settling all outstanding issues, most notably the Palestinian question. For the text of the Camp David Accords see for instance: William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2016), 390-404.

[55] On the role of Jordan in the Camp David peace process see: Nigel J. Ashton, "Taking Friends for Granted: The Carter Administration, Jordan, and the Camp David Accords, 1977-1980," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 620-45.

[56] TNA, FCO93/2193, 'Paper for an incoming government', Holmes, 26 April 1979.

[57] Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East*, 2, 16-29.

February 1981. During a meeting with her delegation she vehemently criticised Carrington for what she called 'your Middle East policy.' She did not support his attempt at a *rapprochement* with the PLO, and angrily said: 'I'll lose my seat at Finchley.'[58] Eventually though, Cold War imperatives and King Hussein's influence convinced her of the importance of putting the Palestinian question to rest[59]. At first, however, the row over the BBQ and the FCO's new European policy played a significant role in keeping the Prime Minister's reticence in check. Minister of State for Europe Douglas Hurd, for instance, recalls in his memoirs how a few days before the Venice European Council, Thatcher's concern over the BBQ led her to adopt a more 'conciliatory' stance on the Middle East[60] In that respect, Britain's campaign to prove its *esprit communautaire* played an important role in the British road to the Venice Declaration as it limited Thatcher's opposition to Carrington's policy.

The FCO began working on Britain's policy reorientation as early as the summer 1979. When the Arabs, under Kuwaiti leadership, pushed once more for a modification of SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights, British diplomats gave serious thought to bringing their support to this initiative. On 9 July, Assistant Under Secretary of State for the Near and Middle East, John Moberly, suggested 'exploring the possibility' of voting in favour of this resolution. He recalled that Britain had recently opposed a similar move, and warned against the risk of further British isolation within the Community[61]. John Crosby of the Near East and North Africa Department (NENAD) also advocated backing the Arab resolution as a means to 'prevent our isolation in Europe, particularly from the French.'[62] In the same vein, Moberly also believed that the FCO should seize this opportunity to make public Carrington's private acceptance of Palestinian self-determination[63]. In any event, no vote ultimately took place during the summer, and, if it had, Thatcher and Carrington had agreed to abstain after the Americans made it clear that they could not support the Kuwaiti initiative[64]. What this episode revealed, however, was that efforts for a stronger British commitment to the Community went beyond the European integration department and widely informed the thinking of FCO officials across the board.

[58] Quoted in Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography*, One: Not For Turning, 544.
[59] For this argument see: Ashton, "Love's Labours Lost: Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein and Anglo–Jordanian Relations, 1979–1990."; Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East*, 1-6.
[60] Douglas Hurd, *Memoirs* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 259-60.
[61] TNA, FCO93/2176, Moberly to Tomkys, 'Arab/Israel: A New Resolution 242', 9 July 1979.
[62] TNA, FCO93/2176, 'Arab-Israel: new security council resolution', Crosby, 23 August 1979.
[63] TNA, FCO93/2176, Moberly to Tomkys, 'Arab/Israel: A New Resolution 242', 9 July 1979.
[64] See manuscript note from Donald F. Murray in TNA, FCO 93/2176, 'Arab-Israel: new security council resolution', Crosby, 23 August 1979.

Despite the extent of pro-Arab sympathies within Carrington's FCO, British diplomats generally shared Thatcher's concern about antagonising the US on the Middle East. Tellingly, before Moberly started arguing in favour of supporting the Kuwaiti initiative along with the rest of the Community, the British Ambassador to the UN, Ivor Richard, had reported that 'a good deal of thought' was being given in Washington to answering Arab demands on SCR 242[65]. John A. Robinson, who had previously been head of the European Integration department and was now in post in Washington, went even further and said that 'there must be at least a significant chance' that the US would soon be ready to 'deal formally with the PLO.' He therefore urged the FCO to come out in favour of amending SCR 242 as soon as possible. The rationale behind his thinking was as follows: on the one hand, in case Washington decided to support such an initiative, Britain would not earn any credit, either with the Arabs or with the Europeans, unless it had taken a similar position beforehand. On the other hand, if Carter gave in to Israeli pressure, the British would then be in an advantageous position to play the middleman between Arabs and Americans[66]. Robinson's argument resonated widely within the FCO, and a sense of relief dominated when the Kuwaiti decided not to table any resolution, especially because it saved Britain from isolation within EPC.

Following this episode, Carrington drafted a paper on British policy towards the Palestinians, which he sent to the Prime Minister in early September. In it, he argued that the government 'should publicly accept the principle of self-determination,' and 'make a modest advance in our contact with the PLO,' notably by agreeing to informal meetings at ministerial level[67]. Thatcher, however, 'deeply opposed' both of her Foreign Secretary's recommendations[68]. Carrington, who had hoped to come out in favour of Palestinian self-determination and make an explicit mention of the PLO at the upcoming UN General Assembly, was forced to backpedal. And ultimately, the speech that he gave on 25 September, only mentioned the need to amend SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights, and called for a 'homeland' for the Palestinians[69]. Interestingly, despite Thatcher's objection, Roger Tomkys, the head of NENAD, in charge of drafting the Middle East section of Carrington's speech, had insisted that a reference be made to a homeland for the

[65] The National Archives (TNA), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 93/2176, Tel. n. 696, UKMIS New York to FCO, 5 July 1979.
[66] TNA, FCO93/2176, Tel. n. 2255 from UK Embassy Washington, 9 August 1979.
[67] TNA, FCO93/2061, PM/79/78, Carrington to the Prime Minister, 'Middle East: Policy towards the Palestinians,' 11 September 1979.
[68] TNA, FCO93/2061, Alexander to Walden, 'Middle East: Policy towards the Palestinians,' 14 September 1979.
[69] For this speech see: TNA, FCO93/2061, 'Draft section on the Middle East for inclusion in the Secretary of State's speech in the general debate at the United Nations.'

Palestinians. He argued that such an 'omission […] would cause great furore.'[70] This would naturally disappoint the Arabs, especially after the FCO had given signs of support for the Kuwaiti initiative during the summer, and there was fear amongst British officials that this might also affect Britain's oil supply[71].

Perhaps more problematically at the time, failing to mention a homeland for the Palestinian would create friction with the Community partners. Permanent Under-Secretary of State and former Permanent Representative to the European Communities Michael Palliser, for instance, believed that 'we could not and should not go back' on earlier statements made in Parliament, at the UN, and within EPC. Thatcher's rejection of Carrington's paper was particularly inopportune because, at that juncture, the Nine were planning to take a further step towards the Palestinians. They were, in fact, in the process of drafting a speech that Irish Foreign Minister Michael O'Kennedy would give at the UN General Assembly on the same day as Carrington's. Ireland, which was holding the rotating EC presidency, had submitted a revised draft to the Political Committee due to meet on 24 September in New York to agree on the final details. FCO officials had several concerns about the Irish draft. Not only did it mention a Palestinian 'homeland,' but there was also a direct reference to the PLO, which they believed Thatcher might reject. In addition, the following wording, which was a call for Palestinian 'self-determination' in all but name might also cause problems with the Prime Minister: 'the Palestinian people, who are entitled, within the framework set by a peace settlement, to exercise their right to determine their own future as a people.' Palliser nonetheless 'strongly' recommended that the FCO approve the Irish draft. He argued that it would stop a 'more radical proposal [being] advanced by the French,' and prevent Britain from 'being seen to be virtually isolated in the Nine and being exposed to undue Arab criticism.' He, therefore, urged Carrington to press Thatcher on the basis of his recommendation. Ultimately, the combination of pressure from the FCO and the cover that a Community statement provided allowed the British to approve the Irish draft.

The anticipation of imminent change in the US stance on the Palestinian question was another important factor that explain the evolution of British Middle East policy in the second half of 1979. In particular, it helped the FCO get Thatcher's approval for Carrington's idea of pushing for an amendment of SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights. During the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in December 1979, for instance, Carter told her that 'addenda or a further resolution might be possible,' especially since the PLO had been helpful over the issue of American hostages

[70] TNA, FCO93/2061, Tomkys to Moberly, 'Secretary of State's speech at UN general debate: Middle East,' 18 September 1979.
[71] TNA, FCO93/2061, Palliser to the Private Secretary, 'Arab/Israel,' 21 September 1979.

in Iran[72]. He recalled that his administration had already contemplated such a move the previous summer but that he had 'dropped the idea because of Israeli opposition.' In any case, Carter made clear to Thatcher that 'the US government would not oppose a resolution building on 242.' And, he even said that, at this stage, European involvement could be helpful since 'it would not be easy to keep the Camp David process going in an American election year.'[73] Throughout the 1970s, Washington had asked its Atlantic allies to stay out of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. But, faced with Camp David's inability to deal with the Palestinian question, the Carter administration now seemed to be changing its mind, and, after her trip to the US, Thatcher had received confirmation at the highest level.

More than anything, perhaps, it was the belief that, under Carter, the US was genuinely trying to adopt a more amenable stance on the Palestinian question that convinced Thatcher, at such an early stage in her premiership, to go along with her Foreign Secretary on the Middle East. But importantly as well, Carrington gave her repeated assurances that he would not pursue a policy which would be at odds with US diplomacy. One such reassurance, for example, came after Carrington's trip to the Middle East between 9 and 18 January. He had then come back more convinced than ever that British involvement at the UN was necessary, but he still made it clear to the Prime Minister that he only intended for his initiative to 'be put forward when, as seems likely, the Camp David process comes to an end in April/May.'[74] Ultimately, when it came to the transatlantic dimension of a possible British initiative the FCO and Downing street were on the same page.

FROM BRITISH TO EUROPEAN INITIATIVE

Now that the Prime Minister's reticence had been neutralised, the British were getting ready to launch their plan to amend SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian self-determination. Until as late as late January, FCO officials mostly talked of a British initiative, and, at this point, it was not clear the extent to which they actually envisaged an engagement with their Community partners through EPC. In a telegram from 24 January sent to the British Embassy in Rome, for example, Carrington wrote: 'For your own background information only, we are urgently considering whether we should propose a new Security Council resolution which would reaffirm 242 and go on to endorse

[72] For an account of PLO mediation with Teheran on the issue of the American hostages see: Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 378.
[73] TNA, FCO82/991, 'Record of meeting between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States at the White House', 17 December 1979.
[74] TNA, FCO93/2599, 'Carrington's report to the Prime Minister following visit to the Mid-East, 9-18 January 1980'.

the Palestinians' right to self-determination.'[75] It is telling that Carrington explicitly indicated in this message that the information should not be shared with the Italians, who had just assumed the Community's presidency. At the very least, it demonstrates that, initially, it was in a spirit of transatlantic and not European cooperation that they considered launching their diplomatic initiative. However, as it became clear that Washington would oppose any move on SCR 242, the British started to look towards the Community.

During his visit to London on 22 February, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance confirmed the fears already running within the FCO that the Americans were, once again, backing away from an initiative at the UN because of Israeli pressure[76]. A few weeks after his visit, Vance sent a personal message to Carrington asking for support in blocking an Arab move at the UN session on Palestine scheduled to open on 31 March. The problem, as he explained it, was less about the content of the new resolution than about the timing. Carter was now facing a tough re-election campaign and could not be seen to favour the Arabs in any way. Tomkys hence warned that it 'would make it very difficult for us to advance in the near future any resolution,' and FCO officials generally agreed with this assessment[77]. At the end of April, deputy Under-Secretary of State Anthony Parsons, for example, who was closely involved with developments at the UN at the time, made a strong case for abstention in the event of the Arab resolution being put to a vote[78]. And, Nicholas Henderson, the British ambassador in Washington, also argued along the same lines during Carrington's visit to the US on 5-6 May[79]. Clearly, FCO officials were not ready to mount any sort of initiative that might put Britain at odds with US Middle East policy. But, at least since February, they had advertised their intentions to amend SCR 242, and backing down now under US pressure would compromise their European policy, and affect their relationship with the Community. The British, therefore, seemed to have found themselves once again in the difficult position of having to square the circle between their transatlantic and European allegiances. This time, however, the extent of Community interdependence forced Britain to make its retreat cautiously.

In fact, already in early February, the FCO had started planning for contingencies in the likelihood that the Americans had a change of heart regarding their support for the Palestinians at the UN. Tomkys, now an FCO Counsellor, warned that 'we should avoid getting too exposed' and that 'a European umbrella may be needed in due course.'[80] Concerned as they were not to compromise

[75] TNA, FCO93/2579, Tel. n. 51, 'Arab-Israel', 24 January 1980.
[76] TNA, FCO82/1030, 'Community briefing: Visit Secretary of State', 25 February 1980.
[77] TNA, FCO93/2580, Memorandum: Arab-Israel, Tomkys, 28 March 1980.
[78] TNA, FCO93/2581, UKMIS New York to FCO, Tel. n. 672, 28 April.
[79] TNA, FCO93/2581, 'Arab Israel', Walden to Maitland, 7 May 1980.
[80] TNA, FCO93/2579, Memorandum, 'New Security Council resolution', Tomkys, 13 February 1980.

their European strategy, there was a consensus within the FCO that there would be a need for 'a careful preparation and good timing' because 'we should get the worst of both worlds if we launched an initiative and were seen thereafter to withdraw under American pressure.' Tellingly, one of the main concerns was that it would 'reinforce the impression in Europe that we are too ready to follow an American lead'. As soon as early February, therefore, the FCO was already planning 'for a more cautious approach in which we should engage with our European partners.'[81] When Carrington met with François-Poncet on 2-3 February in Paris, for instance, he told his French counterpart that the autonomy talks were 'most unlikely to produce anything attractive to the Palestinians.' He added that, while he 'did not wish to disrupt US efforts,' he believed that Europe had a more active role to play[82]. Interestingly, the British Foreign Secretary was now talking of a European role in the Middle East, even though, at this stage, he remained vague about the form that such a role could take. By the end of February, Carrington informed his EPC partners that the Americans were now 'opposed to action in the Security Council before May,' but said that they were 'not against a European initiative in principle.'[83] From that point on, what had started as a British initiative at the UN, progressively merged with the existing ambition within EPC for some sort of European initiative on the Middle East.

During Carrington's visit to Washington in early May, the Americans told him that they could no longer tolerate any attempt to amend SCR 242 until after the presidential elections, and that they intended to push back the Autonomy talks' deadline. In his meeting with US deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, for instance, Carrington said that 'there was no point in doing something which would court US objection or veto, because the US was essential in this endeavour.'[84] That said, a debate took place between FCO officials regarding the best way to handle Washington's change of heart. Parsons, on the one hand, was firmly against making any move at the UN until the end of the year because he believed that the Americans 'would make Homeric efforts' to stop it[85]. Crosby, on the other hand, argued that '[w]e should not allow ourselves to be put off so easily.' He thought that the 'signals from the Americans are not as discouraging as has been suggested.' Based on his recent contact with the US Embassy in London, he interpreted 'the US signals as a yellow/green light.' Ultimately, though, his underlying concern was that backing away from any initiative altogether would confirm Britain's reputation as the

[81] TNA, FCO93/2579, 'A European Initiative', Tomkys to Moberly, 1 February 1980.
[82] TNA, FCO93/2595, 'Secretary of State's meeting with French Foreign Minister, Paris, 2-3 February 1980'.
[83] TNA, FCO82/1030, 'Community briefing: Visit Secretary of State', 25 February 1980.
[84] TNA, FCO82/1029, 'Record of meeting between the Secretary of State of Foreign and Commonwealth affairs and the US assistant Secretary of State Mr Warren Christopher at the Department of State, 5 May 1980.'
[85] TNA, FCO93/2581, Tel. no. 721, 'European initiative on the Middle East,' 8 May 1980.

American Trojan Horse within the Community. He insisted on the fact that the British intention to amend SCR 242 had been 'well publicized' and 'informally canvassed with a number of governments and in the Nine.' Dropping the idea now, he thought, would lead many to conclude that 'we have bowed to US pressure applied during the Secretary of State's visit to Washington.'[86]

FCO mandarins were thus worried about the consequences that the appearance of withdrawal in the face of US opposition would cause to Britain's standing in the Arab world and within the Community. As Crosby had already pointed out during the summer 1979, renouncing any sort of Middle East initiative would give the French the opportunity to 'exploit even harder than at present their more advanced position in the Arab world.'[87] And now, Parsons was similarly concerned that backing away from an initiative altogether would lead to 'the French assuring the Arabs that [the Europeans] would have gone ahead if it had not been for the pusillanimous British.' In order to avoid this problematic situation, he explained that some sort of British engagement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy remained necessary. He also believed that because of the impossibility of a UN initiative until after the American election there was a pressing need to convince the Arabs 'to hold their fire until the end of the year,' and that in order to do that an alternative initiative was needed. In part, his hope was that by neutralising Arab activism at the UN over the next few months, it would prevent Britain from facing the awkward choice of having to vote on a new UN resolution either with the Americans or with the Europeans. To that end, he suggested the opening of 'a serious dialogue with the Arabs, including the PLO,' and this most likely meant organising a meeting at ministerial level. However, in late 1979, Thatcher had already rejected Carrington's identical proposal. Parsons, therefore, suggested that '[t]hese difficulties could be eased by the Nine acting as a whole, perhaps under the leadership of the presidency.' To achieve this, Parsons advised 'that we must talk frankly and urgently to the French about all this' because 'an European initiative will be impossible' without a strong enough Franco-British leadership[88].

Carrington did just that when he met his German and French counterparts in Bonn on 12 May. He explained that at present it would be complicated to table any resolution at the UN in favour of Palestinian rights, and suggested that the Community could envisaged some sort of consultation with the Arabs instead[89]. A month before the Venice European Council, therefore, the British had fully transitioned from the idea of a British initiative at the UN to the idea of a European initiative

[86] TNA, FCO93/2581, 'Arab-Israel,' Crosby to Moberly, 14 May 1980.
[87] TNA, FCO93/2176, 'Arab-Israel: new security council resolution', Crosby, 23 August 1979.
[88] TNA, FCO93/2581, Tel. no. 721, 'European initiative on the Middle East,' 8 May 1980.
[89] TNA, FCO93/2581, 'Secretary of State's meeting in Bonn with the French and German Foreign Ministers,' Walden13 May 1980.

in the Middle East. This largely explain why the EPC negotiations that led to the Venice Declaration went so smoothly[90].

CONCLUSION

When on 13 June 1980 the European Council gathered in Venice came out in favour of Palestinian self-determination, called for the association of the PLO to the peace process, and announced a European diplomatic initiative, which would start by touring the Middle East to meet with all the parties of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the PLO, it was in many ways a success for the FCO. It associated Britain to a declaration which further advanced its position on the Palestinian question, marked its independence from US foreign policy, and allowed the opening of a dialogue with the PLO at ministerial level, all of this under the cover of the Community. The FCO had thus managed to circumvent Thatcher's objections as well as the many domestic and international obstacles to a similar position being adopted at the national level. As a result, in Venice, Thatcher endorsed a declaration, which not only made a direct reference to the PLO, as she had already agreed to with O'Kennedy's UN speech, but which now called for the association of the Palestinian organisation to the peace process. Clearly, at the time, she would not have accepted any such statement coming from her own government. EPC thus afforded the FCO a greater degree of flexibility in the definition of Britain's Middle East policy, as it resolved the disagreement between Thatcher and Carrington on the treatment of the PLO. Moreover, it helped reconcile the tensions between the genuine British concern with the American mismanagement of the Palestinian question for their interests, and their reticence to oppose US Middle East policy.

Early on in Thatcher's premiership, it was the belief that the Americans would welcome a British involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy that led Britain down the road to the Venice Declaration. Unable to go along with its original plan to amend SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights because of US backpedalling, and reluctant to fully withdraw from any initiative altogether because it would damage its relationship with the Community, Britain became fully committed to the idea of a European initiative. The British endorsement of collective European actions in the Middle East was thus considerably facilitated by the Community dispute on the BBQ. The FCO might have fully agreed with the content of the Venice Declaration, and it might have played a leading role within EPC in the months ahead of the Venice European Council, but this leadership did not only reflect the evolution of the British stance on the Palestinian question. It was also, to

[90] For an account of these negotiations see: Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 448-53.

a significant degree, the result of European interdependence, which constrained both Britain's traditional Atlanticism, and Thatcher's wariness of the PLO. The British, therefore, did not just push for the Venice Declaration because they were convinced that it was the best way to promote peace between Arabs and Israelis and defend their interests in the Middle East. They also got involved to prevent further affirmation of Britain's Atlanticist and obstructionist reputation within the Community, and safeguard the credibility of their new European policy. Ultimately, this chapter reveals that, by the end of the 1970s, the definition of British Middle East policy no longer was simply a national affair. And, as we shall see now, a similar dynamic also characterised French policy making towards the Middle East.

CHAPTER 2

THE FRENCH ROAD TO THE VENICE DECLARATION, JANUARY 1979 – JUNE 1980

THE QUIET '*ATLANTICISATION*' OF FRENCH MIDDLE EAST POLICY

INTRODUCTION

One of the hallmarks of France's international identity is its reputation as the Atlantic rebel. If the election of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in May 1974 marked an improvement in Franco-American relations, the general thrust of the French attitude towards transatlantic relations remained essentially unchanged[1]. As Aurélie Gfeller explains, early on in Giscard's presidency, French officials had come to the realisation that if they wanted to continue their pursuit of a policy of *grandeur* and independence they would have to rely on Europe[2]. As a result, she sees France as having 'passed a first test of European solidarity' during the tumultuous 1973-4 period and argues that it signalled the effective beginning of the Europeanisation of French Middle East policy. According to her, in the aftermath of the October War and the severe transatlantic crisis that ensued, the French finally deemed the emergence of a common Community stance towards the Middle East important enough to start making concessions[3]. If this translated into a greater willingness to compromise on transatlantic relations, at this stage, she still largely regards France's approach to European Political Cooperation (EPC) as a means to oppose the Americans. In her conclusion she presents the Venice Declaration as another step in the Europeanisation of French Middle East policy and again understands this episode essentially as a means to challenge the US stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict[4]. The Gaullist conception of a 'European Europe' as a counterpoint to Washington in world affairs was indeed one of the main drives behind the rise of a European foreign policy[5]. But, as this chapter shows, when it came to the Middle East, by the

[1] Frédéric Bozo, *La Politique Étrangère de la France depuis 1945* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012), 149-53.
[2] Aurélie Élisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 197.
[3] Ibid., 99.
[4] Ibid., 200.
[5] For an overview of the disruptive effect of Gaullism on the Cold War order see: Frédéric Bozo, "France, "Gaullism," and the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

end of the 1970s, France's quest for independence in the region had largely been emptied of its substance even though the French still worked hard to cultivate their Gaullist reputation.

This chapter agrees with Gfeller that with the Venice Declaration, France passed a second test of European solidarity. But, by presenting a detailed analysis of Giscard's Middle East policy from January 1979 to June 1980, it reveals that beyond the contemporary perception, France was actively seeking cooperation with Washington whether at the national or European level. As in the British case, the belief that Carter's approach to the Palestinian question was in fact much closer to the European stance than it appeared played in important part in France's decision to intensify its involvement in the Middle East at the turn of the decade. By that time, the French had accepted that they could only act within the confines of the Atlantic Alliance, and their approach had clearly evolved from frontal opposition to discreet cooperation with Washington. This quiet *Atlanticisation* of French Middle East policy was the outcome of a formative process whereby France progressively came to accept throughout the 1970s that transatlantic and European cooperation were indispensable to regain influence in the region. This approach was not without tensions and ambiguities, but it held remarkably well in the months leading up to the Venice European Council. As this chapter also shows, France's efforts to work towards the definition of a new Community consensus on the Middle East was determined in part by its desire to maintain its leadership on the Palestinian question in Western Europe and reassert its Gaullist identity in the Middle East. Ultimately, the *Atlanticisation* of French Middle East policy constituted an indispensable component that allowed for the emergence of the Franco-British leadership within EPC and made the Venice declaration possible. Here again, the focus is on how the national, European and transatlantic dimensions interacted to set the ground for the Venice Declaration, and leaves the issue of why the Community member states decided to go beyond diplomacy to chapter 4.

GISCARD'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Like his predecessors, Giscard was determined to be at the centre of French foreign policy making, and made his intention abundantly clear at the beginning of his term when he said to a *haut fonctionnaire* of the foreign ministry that '[he was] the real minister of foreign affairs.'[6] During his Presidency, he chose three policy areas on which he would assume control: African affairs, the Middle East, and Franco-German relations. On these matters, he often circumvented traditional administrative channels and relied mostly on his closest circle of advisers. In addition to Giscard's

[6] Quoted in Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts, eds., *La Politique Extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985), 25. ('*Je suis le vrai ministre des Affaires étrangères.*')

special adviser for African affairs, two *hauts fonctionnaires* constituted the core of the *Elysée*'s foreign policy staff: Gabriel Robin, succeeded by Patrick Leclercq in 1979, acted as diplomatic advisers, and Jean-Pierre Dutet, succeeded by Guy de Panafieu in 1978, advised the President on international economic affairs. The *Elysée*'s General Secretary was the main point of contact between the President and his advisers and often played an influential role in the definition of foreign policy. Between 1978 and 1981 it was Jacques Wahl who occupied this most important position. The *Quai d'Orsay* also played a central role by providing the necessary briefing materials, which would then be filtered through the President's advisers. The Foreign Minister often was an integral part of the President's inner foreign policy circle and for that reason the position was often filled by a trusted political ally. For the period under scrutiny here, the Foreign Minister was Jean François-Poncet who had served for nearly two years as the *Elysée*'s General Secretary before being appointed to head the *Quai d'Orsay* in November 1978[7].

Giscard's Middle East policy had two main components: a reinvigorated commercial strategy, and increased support for the Palestinian cause[8]. The newly elected French President adopted a rather aggressive and controversial economic strategy, which relied on two major pillars of France's industry, namely armament and nuclear technology. Giscard lifted the 1967 embargo on arms sales that de Gaulle had imposed on the countries directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Six Day War, and this essentially translated into a significant increase in arms sales to the Arab world. He also embarked on a highly sensitive policy of nuclear technology cooperation for civil purposes, most notably with Iraq. Also emblematic of Giscard's Middle East policy was France's expansion into the Persian Gulf. Virtually absent by the early 1970s, France had significantly increased its diplomatic and economic activities in the region by the end of the decade. Beyond armament and nuclear technology, France also relied on its large construction industry to gain new markets in the Arab world. This commercial expansion was one of the main means implemented to remedy the balance of payment crises that had hit the French economy twice in the aftermath of the 1973 and 1979 oil shocks.

Along with this audacious commercial strategy, Giscard ostentatiously put the defence of the Palestinian cause at the centre of his Middle East policy. In October 1974 – less than 4 months

[7] For an early discussion of Giscard's approach to foreign policy, which emphasises his independence from the administration see Samy Cohen, "La Politique Extérieure de la France de 1974 à 1981: Un Seul Homme? Un Homme Seul?," in *La Politique Extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, ed. Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985).

[8] Irène Errera-Hoechstetter, "La Politique Française au Moyen-Orient," in *La Politique Extèrieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, ed. Samy Cohen and Marie-Claude Smouts (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985); Maurice Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence?: la France Dans le Monde depuis 1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 379-82; Bozo, *La Politique Étrangère de la France depuis 1945*, 156-59.

after his election – Giscard had his Foreign Minister, Jean Sauvagnargues, meet with Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), in Beirut, thus sending a strong signal about the pro-Arab orientation of his Middle East policy. The following year, he went a step further and allowed the opening of a PLO office in Paris. In 1976, France voted in favour of a Security Council resolution at the UN that explicitly mentioned both the Palestinian right to 'self-determination' and a 'state.'[9] And, as we shall see, Giscard's policy culminated when he personally came out in favour of Palestinian self-determination during his well-publicised trip to the Gulf states and Jordan in March 1980.

A DISCREET FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION IN LEBANON

In 1979, the French were also exploring the possibility of launching a diplomatic initiative of their own officially to promote peace in the Middle East. Convinced that Camp David was doomed to fail because it did not include proper representation for the Palestinians, they, like the British, sought to remedy what they considered to be a deeply flawed American approach to Arab-Israeli peace. Instead of concentrating their efforts at the United Nations (UN), however, they focused directly on the PLO, and more specifically on the situation in Lebanon. Since 1975, Lebanon had been in the midst of a civil war, which was in large part the direct result of the vast number of Palestinian refugees that had entered the country after their expulsion from Jordan in 1970[10]. As a result, virtually the whole of South Lebanon had fallen under the control of PLO guerrillas, essentially turning the Lebanese-Israeli border into the hotspot of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Following the so-called Coastal Road massacre of 1978, where Palestinian fighters entered Israel, hijacked two buses, and killed 37 civilians, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin ordered the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to enter South Lebanon for a punitive expedition against the PLO. While a ceasefire was eventually negotiated, and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created to enforce it, tensions only continued to rise, eventually culminating in a full blown Israeli invasion in 1982[11]. It is in that particular context that France sought to intervene in Middle Eastern diplomacy.

[9] Vaïsse, *La Puissance Ou L'influence?: la France Dans le Monde depuis 1958*, 381-82.
[10] For an account of the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war see: Fawwaz Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 156-83.
[11] For an account of the establishment of UNIFIL and its role thereafter see: Karim Makdisi, "Reconsidering the Struggle over Unifil in Southern Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (2014): 24-41.

To help manage the rising tensions in Lebanon, the French sought to exploit their relatively good relationship with the PLO. The idea was that in exchange for a significant reduction of military operations from South Lebanon against Israel, Paris would increase its political support for the Palestinian organisation. At this juncture, many French diplomats operating in the Middle East and within the *direction d'Afrique du Nord et Levant* (*ANL*) at the *Quai d'Orsay* generally believed that they were in an advantageous position to launch such an initiative. In recent years, France had again managed to increase its popularity in the Arab world by being the only member state of the European Community (EC) to overtly criticise the Camp David Accords for its treatment of the Palestinian question, or lack thereof. Since then, Arafat had shown ever greater interest in deepening the PLO's relationship with France, which he saw as the key to bringing the rest of the Community closer to the Palestinian side. At first, he started putting out discreet feelers. In late 1978, for instance, only a few weeks after the signing of the Camp David accords, he inquired through the French embassy in Syria if Giscard would be open to receiving an official message from him. A confidential telegram sent to the *Quai d'Orsay*, written on the Ambassador's letterhead, argued in favour of satisfying Arafat's demand. According to this communication, at the time, France had 'a golden opportunity' to play an influential role in the search for Middle East peace because of its distinctive position towards Camp David and its keen understanding of the Lebanese quagmire. The French diplomat further argued that since the signing of the Camp David Accords, the Arabs were looking for increased European support, and that 'today, Europe, for the Arabs, is France first.' Hence, in conclusion, he urged that this advantageous situation be 'exploited without delay.'[12]

France, however, needed to tread carefully. At the time, Camp David was the only viable initiative that could potentially open a path towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Moreover, Washington's central role in what was already hailed by contemporaries as a resounding historical success had considerably strengthened its geopolitical dominance over the region. Under such conditions, France could not afford to appear to be actively working against its Atlantic ally. This was especially so since in the aftermath of this apparent diplomatic breakthrough, Carter could credibly claim that he would genuinely turn his attention to the Palestinian question after the successful conclusion of Camp David's first phase, namely the signing of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. For the time being, France had little other choice but to stay on the sidelines. At least until

[12] *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangère*, Paris (hereafter MAE), 375QO/113, L'Ambassadeur to Servant, Damas, 15 November 1978. (All translations in this chapter are done by the author: '*une situation en or*'; '*l'Europe, pour les Arabes, c'est aujourd'hui la France d'abord*'; '*d'exploiter sans tarder*').

it had become clear that the American-led peace process was ill-equipped to deal with the Palestinian question, France could not do much more than to voice its doubts and actually hope that Carter would manage to pull it off. For that reason, at first, France stalled any rapprochement with the PLO and left Arafat's demand unanswered.

Enthusiasm about Camp David's potential reached its height with the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in March 1979. Concerned that further progress might eventually sideline the PLO from the peace process for good, Arafat embarked on a diplomatic offensive that targeted both Western Europe and the US. In June, for instance, Arafat had a well-publicised meeting in Vienna with Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky and the then President of the Socialist International (SI) Willy Brandt[13]. And, in September, he travelled to Madrid to meet with the Spanish Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez[14]. These official visits were an important step in the PLO's quest for Western recognition, and were perceived at the time as clear diplomatic victories for Arafat. These meetings were largely the result of the widespread belief in Western Europe that no solution to the Middle East conflict could be found without the PLO. In addition, now that peace between Egypt and Israel had been signed, the Palestinian question was at the centre of the peace process and there was a broad consensus among European leaders that on this issue the Camp David framework was inadequate.

It is in that particular context that France seriously started to consider making a strong gesture of support towards the Palestinians. On his side, Arafat, intending to capitalise on the current momentum after his streak of diplomatic victories over the summer, decided to increase the pressure on France, and this time, what he sought was an official meeting with the President. To do so, he used the recent invitation formulated by Georges Marchais' Communist party for a visit to the French capital in order to prompt a reaction from Giscard's government, which had been ignoring his appeal for a rapprochement in recent months. To this end, he had as many intermediaries as possible inquire with French officials how he should react to Marchais' request. In early September, for instance, King Hussein of Jordan himself assumed the role of messenger during his meeting with Giscard, and passed on Arafat's desire to be received in Paris 'but by other people, and in other conditions.'[15]

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[13] For an interesting account of the SI's role in garnering support for the PLO in Western Europe in the 1970s see: Oliver Rathkolb, "The Fact-Finding Missions of the Socialist International in the Middle East, 1974-1976: Political Networking in Europe's Policy Towards the Middle East in the 1970s," in *Détente in Cold War Europe: Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, ed. Elena Calandri et al. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

[14] *The Washington Post*, 'Arafat to visit Spain, aiding bid for recognition,' Tom Burns, 13 September 1979.

[15] MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L., Note, confidentiel, 'Arafat en France?', Paris, 13 septembre 1979. ('*mais par d'autres personnes et dans d'autres conditions*').

Faced with the multiplication of such queries, which were now taking place at the highest level, the *ANL* produced a confidential assessments of the pros and cons of such a visit. What this note revealed was that, contrary to what some of their critics were saying at the time, the French were not complaisant towards the PLO. They were well aware of all the implications that increasing their political support for Arafat would have, and they only envisaged making this gesture if it could lead to significant progress towards peace. As listed in this note, they were concerned, first, about the reaction of French public opinion; second, about Israeli discontent; third, about Arafat's ability to unite the PLO behind his moderate line; and fourth, about compromising Camp David. These matched almost word for word the British concerns about launching their own initiative to complement Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian rights, although, admittedly, a meeting between Giscard and Arafat would be much more disruptive than what the FCO envisaged at the time[16].

As for the reasons in favour of an official visit by Arafat, they were the direct result of the PLO's diplomatic offensive. In that respect, the *ANL*'s confidential assessment mentioned first Arafat's sincere attempt to bring his organisation to commit to a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Second, the note referred to his apparent ability in recent months to assert his moderate line more forcefully, citing the PLO's more amenable attitude towards Israel at the UN for instance. Third, it listed the changing US attitude towards the Palestinian organisation. The *ANL* argued that 'Washington seemed convinced since June that there is something serious in the PLO's "moderation".' At this stage, the *Quai d'Orsay* believed that Carter was trying to circumvent Kissinger's pledge to Israel that the US would not negotiate with the PLO. Finally, the assessment concluded that 'in any case, and this needs to be fully taken into account, the PLO has gained its place in the concertation on the Middle East.'[17]

By September, it appeared that the French were still being cautious about how to bring Franco-Palestinian relations forward. What was evident, however, was that a gesture towards the PLO was in order. The main reason that tilted the balance in Arafat's favour was the firm belief that 'Camp David had no chance of success without taking into account the realities. And, whether we want it or not, the PLO is one of the most important realities of the Middle East situation.'[18] That being said, there were other important realities, most notably Carter's ability to engage with the PLO. At this stage, while the French were still unsure about US intentions, they were nonetheless hopeful.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. (*'Washington parait convaincu depuis juin qu'il y quelque chose de sérieux dans la "moderation" de l'O.L.P.'*; *'De toute façon, et ceci doit être pris en pleine consideration, l'O.L.P. a conquis sa place dans les conciliabules sur le Proche-Orient'*)

[18] *Ibid.* (*'le processus de Camp David ou tout autre n'a guère de chance de réussir sans une prise en compte des réalités. Or, qu'on le veuille ou non, l'O.L.P. es tune des réalités les plus importantes du problème du Moyen-Orient'*)

Their embassy in Washington, for instance, was reporting that high ranking officials within the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department believed that it was 'indispensable to talk behind the scenes with the PLO.'[19] But, for now, the French strategy consisted in putting the ball in Arafat's court. If he wanted an official invitation to France, he would have to make a gesture commensurate with the political gain he would derive from a meeting with Giscard. At this point, though, there was no mention of what the French would consider worthy of such a meeting, but it would have to be something they could sell to the Americans. At this stage, the exact nature of a French diplomatic initiative in the Middle East remained to be defined[20].

In the autumn, the PLO decided to increase the pressure on France through the press. On 29 September, *Le Monde* reported that the Palestinian press agency had recently published a statement apparently confirming that Arafat had accepted Marchais' invitation to come to Paris, and that a date would soon be set. Simultaneously, PLO officials continued to bombard French diplomats with requests for a rapprochement. Under pressure and with no clear political guidance on the course to follow, the *ANL* sent a note to the Foreign Minister and the *Elysée*'s General Secretary on 28 September asking how to handle the situation[21]. In the meantime, Louis Delamare, the French ambassador in Beirut, brought to the *Quai d'Orsay*'s attention the publication in the Lebanese press of an article entitled 'Half-heartedness and tension between France and the PLO.' He reported that the PLO spokesperson in Lebanon, Mahmoud Labadi, had denied that this came from Palestinian sources, and that the article did not reflect his organisation's point of view. However, Labadi also confirmed that Arafat had accepted, 'the principle,' Marchais' invitation, but insisted that no date had been set and that being received by the Communists would be unsatisfactory for both France and the PLO[22].

THE ROBIN MISSION

In early October, therefore, France finally defined its response to the PLO's diplomatic offensive. Following the *ANL*'s request for guidance, Wahl chaired two meetings at the *Elysée* during which the course of French Middle East policy was set for the next few months. It was then decided to send the *Quai d'Orsay*'s political director, Gabriel Robin, to Beirut to meet with Arafat. The object

[19] MAE, 91QO/974, From Pierre Boyer to Paris, 'Objet: Proche-orient – entretien avec M. Sterner,' Washington, 10 septembre 1979. ('*mais il était aussi indispensable de parler "dans les coulisses" avec l'OLP*')
[20] MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L., Note, confidentiel, 'Arafat en France?', Paris, 13 septembre 1979.
[21] MAE, 375QO/113, N°170/A.N.L., Note pour le ministre (sous couvert du Secrétaire général), Paris, 28 septembre 1979.
[22] MAE, 375QO/113, from Delamare to the Foreign Minister, 'a/s – Relations entre la France et l'OLP,' Beyrouth, 5 octobre 1979. ('*Tiédeur et tension entre la France et l'OLP*'; '*le principe*')

of this visit was to ascertain under which conditions the Palestinian leader could be received in Paris. As French diplomats believed that under the current circumstances it was not possible for the PLO to take a step towards Israel's recognition, they decided that the *quid pro quo* for his visit would be about the situation in Lebanon. In that respect, finding out exactly what sort of commitment Arafat could make on this issue was Robin's mission. The general idea designed to extract concessions from the PLO was to present the further development of Franco-Palestinian relations as a first step towards the improvement of EC-PLO relations, and the main message that Robin would carry to Arafat was that he 'had to help Europe help the PLO.'[23] At the time, French diplomats were convinced that the Palestinians believed France to be the key to a Community-wide recognition of the PLO. French ambassador to the UN Jacques Leprette, for example, reported that, seen from New York, Palestinian representatives considered the French attitude to be setting 'the example to which, sooner or later, its European partners referred to.'[24]

Unfortunately, no records of Robin's meeting with Arafat, or any of his reports on his trip to Lebanon were accessible in the archives. It was, nonetheless, possible to find some traces that reveal the objectives and outcomes of his mission. The political director was in Beirut between 19 and 23 October. First, he met with Arafat on the 20th, and then with Lebanese president Elias Sarkis on the 22nd[25]. Upon Robin's return, the *Centre d'analyse et de prévision* (*CAP*) at the French foreign ministry circulated a paper, which identified the demands that Arafat would need to meet in exchange for a meeting with Giscard. There is no need here to go into the details and technicalities of what the PLO commitment would look like. Suffice it to say that, at this stage, the French appeared hopeful about obtaining at least two of their main demands, namely the suspension of PLO raids from South Lebanon and cooperation with UNIFIL. But, the main uncertainty remained the Palestinian leader's ability to impose his decision on dissident groups within his organisation. On that issue, it seems that Robin did not return from Beirut with increased confidence[26].

The *CAP*'s six-page analysis also offered a revealing snapshot of France's conception of its role in the Middle East at the time. Importantly, it shows that the Robin mission was anything but a fool's errand solely designed to release the public pressure that the PLO had been putting on France

[23] MAE, 375QO/113, 'Note operationnelle (Arafat), conclusions de deux reunions tenues par le secrétaire général,' Direction d'Afrique du Nord et Levant, Paris, 8 octobre 1979. ('*aider l'Europe à aider l'OLP*')
[24] MAE, 375QO/113, Tel. N° 2576, From Leprette to Paris, 'A/S. : Visite de M. Arafat à Paris,' New York, 9 novembre 1979. ('*un exemple auquel se réfère, tôt ou tard, ses partenaires européens*')
[25] *Le Monde*, 'Une visite de M. Arafat à Paris serait liée à la stabilisation au sud du pays,' 24 octobre 1979.
[26] MAE, 375QO/113, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, Note, 'A/S. Visite à Paris de M. Arafat: vers un nouveau pas en direction des palestiniens,' Paris, 24 octobre 1979.

over the past few months. Giscard's government was, in fact, serious about sending an official invitation to Arafat. That being said, as François-Poncet had told the foreign press on 12 October, it 'would really make sense only if it was not simply formal and if it allowed to turn a corner in terms of making political progress towards peace'[27]. As the *CAP*'s assessment now put it, 'Paris cannot simply be a step among others between Vienna, Madrid, Ankara, and tomorrow Lisbon, London followed by Washington.'[28] Evidently, the French strongly believed that they had a special role to play in this affair, not only one that was distinct from the other Europeans, but from the Americans as well.

By the late 1970s, France had lost its illusion that, backed by its EC partners, it could take the lead in the search for Middle East peace by offering an alternative to the US approach. That being said, the French still believed that their role was 'irreplaceable' as the *ANL* put it in one of its memoranda, before arguing that '[f]or the PLO, Washington is not a substitute of Paris, the Palestinians knowing very well that between Israel and themselves the American administration does not have a choice.'[29] As a another note further explains '[i]f for Yasser Arafat, the road to Washington went through Paris, it is above all because France can give a recognition and a guarantee of a nature that would reinforce his hand in the negotiations to come.'[30] In some respect, therefore, the French believed that they could be to the PLO what the Americans were to Israel in the search for Middle East peace. At the same time, they also understood that Arafat's ultimate objective was to enter in an official dialogue with Washington, and that it was towards that goal that they could be influential.

At the time, the French might still have had an overinflated perception of their potential role, but if it was the case it was in large part because of what the Arabs, and the Palestinians in particular, were telling them. At the time, Leprette, for instance, was reporting from New York, that PLO representatives saw Arafat's visit to Paris as a crucial step towards American recognition, and were placing a lot of hope in a Giscard-Arafat meeting[31]. In a similar vein, the *ANL* was convinced that

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[27] MAE, 375QO/113, Note, Secret, 'A.S. Entretien avec le chef de l'OLP,' Direction d'Afrique du Nord et Levant, Paris, 18 octobre 1979. ('*n'aurait vraiment son sens que si elle n'est pas simplement formelle et si elle permet de franchir un progrès politique dans le sens de la paix*')

[28] MAE, 375QO/113, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, Note, 'A/S. Visite à Paris de M. Arafat: vers un nouveau pas en direction des palestiniens,' Paris, 24 octobre 1979. ('*Paris ne peut simplement être une étape parmi d'autres entre Vienne, Madrid, Ankara, et demain Lisbonne, Londres puis Washington*')

[29] MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L., Note, confidentiel, 'Arafat en France?', Paris, 13 septembre 1979. ('*irremplaçable*'; '*Pour l'O.L.P., Washington n'est pas un substitute de Paris, les Palestiniens sachant très bien qu'entre Israël et eux-même l'administration n'a pas le choix*')

[30] MAE, 375QO/113, Note, Secret, 'A.S. Entretien avec le chef de l'OLP,' Direction d'Afrique du Nord et Levant, Paris, 18 octobre 1979. ('*Si pour Yasser Arafat, le chemin de Washington passe par Paris, c'est avant tout parce que la France peut lui donner une reconnaissance et une caution de nature à renforcer sa main dans les négociations à venir*')

[31] MAE, 375QO/113, Tel. N° 2576, From Leprette to Paris, 'A/S. : Visite de M. Arafat à Paris,' New York, 9 novembre 1979.

'for Mr. Arafat, Franco-Palestinian relations – an obvious proof of non-alignment – deserved, in a new conjuncture, to receive a new impulsion and that he expected a lot from it.'[32] Hence, the French genuinely considered themselves to be the Palestinians' most important Western asset in their quest to have their voice taken into account in the Middle East peace process, and to some extent, there was some truth to that.

The Robin mission was a good illustration of the French approach to transatlantic relations over the Middle East at the time. During the summer, Paris and Washington were keeping in close touch over the situation in Lebanon. One briefing for François-Poncet's visit to Washington in June, for example, outlined the complementary role to US policy that the French sought to play in the Middle East. Simply put, they would calm down Arab ardours and try to bring them to a more conciliatory stance, while the US would do the same with the Israelis. They recognised that only the Americans had Israel's ear, and the geopolitical means to enforce any negotiated settlement. The briefing, therefore, concluded that if, eventually, it was 'possible to undertake a diplomatic initiative towards Lebanon, we will have to confer with the United States whose support will be necessary with regards to Israel.' Therefore, despite appearances, Paris was seeking close cooperation with Washington. Crucially, if the French could envisage such collaboration, however, it was essentially because they believed that the US objectives were 'sensibly the same' as their own[33].

France's belief that it was in a unique position to drive Western efforts for peace in Lebanon was considerably strengthened when it became clear that Washington did not want to take the lead in this affair. In early October, assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Harold Saunders explained to a French diplomat that on Lebanon the Americans sought to lead from behind and to rely on the international community to de-escalate tensions. In particular, he insisted that French support would prove essential in this matter[34]. As it appeared that the Americans did not believe that they could handle the situation by themselves, the already strong belief at the *Quai d'Orsay* that France had a clear window of opportunity to make a comeback in Middle Eastern diplomacy increased.

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[32] MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L., Note, confidentiel, 'Arafat en France?', Paris, 13 septembre 1979. ('*pour M. Arafat, les relations franco-palestiniennes – prevue évidente de non-alignement – méritent, dans une conjoncture nouvelle, de recevoir une nouvelle impulsion et que l'on attendrait beaucoup*')

[33] MAE, 91QO/894, Visite du ministre à Washington (3-5 juin 1979), Dossier opérationnel, Proche-Orient, Liban, 'Situation.' ('*possible d'entreprendre une action diplomatique en faveur du Liban, nous devrons nous concerter avec les États-Unis dont l'appui nous sera nécessaire au regard d'Israël*')

[34] MAE, 91QO/974, From Laboulaye to Paris, 'A/S. – Entretien avec M. Saunders – Liban,' Washington, 11 octobre 1979.

At the time, French diplomats certainly believed that the Americans needed their help. When, by mid-October, it appeared that the cease-fire in South Lebanon was only holding by a thread, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance finally decided to send seasoned diplomat Philip Habib to the Middle East. However, as the *CAP* remarked, at the moment, the PLO had 'no reason to give the impression to participate too closely in diplomatic concertation of American origins,' and this constituted the main motivation behind the French government's decision to send its own emissary to Lebanon[35].

As it happened, the French and the Americans launched their respective missions at around the same time, with Robin beating Habib to Beirut by only a few days. Based on the archival evidence accessible at the moment, there is nothing to suggest that these two missions had been coordinated in any way. If anything, because of the extent of American unpopularity in the Arab world, Paris actively sought to keep its distance from the Habib mission. It was noteworthy, however, that Habib was also making a point to tell his Arab hosts that there was no connection between French and American activities over Lebanon. For example, during his meeting with Kaddour, Rouillon insisted that Robin's mission was 'strictly independent' from Habib's, even though the US diplomat, who was due to visit Paris on his way back to Washington, would 'naturally' exchange views on this topic with the French government. Interestingly, Kaddour reported in return, that Habib, who had recently met with Syrian Foreign Minister Abdel Khalim Khaddam, had, of his own accord, said the exact same thing while insisting that, at the moment, there was no US peace plan for Lebanon[36].

Beyond the rhetoric, there were nonetheless clear signs of cooperation between Paris and Washington. The insistence on both sides that they were not coordinating their respective efforts, as well as the US repeated assurances that it was not planning any diplomatic initiative certainly coincided with the paradoxical imperatives for a successful French involvement. One of the *Quai d'Orsay*'s main concerns in defining its response to the PLO's diplomatic offensive was not to give Arafat 'the impression that French policy towards Lebanon and the Middle East conflict remains more or less linked to that of the United States.'[37] That being said, the French were well aware that any initiative on their part would also necessitate close cooperation with the Americans. In order

[35] MAE, 375QO/113, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, Note, 'A/S. Visite à Paris de M. Arafat: vers un nouveau pas en direction des palestiniens,' Paris, 24 octobre 1979. ('*pas de raison de donner l'impression de participer de trop près à une concertation diplomatique d'origine américaine*')
[36] MAE, 375QO/111, From Rouillon to Paris, 'A/S. – Mission de M. Robin à Beyrouth,' Damas, 29 octobre 1979. ('*tout à fait indépendante*'; '*naturellement*')
[37] MAE, 375QO/113, Note, Secret, 'A.S. Entretien avec le chef de l'OLP,' Paris, 18 octobre 1979. ('*l'impression que la politique française vis-à-vis du Liban comme du conflit du Proche-Orient reste plus ou moins liée à celle des États-Unis*')

to succeed, therefore, Paris had to give signs of independence from US policy to the Arabs while simultaneously cooperating with its Atlantic ally.

The summary of Habib's meeting with Robin in Paris on 31 October confirms the extensive nature of Franco-American consultation over Lebanon. Robin shared his insights on the PLO's position, while Habib conveyed the latest evolution in Israeli thinking. In addition, the American diplomat reiterated to his interlocutor that his government would prefer 'to stay a bit in the background while waiting to see what others could do.'[38] Also, this meeting clearly illustrated the extent to which, at the time, the French gave priority to transatlantic relations over EPC cooperation on the Middle East. During their talk, Robin laid out the entire French strategy for Lebanon. He even explained that his government was making preparation to receive Arafat in Paris, and reassured Habib that this visit would be framed in the context of events in Lebanon, with the PLO leader expected to make certain commitments to appease the situation. But, he also admitted that, according to some modalities still to be defined, Arafat would also be allowed to make a general statement on the Palestinian question. Interestingly, not only did Habib not protest, but he actually praised the French for their efforts. That his remit was limited to Lebanon probably explains his positive reaction, since in that context the French initiative would indeed prove helpful. But, in terms of the Camp David peace process, the Americans were likely not to be as pleased. In conclusion, Robin said that no one else but the concerned parties had been told about this initiative, and asked Habib to keep the secret[39]. This meeting and the nature of the discussion reveal that, at the turn of the decade, there was an emerging pattern of Franco-American cooperation over Lebanon, which seemed to be establishing an informal transatlantic division of labour.

THE FAILURE OF FRANCE'S INITIATIVE

If the Robin Mission did not close the door on a French involvement, it revealed that it would be trickier than originally thought. Both Robin and Habib had come back from Beirut with the impression that Sarkis and his government were determined to work towards the consolidation of the cease-fire in the South, but within the framework of the next Arab summit first, which was due to take place in Tunis on 20-22 November. For his part, Robin had also noted that Sarkis remained suspicious of the PLO's true motives, but he still appeared hopeful that Arab pressures

[38] MAE, 375QO/111, Secret, Note, N°197/A.N.L., 'A/S. : Entretien du directeur politique avec M. Philip Habib,' Jacques Lecompt, Paris, 1 novembre 1979. ('*rester un peu en arrière en attendant de voir ce que les autres pouvaient faire*')
[39] Ibid.

in Tunis could help contain the president's reservation[40]. However, after meeting with Lebanese Foreign Minister Fouad Boutros on 29 October, Delamare reported that the prospect of progress at the upcoming Arab summit had diminished since Robin's visit. Their mistrust of the PLO had apparently grown so severe that the Foreign Minister informed the French ambassador that at present neither the president nor he could accept to come to Paris to bear witness to PLO commitments which they believed Arafat could not enforce. The Lebanese authorities were also seemingly concerned that by accepting to participate in a French initiative, they would be blamed by their Arab counterparts for the Tunis summit's likely failure. Ultimately, though the Lebanese were not rejecting the French plan altogether, but were instead insisting that the timing was not right. Boutros concluded by saying that after the Arab summit, his government would be in a better position to go along with an Arafat-Giscard meeting, since it would then be able to shield itself from Arab criticisms by pointing to the failure of the Tunis summit. However, this prospect would still be predicated on France's ability to extract 'tangible even if limited' concessions from the PLO[41].

Ultimately, there was one principal obstacle to a French initiative, or any other for that matter, and it came from the Lebanese themselves. As Rouillon reported, the General Secretary of the Arab League, Chedli Klibi, was complaining at the time that the positions of President Sarkis, Prime Minister Selim Hoss, Foreign Minister Boutros, and the commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Victor Khoury were all different. Since the top civil and military leaders were utterly divided, the Lebanese government was in no position to negotiate. As Rouillon put it, 'it was first Lebanon's policy which was to blame, and only subsidiarily, although being in fact crucially important, Palestinian policy.'[42] As he had already done in 1978, Arafat could give assurances that he would cooperate with UNIFIL and stop the fedayeen's attacks against Israel, at least for a while[43]. However, what he could not do was to accept the Lebanese government's demand for the re-establishment of its military authority in the entire South. Arafat did not intend to violate the country's sovereignty indefinitely. But, because the political consensus over the question of Palestinian refugees in the country was too unstable, he could not put his fate in the LAF's hands. Complicating the situation further was, of course, the fact that Israel was actively working towards

[40] MAE, 375QO/111, Secret, Note, N°197/A.N.L., 'A/S. : Entretien du directeur politique avec M. Philip Habib,' Jacques Lecompt, Paris, 1 novembre 1979.
[41] MAE, 375QO/111, Tel. N°2636/41, 'A/S : Entretien franco-libanais,' Delamare, Beyrouth, 29 octobre 1979. ('*tangibles même limitées*').
[42] MAE, 375QO/111, Tel. N°1837/1831, 'A/S. – Entretien avec M. Abou Mayzar: Sud-Liban,' Rouillon, Damas, 30 octobre 1979. ('*c'était d'abord la politique du Liban qui était en cause et accessoirement seulement, bien qu'elle fut en fait d'une importance crucial, la politique palestinienne*')
[43] Makdisi, "Reconsidering the Struggle over Unifil in Southern Lebanon."

the PLO's destruction, and had found a precious ally in Major Saad Hadad, who had defected from the LAF in 1975 to create the Free Lebanon Army (FLA). After the 1978 invasion, Hadad had assumed control of the area along the Israeli border to act as a buffer against the Palestinians[44].

The French abandoned their plan for an Arafat-Giscard meeting on 9 November. In his explanation, Robin pointed the finger squarely at the Lebanese authorities for their inability to take a clear stance, most particularly on the issue of the LAF's deployment in the South. By contrast, he appeared to understand Arafat's predicament. He gave him credit for trying to facilitate an arrangement, and deplored the fact that he was ultimately 'powerless.' Robin then concluded that there was 'no need to pursue our efforts, and to follow up' on his mission[45]. Interestingly, before shelving its initiative, the *Quai d'Orsay* did not even wait to see if after the Tunis summit the Lebanese government would look more favourably upon it. One likely explanation was that, from that point on, the French could not justify making such a move anymore, neither to their public opinion nor to the Americans. At the time, there were two options that could convince Giscard to take such a political risk. The first one was that Arafat be willing to take a step towards Israel's recognition, but that had been ruled out from the beginning. The second one was the consolidation of the cease-fire in South Lebanon, but the Robin mission concluded that this was not possible either.

In addition, creating a rift with Israel had always been one of the *Quai d'Orsay*'s main concerns, and by November it seemed that Begin was willing to react vigorously to the possibility of a visit by the PLO leader. On 5 November, for instance, the Israeli ambassador, Meir Rosenne, said on French television that welcoming Arafat to Paris 'would be for us as if one would receive Hitler in France today.'[46] This comment sparked outrage in the government's ranks, and Wahl summoned Rosenne to the *Elysée* to issue him with a stern warning. Marc Bonnefous, the French ambassador to Israel, was also asked to pass on an official communiqué that qualified Rosenne's statement as 'indecent' and expressed 'the firm hope that such excess of language would not occur again.'[47] But, as Bonnefous reported, the Israeli authorities stood firmly by Rosenne's words. The French ambassador also warned that 'we will be faced with an offensive where nothing will be spared in

[44] Ibid.
[45] MAE, 375QO/111, Tel. N°769, 'Objet: Suite de la mission de M. Robin,' Robin, Paris, 9 novembre 1979. ('*impuissante*'; '*il n'y a plus lieu de poursuivre nos efforts, et de donner une suite*').
[46] MAE, 375QO/113, Note N°1593, Pour le cabinet du ministre (à l'attention de M. Viot), 'a/s. Déclaration de l'ambassadeur d'Israel,' Paris, 7 novembre 1979. ('*serait pour nous comme si on accueillait en France Hitler aujourd'hui*').
[47] MAE, 375QO/113, Tel. N°327/28, 'Objet: Déclaration de l'ambassadeur Rosenne,' Lecompt, Paris, 13 novembre 1979. ('*idécent*'; '*le ferme espoir qu'un tel excés de langage ne se reproduira pas*').

order to prevent Arafat's visit to Paris' since the Israelis would consider it to be 'a large-scale diplomatic success for the PLO.'[48]

Throughout November, the row over a possible invitation of the PLO leader continued and it appeared that Begin was prepared to use French public opinion against its government. On 26 November, for example, three pro-Israel organisations – *le Renouveau Juif*, *la Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme*, and *l'Alliance France-Israel* – arranged a meeting in Paris where 5,000 people gathered against Arafat's visit to the French capital and for peace in the Middle East. Various personalities from the Socialist Party or Holocaust survivor associations, amongst others, spoke vehemently against the PLO and its leaders, who were described as terrorists. And, the meeting ended on the promise that if needs be there would be other and bigger protests of the sort[49]. While these organisation's influence could not be compared to that of the American Israel lobby, it was still a source of concern for the French government. At the time, there were very few international issues that had the potential to mobilise domestic and international public opinion in this way, and in Western Europe public sentiment was clearly having an increasing impact on foreign policy making towards the Middle East.

While these pressure did not force the government's hand on the issue, it still put French officials in a delicate position. In response to a journalist's question on 8 November, for instance, François-Poncet clearly kicked the can down the road. He simply referred to his previous statement on 12 October in front of the foreign press and added that 'the question remained thus open,' and that in any case 'the dialogue [with the PLO] would naturally continue, as was in fact the case in most other European countries.'[50] The next day, in his answer to an MP's written question, he gave the same answer, although now he was being a bit more explicit and said that the government 'had no such project at the moment.'[51] Clearly, the Foreign Minister was embarrassed by the issue.

Ultimately, in this difficult balancing act between the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Americans, and the vicissitude of its public opinion, the French government still gave priority to its relationship with the PLO. By the late 1970s, the Palestinian question had become one of, if not the main, pillar of France's international identity, and officials at the *Quai d'Orsay* were getting concerned

[48] MAE, 375QO/113, Tel. N°787/796, 'Objet: Démarche auprès du ministre des affaires étrangères,' Bonnefous, Tel-Aviv, 15 novembre 1979. ('*Nous allons affronter une offensive ou rien ne nous sera épargné pour éviter la venue à Paris de M. Arafat*').
[49] MAE, 375QO/113, 'Mémoire sur une reunion sur un sujet d'actualité,' M. Kholty.
[50] MAE, 375QO/113, 'Questionnaire de la "Dépêche du Midi," Moyen-Orient, Question n°7,' Lecompt, Paris, 8 novembre 1979. ('*la question reste donc ouverte*'; '*ce dialogue sera naturellement maintenu, comme il l'est d'ailleurs par la plupart des pays européens*').
[51] MAE, 375QO/113, 'Question écrite n°22.157 posée le 9 novembre 79, par M. Krieg, Député.' ('*qu'il n'existait pas actuellement de projet à cet égard*').

that it was starting to erode. In early October, for example, the PLO office in Paris had conveyed Arafat's frustration with French policy to the *ANL*. Apparently, the Palestinian leader had recently asked: 'Can France take an initiative without a green light from the Americans?'[52] This was also what PLO representatives at the UN were passing on to the French ambassador. As Leprette reported, after his meeting with Sauvagnargues in 1974, Arafat had developed great hopes about the future of the PLO's relationship with France. But, these were beginning to wane fast since not much had happened since then. Arafat was starting to wonder if it had either been a publicity stunt for the French at a time where they needed Arab good graces, or that Paris was now bowing to American pressure[53].

As Leprette indicated, at present, France had a good opportunity to prove Arafat wrong. He explained that the Palestinians understood that in the pursuit of their larger objective, namely to enter in an official dialogue with the US in order to get a seat at the negotiation table, they would not be able to achieve much progress over the next two years because of the upcoming American and Israeli elections. In these circumstances, what the PLO expected from France was to help them 'play for time' and keep their 'momentum' going until the Americans were back in business[54]. Not only would this help preserve France's precious relationship with the PLO, but it would also help make progress towards a resolution of the Palestinian question, which the French believed was the only way towards peace in the Middle East, and hence towards the protection of their considerable interests in the region.

One other major reason that tilted the balance in Arafat's favour, was that the French had become worried that in terms of the Palestinian question they were losing their edge in Western Europe. In its long assessment on the Giscard-Arafat meeting's feasibility, the *CAP* acknowledged that France stood to gain politically from this visit. As it put it, '[w]e should not pretend that the advantages gained at the beginning of the 1970s from our spearheading position on the question of the Middle East conflict are not somewhat weakened today. Others have caught up with us, and we appear not to have made new substantial progress.' Interestingly, in recent months the pressure had come first from outside of the Community. The French interpreted Arafat's visit to Vienna as an event that went beyond the borders of Austria. They saw it as a rapprochement with the whole of 'European social democracy, which was traditionally close to Israel, and also as a step of the Germanic world towards the PLO' since 'M. Schmidt had expressly authorised M. Brandt's

[52] MAE, 375QO/113, Note, Secret, 'A.S. Entretien avec le chef de l'OLP,' Direction d'Afrique du Nord et Levant, Paris, 18 octobre 1979. ('*La France peut-elle prendre une initiative sans le feu vert des américains?*').
[53] MAE, 375QO/113, Tel. N°2576, From Leprette to Paris, 'A/S. : Visite de M. Arafat à Paris,' New York, 9 novembre 1979.
[54] Ibid. ('*pour gagner du temps et maintenir l'élan*').

presence at M. Kreisky's side.' As for the Spanish government's commitment not to recognise Israel during Arafat's visit to Madrid, they believed that it showed that Spain was now willing 'to play the PLO's card to the exclusion of all others.'[55] All of this revealed the extent to which the PLO had managed to raise its profile in the international community, and France's support for Arafat's organisation now paled by comparison. Now that an Arafat-Giscard meeting had been ruled out for the foreseeable future, the French would have to find another entrance door than Lebanon to deal with the Palestinian question.

GISCARD'S VISIT TO THE MIDDLE EAST, 1-10 MARCH 1980: AN EXERCISE IN 'NON-ALIGNED ATLANTICISM'

Unfortunately, no records of conversations between Giscard and his hosts were accessible neither in the *Archives Nationales*, nor in the archives of the French foreign ministry. However, briefing memoranda as well as assessments of the President' trip were available. These were very useful in terms of understanding the focus of French Middle East policy as the Community started its preparatory work ahead of the Venice European Council. Importantly, for the purpose of this dissertation, they also reveal the central role these visits played in the Community's road to the Venice declaration, and further highlight the difficult balancing act between the Palestinians and the Americans that defined French Middle East policy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

One of Giscard's achievements in the Middle East was the development of France's relations with the Gulf states. His policy of *rapprochement* culminated with his trip to Kuwait, Bahrein, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Jordan between 1 and 10 March 1980. It was the first time that a French President visited each of these countries in an official capacity. The objective was to recognise the new status that they now occupied for French interests in the Middle East, and to give an increased political dimension to relations that were basically economic in nature. As Leclercq put it in one of the presidential briefings ahead of the trip, these countries were 'first and foremost an oil-slick beneath the sand, and their existence are economic and financial before being political.'[56] Unsurprisingly, oil was central to these new relationships, which, since 1973, had played

[55] MAE, 375QO/113, Centre d'analyse et de prévision, Note, 'A/S. Visite à Paris de M. Arafat: vers un nouveau pas en direction des palestiniens,' Paris, 24 octobre 1979. ('*Il ne faut pas se dissimuler que les avantages acquis au début des années soixante-dix grâce à notre position en fleche sur la question du conflit du Proche-Orient, sont aujourd'hui quelque peu éroder. D'autre nous ont rejoints, et nous paraissons n'avoir pas fait de nouveau progrès substantiels*'; '*la sociale démocratie européenne, traditionnellement proche d'Israël, et comme un pas du monde germanique vers l'OLP*'; '*M. Schmidt avait expressément autorisé la présence de M. Brandt au coté de M. Kreisky*'; '*à jouer la carte de l'OLP à l'exclusion de toute autre*').

[56] *Archives Nationales*, Paris (hereafter AN), AG/5(3)/979, Note pour le president de la république, 'a/s : Visite dans le golfe – note d'entretien,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 26 février 1980.

a central role in France's strategy to overcome the adverse effect of its energy dependency on the Middle East.

The *Elysée*'s diplomatic adviser also explained that the reasons for France's popularity in this part of the world were: the independence of its foreign policy, its stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1967, and the fact that there was no history of French colonialism. Under Giscard, France had managed to exploit these advantages quite skilfully. But, more recently, Paris had grown concerned that it was losing some of its prestige. Unsurprisingly, it was France's relative idleness on the Palestinian question, which was identified as the main problem. As Leclercq reminded Giscard, '[o]ur position on the [Middle East] conflict and the Palestinian problem greatly contributed to our reputation in the Gulf.' However, he added, 'the Emirates have noticed that today the other European countries have caught up with us, and some even surpassed us on the issue of Palestinian rights.'[57] In this context, Giscard's trip to the Gulf states and Jordan constituted the perfect opportunity regain the upper hand on the Palestinian question in Western Europe.

Initially, this trip was not intended to be the theatre for a major French gesture towards the Palestinians. The Arab-Israeli dispute, though, was always going to be a major topic of discussion. On the one hand, as Leclercq explained, the Gulf states have 'the conviction that the whole stability of the Arab world depends [on a resolution of the Middle East conflict].' On the other hand, it was crucial for their internal stability because of 'the presence, in each of them, of a non-negligible Palestinian community, which occupie[d] an important place in [their] administrations.' It is, therefore, understandable that, as Leclercq stated, the Palestinian question remained their 'paramount' security concern[58]. To put things into perspective, at the time, out of Kuwait's 1.5 million population, only 450,000 were nationals and 300,000 were Palestinians[59], while only 25% of Qatar's 200,000 population were nationals and 10% were Palestinians[60]. More generally, by the late 1970s, the Emirs were eager to develop a political influence commensurate with the recent explosion of their role in the international economy. As Leclercq expressed it, 'they want to be treated as serious and responsible partners, and not as simple excrescences of Saudi Arabia.'[61]

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[57] Ibid.

[58] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note pour le president de la république, 'a/s : Visite dans le Golfe – note d'entretien,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 26 février 1980 ('*la conviction que toute la stabilité du monde arabe en depend*;' '*la presence, dans chacun d'entre eux, d'une communauté palestinienne non négligeable qui occupe, notamment, une place importante dans l'administration*;' '*primordial*.').

[59] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note, 'a. s: Koweit,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 21 février 1980.

[60] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note, 'a. s: Qatar,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 21 février 1980.

[61] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note pour le president de la république, 'a/s : Visite dans le Golfe – note d'entretien,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 26 février 1980.

Hence, speaking to them about regional and international matters was in part meant to flatter their egos and set more favourable grounds for business deals.

The French were worried about the optics of this presidential visit. They knew that it would be taken as a prime example of the mercantilist nature of their Middle East policy, and it was in part with that concern in mind that Jordan was added to the trip. The Hashemite kingdom was not a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and it was directly involved in the conflict with Israel. The hope was that it would alleviate the potential criticism, both foreign and domestic, that it was simply an oil oriented operation, and that this would be justification enough for making the Middle East conflict the main political item on the agenda[62]. As the plan for this trip was beginning to take shape in late 1978/early 1979, it was clear that, for the French, the Palestinian question was mostly meant to serve as window dressing for economic talks. As it happened, however, Giscard officially came out in favour of Palestinian self-determination in communiqués published at the end of each of his visits. Ultimately, far from only being the intended façade for pushing mercantilist objectives, this trip ended up being a major component of France's strategy to make a comeback in Middle Eastern diplomacy.

The development of France's relations with the Emirates had happened remarkably quickly, and naturally it triggered some resentment on the part of Britain, the former colonial power, which still regarded this part of the world as its preserve[63]. Because there was not history of French colonialism in the Gulf, Paris had an edge over London to develop its relationship with the countries of the region. Moreover, the British reputation as a close American ally strengthened the Gulf state's desire for a rapprochement with France[64]. As Vincent Labouret, the General Secretary of the *Companie française des pétroles* (*CFP* – today's Total) and a member of the *CAP*, reported to Wahl after a visit to the Gulf, 'Great Britain is not, despite the conservation of local means of influence, the desired partner.'[65] As in the case of the PLO, in fact, the development of France's relations with the Gulf states was a clear example of the extent to which Gaullism had managed to set the French apart from the rest of their Western partners in the eyes of many Arab states. In fact, it is probably the most explicit illustration of how, by the late 1970s, France's international identity could translate into concrete economic and political benefits. As it had done in Western

[62] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note pour le président de la république, 'a. s Visite aux pays du Golfe,' G. Robin, Paris, 13 juillet 1979.
[63] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note, 'a. s : Qatar,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 21 février 1980.
[64] For this analysis see for instance AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note, 'A/s : Emirats Arabes Unis,' P. Leclercq, Paris, 21 février 1980.
[65] AN, AG/5(3)/979, From Vincent Labouret (Ministre Plénipotentiaire) to Monsieur Wahl, Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la Répblique, Paris, 5 avril 1979.

Europe since the 1960s, Gaullism was now resonating with the oil monarchies of the Gulf, and this particular ideological framework – which admittedly did not always translate into facts – along with the French military industry sustained France's economic and political expansion in the Gulf.

France's response to the Gulf states' repeated demands to buy Western weapons was a perfect illustration of its particular standing within the Atlantic Alliance. It contrasted sharply with the US, and further strengthened its newly acquired position in the region. Following the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Americans had sought to take regional security into their own hands. Instead of solely relying on regional actors to secure their interests, now they sought to implement a new security framework, which consisted in projecting direct US military power in the Persian Gulf[66]. Because of their strategic geographical location, Washington sought to make the Gulf states an integral part of their new strategy. However, the oil monarchies' political and military weakness meant that they were especially concerned not to get caught in the middle of mounting East-West tensions. They were thus reluctant to be dragged into a regional security scheme that would entail the establishment of US military bases on their soil, and hence associate them too closely with the Americans[67]. As a result, Washington rejected their demands for military equipment, something that the Emirs naturally took as a slap in the face since it meant that they could not be trusted to play a direct role in the security of their own region[68]. The French, on the contrary, were quick to answer these demands. They were willing to sell arms to the Gulf states outside of any commitment to regional security schemes and, importantly, they justified this according to the Gaullist doctrine that regional security was 'the sole responsibility of the countries of the region,' as stated in every joint communiqué issued at the end of each of Giscard's visits in the Gulf[69]. At the time, therefore, the French genuinely stood out of the Western pack, not just because of their rhetoric, but because of their actions as well.

French mercantilism was obvious here, but importantly it was framed within the Gaullist discourse that advocated the overcoming of Cold War bipolarism and the respect of the regional powers' sphere of influence. Of course, a link between arms sales and oil supply had been explicitly established. As Labouret explained in the case of the UAE, France was getting preferential treatment essentially because it was 'the only one to answer Abu Dhabi's security concern by

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[66] Olav Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (2004): 21-55.
[67] AN, AG/5(3)/979, 'Note pour le president de la République – a/s: Visite dans le golfe – note d'entretien,' Leclercq, Paris, 26 février 1980.
[68] AN, AG/5(3)/979, From Vincent Labouret (Ministre Plénipotentiaire) to Monsieur Wahl, Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la Répblique, Paris, 5 avril 1979.
[69] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Présidence de la République, Service de presse, 'Communiqué commun à l'occasion de la visite de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Présient de la République française, à l'Etat des Emirats Arabes Unis.'

supplying it with armaments.' The Federation's oil minister, Mana al Otaiba, thus told René Giraud, the French minister for industry that his country was ready 'to answer all of France's demands in terms of oil and to give it priority over all other countries in the world.'[70] In addition, the Emir of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed, who was also the UAE's President, had told Labouret, for example, that the exclusive concessions he was willing to grant the *CFP* were done in order to 'cultivate a precious friendship'. And Zayed expressed without any ambiguities that in return he expected both security gains, essentially in the form of continued arms sales, and political benefits, which should be manifested in an official visit by the French President[71].

Close and mutually beneficial relations had thus been established between France and the Gulf states throughout the 1970s. The French military industry was obviously central in achieving this. But, as important, was France's ability to justify arms sales based on a sustained ideological doctrine, which had consistently driven its foreign policy since de Gaulle[72]. By the early 1980s, though, France's international identity as the Atlantic rebel also put some constraints on the definition of its Middle East policy. The French had to live up to their reputation for fear of losing their preferential treatment on which their economy crucially depended. As Leclercq put it for instance: 'the friendship that the leaders of the UAE have for our country is demanding.'[73] At that juncture, it was clear that the economic aspect of these relationships relied heavily on France's distinctive stance in international politics – one that was firmly embedded within the Western camp, but without shying away from voicing its disagreement with the American hegemon. Importantly, both aspects were equally important, and, as a result, France had managed to position itself between the non-aligned Arab states who were nonetheless more interested in developing their relationships with the West than the East, and the Atlantic world.

Giscard's visits to the Gulf states and Jordan was a prime example of this delicate balancing act. The trip's main political objective was to re-assert France's leadership on the Palestinian question within the West thus strengthening its position as a 'non-aligned Atlantic' power, and at that point, this meant re-establishing its lead over its Community partners[74]. While, this obviously had to be done at the national level, it nonetheless continued to be framed within the collective European

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[70] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Note pour le Président, 'Objet – Escale du Président à Abu Dhabi (16 juillet 1979): entretien avec le Cheikh Zayed Ibn Sultan Al Nahyane,' Robert Richard, Paris, 13 juillet 1979.
[71] AN, AG/5(3)/979, From Vincent Labouret (Ministre Plénipotentiaire) to Monsieur Wahl, Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la Répblique, Paris, 5 avril 1979.
[72] This is an important point that is not given its proper place in the current account of Giscard's Middle East policy. See: Errera-Hoechstetter, "La Politique Française au Moyen-Orient."
[73] AN, AG/5(3)/979, 'note – A/s: Emirats Arabes Unis,' Leclercq, Paris, 21 février 1980 ('*l'amitié que voue à notre pays les dirigeants de la Fédération est certes exigeantes.*').
[74] AN, AG/5(3)/979, Visite de Monsieur le Président de la République à Abou Dhabi (5-6 mars 1980), 'Notes d'entretien – objectifs de la visite présidentielle,' anonymous and undated.

context. For instance, a note for Giscard's talks with Sheik Zayed identifies the European position on the Arab-Israeli conflict as the first political topic to tackle. It acknowledges that the UAE wished for the Community, not France alone, to play a more active role in this matter. Hence, the advice given to the President was to explain the collective European stance while highlighting 'the distinctive aspects' of the French position within the Community, and to emphasise the 'importance' of France's leadership on this topic[75]. In order to demonstrate that his country remained ahead of its European counterparts on the Palestinian question, Giscard agreed to issue joint communiqués at the end of each of his visits, where he stated his support for Palestinian self-determination[76]. Logically, it was the communiqué issued in Amman that went the furthest. Not only did it support 'Palestinian self-determination within the context of a just and lasting peace settlement,' but it also specified that Palestinian representatives had to be 'associated' to the negotiations, which 'implied the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.'[77] This was, almost word for word, what the Venice European Council would declare two months later.

A few days after Giscard returned from the Middle East, François-Poncet briefed the Senate foreign policy committee on the presidential trip, and there again France's actions were largely framed within the Community context. As his talking points reveal, the Foreign Minister was to emphasise that these visits had 'strengthened the European stance,' and that while the President had spoken in France's name, he had 'taken into account' his European partners' stances. In terms of what the government should do next, the priority was to prepare an initiative '*à neuf*.' The goal was now to 'arrive, with our partners, at common positions which would allow for the progressive exercise of common responsibility.' By mid-March, the first option the French were considering was an amendment of SCR 242 or the submission of a new resolution. At this point, they believed that this was something Washington could accept, and there never was any intention to challenge American efforts as François-Poncet was to emphasise to the Senate foreign policy committee. Besides, as his talking points made it clear, no matter what initiative the Europeans agreed on within EPC, nothing would be done before the autonomy talks' deadline on 26 May[78]. If Giscard and his Foreign Minister had indeed framed their initiative within the collective European context,

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[75] AN, AG/5(3)/3119, Visite de Monsieur le Président de la République à Abou Dhabi (5-6 mars 1980), 'Notes d'entretien – sujets politiques', anonymous and undated ('*les caractères distinctifs*;' '*l'importance*.').
[76] All of these statements can be found in AN, AG/5(3)/3119.
[77] See for instance AN, AG/5(3)/3119, 'Communiqué commun à l'occasion de la visite de M. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Président de la République française au Royaume Hachémite de Jordanie' ('*l'autodétermination dans le cadre du règlement de paix juste et durable*;' '*associées*;' '*ce qui implique la participation de l'Organisation de Libération de la Palestine*.').
[78] AN, AG/5(3)/3119, Commission des Affaires Étrangères du Sénat, 13 mars 1980, 'Schéma de communication du Ministre sur le Moyen-Orient (après le voyage du Président dans le Golfe et en Jordanie, avec son prolongement en Arabie),' Anonymous and undated ('*renforcé la position de l'Europe*;' '*en tenant compte*;' '*arriver, avec nos partenaires*, *à des positions communes permettant d'exercer progressivement des responsabilités conjointes*.').

France had, in fact, not discussed anything with its Community counterparts prior to the presidential trip. In typical French fashion, Paris had acted unilaterally before seeking its European partners' support. Despite being surprised and annoyed by Giscard's pronouncement, though, one after the other European governments aligned with the French position[79].

There was nevertheless some irritation, not just at the fact that France had acted alone, but also because the trip was having such a big impact on international public opinion. The American press, for example, expressed anxiety at what was often presented as a turning point not just for France's Middle East policy but also the Community's. As a result, talks of a European initiative at the UN that would seek to challenge Camp David in the near future were all over the newspapers, despite multiple French statement to the contrary[80]. The British press welcomed Giscard's trip in a largely positive fashion with the *Financial Times*, for instance, qualifying it as 'a brilliant diplomatic success.' It also noted, however, the frustration of the other Europeans and wrote that 'in finding the right words, at the right time and in the right place,' Giscard had managed to convince Arab leaders that France was leading its Europeans partners on the Palestinian question[81]. The Italian press generally praised Giscard's diplomatic skills as well, with the *Corriere della Sera* writing that if the President's ambition to conduct 'a non-aligned Atlantic' policy had sometime been mocked, he had now managed to take a convincing step in that direction. *Il Popolo*, on the other hand, chose to emphasise that there was nothing really new in the defence of Palestinian self-determination[82]. European governments also stressed the fact that the notion of Palestinian self-determination was nothing new for the Community and referred back to the Irish Foreign Minister's speech at the UN on behalf of the Nine on 25 September 1979, although it actually refrained from using the actual term[83].

European annoyance also came from the fact that journalists often presented the Community member states' support as a major advancement of their respective national stance on the Palestinian question. In response, the British referred to Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington's speech at the UN on 25 September 1979, when he had pleaded for the modification of resolution

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[79] AN, AG/5(3)/3120, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, direction des services d'information et de presse, 'Note – A/S: Voyage du Président dans le Golfe et en Jordanie,' Paris, 10 mars 1980.
[80] AN, AG/5(3)/3119, Note pour le president, 'Objet: Réactions de la presse américaine au voyage du president au Proche-Orient,' Anonymous, 11 mars 1980.
[81] AN, AG/5(3)/3120, TD Londres 209, 'Objet: Voyage du Président de la République au Moyen-Orient,' Sauvagnargues, 11 mars 1980 ('*un brillant succès diplomatique*;' '*En trouvant les mots justes, au bon moment et au bon endroit*').
[82] AN, AG/5(3)/3120, TD Rome 194, 'Objet: Nouvelles reactions italiennes au voyage de M. Giscard d'Estaing en Orient,' Puaux, 12 mars 1980 ('*Atlantique non-alignée*').
[83] The text of the speech can be found in: TNA, FCO98/677, Tel. No. 1625, from New York to FCO, 'MIPT: UNGA: Question of Palestine debate,' 26 November 1979.

242 in favour of Palestinian rights[84]. For their part, the Germans pointed to the fact that they had also defended the notion of self-determination for the Palestinians at the UN back in 1974[85]. The frustration at Giscard's diplomatic success also came from the fact that, as will be further explored in the next chapter, at the time, discussions within EPC were already moving towards using the term of 'self-determination' instead of more convoluted phrases. Furthermore, at this stage, most member states, including Britain and West Germany, were already convinced of the necessity to call for the association of the PLO to the peace process – in large part because they believed that it was acceptable to the Americans.

Ultimately, though, the French were the first to use the actual term of 'self-determination,' and also the first to explicitly call for the association of the PLO to the peace process. If Giscard's statement did not, in fact, marked a significant advancement from O'Kennedy's UN speech in terms of content, it still constituted a semantic evolution, which the Community member states had refrained from until now. Adding to that the symbolism of having the French President making such a statement in the Middle East, the *Financial Times* had indeed put its finger on what constituted the real significance of Giscard's move. Ultimately with his trip, he had succeeded in creating the illusion that France was much further ahead on the Palestinian question than its European counterparts, and in so doing had fulfilled his trip's main political goal. In addition, he had managed to place France and the Community at the centre of discussions over the future of the now moribund Camp David peace process. And, this proved to be the most important factor in raising expectations that the Community would soon be ready to take its own initiative on the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

Over the past year, the French had managed to pull off quite an extraordinary diplomatic feat. On the one hand, they sought closer bilateral cooperation with the US over Lebanon. On the other hand, with Giscard's visit to the Gulf states and Jordan, they had managed to create the perception in international public opinion that they were leading European efforts against Camp David. Their firmly established Gaullist reputation played a central role here, as everyone was all too ready to believe that they were once again prepared to challenge US policy, and that they were once more

[84] AN, AG/5(3)/3120, AFP BX60, 'La position du governement britannique,' Londres.
[85] AN, AG/5(3)/3120, TD Bonn 331, 'Object: La RFA et le problème palestinien,' Berniere, 7 mars 1980.

trying to drag the rest of the Community along with them. But, this perception did not match the reality of French Middle East policy as this chapter has revealed.

The US shifting attitude towards the Palestinian question under Carter was a crucial factor that facilitated the emergence of a new Community consensus on the Arab-Israeli conflict ahead of the Venice European Council. But, another important factor was Arafat's diplomatic offensive, as it jolted the Europeans into action. Giscard's *rapprochement* with the PLO since his election had become one of the main barometers of French international identity. At this point, asserting the Gaullist thrust of his foreign policy was of course a means, amongst others, to secure French economic interests in the Middle East. But, while this was true in the case of the Gulf states, it was not in the case of Lebanon, and yet, there also, regaining the edge on the Palestinian question was France's primary political aim. At the time, the French clearly approached the situation from the perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict first, and the Lebanese civil war was only secondary. This had always been the problem with US policy towards Lebanon[86]. But now, it appeared that, despite all the talk of historical responsibility towards their former protectorate to justify their diplomatic involvement, the French were adopting a similar approach. Clearly, at the time, supporting the PLO's quest for Western recognition was more important to France than supporting the Lebanese government's aim to reassert its authority over the whole of its territory. This need to adopt a forceful position on the Palestinian question was made all the more pressing by the fear in Paris that its stance on the issue was in danger of being surpassed by that of some of its European partners. In this case, Arafat's diplomatic initiative had triggered an intra-European competition on the Palestinian question, which ultimately smoothed the way to the formation of a new Community consensus on the Middle East conflict.

If in the autumn 1979, France was launching a diplomatic mission on its own, it was mostly envisaged as a first step towards eventually getting the rest of the Community involved. Less than a year before the Venice European Council, both France and Britain seemed to favour bilateral cooperation with Washington instead of independent European actions. That said, by 1980, a collective European initiative was also being discussed in parallel within EPC. Interestingly, the desire for transatlantic cooperation and involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy at the national level did not seem to cancel out the need for independent European action. This situation illustrates the convoluted nature of foreign policy cooperation over the Middle East within the Community at the time. There was a bizarre blend of competition and cooperation between

[86] For this argument see: James R. Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention: US Foreign Policy and the Collapse of Lebanon, 1967-1976* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 221-24.

national and collective foreign policy making in Western Europe, which clearly illustrate that, far from being mutually exclusive as is often assumed, in this case, the national and European dimensions worked hand in hand.

Importantly, despite alarming reports in the American press, at the time, France or Britain taking an opposite stance to Washington on the Palestinian question did not necessarily represent the actual state of transatlantic relations over the Middle East as whole. However, given the heated public debate that often took place over the Arab-Israeli conflict in the West, perception could all too quickly become reality. But, in fact, as this chapter shows, by the end of the 1970s, Giscard had *Atlanticised* French Middle East policy. The French had to play a double game between the PLO and the US, which consisted in strengthening their Gaullist reputation by giving increased support to the Palestinians, while simultaneously improving cooperation with Washington. Their strategy entirely relied on their ability to convince the Arab world that they were once again willing to take their distance from the Americans and bring their Community partners along with them. However, this distantiation from US policy had clear limits, and it could only work in cooperation with Washington. In that respect, ahead of the Venice European Council, Giscard had managed to pull off an impressive exercise in non-aligned Atlanticism. The road to the Venice Declaration therefore cannot be reduced to a European attempt at opposing US Middle East policy as is currently the case. It was in fact a much more complex process, which entailed a differentiated policy between the two sides of the Atlantic, which was fundamentally based on cooperation.

Ultimately, France's acceptance of the transatlantic dimension as an integral part of its Middle East policy was crucial for the Community's ability to agree on a common stance and launch for the first time a diplomatic initiative outside of the European continent. In addition, as the previous chapter has shown, Britain had to operate the opposite diplomatic manoeuvre, namely proving its Europeanism to its EC partners. In the end, the toning down of French Gaullism and British Atlanticism proved to be the essential intra-European factors that explain how the Community found itself in a position to issue the Venice declaration.

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMUNITY'S ROAD TO THE VENICE DECLARATION, 1971-1980

EUROPEAN SELF-RESTRAINT OR AMERICAN OBSTRUCTIONISM?

INTRODUCTION

The Venice Declaration is now remembered as a landmark in the evolution of a collective European stance towards the Middle East conflict at the core of the European Union's (EU) diplomacy. However, the road to the European Community's (EC) recognition of Palestinian self-determination and of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) as a party to the peace process is presented in less than glorious terms in the historiography. As the argument goes, intense American pressure considerably watered down the EC member states' ambition for a more assertive declaration. As a result, the Venice Declaration has become the quintessential symbol of European Political Cooperation's (EPC) limits in establishing an independent European voice in world affairs[1]. Maria Gainar's book is the only archival-based account of the this episode, and she presents a more positive assessment of the nine EC member states' (the Nine) attempt to define a common stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. But, it still regards US obstructionism as the determining factor in the drafting of the Venice Declaration. It basically presents pressures from Washington as having largely defeated France's efforts to push for a more pro-Arab declaration. However, it does not explain why this time the French rallied their EPC partners instead of breaking ranks as they usually did[2]. Ultimately, there is a broad historiographical consensus that the Americans prevented both the emergence of a more assertive European voice and a more active diplomacy in the Middle East.

[1] For the political science literature see for instance: Adam M. Garfinkle, *Western Europe's Middle East Diplomacy and the United States* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 1983); David Allen and Alfred Pijpers, eds., *European Foreign Policy-Making and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1984); Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Elena Calandri, "The EC and the Mediterranean: Hitting the Glass Ceiling," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019).

[2] Maria Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980* (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012), 448-41, 576.

This chapter presents a very different picture of the Community's road to the Venice declaration. It argues that instead of being another example of EPC's failure in the face of American obstructionism, this episode can better be understood as an exercise in European self-restraint. To a significant extent, the following analysis relies on the conclusions of the previous two chapters, and seeks to merge the British and French national perspectives with the collective European dimension. It shows that, this time, the Europeans never tried to challenge US policy, and actively sought cooperation with the Atlantic hegemon, France included. For reasons explained in the introduction, this dissertation has chosen to focus on the French and British perspectives. But, again, this does not mean that the rest of the Community did not matter. The analysis developed in this chapter is therefore inevitably a partial one, but it still advances considerably our understanding of this major episode in the history of European foreign policy.

This chapter uses the literature of European Middle East policy extensively, in order to emphasise the originality of this reassessment. The first part historicises the Community's road to the Venice declaration within the larger context of the emergence of EPC in the 1970s and the evolution of US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. The second part largely relies on Gainar's account of the EPC negotiations ahead of the Venice European council, and complements it with the new perspective gained from the British and French archives in the previous two chapters.

ON THE SIDELINES, 1969-1980

THE DIFFICULT EMERGENCE OF A SINGLE EUROPEAN VOICE, 1969-1973

As result of the 1967 Six-Day war, both France and Britain began to redefined their policies towards the Middle East. They seized this opportunity to start repairing their respective relationships with the Arab world, which had been strained ever since the 1956 Suez crisis[3]. For France, this shift materialised in a frontal opposition to US policy, and it became one of the foundational acts of the country's Gaullist identity in international relations[4]. For Britain, it consisted of positioning itself between Arabs and Americans in order to mediate between the two parties[5]. At that juncture, the two former colonial powers were desperately trying to retain their

[3] See for instance: Tore T. Petersen, "Suez 1956: European Colonial Interests and US Cold War Prerogatives," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
[4] Garret Martin, "At Odds in the Middle East: Paris, Washington, and the Six-Day War, 1967," ibid.).
[5] Nigel J. Ashton, "Searching for a Just and Lasting Peace? Anglo-American Relations and the Road to United Nations Security Council Resolution 242," *The International History Review* 38, no. 1 (2015): 24-44.

diplomatic influence in the Middle East. In 1968, de Gaulle suggested that France and Britain participate in consultations, along with the two superpowers, designed to help advance peace between Arabs and Israelis, and manage Cold War tensions in the region. These quadripartite talks took place between 1969 and 1971, but never amounted to anything, largely because of Washington's growing concerns that the other three participants would team up against its pro-Israeli stance[6]. After 1971, France and Britain found themselves definitively excluded from the Middle East peace process, which became the superpowers' exclusive preserve.

It was precisely at that point that the Community's long-standing efforts to establish a foreign policy began to take shape. De Gaulle's resignation on 28 April 1969, opened the way for a major advance in the process of European integration. At the initiative of the new French President, George Pompidou, the then six EC member states (the Six) gathered in The Hague in December 1969, and finally reach a general agreement on the completion, widening, and deepening triptych intended to bring them to a closer union[7]. The advent of more European minded leaders in France with Pompidou, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with Willy Brandt, and Britain with Edward Heath, led to two major agreements that would allow for the emergence of a common European foreign policy in the 1970s: First, Britain's entry into the Community, and second the creation of EPC[8].

The first international issue that EPC dealt with was the Middle East. Arab-Israeli antagonism, compounded by increasing Cold War tensions, threatened regional and global stability. Not only was this of grave concern for Western Europe's economic interests, but the Community member states were also becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the resulting consolidation of the superpower condominium. It was thus in that context that the Six first tried to make use of the fledgling EPC. As France assumed the rotating EC presidency in the first half of 1971, French Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann aimed to define a common Community stance on the Middle East conflict. The so-called Schumann paper, approved on 13 May 1971, momentarily reconciled the member states' positions, which in the aftermath of the Six Day war spanned from France's call for a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories to the Netherlands' full

[6] Antoine Coppolani, "La France et les Etats-Unis Dans les Négociations Quadripartites Sur le Moyen-Orient (1969-1971)," in *Les Relations Franco-Américaines au XXe Siècle*, ed. Pierre Mélandri and Serge Ricard (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

[7] On the Hague summit see for instance: Wiflried Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, trans. Robert F. Hogg (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 170-221. For the final communiqué of The Hague summit see*: Bulletin of the European Communities*, 1-1970 (hereafter *Bull. EC*), 'Communiqué final du sommet de La Haye (2 décembre 1969)' (Luxembourg: Office des publications officielles des Communautées européennes), 12; 15-17.

[8] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 17-55.

support of the Israeli position. The Six now agreed on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories with the possibility of minor border modifications. And, importantly, the Schumann paper also revealed that the EC member states were already sensitive to the Palestinian question[9]. The French suggestion that the Schumann paper be made public though led to the collapse of the emerging Community front. Faced with Dutch opposition and German uneasiness, France nonetheless decided to present it to the United Nations (UN) General Secretary. Israel immediately denounced what Paris had sought to present as the European position, and France lost its partners' support[10].

In 1971, the French did not understand how to lead European diplomatic ambitions. Ever since the Fouchet plans of the early 1960s, they had sought to make use of the increasing integration and cooperation between EC member states for foreign policy purposes. However, they had failed essentially because de Gaulle's conception was one of French domination[11]. Under Pompidou, the French still seemed to have the same inclination. Too eager to harness the Community's diplomatic potential to weigh in on a matter of primary concern both to them and their European partners, they were primarily responsible for botching this first attempt to define a common foreign policy stance on the Middle East conflict. While the EC member states had then failed to speak with a single voice, this episode had still revealed their increasing interest in working together on the Middle East. Besides, France's leadership in this matter testified to the growing irrelevance of its national diplomacy. It would take another Arab-Israeli war for the French to finally come to the realisation that it could not impose its view on the rest of the Community. In the meantime, the French went back to focusing on national actions without much success.

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR AND TRANSATLANTIC CRISIS, OCTOBER 1973 – JUNE 1974: FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE OR THE END OF EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY?

Since the experience of the Schumann paper, France had lost interest in EPC, and the first Community enlargement in 1973 only seemed to make agreement on the Arab-Israeli conflict more difficult[12]. However, the combination of a severe transatlantic crisis – triggered by Henry

[9] The Schumann paper can be found in Greilsammer and Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance*, 27.
[10] Aurélie Élisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 88-90.
[11] For an account of de Gaulle's plans for a European foreign policy see: Loth, *Building Europe: A History of European Unification*, 101-07.
[12] Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*, 90.

Kissinger's ill-fated Year of Europe initiative[13] –, war in the Middle East, and the resulting oil shock, completely changed the dynamics. In addition, concerns over diverging Cold War interests between the two sides of the Atlantic, most particularly with regards to the pursuit of *détente*, further highlighted the need for an independent European voice in international politics. It is, therefore, in that super-charged context that, on 6 November 1973, the now nine EC member states issued their first ever foreign policy declaration. Taking an opposite stance to Washington, they called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and publicly stated that 'in the establishment of a just and lasting peace account must be taken of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.'[14]

The oil shock had been key to getting the pro-Israeli members of the Community – the Dutch and the Danes most particularly – to back a position that gave support to the Arab side. As for Britain and France, their common frustration at being completely excluded from the Middle East peace process had further increased. Having warned the Americans for months against the threat of an armed conflict, they felt vindicated by the outbreak of another Arab-Israeli war. But this experience also painfully highlighted how weak their respective influence was in Washington on this issue. In the end, this largely explained their heightened interest in collective European actions, which proved essential for the emergence of a common Community stance[15].

By 1974, however, after a few months of unprecedented diplomatic activism on the part of the Community, Washington had managed to rein in European ambition for independence in international politics to a significant extent. It was undeniable that American opposition was largely responsible for the Nine's failure to get involved in the search for Arab-Israeli peace. Excluded from crisis management in the Middle East, the Nine had no choice but to watch from the sidelines while a forceful display of American power dealt with the consequences of the Yom Kippur war. Kissinger had also managed to break European unity on energy policy. At first, the EC member states had been willing to stand with France's confrontational stance towards the US. But the French idea of dealing with the oil shock by intensifying the Community's relations with the Arab world outside of the Atlantic framework went too far. And, in the face of Washington's discontent with its European allies the Community front eventually collapsed. At the Washington conference on 11-13 February, Kissinger succeeded in imposing his plan to deal with the oil crisis, which essentially consisted in building a Western consumer block to face the Organization of the

[13] Kissinger had then made a speech in which he described Western Europe as having regional responsibilities while the superpower had global ones. There are good accounts of this episode in both: ibid., 19-57; Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, 140-83.
[14] *Bull. EC*, 10-1973, 'Declaration by the Nine of the situation in the Middle East,' 105-6.
[15] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, 192-98.

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). On this occasion, the French were the only ones not to rally the US strategy. This Gaullist display once again emphasised France's isolation on transatlantic relations within EPC. Furthermore, it also highlighted the fact that, at the time, the rest of the Community believed that their energy security lay first and foremost with the Americans. The French idea of a common Euro-Arab front as a means to mitigate the oil shock had thus failed to gather enough support[16].

This most strained episode in the history of the Atlantic Alliance forced the Nine to reassess their relationship with the US, and this is what the so-called Gymnich agreement of 11 June 1974 was all about. The Community then decided to set up an informal mechanism for consultation with third parties. In particular, they expressed their hope that 'this gentlemen's agreement will also lead to smooth and pragmatic consultation with the United States which will take into account the interest of both sides.'[17] This agreement is at the centre of Daniel Möckli's and Aurélie Gfeller's respective arguments. For Möckli, this procedure was essentially the result of American pressure. Accordingly, it meant the renunciation of the Gaullist notion of a 'European Europe,' and hence, the end of an independent European voice in world affairs[18]. For Gfeller, however, it was a sign of the Europeanisation of French foreign policy. As she reveals, Paris accepted the Gymnich agreement in order to get its EPC partners to agree to launch its proposal for a Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD). Accordingly, this marked a new French commitment to collective European actions, which ultimately 'stemmed from a realistic assessment of the situation: asserting EPC against the United States was no longer an option.'[19]

This partnership between Western Europe and the Arab world was much less ambitious than the French had originally intended, and to the disappointment of the Arabs the EC member states refused to engage with the Middle East conflict in that forum[20]. The Americans, however, still forcefully opposed it, not so much because of the content, but because of the symbolism of European independence that went along with it. Despite US discontent, France's partners committed to the EAD. Importantly, this shows that the Community member states were not against taking initiatives that opposed Washington's wishes. But, it could only happened within

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[16] For accounts of the Washington energy conference see both: Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*, 127-34; Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, 253-79.

[17] The full text can be found in Christopher Hill and Karen E. Smith, eds., *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), 97-98.

[18] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, 316-22.

[19] Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*, 161-63.

[20] Allen and Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," 94-96.

certain limits. The major lesson here for the future of European foreign policy was that France's compromise on transatlantic consultation allowed for renewed European unity in the face of American opposition. And, indeed, as research expanded into the later part of the 1970s, historians are increasingly siding with Gfeller, and the emerging consensus seems to be that 'Gymnich was about self-limitation, more than externally imposed shackles.'[21]

As it happened, the tense experience of 1973-4 proved to be a defining moment in the origins of a common European policy toward the Middle East. Despite considerable American obstructionism the Nine had nonetheless managed to define a collective and independent identity of view on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, on 14 December 1973, they had issued a declaration on European identity, which, while acknowledging 'close ties' with the US, still asserted their 'determination […] to establish themselves as a distinct and original entity.'[22] At that point, their desire for independence in international relations remained mostly rhetorical of course. But given that by then they only had very limited experience of cooperation within EPC, and that this fledgling institution functioned on a purely intergovernmental basis, it still constituted a remarkable achievement. Furthermore, it is also worth emphasising the fact that this transatlantic dispute ended with the NATO declaration of 19 June 1974, which essentially reaffirmed the *status quo ante* within the Atlantic Alliance that had been painfully negotiated as a result of the Gaullist challenge of the 1960s, and enshrined in the 1967 Harmel report[23]. Ultimately, this demonstrated that there was also a limit to what the Americans could impose on their much less powerful allies[24].

In the end, this episode had indeed revealed the weakness of EPC and the many obstacles to collective action in the international arena. More significant, however, for the future of European foreign policy, was that the Community member states had also acutely felt the vulnerability of their national standings, and this was particularly true of France and Britain. As much as Europe did not prove a functioning option at this point, neither Paris nor London had been able to achieve their objectives on their own, and they still remained excluded from the search for Arab-Israeli peace. If at that juncture it felt like the Europeans were weaker than ever in terms of influencing the course of events in the Middle East, there was nevertheless a silver lining: The Nine's very

[21] N. Piers Ludlow, "The History of the EC and the Cold War: Influenced and Influential, but Rarely Center Stage," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019), 26.
[22] Full text in Hill and Smith, *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents*, 93-97.
[23] For this analysis of the NATO declaration see: Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*. For an account of the Harmel report see: Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).
[24] On the ability of smaller powers to influence the superpowers see: Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 567-91.

public clash with Washington had allowed the Arabs to identify the Community – not only France or Britain – as a potential Western counterweight to US Middle East policy, thus establishing the Community on the diplomatic map. For instance, in response to the French proposal to set-up a Euro-Arab partnership as a means to break the superpower condominium over the Middle East, the Arab League took the initiative to send a delegation to the Copenhagen EC Summit of December 1973 to discuss the idea. This was a crucial early step that firmly established the Community as a potential counterweight to US policy in Arab eyes, and gave substance to the Declaration on European identity issued at the end of the Summit[25].

By that point, there was, in fact, a major policy difference between the two sides of the Atlantic. The Americans defended a step-by-step approach to peace in the Middle East, while the Europeans advocated a comprehensive one. What this meant was that Washington sought to solve the issues that could be dealt with in the short-term first, and obviously that excluded the Palestinian question, the occupied territories, and the status of Jerusalem. On the contrary, the EC member states sought to tackle all issues at once, which in effect put the Palestinian question at the centre of the peace process. In so doing, they asserted their belief that this was the only way to reach a lasting peace settlement between Arabs and Israelis. As a result, from that point on, the Community would be identified as a distinct actor from the US with respect to the Middle East conflict.

Until the Camp David accords of September 1978, the EC member states focused on the EAD, especially on the economic side of this emerging partnership, but with very little result. It has recently been suggested that after the 1973-4 experience, the Community definitively shifted its focus away from EPC, and towards international economic activities under the European Commission's purview. The idea behind this argument is that EPC had failed in large part because of its intergovernmental structure, and that a degree of supranationality was necessary for the EC member states to be able to work collectively in the international arena[26]. However, as the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, despite its many institutional shortcomings, EPC continued to serve an important purpose for Western Europe's diplomatic ambition in the Middle East.

[25] Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974*, 99-101.
[26] Lorenzo Ferrari, *Sometimes Speaking with a Single Voice: The European Community as an International Actor, 1969-1979* (Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2016), 93-117.

1977 marked the beginning of the process that would lead the Community to issue the Venice declaration in June 1980. Since 1975, progress towards Arab-Israeli peace had come to a halt. But, Jimmy Carter's advent to the US presidency in January 1977, the election of Menachem Begin's nationalist Likud party in Israel in May, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's surprise visit to Jerusalem in November, would lead to the signing of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel under American patronage in September 1978. This landmark in the search for peace between Arabs and Israelis would breathe new life into the peace process, and ultimately create an opportunity for a European come back in Middle Eastern diplomacy.

During the Carter presidency, the Americans tried, for the first time, to deal with the Palestinian question in earnest, and this genuine intent momentarily transformed the nature of transatlantic relations over the Middle East conflict. If the EC member states had learned anything in 1973-4, it was that the Americans could impose their vision for Arab-Israeli peace against virtually the whole of the international community. Their exclusive relationship with Israel made them indispensable to any diplomatic efforts, and their geopolitical weight was essential to enforce any terms of peace between the conflicting parties. As long as US policy consisted in shielding Israel from international pressure to return the territories occupied since 1967, and from addressing the Palestinian question – as was largely the case under Kissinger[27] – there was nothing anyone could do. Under Carter, however, the American approach had drawn closer to the Community's[28]. At first, however, this shift in US policy made the need for a European involvement obsolete.

From 1977 onwards, discussion on the Arab-Israeli conflict came back to the forefront of the EPC agenda. As early as January, the Nine, under the British presidency, and basing themselves on a German proposal, agreed to an evolution of their common stance on the Palestinian question. The new consensus, approved by the Community's Foreign Ministers on 31 January, was that 'the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to give effective expression to its national identity' had to be taken into account if there was to be any chance of peace in the Middle East. The German and the British, however, decided to block its publication after the Americans expressed concern that the Community's position could complicate their own efforts. But, in typical EPC fashion, the document was leaked to the press a few days later[29]. At this stage, the US attitude could easily

[27] For an account of Kissinger's diplomacy see: William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 130-73.
[28] For an account of Carter's diplomacy see: ibid., 177-244; Jørgen Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).
[29] Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 421-24.

be explained by the fact that the new administration needed time to turn campaign statements into actual policy. And, indeed, in a speech in Clinton, Massachusetts, on 16 March, Carter announced his plan for Middle East peace, and confirmed the expected shift in US policy. Washington was now calling for a comprehensive approach to an Arab-Israeli settlement that would aim to address all outstanding issues without exception. The new President recommended that all the parties to the conflict should participate in an international conference to be gathered under the auspices of the UN, where the Palestinians should be able to represent themselves, and in which the Soviet Union should also participate. Most famously, during the Q&A, Carter echoed the Balfour declaration of 1917, by speaking in favour of a 'homeland' for the Palestinian[30]. To the disappointment of the Europeans, however, they were not asked to join in the negotiations.

As Carter was struggling to reconvene the Geneva conference, however, the Nine decided to make their voice heard. At France's initiative this time, the EC member states got to work within EPC and drafted the first declaration on the Middle East to be adopted by the Community's Heads of states and governments[31]. On 29 June, the European Council, assembled in London, found itself in a position to go even further than what the Foreign Ministers had agreed on back in January. The London Declaration, as it came to be called, stated that 'a solution to the conflict in the Middle East will be possible only if the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to give effective expression to its national identity is translated into fact, which would take into account the need for a homeland for the Palestinian people.' They urged the conflicting parties to resume negotiations as soon as possible, and naturally, expressed their willingness to help in any way they could[32]. At this point, the Nine were obviously trying to support Carter's efforts, not to oppose them, as the reference to a 'homeland' clearly implied. European cohesion in London had largely been the result of Carter's policy shift on the Middle East conflict. Problematically for the Community's diplomatic ambition, however, if Carter were to succeed, there would actually be no need for a European involvement. In that respect, it is interesting to note that, while the Nine had watched from the sidelines because of US obstructionism during the Kissinger years, during the early Carter years it was essentially because their stance had become largely redundant to that of their Atlantic ally.

All of this changed with the signing of the Camp David accords on 17 September 1978 however. Having failed to reconvene the Geneva conference, and taken aback by Sadat's trip to Jerusalem,

[30] Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*, 40-41.
[31] Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 425-29.
[32] For the text of the London declaration see: Hill and Smith, *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents*, 301.

Carter had been forced to change tack and build on the Egyptian President's unprecedented gesture towards Israel[33]. The Camp David accords put the Nine in an awkward position. On the one hand, by any standards, it was a historic achievement since it was the first time that an Arab country had agreed to negotiate peace with Israel. On the other hand, the Arab world had unanimously rejected it, because it failed to properly deal with the Palestinian question. These accords consisted of two distinct phases: the first one was the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and the second was a rather vague promise to set up a multilateral diplomatic framework for comprehensive negotiations that would deal with the Palestinian question[34]. Like the Arabs, the Europeans had their doubts about the feasibility of Camp David's second accord. As they saw it, the two major problems were that the first accord had not been made dependent on the second, and that the formula for Palestinian representation, which mostly relied on Jordanian participation, was inadequate to say the least[35]. However, at this time, it was difficult for the Community to denounce the shortcomings of a peace process that had barely started. The Nine, therefore, timidly welcomed these accords on 19 September, while publicly renewing their commitment to the principles of the London Declaration[36]. Significantly, at this stage, even France did not break rank with its EPC partners.

It was not until the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in Washington on 26 March 1979 that the Nine, who had remained united in their passivity since Camp David, showed sign of disunity and started to voice their uneasiness with US efforts. Unsurprisingly, at this juncture, France was the only member state which felt that the Europeans should voice their concern clearly, while the rest of the Community believed that, at this stage, it was more important to continue to support American efforts[37]. The French had rejected a first draft of the Community's statement because they thought it too welcoming, and submitted their own version to the Political Committee. This led to a long and difficult discussion that saw France's draft rejected, and a return to a somewhat toned down version of the previous position[38]. In the end, the Nine issued a statement, which praised Carter, Sadat, and Begin for their efforts. But, they also emphasised that 'a difficult road remains to be trodden' before reaching the stated goal of a comprehensive Middle

[33] On the US road to Camp David see: Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 191-97. For an updated account, which makes full use of the archives see: Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*, 89-110.
[34] For the text of the Camp David accords see: William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2016), 390-97.
[35] For the role attributed to Jordan at Camp David see: Nigel J. Ashton, "Taking Friends for Granted: The Carter Administration, Jordan, and the Camp David Accords, 1977-1980," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 620-45.
[36] Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 429-34.
[37] *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (hereafter MAE), 4174, Note, 'Traité de paix egypto-israélien', 10 avril 1979.
[38] MAE, 4170, 'Déclaration à Neuf sur le Proche-Orient', 24 mars 1979.

East peace deal, and once again referred to the London declaration[39]. However, this statement displeased everyone because it did not go far enough either in its support or in its criticism of Camp David. Here, the source of disunity within EPC was not about a diverging assessment of the Middle East situation, but the level of transatlantic solidarity. On their side, the Arabs considered that the Community's criticism to be too weak, and decided to suspend the EAD[40].

The result of the Nine's dissatisfaction with their own declaration was that most governments subsequently made public their individual positions. Unsurprisingly, France and Britain were on opposite sides. British Prime Minister James Callaghan expressed his regrets in Parliament on 27 March that the Community had not welcomed the Washington treaty more warmly[41]. In the same spirit of dissatisfaction with the Community's position, Paris issued a declaration after a Cabinet meeting at the *Élysée* on 29 March. This statement plainly expressed France's view that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty had failed to fulfil crucial conditions for the completion of a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict[42]. It is worth recalling that, as explained in the previous chapter, at this point, the French were growing concerned that their leadership within the Community on the Arab-Israeli conflict was eroding. Moreover, at the time, they were also being pressed by the PLO to make a further gesture of support towards the Palestinians. Therefore, beyond their genuine concern about the direction that the peace process was taking, the French attitude was also motivated by their desire to set themselves apart from the rest of the Community on the Palestinian question. And, indeed, France's reservation about the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty resonated all the more loudly as it contrasted with the rest of the Community.

That said, the Community's public support for Camp David had always been conditional on the successful definition of a global framework for peace, and as this prospect decreased, the Community's desire for a more active engagement grew. While France was the first within EPC to be willing to explicitly voice its concerns regarding Camp David, its partners were in fact not far behind. As Camp David's second phase dealing with the question of Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories started on 29 May 1979, the rest of the Community progressively rallied to the French in their willingness to express their concern publicly about the US-led peace process. Most problematically, at this juncture, the autonomy talks remained limited to Egypt and Israel, as

[39]Hill and Smith, *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents*, 302.
[40] For a concise account of the EAD between 1973 and 1980 see Allen and Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," 94-96.
[41] House of Commons, debate (27 March 1979), vol. 965, cc 258. Available at: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1979/mar/27/prime-minister-engagements (accessed 2 December 2020)
[42] MAE, 4170, 'Communiqué publié à l'issue du Conseil des Ministres du 29 mars 1979'.

Jordan or any other Arab state refused to join[43]. In addition, Begin's settlement policy, which had intensified just after the signing of the Washington treaty, further compromised the autonomy talks[44]. Faced with the deadlock of the Camp David peace process, in the summer 1979, Carter approved an initiative designed to amend UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian self-determination. The objective, however, was to get the PLO to endorse the Camp David peace process, and convince Yasser Arafat to fulfil some of the conditions that would allow Carter to do away with Kissinger's pledge to Israel that the US would not negotiate with his organisation[45].

Camp David had forced Arafat to step up his public diplomacy in the US to push for a rapprochement with Washington and prevent the PLO from being further sidelined from the peace process. In September, for instance, Arafat was interviewed for the first time on American television. He had then assured the American public that 'the PLO is now more moderate,' and also offered some timid but unprecedented retraction from previous anti-Israeli statements, when he said, for instance, that talking about the destruction of Israel was a 'joke,' and that the Palestinians were only fighting against 'imperial' Zionism[46]. Throughout the 1970s, the Palestinians had made significant headways towards improving their very negative image in US public opinion. They had progressively developed a more positive presence in the media through various organisations and public personalities, even if it never amounted to a proper lobby like that which Israel had managed to establish[47]. However, under Carter these efforts seemed to be paying off. If, paradoxically, Camp David seemed to have created a mutual desire for a Palestinian-American rapprochement, it caused a deep split in the Arab world. Furious against Sadat for having signed a bilateral peace deal with Israel, and for agreeing to proceed with negotiations on the occupied territories, the Arab League excluded Egypt and moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. Camp David had thus profoundly affected the international politics of Arab-Israeli conflict, and created an opening for European involvement.

A year before the Venice European Council, therefore, Carter was, once again, trying to change tack on the Palestinian question, and was responding positively to Arafat's diplomatic offensive.

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[43] For two historical accounts of the Autonomy talks see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 145-61; Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*, 162-76. See also: Harvey Sicherman, *Palestinian Autonomy, Self-Government & Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

[44] Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, 136-45.

[45] A recent account using US archives confirms that the Carter administration was indeed actively trying to change the US approach towards the PLO in the second half of 1979: ibid., 151-53.

[46] MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L., Note, confidentiel, 'Arafat en France?', Paris, 13 septembre 1979.

[47] Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and US-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

During the Palestinian leader's trip to Vienna in June, for example, Carter authorised his Ambassador, Milton Wolf, to meet with members of the Palestinian delegation[48]. Contacts between the PLO and US officials did not stop there. In August, it was revealed that Andrew Young, the US Ambassador to the UN who was holding the presidency of the security council at the time, had secretly met with PLO representatives in a New York apartment to discuss changes to SCR 242[49]. The same month, the US permanent representative at the UN had also voted in favour of a resolution that asked for the immediate opening of a dialogue between Israel and the PLO[50]. Hence, by the summer 1979, the Americans appeared more open than ever towards the Palestinians, even though they were failing to actually translate their changing attitude into policy. As explained in chapter 1, this was what the British were trying to build upon in the second half of 1979, with Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington's UN speech in favour of amending SCR 242, and his ensuing attempt to do so. Unsurprisingly, it was also at that time that the Community had managed to agree on further support for the Palestinian, which the Irish Foreign Minister, Michael O'Kennedy announced in his speech at the UN on the Nine's behalf. It is, therefore, in that particular context of a transatlantic convergence on the Palestinian question that the Community's road to the Venice declaration has to be understood.

THE VENICE DECLARATION OF 13 JUNE 1980: AMBIGUOUS COOPERATION ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

In the early months of 1980, the encouraging evolution of the Carter administration's attitude towards the Palestinians lost momentum. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 forced Washington to re-centre its focus on the Cold War conflict. And, with the US presidential election of November 1980 just around the corner, Carter's margin of manoeuvre in the Camp David peace process became considerably reduced. This unfortunate turn of events largely contributed to creating the perception of a transatlantic clash over the Middle East, something that weighs heavily in the current understanding of the Venice declaration.

Until the start of the autonomy talks, the Americans had been clear about their expectation that the Europeans should not get involved in the search for Arab-Israeli peace. But, as the Palestinian question took centre stage, they were clearly struggling to make further headway, and their attitude

[48] Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, 151-53.
[49] For this episode which led to Young's resignation see: Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 491; Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, 153-55.
[50] For a reference to this episode see: MAE, 375QO/113, N°151/A.N.L, Note, 'Arafat en France?,' Paris, 13 septembre 1979.

towards European involvement changed. As already explained in the previous two chapters, it was largely because the Carter administration had sent clear signals that it would be open to a supporting European role in the search for Middle East peace that both Britain and France made plans to launch diplomatic initiatives of their own. London focused its energy on the UN, while Paris concentrated directly on the PLO. As it became progressively clear in early 1980 that Washington could no longer condone a move at the UN, the British sought the cover of the Community to avoid the perception that they were bowing to US pressure. As for France, its strategy was not as affected by the changing American attitude. However, it still involved a collective European dimension. With Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's trip to the Middle East, and his pronouncement in favour of Palestinian self-determination, the French had managed to re-assert their leadership on the Palestinian question within the Community. And now, the second phase of their plan was to convince their EPC partners to mount a European initiative in response to increasing Arab demands. By April 1980, both French and British Middle East policies had converged towards making use of EPC in order to try to influence the future of the Middle East peace process, which the Americans themselves recognised was in an impasse. Considering the history of European Middle East policy until this point, this was, undoubtedly, the most important internal dynamic that explains the Community's success in issuing the Venice Declaration.

It was at the European Council in Luxembourg on 27-28 April 1980 that the Heads of state and government, 'conscious that Europe may in due course have a role to play', mandated the Foreign Ministers to draft a report on the Middle East that would define the conditions for European involvement[51]. From that point on, negotiations within EPC progressed quickly and without any fundamental disagreement on the general principles that should guide Europe's search for Arab-Israeli peace. There was one exception though. During an extraordinary session of the Political Committee on 4 June, less than ten days before the Venice European Council, disagreements between France and Britain erupted. Apparently, the French were in favour of talking explicitly about a Palestinian state, whereas Britain adopted the opposite position. And, according to the traditional account, it was the British who, with the support of most of their EPC partners, won the argument[52].

Nevertheless, this should not be taken as proof that France was genuinely pushing its EPC partners for a more assertive declaration in the face of US obstructionism, as is often suggested[53]. There is

[51] *Bull EC*, 4-1980, 'Declaration on international situation', 145-6.
[52] For a detailed account of the EPC negotiations on the Venice declaration see: Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 448-53.
[53] For this account backed by archival evidence see: ibid., 449.

no trace in the French archival records that indicates that officials at the *Quai d'Orsay* were unhappy about losing this argument. As it happened, the Nine quickly settled their difference, and the fact that this disagreement remained at the level of the Political Committee without ever reaching the Foreign Ministers is a strong indication that the French never seriously pushed their partners on this issue. Had they done so, it would most certainly have created a major rift within EPC. And, had this been a serious quarrel, at the very least, there would have been conversations within the FCO about how to handle the latest French challenge to European unity on the Middle East. But, again, no records of such discussions could be found. In addition, there is an intriguing discrepancy between Giscard's memoirs and the French archival record on this issue. While the latter indicates that the *Quai d'Orsay*'s Political Director proposed to mention a Palestinian state in the Venice Declaration, the former explains that the French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet had opposed such a demand coming from some of the other European partners[54]. This confusion further suggests that France never had any clear intention of pushing for a more pro-Arab declaration. It is, therefore, more likely that the French proposal for the mention of a Palestinian state was designed to give the Arabs the impression that they had tried, but that their Community partners would not have it. This interpretation is in line with France's attempt, at the time, to give the appearance that it remained ahead of its European partners on the Palestinian question. Besides, it is worth asking why, if the French were serious about calling for a Palestinian state, did Giscard not do it himself during his recent trip to the Middle East.

In the months leading to the Venice European Council, in fact, one of the Nine's main concerns was to make sure that their actions would not attract significant US opposition. And, needless to say, calling for a Palestinian state would have been a step too far. But, in fact, at this stage, the Nine never seriously envisaged going beyond what they agreed on in the final draft of the Venice Declaration. Palestinian self-determination and the association of the PLO to the peace process already marked a major difference from US policy, but one that the Americans did not feel they could legitimately oppose. The most contentious issue was the nature of the diplomatic initiative that the Nine planned on announcing in Venice. As they got to work on the Middle East report after the Luxembourg European Council, they considered two main options: amending SCR 242 and a consultative mission with the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict[55]. As Carter progressively backpedalled from his attempt to break with the traditional US approach to the PLO in early 1980,

[54] Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Le Pouvoir et la Vie: Choisir*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Compagnie 12, 2006), 344.
[55] Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 448.

the Nine eventually agreed to abandon any move at the UN. This was the only element that they would have wanted to include in the Venice Declaration, but did not because of US opposition.

But even then, the Europeans only considered amending SCR 242 because they thought it acceptable to Washington. In fact, on this issue, it was the Americans who failed to communicate their intention clearly as they shifted their policy in the first half of 1980. Initially, this miscommunication was due to the fact that Carter was struggling to reconcile his desire to make progress in the peace process, with the imperatives of the upcoming presidential campaign[56]. And, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's resignation on 21 April over the failed hostage rescue mission in Teheran, about which he had not been informed beforehand, did not help with clear transatlantic communication[57]. His replacement, Senator Edmund Muskie took office on 8 May, and met with his British, French, and German counterparts in London on 16 May. He then told them that, while at first, he had been under the impression that the Camp David peace process was 'grinding to a halt', he had now changed his mind and believed that 'the talks had a chance,' and that they would continue beyond 26 May. This comment was particularly telling about American ambivalence on this issue over the past few months[58].

During this quadripartite meeting, all three European Foreign Ministers presented a united front, and argued that there was a pressing need for a European initiative, which, although not yet defined, would be launched at the next European Council. Carrington reminded Muskie that his predecessor had told him back in February that he would not object to a European initiative after 26 May. François-Poncet then asked if the Americans would indeed veto any resolution building on SCR 242. Muskie said that they would, thus confirming what Carrington had been told during his visit to Washington earlier that month[59]. In conclusion, the new Secretary of State urged his European counterparts that 'at the moment and for as long as possible you not consider any initiative that goes to 242.' But, he also said that he would 'look at' any other initiative although he 'could not support it.'[60]

During their informal EPC meeting on 17-18 May, the Foreign Ministers discussed once again the nature of their upcoming Middle East initiative, but did not managed to reach an agreement. At

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[56] Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), 93.
[57] Vance recounts the process that led to his resignation in: Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 398-413.
[58] MAE, 4170, 'Initiative des Neuf au Proche-Orient', 21 mai 1980.
[59] The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FCO82/1029, 'Record of meeting between the Secretary of State of Foreign and Commonwealth affairs and the US assistant Secretary of State Mr Warren Christopher at the Department of State, 5 May 1980.'
[60] TNA, FCO93/2582, Tel. n. 160, 'Record of Quadripartite talks', 16 May 1980. Carrington's visit to Washington in early May had been treated in chapter 1.

this juncture, it appears that France alone was still envisaging an amendment to SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights. According to the British summary of that meeting, François-Poncet made the point that other resolutions were likely to be put forward, which would force the Nine to take position anyway[61]. It is not clear from the French archival record what the rationale for this argumentation was. But, based on the analysis developed in the previous chapter, it is probable that the *Quai d'Orsay*'s fear was that faced with a more radical resolution than what the European would table, France would found itself in an awkward position. It would either have to vote against thus compromising its standing in the Arab world, or vote in favour and antagonise the Americans. And, if it decided to abstain, it would displease everyone.

In any case, when François-Poncet travelled to Washington, and met again with Muskie on 30 May, he made it clear that the European initiative would not constitute a challenge to Camp David, although it would not endorse it either, and that there would be no attempt to amend SCR 242. He told his host that the Nine were thinking of a diplomatic mission to the Middle East designed to assess the positions of the Arabs and the Israelis, and informed him of the content of the upcoming European Council declaration. He said that it would balance Israeli security imperatives with the rights of the Palestinians, which meant that it would recognise their right to self-determination and call for the association of the PLO to the negotiations. He added that the Nine would refrain from treating the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people[62]. At present, the French archival record does not allow for an explanation of François-Poncet's change of heart regarding a European initiative at the UN. But, what is clear is the importance that France attached to transatlantic cooperation over the Middle East at that point. Not only had Paris accepted to abandon a move on SCR 242 for the time being, but it communicated the exact content of the Venice Declaration to the Americans several weeks before its publication.

This reassessment of the Community's road to the Venice declaration sheds new light on the meaning of Carter's televised interview of 31 May, which had been central in creating the perception of a major transatlantic clash over the Middle East. He had then explicitly warned 'the European allies not to intervene in the negotiations as long as we are meeting and are making progress toward the Mideast peace settlement.' He particularly insisted that he 'will not permit at the United Nations any action that would destroy the sanctity of the present form of UN 242' and made it clear that he 'would not hesitate to use [his veto power] if necessary.'[63] But, at this point,

[61] TNA, FCO98/944, 'Informal meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers: Naples 17-18 May,' Lever, 19 May 1980.
[62] MAE, 91Q/901, 'Entretien du ministre avec le secrétaire d'état le vendredi 30 mai de midi à 13 heures', TD Washington 1156, 2 juin 1980.
[63] Quoted in: Simon Nuttall, *European Political Cooperation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 165.

the President had to know that the Europeans had no intentions of challenging Camp David and modifying SCR 242. In the light of the evidence unearthed in this chapter, this interview can, in fact, better be understood in the context of the presidential campaign. Because of his attempt to change the US approach to the Palestinian question, Carter was particularly vulnerable to be depicted as pro-Arab during this election cycle, something that was highly damaging for American politicians[64]. Ronald Reagan, the likely Republican candidate, for instance, was making strong pro-Israeli statements and was seizing every opportunity to attack the current administration's Middle East policy. And, Senator Ted Kennedy, Carter's challenger for the Democratic nomination, speaking at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's (AIPAC) annual assembly, also criticised Carter's actions over the past few months[65].

These attacks were all the more problematic for Carter because of an incident that had occurred on 3 March during a debate on the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories at the UN Security Council. The US Permanent Representative to the UN, Donald McHenry, had then voted in favour of a resolution condemning the settlements. According to Carter's memoirs, McHenry was given his voting instruction based on the assumption that the resolution did not make any reference to Jerusalem. However, the resolution ended up referring to the Holy City, and McHenry still voted in favour. This created a major diplomatic incident with Israel, which led to an embarrassing retraction from the White House. As Carter wrote in his memoirs, 'this episode was a major cause of my primary losses in New York and Connecticut, and it proved highly damaging to me among American Jews throughout the country for the remainder of the election year.'[66] This, further puts into perspective Carter's motives in warning his Atlantic allies not to do something his administration knew they did not plan on doing. In effect, at this juncture, the President was most likely using the Community as a strawman to combat his politically damaging pro-Arab reputation, and his interview appears more as a piece of campaign bravado than a genuine warning to the Atlantic allies.

In fact, a day before Carter's interview, François-Poncet had repeated most of what he had said to Muskie at a press conference held immediately after their meeting. He had then publicly insisted that the European initiative would not 'try to harm or interfere in any way with other negotiations.'[67] Coming from a French Foreign Minister, this was particularly revealing of

[64] For a good account of the Israel lobby on US domestic politics and foreign policy see: John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).
[65] MAE, 91Q/975, 'Proche-Orient. Politique américaine', TD Washington 1023, 13 mai 1980.
[66] Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, 502-04.
[67] MAE, 91Q/901, 'Extrait de la conférence de presse du ministre devant les journalistes américains et français, vendredi 30 mai, 16h30'.

European good intentions. François-Poncet's public campaign to calm American anxieties did not stop there. On 2 June, he was interviewed on American public television, and the presenter's opening remarks qualified the Atlantic Alliance as 'the strained alliance'. He further said:

> 'One of the recurring themes in American foreign policy is the irritation with the allies, and that has been an unusually prominent theme recently. […] These strings have been most acute between the United States and its oldest allies of all, the French. In recent weeks, France has rejected the boycott of the Moscow Olympics, French President Giscard d'Estaing has a sudden meeting with Soviet President Brezhnev, without consulting Washington. Despite strong opposition in Washington, the French are now pushing for a new European initiative, to get the Palestinians into the Middle East peace talks.'[68]

While the presenter may have been right in terms of diverging Cold War policies on both sides of the Atlantic, he was, in fact, wrong about French and European intentions towards the Middle East conflict. The Europeans might have voiced their concern about Camp David, but, as we saw, they had no intentions of challenging it. Here, the extent to which Carter's interview had contributed to creating a false perception of a transatlantic clash over the Middle East is obvious.

Faced with such a grim picture of transatlantic relations, François-Poncet replied: 'I hope you will not hold it against me, that the media are making it out to be more than it is.' As the discussion turned to the European initiative, he explained that there was an urgent need to take into consideration the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination, that the Nine were in a unique position to do so, but that their goal was 'not to harm, not to paralyse, not to be against the American policy in that area.' He then gave further reassurances that there would not be any initiative at the UN, but that the Nine would simply try 'to develop political contacts' with all the parties concerned including the Palestinians. As the host was depicting the Community's recognition of Palestinian self-determination as something that France was trying to force on its partners, François-Poncet intervened to set the record straight. He countered that 'most European partners are already agreed that PLO is a concerned party,' before concluding: 'I don't even think we'll have to press anyone.'[69]

On 13 June 1980, therefore, the European Council issued a declaration that came as no surprise for the Americans[70]. Nevertheless, Carter, speaking in front of an audience of Jewish journalists, feigned to express discontent at the Europeans. As Laboulaye reported, Carter claimed again that he would firmly oppose any European move to amend SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian self-

[68] MAE, 91Q/901, 'The MacNeil/Lehrer Report, PBS network, Monday, June 2, 1980 at 7:30 PM'.
[69] Ibid.
[70] For the full text of the Venice declaration see: Hill and Smith, *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents*, 302-04.

determination. He also said that he would convey to his European counterparts at the G-7 summit in Venice the following week that he would not tolerate any challenge to the Camp David peace process. He then wrongly affirmed that his administration had had a role in toning down the Nine's pro-Arab ambitions[71]. This might not have been a completely disingenuous remark though, since at the time, despite the many European disclaimers, there was a sense in Washington that the Nine had actually sought to go further than they did.

The President's reaction contrasted with that of his Secretary of States. Tellingly, back in May, Muskie had said to François-Poncet that his government would probably criticise the European initiative publicly, even though he personally understood the Nine's rationale for getting involved[72]. His reaction to the Venice Declaration though sought to emphasise the compatibility of European and American policies. He said that he believed the European initiative to be aimed at the medium to long term resolution of the conflict in the Middle East, and that it relied on the hope that the PLO would eventually come to recognise Israel's right to exist. He added that, on the contrary, the Americans focused on the short-term management of the peace process, which at present could not include the PLO since it was still refusing to recognise Israel[73]. This was, in fact, a pretty accurate assessment of transatlantic relations over the Middle East conflict at the time.

Nevertheless, the American press largely ignored Muskie's position and followed Carter's lead. The very influential *New York Times*, for instance, in an editorial entitled 'Minor-League Mid East Game,' wrote that '[a]s a declaration of independence from American diplomacy, the European Allies' pronouncement in Venice Friday was merely pathetic.'[74] While admitting that Camp David was in an impasse, the *Washington Post* also took the position that '[w]hat the Europeans have done, nonetheless, is wrong.' And the *Baltimore Sun* attributed the Venice Declaration to 'rivalry with Washington, oil-fired craving for Arab approval, and honest belief in redressing Palestinian grievances.'[75] While the President had mostly issued his warnings for domestic consumption in the context of a very difficult election campaign, his intervention dramatically shaped the perception of the European initiative worldwide. There was one positive outcome for the Community, however. Carter's reaction combined with the harsh criticism that dominated in the American

[71] MAE, 4170 'Première réaction américaine à la déclaration des Neuf sur le Moyen-Orient', 13 juin 1980.
[72] MAE, 91Q/901, 'Entretien du ministre avec le secrétaire d'état le vendredi 30 mai de midi à 13 heures', TD Washington 1156, 2 juin 1980.
[73] MAE, 4170 'Première réaction américaine à la déclaration des Neuf sur le Moyen-Orient', 13 juin 1980.
[74] TNA, FCO93/2570, Tel. No. 2250, 'Arab/Israel European Council statement,' 15 June 1980.
[75] TNA, FCO93/2570, Tel. No. 2278, 'Washington Tel. 2253: Arab/Israel – European Council Middle East statement,' 17 June 1980.

press contributed to creating the perception that the Europeans had further distanced themselves from Washington on this issue. This further established the Community as a potential counterweight to the US approach to the peace process, even though the Arabs, and the PLO in particular, also believed that the Europeans had not gone as far as they wanted because of American pressure[76].

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has explained, contrary to the common perception, the French never had to push their EPC partners to recognise Palestinian self-determination and call for the association of the PLO with the peace process. By this time, in fact, the French were not ready to call for a Palestinian state yet, and thus never seriously pushed for a more assertive declaration than the one issued by the European Council on 13 June 1980. Moreover, at the time, using the Community's potential diplomatic weight to make a comeback in Middle Eastern diplomacy was an integral part of France's national strategy. The French needed EPC, and by then they had learned that it was impossible to make it function in opposition to the US, since every time they had tried in the past, it had led to the collapse of European unity. This time, therefore, they took into consideration US concerns, and this attitude largely explains why negotiations went so smoothly within EPC. If this reassessment emphasises the *Atlanticisation* of France's foreign policy its corollary was the Europeanisation of Britain's. As a result of EC interdependence, best exemplified at the time by the British Budgetary Question (BBQ), Britain, which had failed to act on its own after Carter had changed his mind on amending SCR 242, demonstrated an unprecedented commitment to collective European action towards the Middle East. This particular dynamic of Franco-British convergence towards Europe allowed for the emergence of a Community consensus strong enough to navigate the transatlantic dimension of European foreign policy making.

This Franco-British leadership was made possible in large part because both London and Paris could use the Community as a cover: the British from the Americans, and the French from the Arabs. Paris could thus justify supporting a European stance that did not go as far as the Arabs would have wanted without affecting its reputation for leadership on the Palestinian question within the Community. And, London could more easily face US anxieties about a European involvement by pointing to their imperative for European solidarity. While the other EC member states also played a role in this story, by far, the main intra-EPC dynamic was the emergence of

[76] For the reactions to the Venice declaration see: Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 453-55.

the Franco-British leadership. Agreement between them was a pre-requisite for any advancement of the Community's stance towards the Middle East conflict. This was not only because of their superior international stature, but also because their different approaches to transatlantic relations exemplified perfectly the Community's Middle East dilemma of striking the right balance between Atlanticism and Europeanism. On the one hand, European relevance in Middle Eastern diplomacy stemmed from having a different position from Washington's; and, on the other hand, if this position was too different from the American hegemon, their collective front would collapse.

This chapter has, therefore, revealed a much more intricate and historically relevant picture of the Community's road to the Venice Declaration. It has shown that this episode can better be understood as a European attempt at cooperation with Washington, instead of yet another chapter in the long-running transatlantic dispute over the Middle East since Suez. In fact, far from being a repeat of the 1973-4 crisis, as the literature basically argues, the events of 1979-80 marked a break in the Community's approach to transatlantic relations over the Middle East. By that time, the Europeans still disagreed with the American approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but they accepted that frontal opposition was pointless and even counterproductive. Instead, they worked around US policy, and kept Washington informed of their intentions every step of the way. In that respect, the the road to the Venice Declaration was about European self-restraint and not American obstructionism. This is an important distinction as it set the ground for an effective involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy as explained in the second part of this dissertation. But, first, now that we have seen how the Europeans managed to issue the Venice Declaration, we shall turn to the reasons why they wanted to get involved in Middle East diplomacy in the first place.

CHAPTER 4

FROM CAMP DAVID TO THE VENICE DECLARATION

THE EUROPEAN RESCUE OF US MIDDLE EAST POLICY

INTRODUCTION

If the Venice Declaration is remembered as a milestone in the evolution of the European stance on the Middle East conflict, the ensuing diplomatic initiative has been utterly forgotten. In Venice, the nine Community member states' (the Nine) had announced that they would launch their first diplomatic mission outside the European continent. This was a significant step in European Political Cooperation (EPC) history. For the first time, the Europeans found themselves in a position not only to voice their position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also to back up their words with collective actions. In many ways, this was the most remarkable aspect of the European Council's statement in Venice.

That said, the historiography barely engages with this episode. Again, Maria Gainar's book presents the only account based on archival research[1]. It naturally emphasises its importance for the process of foreign policy cooperation itself, but, in terms of its impact in Middle Eastern diplomacy, it concludes, along with the rest of the literature, to a complete failure[2]. Given the current analysis, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the announcement of the Community's diplomatic mission in Venice was essentially a face-saving measure. Having watered down their declaration because of American obstructionism, the Nine simply launched an initiative to escape the appearance that they had completely bowed to US pressure. Ultimately, the lack of scholarly engagement tends to substantiate the popular perception that this episode was nothing more than a desperate attempt to be relevant in world affairs. In the final analysis, on top of being a prime example of the Community's inability to adopt a truly independent stance from the US, the Venice Declaration

[1] Maria Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980* (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2012), 455-61.
[2] Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 53-57; David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 100-01; Elena Calandri, "The EC and the Mediterranean: Hitting the Glass Ceiling," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019), 79.

also emerges from the historiography as yet another example of the European Community's (EC) ineffectiveness as an active diplomatic actor.

Problematically, the question of the Nine's objective with their diplomatic mission to the Middle East has not been the object of any serious inquiry. It is therefore worth asking what the Nine actually sought to do with their initiative. According to paragraph 11 of the Venice Declaration, the Nine's objective was 'to ascertain the position of the various parties with respect to the principles set out in this declaration and in the light of the results of this consultation process to determine the form which an initiative on their part could take.'[3] The Europeans did consult with both Arabs and Israelis, but they never managed to bring any concrete contribution to peace. In that respect, their initiative was indeed an unmitigated failure.

There is something odd, though, about the Nine's objective as stated in the Venice Declaration. On the one hand, they did not need a touring mission to assess the positions of the various parties to the Middle East conflict. These were pretty well known by that stage. Besides, as we saw in the first two chapters, France and Britain already had a full picture of the situation. On the other hand, it is hard to see what the European initiative could be about if it was not setting an alternative course to Camp David, or amending United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian rights. The Americans were obviously opposed to the former option. As for the latter, it was the only way for the Europeans to address Arab concerns within the Camp David framework, but there again Washington would not allow it, at least for the moment. To recapitulate, the legitimacy of the Nine's involvement stemmed from Arab expectations that they would be challenging US policy, but they were in no position to do so. As explained in the previous chapter, the Europeans were fully aware of their limitations, and never actually intended to offer an alternative course to Camp David. So, assuming that their diplomatic mission was not simply a face saving measure, why did the Europeans decide to go beyond declaratory diplomacy and what did they try to achieve exactly?

This chapter contends that there was an important security dimension to the European initiative, which has gone unnoticed in the literature. The main reason for this is that the Venice Declaration has been analysed exclusively through the prism of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, therefore, it is simply assumed that the Nine sought to mount some sort of peace initiative. Putting the Community's renewed activism towards the Middle East in the late 1970s in the context of American, French, and British policies towards the region at large, this chapter identifies the

[3] Christopher Hill and Karen E. Smith, eds., *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), 302-04.

unusual set of international circumstances that finally convinced the Nine to try to go beyond declaratory diplomacy. It shows that, like in 1973, there was a convergence between support for the Palestinians and the defence of European interests in the Middle East, and that, like in 1973, the Europeans believed that US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict was not adequate to lead to a comprehensive and lasting settlement. It explains, however, that there were three major differences in 1980, which primarily justified the Nine's decision to go beyond declaratory diplomacy: First, because Camp David had become the focus of Arab revolutionary fervour, they believed that US policy had become the biggest risk for the stability of the region; second, the US security framework in the Middle East had collapsed; and third, they had lost confidence in US global leadership. This chapter therefore argues that with the launch of their initiative, the Nine sought to rescue Carter's failing Middle East policy. It shows that the Venice Declaration should be understood first and foremost as a European attempt to participate, in cooperation with Washington, to the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the Middle East. In doing so, it reveals the potential of a differentiated policy between the two sides of the Atlantic for the defence of Western interests and the duplicity that comes along with it.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT: AN OVERVIEW

Carter's crowning achievement in the Middle East was of course the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978. However, the negotiations that ensued remained limited to a bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel, and the talks on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories never amounted to anything. In that respect, instead of laying down the groundwork for a comprehensive settlement as Carter initially envisaged, Camp David achieved almost the opposite result[4]. Recently, William Quandt, who has written extensively about US policy towards the Middle East conflict, and also participated in the Camp David negotiations, wrote that '[i]n retrospect, I now think that we would have done better at Camp David to accept the fact that we could only hope to set out the guidelines for an Egyptian-Israeli agreement,' and that 'a large part of the Camp David Accords was a sort of smokescreen to make [Anwar] Sadat and Carter feel that they had done their best to establish an eventual basis for a comprehensive peace.' He, admitted to tweaking the language of the Accords so that 'Begin could interpret the text his way; Sadat and Carter could

[4] For two recent account of Carter's policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 17-161; Jørgen Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018). See also William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2016).

say it laid the ground for an eventual 'land for peace' agreement on the West Bank, if only Jordan or the Palestinians would join the process.'[5]

Carter's and Sadat's desperate attachment to Camp David as a basis for negotiating a comprehensive settlement antagonised the rest of Arab world. Initially, though, in strict Cold War terms, Camp David was undoubtedly a success for the Americans. Egypt, the most powerful Arab state, had gone from cultivating it relationship with Moscow under Gamal Abdel Nasser to a staunch US ally under Sadat, and this transition culminated with Cairo's participation in the American-led peace process. The Soviets thus found themselves excluded from the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation, something that strengthened the Western position in the Middle East. But, Camp David proved to be a double-edged sword. Its failure to include the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the negotiations fuelled anti-American sentiment in the Arab world, and exacerbated revolutionary fervour in the Middle East. By creating the illusion of a workable framework to deal with the Palestinian question, Camp David created new opportunities for Soviet expansionism, and contributed to the rise of political Islam. In the end, Carter's policy rapidly came to constitute a threat to Western interests in the region. And, this unfortunate outcome became the underlying reason for Europe's decision to get involved in Middle Eastern diplomacy.

As the Palestinian question festered, it became a major security concern for both regional and Western powers. The US attitude not only affected the Palestinian struggle for national recognition, but it also threatened the security of the entire Middle East, and increasingly prevented the Americans from managing regional tensions. This was most obvious in the case of the Lebanese civil war, where the PLO was playing a central role. Washington's engagement in Lebanon in the second half of the 1970s was probably the most evident manifestation of how its treatment of the Palestinian question came to hinder the pursuit of its Middle East policy. While in the search for Arab-Israeli peace the Americans had managed to circumvent the PLO, this was not an option in the case of the Lebanese civil war. As a result, the US was unable to take the lead on this issue instead letting the main Arab powers drive diplomatic efforts, even though they still exerted significant influence behind the scene[6].

However, as the Lebanese civil war became ever more intertwined with the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US approach to the Palestinian question made it increasingly difficult for Washington to

[5] William B. Quandt, "H-Diplo Article Review of Nigel Ashton. "Taking Friends for Granted: The Carter Administration, Jordan, and the Camp David Accords, 1977-1980"," Review, *H-Diplo*, no. 740 (2018).
[6] On the interconnection between US policies towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Cold War in the Middle East, and the Lebanese civil war see: James R. Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention: US Foreign Policy and the Collapse of Lebanon, 1967-1976* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1-19.

manage the situation in the background. This became obvious after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, which forced Carter to backpedal on his original intention to reconvene the Geneva conference and break away from Kissinger's step-by-step approach to the Arab-Israeli peace process. Not only did it bring to an end the tacit cooperation with Syria over Lebanon, but it also contributed to the intensification of PLO attacks against Israel, which, in turn, led to the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon[7]. Tellingly, this crisis was handled at the UN, even though the Carter administration still played a crucial role in negotiating the cease-fire. However, when it came to getting Arafat's endorsement, it was Kurt Waldheim, the UN General Secretary, who took the lead and paid the Palestinian leader a visit in South Lebanon, thus *de facto* recognising the PLO as a party to the conflict[8]. In that respect, the diplomatic treatment of the Lebanese situation stood in sharp contrast to the other areas of the Arab-Israeli dispute, where, by that time, Washington had assumed exclusive diplomatic leadership. By the late 1970s, therefore, Lebanon had become the blackspot of US Middle East policy, precisely when the country had turned into the epicentre of the Arab-Israeli conflict. And, as explained in chapter 2, in 1979, the Americans were reluctant to take the lead in dealing with the collapse of the cease-fire in South Lebanon, and looked towards France, amongst others, for help.

In the second half of the 1970s, therefore, it was clear that the Palestinian question had become a major security issue, and Carter's determination to address it was in part a response to growing instability in the Middle East region, and not just the belief that the Palestinians were being treated unfairly. But, as he repeatedly failed to do so, he needed increasing support from regional powers and Atlantic allies to handle the situation.

FATEFUL 1979: THE COLLAPSE OF THE US SECURITY FRAMEWORK IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Taking a quick look at the state of affairs in the Middle East at the end of the 1970s, it is hard to overestimate the extent of Western concerns towards the region. The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, which led to the fall of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, on 11 February 1979, dealt a first blow to the US security framework in the Middle East, and triggered a second oil shock. Until then, Iran had been one of two countries, along with Saudi Arabia, that were important recipient of US foreign aid and arm sales in exchange for policing the region. Not only did the return of

[7] Javier Gil Guerrero, "Overshadowed Crisis: The Carter Administration and the Conflict in Southern Lebanon," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 4 (2016): 401-21.
[8] Karim Makdisi, "Reconsidering the Struggle over Unifil in Southern Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (2014): 24-41, 30.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Tehran lead to the loss of one of Washington's regional policemen, but the revolution also constituted a powerful pole of attraction for Muslims all over the Middle East who had grown disillusioned with both superpowers[9]. At first, the new regime directed revolutionary fervour primarily towards the US. Most famously, on 4 November 1979, Iranian students who supported Khomeini's revolution, stormed the US embassy in Tehran taking sixty-three American hostages. This was a spectacular event, which plagued Carter's last year in the White House[10]. In addition, Iran's transformation into a revolutionary power resulted in mounting tension with Iraq, which led to the outbreak of war in September 1980[11].

There was also serious concern about Saudi Arabia's internal stability. In November 1979, for example, a group of armed insurgents seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and called for the overthrow of the House of Saud[12]. The country's security forces struggled to regain control of the situation, and, in the end, the French provided significant tactical and human support in the resolution of the crisis[13]. This considerably strengthened the perception that the Saudi regime was in no position to squash a large scale rebellion like the one that had just taken place in Iran. In addition, the country's Communist party had found a new lease of life from 1975 onward, and progressively became a force to be reckoned with in Saudi domestic politics. Furthermore, this internal threat to the regime was compounded by the resumption of hostilities between the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in February 1979[14]. Add to that the growing anti-Americanism in the population since Camp David together with the Kingdom's close relationship with Washington, and it was clear that the regime's reliability as a Western security asset was shaky at best. All this also meant that, at that juncture, getting Saudi Arabia to support Camp David would prove extremely difficult. In January 1979, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) memorandum on the impact of the Iranian revolution on the Saudi authorities warned that they were distancing themselves from Egypt and the US, and that on Camp David 'they may move even closer to the rejectionist position.' The memorandum also expressed

[9] Javier Gil Guerrero, *The Carter Administration and the Fall of Iran's Pahlavi Dynasty: US-Iran Relations on the Brink of the 1979 Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[10] For a good account see David R. Farber, *Taken Hostage : The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[11] On the Iran-Iraq war see for instance: Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge Mass.: The Belknap Press, 2015).
[12] On this event see Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).
[13] Hamit Bozarslan, "Revisiting the Middle East's 1979," *Economy and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 558-67.
[14] Toby Matthiesen, "The Cold War and the Communist Party of Saudi Arabia, 1975–1991," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (2020): 32-62.

the concern that they 'might also decide that they have to reach an accommodation with the USSR.'[15]

So when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan on 28 December 1979, officially to prevent the toppling of the pro-Soviet regime, it catalysed all the anxieties that had been building up in Washington over the past year. This event vindicated the fear of those who believed that Moscow was set on regaining its influence in the Middle East, and East-West tensions once again came to overshadow the regional threats that Washington had clearly identified. The Western allies forcefully condemned Soviet actions and sought to build a common Arab/Muslim front against the threat of Communist expansionism. However, American policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict made this impossible. That Washington had called for an immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and not of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza was perceived as an unacceptable double standard. Far from giving the West a strategic edge in the Cold War, the Afghan crisis had, in the short-term, highlighted the extent to which Camp David had alienated significant swathes of Arab public opinion. In sum, by the end of the 1970s, Arab discontent with US Middle East policy had reached unprecedented heights[16]. It is, therefore, in the face of these numerous challenges, that Carter attempted to redefine US Cold War policy, articulate a new security framework for the Middle East, and salvage his biggest foreign policy success – Camp David –, all the while running for re-election.

This succinct overview suffices to convey the extent of US anxiety towards the Middle East by the end of the 1970s. Seen from Washington, it really seemed that the whole region was on the brink of chaos, and it naturally called for a forceful American reaction in order to protect the West's considerable interests. Already since early 1979, there was a debate within the Carter administration regarding the best way to strengthen the security framework in the Middle East. The Pentagon and the National Security Council (NSC) were pushing for a direct military commitment, whereas the State Department devised a strategy which revolved around the completion of the Camp David peace process[17]. This naturally meant engaging with the Palestinian question, and, as explained in

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[15] Document 181, 'Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency,' Washington, January 26, 1979, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*)*, 1977-1980, Volume XVIII: Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula* (Washington: GPO, 2015), 590.

[16] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 288-330; Amin Saikal, "Islamism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[17] For detailed discussions of the definition of a new US security framework in the Middle East see Olav Njølstad, "Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years," *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (2004): 21-55, 23-30; Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 271-92; Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 288-89.

the previous chapters, Carter tried one last time to deal with this most pervasive of issues, and even enrolled the Europeans in his efforts. But, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pentagon and the NSC managed to convince the President that the pressing need for a forceful American response did not allow to wait for progress in the peace process. As a result, US policy shifted towards a more traditional policy of containment. As we shall see, it is in that particular context that the Venice Declaration and the decision to launch a diplomatic initiative becomes relevant.

THE VENICE DECLARATION AS A TRANSATLANTIC SCHEME FOR A NEW SECURITY FRAMEWORK IN THE MIDDLE EAST

GOING BEYOND DECLARATORY DIPLOMACY: A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN US LEADERSHIP

To understand the EC member states' motivation for a diplomatic engagement in the Middle East in the early 1980s, it is important to put this decision in the broader context of transatlantic relations by the end of the Carter presidency. If tensions over the Arab-Israeli peace process between the two sides of the Atlantic were partly the result of US domestic politics, and therefore largely cosmetic in nature, there was nonetheless, at the time, a serious strain on the transatlantic partnership at large.

From the outset, the Europeans were ambivalent about Carter's election. A Washington outsider, he arrived in the White House with very little foreign policy experience, something that was a considerable source of anxiety for Western European leaders. That being said, at least on paper, his intention to break from Kissinger's *realpolitik* and redefine America's diplomacy with Human Rights at its core boded rather well for the transatlantic partnership[18]. At the beginning of his presidency, Carter readily acknowledged that America's 'national security was often defined almost exclusively in terms of military competition with the Soviet Union' and argued that 'it cannot be our sole preoccupation to the exclusion of other world issues'. The new President genuinely intended to decentre Cold War strategic thinking from the definition of American foreign policy by putting the East-West conflict 'in perspective, both historically and in terms of the overall global scene.' And, he acknowledged the European 'role in world affairs [was] becoming increasingly

[18] For an account of Carter's attempt to put Human Rights at the centre of US foreign policy see for instance: David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004): 113-43.

significant.'[19] As it happened, however, for the most part, Carter struggled to implement his vision, and largely failed to convince the Europeans of his leadership skills in world affairs[20].

The most damaging issue for Carter's reputation in Western Europe was undoubtedly his handling of the transatlantic security partnership. Eager to pursue *détente* with the Soviet Union, Carter set out an ambitious disarmament agenda. As he puts it in his memoirs, he wanted to 'push the *limitation* talks into *reduction* talks.'[21] The new President also dropped his predecessor's plan to modernise NATO's nuclear arsenal. The combination of the two, however, destabilised the fragile transatlantic consensus on Western Europe's security, and revived the Europeans' long-standing Cold War fear of a 'transatlantic decoupling.' In his memoirs, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt expresses this particular concern perfectly when he writes: 'the refusal to include the intermediate-range missiles directed at European targets in the negotiations [with the Soviet Union] concealed Washington's intention merely to reduce the strategic threat to American territory without being bothered by any European security interests.'[22] In hindsight, Kissinger put his finger on the exact nature of this dispute when he wrote 'the argument in favor of the intermediate range weapons was political, not strategic' and argued that '[h]ad America's European allies truly believed in America's willingness to resort to nuclear retaliation from the continental United States or from weapons based at sea, the new weapons on European soil would have been unnecessary.'[23] This perceived American challenge to European security constituted the backbone of transatlantic tensions during the Carter era, and irremediably damaged the President's relationship with the Atlantic allies. Ultimately, this dispute affected every areas of the transatlantic partnership[24].

Carter's attempt to transform US Cold War policy was also obvious in his initial plan to associate the Soviets with the Middle East negotiations. Unfortunately, here again, he did not manage to implement his vision. In addition, as we saw, he repeatedly failed to change US policy towards the Palestinian question, which both sides of the Atlantic had come to regard as a major security issue. Therefore, when, in 1979, the US security framework in the Middle East was collapsing in front of their eyes, the Europeans grew extremely anxious about Washington's ability to deal with the

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[19] Document 52, 'Remarks by President Carter', July 21, 1977, *FRUS*, *1977-1980*, *I*, 230.
[20] Joe Renouard and D. Nathan Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership in Time of Peace: Jimmy Carter and Western Europe, 1977-1981," in *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, ed. Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[21] Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 222.
[22] Helmut Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective*, trans. Ruth Hein (New York: Random House, 1989), 185.
[23] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 776.
[24] For good overviews of the transatlantic strategic debate in the 1970s see Leopoldo Nuti, "The Origins of the 1979 Dual-Track Decision - a Survey," in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, ed. Leopoldo Nuti (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Joachim Scholtyseck, "The United States, Europe, and the Nato Dual-Track Decision," in *The Strained Alliance: US-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, ed. Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

situation. Already doubtful of Carter's capacity to lead the West in a time of *détente*, they were naturally that much more anxious about his ability to cope with the return of Cold War tensions[25]. They, therefore, decided to get involved to help their struggling Atlantic ally navigate the explosion of tension in the Middle East. The Europeans, of course, did not have the geopolitical means to act as a substitute to American power. But, what they could do was to engage with the Palestinian question, at a time when the Americans no longer could.

Ahead of the Venice European Council, the Europeans often voiced their dissatisfaction with Carter's leadership, and not just amongst themselves but to the Americans directly. When British Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington travelled to Washington in May 1980, for instance, one of the main objectives of his trip was to convey the extent of European anxiety with US leadership. As one of the briefs put it, Carrington was to express concern with an 'apparent absence of coherent strategic design' in Washington's dealings with renewed East-West tensions. Furthermore, he was to point to 'the confusion of priorities in American policies' towards the Middle East[26]. The return to a more traditional Cold War policy announced during Carter's last State of the Union was an alarming prospect for the Europeans[27]. Not only did it threaten their own pursuit of *détente*, but they also believed that the US plan for a military build-up in the Middle East without addressing the Palestinian question first, or at least simultaneously, jeopardised their considerable interests in the region. In fact, just like the US State Department, the Europeans were not against the militarisation of Western Middle East policy, and, as will shall see, France and Britain took an active part in this military build-up. But, they did not believe that it was achievable without a genuine Western engagement with the Palestinian question.

Naturally, the Arabs were also concerned by the direction of US policy in the region, as well as Carter's lack of leadership in this time of crisis. Returning from a trip to the Gulf in April 1979, this is precisely what Vincent Labouret, the General Secretary of the *Companie française des pétroles* (*CFP* – today's Total), an adviser at the *Centre d'analyse et de prévision* (*CAP*) at the *Quai d'Orsay*, and a Minister plenipotentiary to the Gulf region reported to Jacques Wahl, the *Élysée*'s General Secretary. He explains that 'the loss of confidence' in the US was 'unanimous' in that part of the world. There were two main reasons for this state of affairs: First, as a result of events in Taiwan

[25] In their memoirs, Thatcher, Giscard, and Schmidt all express, to varying degrees, doubts about Carter's global leadership in 1979-80: Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 86-91, 156-60; Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Le Pouvoir et la Vie: Choisir*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Compagnie 12, 2006), 199-227; Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective*, 181-87, 202-19.

[26] The National Archives, London (Hereafter TNA), FCO 82/1029, 'Steering brief for Secretary of state's visit to Washington', 3-6 May 1980.

[27] Document 138, 'Address by President Carter on the State of the Union Before a Joint Session of Congress', January 23, 1980, *FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume I: Foundations of Foreign Policy* (Washington: GPO, 2014), 691-700.

and especially Iran, there was a pervasive feeling that 'the United States were abandoning their friends.' Second, the Americans were turning a deaf hear to Arab demands to buy arms, and were telling the Gulf states that they should focus on supplying oil to the West and let them handle regional security[28]. But, as explained in chapter 2, the Gulf states preferred to take regional security into their own hands because they did not want to be drawn into the confrontation between the two superpowers. And, of course, the establishment of a direct US military presence on their soil would inevitably turn them into Cold War targets. Others, like Saudi Arabia, were more open to a direct US military build-up in the region, but again this was made impossible because of the US approach to the Palestinian question. In that context, increasing cooperation with Washington would prove too costly either with the so-called Arab radicals or with their own population.

One major consequence of the US attitude was a significant intensification of Arab demands for a European involvement in the Middle East. Following the visits by German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher to the Middle East in June 1979, for instance, the *Auswärtiges Amt* gave a report to the Ambassadors of the Nine in Bonn. According to the French summary of this meeting, the Germans said that the US were no longer in position to move the Camp David peace process along. They argued that given the considerable opposition to the US initiative in the Arab world, the Nine should seriously think about answering the Arabs' call for a diplomatic initiative. And, they also insisted that promoting peace in the Middle East was essential to European interests[29]. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), therefore, firmly believed that the Nine had to get involved, and for obvious reasons, in their case, the cover of the Community was indispensable[30].

In January 1980, it was Carrington's turn to tour the Middle East. On that occasion, the Saudis made it clear that, despite considerable concerns about Soviet expansionism after the events of Afghanistan, the fundamental source of instability in the region remained the Camp David peace process. The Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al Faisal, expressed concerns about the direction of US policy. He was worried that Washington was focusing primarily on the Soviet threat, and seemed to underestimate the destabilising effect that Camp David and its treatment of the Palestinian question was having on the region. That being said, he also acknowledged that the change in the

[28] *Archives Nationales*, Paris (hereafter AN), AG5(3)/979, 'Vincent Labouret (ministre plénipotentiaire) à Monsieur Wahl, Secrétaire Général de la Présidence de la République,' Paris, le 5 avril 1979 ('*la perte de confiance*'; '*l'unanimité*'; '*les États-Unis abandonnent leurs amis*')

[29] *Archives du Minitère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (Hereafter MAE), 3997, 'Voyage the M. Genscher au Proche-Orient', Henry, 5 septembre 1979.

[30] For the FRG's Middle East policy in the postwar era see: Matthias Schulz, "La République Fédérale D'allemagne Et le moyen-Orient: Entre Responsabilités Historiques, Intérêts Et européanisation," *Relations internationales* 172, no. 4 (2017): 95-114.

US attitude in recent months could, in part, be attributed to the imperatives of the US elections. He therefore recognised that in the current context 'a European initiative would be timely and the Americans would probably welcome it.'[31] Following this trip, Carrington briefed the Ambassadors of the Nine in London, and said that the danger of internal subversion in the Middle East was greater than that of external aggression, and identified Camp David as the main reason for this problematic state of affairs. He added that the Americans tended to downplay Camp David's disruptive impact, and concluded that, for that reason, the Nine should seriously envisage the possibility of a European initiative [32]. As already explained in chapter 2, during his trip to the Gulf and Jordan in May 1980, French President Valéry Giscard was given the exact same message.

Between June 1979 and May 1980, West Germany, Britain and France all received the same message from various Arab states: Camp David was the main source of instability in the region, and the Europeans needed to intervene to help the West's friends keep a handle on the situation. Both Carrington's and Giscard's visits took place after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and still the message was that the greatest threat to the region was the lack of American engagement with the Palestinian question. Interestingly, Arab leaders were not asking for French, British, or German involvement, but for a collective European intervention. They believed that there was a need to offset the impact of US policy and that, for this to be achieved, it would take a collective European involvement at the very least. At this juncture, though, it was not clear what they envisioned the Community's role to be exactly. They certainly expected a different approach to the Palestinian question than the Americans, but there was no clear indications as to the form that a European initiative should take. On their part, the Nine only envisaged a touring mission at this point, but whatever the nature of their diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, it was meant to remedy the shortcomings of the US strategy. Clearly, they were not only interested in acting as peace brokers. That said, neither disagreements with Washington's policy nor Arab encouragements for a European initiative were new occurrences, even though, at this juncture, they were more pronounced than usual. By themselves, therefore, these two factors do not suffice to fully account for the Nine's decision to intervene. Ultimately, their lack of confidence in the US ability to maintain regional security weighed heavily in their decision to go beyond declaratory diplomacy.

[31] TNA, FCO8/3749, 'The visit of Lord Carrington to Saudi Arabia', Craig, 27 January 1980.
[32] MAE, 4443, 'Exposé de Carrington sur sa tournée', Sauvagnargues, 21 janvier 1980.

There was of course a peace dimension to the European initiative. The drafting of the Ministerial report on the Middle East, to be submitted to the Venice European Council, focused on the Arab-Israeli peace process itself. Its purpose was to determine 'the role which Europe can play at the present moment with a view to contributing to the conclusion of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in the Middle East,' and to define the principles that should guide the Community's diplomacy. Accordingly, the Foreign Ministers suggested that '[t]he soundings should be carried through a visible process of consultation of those concerned. A touring mission should make contact with at least Israel, Egypt, the US, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, the Arab League, the PLO and representatives of the West Bankers and Gazans.'[33] This is all well and good, but, as already explained, France, Britain, and the FRG had significantly intensified their contacts in the region over the past year, and the Europeans were fully aware of the parties' various positions on how to reach a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hence, there was hardly any need for yet another round of consultation.

The analysis must, therefore, go beyond the Foreign Ministers' report and the Venice Declaration's stated goals to fully understand the European initiative's purpose. Naturally, ahead of the Venice European Council, discussions within EPC centred around the definition of the principles for peace to be announced in the upcoming declaration[34]. To justify a diplomatic initiative, the Nine first had to demonstrate to the Arabs that their stance differed from Washington. Without their call for Palestinian self-determination and the association of the PLO to the peace process there was really no foundation for a European role. In that respect, the Venice Declaration was essentially meant to set the stage for a larger European involvement. Similarly, reporting on the mission's outcome largely focused on the goals officially set by the European Council, and therefore remained limited to the Nine's potential contribution to Middle East peace[35]. In part, this explains why the security dimension of the European initiative has gone unnoticed in the literature.

While the emphasis in the discussions within EPC might not be representative of the Nine's other goals, there are nevertheless important indications that their diplomatic initiative was meant to be something more than a concrete contribution to peace. In the first instance, it is interesting to note

[33] TNA, PREM19/754, 'Draft report of Foreign Ministers on the Middle East' (Unofficial translation).
[34] Gainar, *Aux Origines de la Diplomatie Européenne: le Neuf et la Coopération Politique Européenne de 1973 à 1980*, 448-51.
[35] Ibid., 455-61.

that the Foreign Ministers' report talk of a 'visible process of consultation.' That the Nine's mission should be visible was meant to serve one important purpose, which, while not stated in the Venice Declaration or mentioned in the Foreign Ministers' report, still constituted a major, if not the major, goal for the Europeans. As Carrington reminded his EPC counterparts during a Ministerial meeting in Brussels on 22 July, for instance, an important reason for the European initiative 'was the paralysis of US policy during the electoral period.'[36] The British believed that the Community's immediate priority was to prevent further deterioration of the Middle East situation. To that end, they thought that one of the Nine's main objectives should be to maintain the 'momentum of Western peace efforts during the forthcoming difficult period, in particular to allay Arab fears about Western policy.'[37] In the short-term, therefore, with their diplomatic initiative, the Nine sought to fill the diplomatic vacuum that the American retreat from the Middle East peace process had left, hence the need for visibility. Obviously, this is not something they could advertise, since the expectation that legitimised their diplomatic engagement was that they would act independently of the Americans.

Fundamentally, filling the diplomatic vacuum was meant to help Washington manage radicalisation in the Arab world, which had exploded as a result of Camp David. Back in May, British Permanent Representative to the UN, and former Ambassador to Iran, Anthony Parsons, had warned that the Europeans could not afford to remained idle in the face of growing instability in the region. He explained that some ways of 'keeping the Arabs in play until after the [US] presidential election' had to be elaborated for fear that 'the more extreme Arabs' would gain increasing influence in regional politics. He therefore suggested the opening of dialogue with the PLO[38] Here, it is clear that the British rationale for a touring mission went beyond the search for peace, something that Carrington's intervention during the Ministerial meeting of 22 July further corroborated. Tellingly, he warned his EPC counterparts that the mission, as currently defined, with an ending in mid-September, was 'merely an initial episode,' and was not 'adequate' to manage tensions until the Americans were back in business[39].The French as well concurred that the Nine's most pressing objective was to stall further radicalisation in the Middle East during the US presidential campaign,

[36] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 532, 'European Political Cooperation: Ministerial meeting, Brussels 22 July: Venice Declaration and Thorn Mission. Summary,' 23 July 1980.
[37] TNA, FCO98/920, Brief, 'Political Committee, Luxembourg, 16-17 July 1980. Item 1: Middle East.'
[38] TNA, FCO93/2581, Tel. n. 721, 8 May 1980.
[39] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 532, 'European Political Cooperation: Ministerial meeting, Brussels 22 July: Venice Declaration and Thorn Mission. Summary,' 23 July 1980.

and that the touring mission was only a first step in what needed to be a wider European engagement in the Middle East[40].

The Nine's increased concern about radicalisation in the region had a significant Cold War dimension. As the Saudi Foreign Minister had explained to Carrington during his recent visit for example: 'Camp David had reintroduced radicalism into the Arab world, widened the field for Soviet mischief and made life impossible for the West's friends.'[41] In fact, this assessment explains in large part the Nine's commitment to a European initiative in Venice. In line with Parsons' global reading of the situation, in May, the head of the Middle East and North Africa Department (NENAD) at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Oliver Miles, argued that 'we must look at Arab-Israel against the background of the wider regional problems, particularly Afghanistan and Iran'[42]. The French also were thinking about a European role in the Middle East in Cold War terms. This is what, for example, a conversation between French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet and FCO's Ian Gilmour, the Lord Privy Seal with a portfolio for foreign policy, on 19 September, reveals. During their meeting, François-Poncet argued that if the Europeans failed to offer a genuine alternative to American efforts, it 'would cause disillusionment among the Arabs and leave them feeling that they had nothing but the Americans or the Russians to choose between.'[43] Following Giscard's trip to the Gulf, he had also made the exact same point in front of the Senate's Foreign Affairs Commission[44].

France's Gaullist obsession of breaking the superpower condominium over the Middle East was not about offering a neutral alternative to the US and the Soviet Union though. Instead, it was meant to strengthen the West's position in the region. French Political Director, Gabriel Robin, for instance, explained to his German counterpart, Klaus Blech, that the Nine disposed of a 'good argument' to convince the Americans of the necessity of a European initiative. As he put it: 'the best chance of reducing, in the long-term, Moscow's influence in the Middle East was to reach a solution to the Middle East conflict.' To achieve this, Robin continued, it was indispensable to

[40] MAE, 4152, N° 198 AN/MO, 'Éléments pour la communication du Ministre au conseil des Ministres du 23 juillet,' 21 juillet 1980.
[41] MAE, 4443, 'Exposé de Carrington sur sa tournée', Sauvagnargues, 21 janvier 1980.
[42] TNA, FCO93/2581, 'Policy towards the Middle East', Miles to Moberly, 19 May 1980.
[43] TNA, FCO955, 'Record of conversation between the Lord Privy Seal and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay on 19 September 1980 at 11.45 AM.'.
[44] AN, AG/5(3)/3119, 'Commission des Affaires Étrangères du Sénat, 13 mars 1980 – Schéma de communication du Ministre sur le Moyen-Orient (après le voyage du Président dans le Golfe et en Jordanie, et son prolongement en Arabie.'

deal with the Palestinian question head-on, which, for the French, ultimately meant going beyond Camp David[45].

One of the principal objectives behind the Venice Declaration was, therefore, to contribute to the preservation of Western security in the Middle East. Admittedly, the Nine's diplomatic activism from the summer 1980 onward stemmed from a profound disagreement with Washington regarding the best strategy to deal with the Middle East situation. More than this in fact, they believed that the US inability to deal with the Palestinian question was the main reason that opened the door to Soviet subversion in the Middle East. They had identified Camp David as the main source radicalisation in the Arab world, and they sought to appease tensions by doing what Washington could not. That said, the European initiative was primarily meant to mitigate the negative outcome of US policy, not oppose it. In that respect, the Venice Declaration undoubtedly went beyond the promotion of Arab-Israeli peace, and, in fact, had a significant security dimension, which was meant to serve Western interests as a whole.

COMPLICIT DISSONANCE: TRANSALTANTIC DUPLICITY AND THE SECURITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

By the time of the Venice Declaration the general perception was that the two sides of the Atlantic were running at cross-purposes over the Middle East. But, the situation was infinitely more complex than this. The genuine transatlantic dispute over Camp David, in fact, came to serve Western economic and Cold War interests in the Middle East as whole. On the one hand, the Europeans actively sought to exploit their disagreement with Washington to both increase their influence in the region and help maintain Western security. On the other hand, the Carter administration, which was in a policy impasse at the time, passively relied on European diplomatic activism, all the while cultivating the perception of a transatlantic clash over the Middle East for domestic purposes. In this duplicitous game across the Atlantic, the Community was a pivotal instrument. It allowed the EC member states to play a double game whereby they would ensure the Americans that there would not be any challenge coming their way while entertaining hopes in the Arab world that they were getting ready to mount an initiative independent from Washington. Also, it allowed Carter to use the Community as a strawman in a desperate attempt to combat his pro-Arab reputation in the context of the presidential campaign, while limiting the strain that it could cause in his bilateral relations with the EC member states. The unintended

[45] MAE, 4006, 'Compte-rendu de la réunion des directeurs politiques français et allemand (Paris, le 9 septembre 1980),' confidentiel ('*bon argument*'; '*la meilleure chance de réduire à long terme l'influence de Moscou au Proche-Orient est d'aboutir à une solution du conflit du Proche-Orient*')

consequence of this was to strengthen the perception of European independence from the US in the Arab World, which in turn strengthened the European position.

The Community's international identity, which the EC member states had strived to build throughout the 1970s, proved indispensable in handling Europe's Middle East dilemma which consisted in walking the very thin line between Arab approval and American opposition. Laying out what British and French Middle East policies gained from and brought to EPC reveals the extent to which the Community had become a distinctive international actor by the early 1980s, and how it could be used for the defence of Western interests worldwide.

In Britain's case, participation in a European initiative allowed for the attenuation of its Atlanticist reputation. With their EC membership, the British benefited from France's Gaullist identity. This allowed them to be part of an initiative, which was perceived in the Arab world as being more independent from the US than what they could ever have set up on their own, all the while insisting within EPC that there should not be any challenges to American policy. At the same time, British Atlanticism also limited the Carter administration's anxieties about the European initiative. Experience had shown the Americans that they could often lean on Britain to rein in European diplomatic ambitions, and this time was no exception. As a briefing memorandum for US Secretary of State Edmund Muskie ahead of Carrington's visit in early May put it, for instance, the main objective was 'to strengthen the British disposition to shape anything the Europeans do in terms of supplementing our strategy rather than replacing it, and to get the British to work on the Europeans to keep their options open until we see what we have in hand at the end of this month.'[46]

France's use of EPC was even more striking. Its Gaullist reputation had been central in the Community's ability to play an active role in Middle Eastern diplomacy, as it gave the Arabs confidence that a European engagement could be a genuine counterweight to US policy. It is, indeed, hard to see how the Arabs could have come to identify the Community as a potential counterweight to US policy without France. That said, despite their multiple pronouncements to the contrary, the French knew that setting European diplomacy in frontal opposition to Washington was not a viable option. Their Community counterparts would not have it, and neither would the Americans. In fact, it was also doubtful that, in the face of US opposition, they, themselves, would be willing to go through with a challenge to Camp David. As a memorandum

[46] The National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, (hereafter NARA), RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, Briefing Memorandum, From Saunders to the Acting Secretary, 'Your Discussion with Carrington on the Middle East,' 2 May 1980.

for François-Poncet dated 11 September explains: 'In fact, at the moment, it is advisable to limit ambitions to a reasonable role for Europe […]. But, this method, the only one that the European Community can set for itself at the moment, does not permit the concrete action that M. Kissinger had led to initiate the Camp David [*sic.*] peace process.'[47] The French were thus fully aware of the limits of European influence in the search for Arab-Israeli peace.

France also benefited from British Atlanticism. If the French often tested the transatlantic boundaries within EPC, they ultimately knew that the British would check their Gaullist impulses. They could, therefore, push harder than they probably would have otherwise without running any serious risk of actually setting the Community on a course that would clash with the American hegemon, all the while ingratiating themselves with the Arabs. That, at this juncture, they did not state publicly what they could not get their European partners to endorse, as they had often done in the past, is a strong indication that they never truly intended to go beyond what would be acceptable to Washington.

The French case is particularly revealing of European duplicity towards the Arabs. For example, ahead of Giscard's trip to the Gulf, Patrick Leclercq, the *Élysée*'s diplomatic adviser, wrote a revealing memorandum. In it, he plainly advised that the President engage in 'double talk' with his hosts. His recommendation was that Giscard should 'cultivate their non-alignment,' while simultaneously emphasise, 'in a discreet fashion,' that 'it would be unwise to ignore where [their] true friends are.' In other words, as Leclercq also put it, if 'the United States' clumsiness could exacerbate the threats,' ultimately, '[these threats] did not come from [the American] side.' Giscard's diplomatic adviser warned that the President 'should not appear as a defender of the United States, [or] as its spokesperson.' But, he insisted that US and Europe's interests in the region 'are connected,' and that the 'reservation that some American initiatives can arouse' must not lead the Gulf states to forget that the Soviets are the real enemy. He then concluded that it was in Arab interest that 'the West did not leave any doubts in terms of its attachment to the preservation of the current situation.'[48] This note confirms that, ultimately, the French understood

[47] MAE, 4171, Note pour le Ministre, 'Suite de la Mission Thorn: Question de méthode et question de fond,' 11 septembre 1980 ('*En fait, il convient actuellement de limiter les ambitions au niveau d'un role raisonnable de l'Europe* […]. *Mais cette méthode, la seule que la Communauté Européenne puisse se fixer à l'heure actuelle, ne permet pas l'action concrète que M. Kissinger avait menée pour engager le processus de Camp David*').

[48] AN, AG5(3)/979, Note pour le Président de la République, 'a/s : Visite dans le Golfe - Note d'entretien (par P. Leclercq),' Paris, 26 février 1980 ('*un double langage*'; '*cultiver leur non-alignement*'; '*de manière plus discrète*'; '*qu'il serait peu sage d'ignorer ou se trouvent les vrais amis*'; '*les maladresses des Etats-Unis peuvent exacerber les menaces mais que celles-ci ne viennent pas de leur côté*'; '*Sans doute ne devons-nous pas apparaitre comme les défenseurs des Etats-Unis, ni leur porte parole*'; '*nos intérêts sont solidaires*'; '*Les réserves que peuvent susciter certaines initiatives américaines*'; '*Il est de leur intérêt que l'Occident ne laisse pas de doute sur son attachement à la préservation de la situation actuelle*').

their role in the Middle East first and foremost as a Western actor, and reveals the astonishing discrepancy between France's Gaullist rhetoric and its real intentions.

Ultimately, the particular blend of French Gaullism and British Atlanticism that resulted from nearly ten years of EPC cooperation on the Middle East allowed for the emergence of a collective diplomatic actor, with a distinct identity, that could navigate the intricacies of Europe' Middle East dilemma in a way that none of its member states could have ever done on their own. Interestingly, what this chapter reveals is the extent of European duplicity in the Middle East, which ultimately, contrary to the popular perception, translated into complicity with Washington not the Arabs. Again, this does not mean that the Nine did not in fact disagree with American diplomacy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. But, their defence of the Palestinian cause, as genuine as it might be, was meant, first and foremost, to defend Western economic and Cold War interest not bring peace in the Middle East.

There was also a certain degree of duplicity coming from Washington. Carter and the State Department agreed with the Europeans that a political engagement with the Palestinian question had to go hand in hand with a US military build-up. But, the imperatives of the presidential campaign together with the return of the Cold War as the US main concern in the Middle East following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led the President to drop his efforts to change the US approach to the Palestinian question. The gravity of the situation warranted immediate action, but because he could no longer engage with the Palestinian question, the only option left was to focus on the militarisation of US Middle East policy.

By the time of the Venice Declaration, the US officials who had advocated that a gesture be made towards the Palestinians had not changed their minds. Harold H. Saunders, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, for example, had sent a revealing memo to Muskie on 5 June entitled 'Managing a Pause in Middle East Negotiations.' In the event that a resumption of the negotiations were not possible in the short-term, Saunders explained that the main question to answer was whether or not it would be possible to curb Israel's obstructionism. If yes, then the US should put 'maximum pressure' on Egypt. If no, he argued that 'we should at least consider carefully whether we might not make a virtue of necessity by using the prolonged pause to advance toward longer-term objectives.' In this case, he envisaged two options. First, 'to stake out our own positions on certain key issues, thereby positioning ourselves better with the Europeans and moderate Arabs.' Second, 'to complement whatever pressures may be building within Israel for

more flexible negotiating position.' Clearly, if Israeli obstructionism led to the collapse of the Autonomy talks, Saunders believed that the US should draw closer to the Euro-Arab position[49].

Furthermore, in the likely event of a prolonged pause in the peace process, Saunders wrote that 'we will probably have to take a somewhat different tack with our European allies than we have thus far.' Still insisting that any moves from the Europeans would have to be compatible with US policy, he argued that 'we would not interfere with efforts truly designed to bring about constructive changes – especially in the respective attitude of Israel and the PLO towards one another. We would in fact welcome their success.' Saunders' idea of a European initiative was that of 'direct and quiet diplomacy.' This was essentially what the Nine announced in Venice, and would pursue over the next two years. Thinking beyond the short-term management of the peace process, Saunders reasoned that '[o]ur broader interests would probably be better served by their stealing the field with a potentially constructive move of their own.' While the memo insisted that for now the focus should be on getting Egypt and Israel talking again, it concluded that '[a]t the same time we will have to lay the groundwork for possible later collaboration.' Importantly, this memo reveals that the State Department actually had no other plans to deal with a break in the negotiations other than to rely on the European initiative[50].

Saunders' thinking made its way through to Carter when on 11 June Muskie wrote to the President that '[a]t some point down the road, we might want to consider further adjustment in our position [towards the Middle East], if that would facilitate a common Western position that could advance the prospect for peace.'[51] At this stage, for the State Department at least, making a gesture towards the Palestinians went beyond the particular case of the Arab-Israeli dispute. The director of the Policy Planning Staff, Anthony Lake, for instance, sent a memorandum to the Secretary on 21 June where he clearly explained the central importance of the Middle East conflict for Western interests: 'Western economies depends on access to energy; our access to energy depends on stability in Southwest Asia and our position there; our position in Southwest Asia depends importantly on resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute.' On this most important of issues, though, he believed that 'progress is unlikely in the coming months' because of Israeli obstructionism and the presidential election. He therefore advised that Muskie 'play a personal role' in influencing 'European actions in the wake of their declaration so that they actually enhance the pressure on

[49] NARA, RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, Briefing Memorandum, From Harold H. Saunders to the Secretary, 'Managing a Pause in Middle East Negotiations,' 5 June 1980.
[50] Ibid.
[51] NARA, RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, Memorandum, From Muskie to the President, 'Relations with Western Europe,' 11 June 1980.

Israel and the Palestinians rather than strengthening the extremist on both sides.'[52] Evidently, Lake had some concerns about European intentions. But, at that juncture, the Americans had, in fact, no other options but to passively rely on the Community's diplomatic activism, not only to deal with the hiatus in the peace process, but, more generally, for the defence of Western interests in the Middle East.

In the final analysis, the Carter administration was indeed divided on the best strategy to deal with the collapse of the Western security framework in the Middle East. As a result, State Department officials were in no position to publicly support the Nine's efforts. In their dealings with the Europeans, they therefore had to strike a delicate balance between voicing their concerns and not opposing the Nine's diplomatic activities. Ultimately, though, it was clear that the State Department understood the European initiative's potential, and in many respect was relieved that the Community was there to fill the diplomatic vacuum. Commenting on how to handle transatlantic relations in this time of international upheaval, Muskie explained to the President that '[o]ur aim would not be to preserve Western unity for its own sake, but to marshall [*sic.*] the strengths of the West which will be essential if we are to deal successfully with our most pressing international problems.'[53] Clearly, the Community's strength was its relationship with the Arab world, and at the time the perception of a transatlantic clash over the Middle East reinforced the European position. While not the result of a formal transatlantic strategy, there was nonetheless a complicit dissonance across the Atlantic, which played an important role in securing Western interests in the Middle East over the next two years as the remainder of this dissertation explains.

CONCLUSION

European involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy fundamentally stemmed from a disagreement with the US approach to the search for Arab-Israeli peace. That said, it does not explain why the Nine got involved in 1980 and not in 1973. They certainly had more experience at foreign policy coordination by the end of the decade, and their stance had grown more assertive. But they still faced the same fundamental problem: They did not have the means to act as a substitute for the Americans. They, therefore, could not seriously challenge US policy, and, in fact, by the time of the Venice declaration, they no longer sought to do so, even though they still believed that the US-led peace process was on the wrong course and a threat to Western interests. Instead, their initiative

[52] NARA, RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, Memorandum, From Lake to the Secretary, 'Issues for the Coming Months,' 21 June 1980.
[53] NARA, RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, Memorandum, From Muskie to the President, 'Relations with Western Europe,' 11 June 1980.

was, in large part, an attempt to neutralise the adverse effect that Camp David was having on the US capacity to cope with the collapse of its security framework in the region. This proved extremely worrying for the Europeans because they were dependent on the American strategy to secure their considerable interests in the region, which itself relied heavily on Arab willingness to lend a helping hand. So when, despite several attempts, Carter failed to change the US approach to the Palestinian question, the Nine decided to intervene. This failure prevented 'moderate' Arab leaders from giving the West the support it needed to protect its interests in the region and the European intervention was primarily meant to remedy this problematic situation. In effect, with their initiative, they sought to bridge the gap between 'moderate' Arab states and the Americans and in so doing hoped to bring a political contribution to the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the Middle East.

As this chapter also demonstrates, French and British Cold War security concerns became an integral part of the Community's rationale to get involved in the Middle East by the summer 1980. As the European saw it, the problem was not only that US policy towards the Palestinian question made the rebuilding of the security framework significantly more difficult. They also believed that Camp David had become the main reason for increased radicalisation in the Middle East, and that, in turn, it was the principal factor that opened the door to Soviet subversion in the region. In that respect, their initiative was also meant to close that door by managing Arab discontent with Camp David, until the Americans could push again for progress in the peace process. There was therefore an important Cold War dimension to the Venice Declaration, which has also gone unnoticed in the literature. Besides, at the time, the Nine's Cold War concern went beyond the Middle East, since if there ever was a clash between the two superpowers over the region, it would also have dire consequences for European *détente* and security, as events over Afghanistan already demonstrated.

Contrary to the public rhetoric that went along with the Venice initiative, the Nine's fundamental objective was to help the Americans consolidate their dominance over the region. Understandably, this was not something the Community could advertise, otherwise their intervention would have lost all legitimacy in Arab eyes. The Europeans therefore engaged in a duplicitous diplomacy. They used their positive reputation in the Arab world, which they had slowly built throughout the 1970s, to launch an initiative, which relied on the fact that they would pursue an alternative course to peace in the Middle East than what the Americans had done so far. However, they knew from the start that they were in no position to achieve this by themselves, but still hoped that, if re-elected,

Carter could build on their efforts to keep the Arabs at play, and go back to trying to change the US approach to the Palestinian question.

Finally, European anxiety about US policy went beyond Camp David. Historicising the Venice Declaration in the larger context of transatlantic relations at the end of the 1970s reveals that European concerns ran much deeper. The general lack of trust in Carter's leadership played a significant part in the Nine's decision to go beyond declaratory diplomacy this time around. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, the Europeans were in disagreement with Kissinger's handling of the Middle East crisis, and also feared that it could endanger their interests. But, at this stage, the US security framework was still standing; the Palestinian question, while already a source of radicalisation, was not nearly as potent as by the end of the decade, which allowed Kissinger to make progress towards peace while ignoring Palestinian revendications. And ultimately, despite being the cause of great European frustrations, Kissinger's diplomacy rapidly demonstrated that Washington was on top of the situation. By the summer 1980, however, the US security framework had collapsed, the peace process was in an impasse, the Palestinian cause had gain momentum, and the Europeans did not trust Carter's ability to lead them out of the multiple international crises, which were occurring simultaneously. Ultimately, therefore, the Venice Declaration can be seen as a European attempt to rescue US Middle East policy and it is in light of this unstated objective, that European diplomatic activism in the Middle East in the early 1980s should be reassessed.

CHAPTER 5

THE THORN MISSION, JULY – SEPTEMBER 1980

BEYOND DECLARATORY DIPLOMACY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a completely new take on the Community's first diplomatic mission outside of the European continent. Against the current analysis, it further confirms that in the summer 1980, the nine Community member states' (the Nine) priority was to help prevent the further deterioration of the Middle East situation. It contends that, measured against the Venice Declaration's unstated goals, the Europeans were, in fact, quite successful on several counts. And, it demonstrates that by going beyond declaratory diplomacy, they managed to become an integral part of the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation. To prove this argument, the analysis focuses first on how the Nine went about setting up their touring mission, which further reveals the nature of their objectives at the time. It then shows the impact of European diplomatic efforts from the summer 1980 onward by zooming in on three of the parties involved in the Middle East conflict: Israel, Egypt, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). In so doing, it also uses US sources to bring in the transatlantic dimension in the analysis and illustrate the extent to which the Europeans had become part of US thinking towards the region.

The reasons for selecting these three actors are as follow: First, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin had forcefully rejected the Venice Declaration and, therefore, explaining why Israel accepted to participate in the Nine's diplomatic initiative allows for an assessment of the Community's diplomatic weight at the time. Second, along with Israel, Egypt was the other player in the Middle East peace process. At the time, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was torn between his commitment to Camp David and the antagonising effect that his diplomatic engagement with Israel was having in his own population and the rest of the Arab world. Forced to suspend his country's participation in the talks on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories as a result of Begin's provocative policies, Sadat found himself isolated, and in a very delicate situation both domestically and internationally. Therefore, looking at the dynamics that drove European engagement with Egypt allows for an assessment of the Community's ability to help fill the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East, which was, as explained in the previous chapter, one of the

main European objectives. Third, the PLO's influence on Arab politics had grown significantly throughout the 1970s. Camp David proved a major source of radicalisation among Palestinians, and hence within the Arab world at large. At the time, the Nine sought to engage with PLO leader Yasser Arafat as a means to promote moderation in the region. Therefore, focusing on the Community's first formal contact with Arafat permits an early assessment of the core element of the European strategy for the Middle East.

THE CHOICE OF GASTON THORN: AN INCONVENIENT CHOICE OF CONVENIENCE

In the weeks following the Venice European Council, the Nine turned their attention to defining the modalities of their diplomatic mission to the Middle East. In accordance with their latest statement, they now had to organise contacts with all the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Tasked with this unprecedented exercise, the European Political Cooperation (EPC) machinery would be seriously tested, and discussions among the Nine started apace as the world was still reacting to the Venice Declaration.

Discussions were due to start at the Political Committee's last meeting under the Italian presidency, scheduled for 26-27 June. Then, the Political Directors addressed four main questions: Who should be put in charge of the mission? What timeframe should be set for its completion? Which parties to the conflict should be contacted? And, what should be the precise objective of these contacts?[1] The first item on the EPC agenda was to decide on the composition of the mission's delegation. On that front, the Foreign Ministers' report on the Middle East submitted to the European Council in Venice avoided taking a clear position. It simply ruled out 'a mission consisting of representatives of all members of the Nine' as 'unwieldy and unworkable' and suggested four different options: the presidency alone, the Troika – which was a special body composed of the previous, present and upcoming presidency –, a specially appointed commission, or a special emissary[2]. The Germans and the Italians voiced their preference for the Troika formula, and the Dutch leaned toward the nomination of a special emissary. However, they swiftly rallied to the position of France, Britain, and the rest of the Community, who favoured a mission led by the presidency alone, which, in this case, meant Luxembourg. There was further consensus

[1] *Archives du Ministère de Affaires Etrangères*, Paris (hereafter MAE), 4171, TD diplomatie 22683, 1 juillet 1980, 'Comité Politique du 27 juin 1980. Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise.'
[2] For a full draft of this report in English see The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), PREM19/754, 'Draft report of Foreign Ministers on the Middle East' (Unofficial translation).

on the fact that it should be conducted at the highest political level to signify the importance the Community attached to its initiative. Therefore, by 27 June, the Nine had decided, quite easily it seemed, that Gaston Thorn, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, would lead Europe's touring mission to the Middle East. And, Paul Mertz, the Luxembourg Political Director, immediately indicated to his colleagues that Thorn was ready to personally take charge of this mission[3].

At first glance, the choice for Luxembourg's Foreign Minister seems at odds with the importance that the Nine claimed to attach to their diplomatic mission. It is, indeed, striking that the Community nominated the Foreign Minister of a country, which did not even have diplomatic representations in the Middle East. The Europeans were well aware of their choice's shortcomings. While the Political Directors had been quick to select Thorn, they were even quicker to insist that their own high-level experts be attached to the delegation. Incidentally, it was precisely because they had doubts about Luxembourg's capacity to lead the mission by itself that the Germans and the Italians initially favoured the Troika formula. As most member-states offered to flank the presidency with their own experts, it became evident that the Nine would need to set a strict limit to the membership of Thorn's delegation. After all, restricting the size of the mission was one of the very few indications clearly formulated in the Foreign Ministers' report. Accordingly, the French warned the Political Committee of the dangers of having too many experts attached to the delegation. They suggested that it should be limited to two or three experts per visits, who should be selected, in each case, from the member states which had the best relationship with the host country[4]. Clearly, with this suggestion, the French were, in effect, trying to ensure that either they or the British be associated to virtually every trip.

Interestingly, neither France nor Britain vied for the mission's leadership. Judging by the summary of the Political Committee meeting of 26-27 June, neither of them seemed interested in taking on such a role[5]. Far from denoting a lack of interest, their attitudes stemmed from their common desire to avoid lengthy debates on this issue. In that respect, the choice for the presidency formula represented the easiest way to bypass most of the potential obstacles likely to emerge during the selection process. In fact, that Luxembourg was due to assume the Community's rotating presidency in July was crucial to this formula gaining the Political Committee's favour. As a brief from the French Foreign Ministry puts it: 'The presidency, falling to Luxembourg, is on the

[3] MAE, 4171, TD diplomatie 22683, 1 juillet 1980, 'Comité Politique du 27 juin 1980. Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise.'
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

contrary a neutral, simple formula, which should not raise any objections.'[6] Moreover, despite the absence of any precedent or fixed set of rules, it still allowed for a logical justification of Thorn's nomination, namely that traditionally the presidency took charge of EPC activities.

That said, not all of the member states would have been acceptable. It was still too soon for the symbol of a German leadership not to impact the mission negatively, especially with an Israeli leader such as Begin who never missed an opportunity to make public references to the Second World War and the Holocaust[7]. France's pro-Arab reputation and Britain's perceived closeness with Washington could also compromise the façade of neutrality needed to talk to both sides of the conflict. Besides, many within the Community would feel uncomfortable with either Paris or London at the helm for fear that it could overshadow the mission's collective nature. Also, the French and the British were against the Troika formula because it would include The Netherlands whose pro-Israeli reputation ran the risk of alienating the Arabs. Therefore, judging by the discussion in the Political Committee, the presidency formula would have most certainly been dismissed had it not fallen on a member whose international reputation did not pose any challenge to the Nine's neutrality[8].

Hence, the choice for the presidency formula, was one of convenience more than one of confidence in Thorn. While it most likely avoided interminable debates and confrontations within EPC, it nevertheless came along with significant downsides. In fact, of all the acceptable members of the Nine, Luxembourg was by far the least desirable to lead the mission. An Italian, Irish, or Belgium leadership, by contrast, would have significantly strengthened the mission. Not only did these countries all have embassies in the Middle East, but they also had valuable experience in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ireland and Italy had both presided over major advancements of the Community's stance on the Palestinian question. As for Belgium, its Foreign Minister, Henri Simonet, was a well-respected diplomat in European circles, and the country's diplomatic representation in the Middle East was both familiar enough with the politics of the region and neutral enough for his leadership to be satisfactory to Arabs and Israelis alike. The Netherlands, for example, which originally favoured the nomination of a special emissary to head

[6] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980. ('*La Présidence, Luxembourgeoise, est au contraire une formule neutre, simple, qui ne saurait soulever d'objection.*)

[7] For an account of the FRG's role in European Middle East policy see: Matthias Schulz, "La République Fédérale D'allemagne Et le moyen-Orient: Entre Responsabilités Historiques, Intérêts Et européanisation," *Relations internationales* 172, no. 4 (2017): 95-114.

[8] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980; and TNA, FCO98/919, Brief, 'European Political Co-operation: Political Committee, Rome, 26/27 June 1980, Item 1: Middle East.'

the mission, thought of Simonet as a suitable candidate[9]. Likewise, the French considered him as a better alternative to Thorn[10]. Nevertheless, the Political Directors quickly settled on the presidency formula despite being aware, among other things, that it would inevitably imply a prominent role for the Dutch whose embassies acted as Luxembourg's representations in the Middle East. This actually was a major downside for the European mission because The Netherlands was the only Community member state to have its embassy in Jerusalem instead of Tel-Aviv. In addition, the Dutch did not have an office in East-Jerusalem, which was a significant obstacles to the country's relationship with the Palestinians of the occupied territories.

While France and Britain could not be at the forefront of the Community's diplomatic efforts, they nonetheless planned on playing an active role in the background, and in that respect a weak Luxembourg leadership should play into their hands. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials were concerned about the presidency's ability to carry out the European initiative efficiently, and they believed that 'chances of keeping the mission on the rails would be higher if officials of appropriate seniority and expertise from other members of the Nine, notably France and ourselves, were associated with it.'[11] Likewise, the French also believed that the touring mission was 'a heavy burden for a presidency with only limited means,' and they were also determined to 'play an active role in the organisation of the contacts' by attaching their own experts to Thorn's delegation[12].

Paris and London had been all too presumptuous in their belief that Luxembourg's lack of diplomatic and material resources meant that they would be able to handle Thorn easily. Ahead of the EPC ministerial meeting on 21-22 July, Mertz indicated that Thorn was now thinking of restricting membership to his delegation to a minimum, and that he would, in fact, attach two or three of his own experts only[13]. Thorn rapidly confirmed his intentions, and justified this decision based on the experience of his unofficial visits to Baghdad and Amman in late June. As a result, Thorn had become convinced that *tête-à-tête* meetings with Middle Eastern leaders would create a more propitious setting to fulfil the mission's objectives. Besides, to his EPC counterparts' dismay,

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[9] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980.
[10] MAE, 4171, Fiche pour le Ministre, 'A/S. : Mission the M. Thorn,' 17 juillet 1980.
[11] TNA, FCO98/919, Brief, 'European Political Co-operation: Political Committee, Rome, 26/27 June 1980, Item 1: Middle East.'
[12] MAE, Direction Europe 1976-1980, carton 4171, série: Communauté Européenne, sous-série: 4, dossier: 3, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980 ('*une lourde charge pour un présidence disposant de moyens limités*'; '*jouer un rôle actif dans l'organisation même des contacts*.')
[13] MAE, 4152, Note de synthèse, 'A.S: Réunion ministerielle de coopération politique, Bruxelles, 22 juillet 1980,' 21 juillet 1980.

Thorn also came back from his trip feeling optimistic about the chances of success of the Nine's initiative. This seriously worried the rest of the Community, which believed that Thorn did not properly appreciate the gravity and complexity of the situation. A memorandum from the *Quai d'Orsay*, for instance, noted that he 'undoubtedly underestimate the difficulties ahead of him.'[14] France and Britain became worried that they would not be able to retain sufficient control over the course of the mission[15]. But, unfortunately, by then they had agreed to grant Thorn sole authority to oversee the composition of the Nine's delegation[16].

There was another major problem with Thorn's leadership. From January 1981 he was to become the next President of the European Commission. Hence, it was to be expected that preparation for his new appointment would eventually distract him from his EPC responsibilities. Initially, the Nine envisaged a mission that would run at least until the end of the year, with the possibility that he be kept in charge in the early months of 1981. But, despite the fact that his nomination had been known since the Venice European Council, they still went ahead with their decision to put him in charge of the mission. Luxembourg eventually told its Community partners that Thorn intended to end his mission sometime in September, something that caused quite a stir within EPC[17]. In particular, it provoked a strong British reaction. During the meeting of the Middle East working group on 14 July, John Holmes, the FCO official in attendance, urged his colleagues that they 'should be thinking in terms of a thorough and possibly lengthy process.' He forcefully rejected the proposed schedule for the mission, asserting that 'it was an illusion to think that after one tour by Mr. Thorn, the Nine would be in a position to adopt a particular initiative or that it would necessarily be desirable to act decisively in September even if they were.' He then concluded that they all 'should be thinking in terms of keeping momentum going at least until the beginning of next year.' However, to Holmes' dismay, none of his colleagues seemed to share his concern that the time restriction imposed by the Community's choice for Thorn could seriously jeopardise the mission[18].

At first, the French also envisaged that the mission would run either until the end of the Luxembourg Presidency or just before the conclusion, by late November or early December, of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly debate on the Palestinian question[19]. When Thorn

[14] MAE, 4171, Fiche pour le Ministre, 'A/S. : Mission the M. Thorn,' 17 juillet 1980 ('*mesure sans doute mal les difficultés qui l'attendent*').
[15] TNA, FCO98/954, 'Arab/Israel: Venice follow-up,' R. O. Miles, 15 July 1980.
[16] TNA, FCO98/920, Tel. No. 107, 'Arab/Israel: Middle Working Group,' 14 July 1980.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980.

announced its plan for a shorter mission, however, the *Quai d'Orsay* easily accepted it, and reckoned that the Community could circumvent this issue by nominating another head of mission[20]. This stood in sharp contrast with the reaction of FCO mandarins, who were now alarmed at the potential consequences of a Luxembourg leadership. In a memo dated 15 July, Oliver Miles, the head of the Near East and North Africa Department (NENAD) exposed his view that 'there is a danger that the process will falter and lose credibility because of Luxembourg's lack of experience and because M. Thorn's attentions are likely to be increasingly distracted as 1980 continues.' He fully agreed with Holmes, and believed that making changes to the mission leadership around October or November, as the French now envisaged, would prove most problematic, because 'this is precisely the time when the US elections will be at their height and it will be most vital for the Nine to be visibly active.' In this memorandum, Miles went as far as to express regrets that it was 'almost certainly too late to switch horses from Thorn.'[21]

At this juncture, the British were most concerned that the modalities of the Nine's mission were not adequate to fulfil the Community's main objective, namely filling the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East. Concerned about the shape that the mission was taking, they pressed their partners hard during the Political Committee meeting of 16-17 July to ensure that European activism did not ran out of breath until at least the beginning of 1981[22]. The French also shared the British concerned of filling the diplomatic vacuum but they disagreed on the best way to achieve their common goal. While, the FCO believed that the Nine's diplomatic activism in the region would suffice, the *Quai d'Orsay* thought that the Community should rapidly come up with concrete proposals for making progress towards peace. France's plan was to boost Arab hopes that the Europeans were serious about promoting a new approach to peace that differed from Camp David. This should help them preserve their credibility as a distinctive actor from the Americans, and encourage moderation in Middle Eastern politics in the meantime. This is why, unlike the British, the French were not that concerned about a shorter touring mission, as it would allow the Community to put forth their plan for peace sooner[23].

In typical EPC fashion, during their meeting on 21-22 July, the Community's Foreign Ministers endorse a report on the mission's modalities, which left much to be decided later. It confirmed Thorn's nomination, and gave him a significant amount of independence on how to handle the contacts. It identified the following parties to consult, preferably in this order: Israel, the

[20] MAE, 4171, Fiche pour le Ministre, 'A/S. : Mission the M. Thorn,' 17 juillet 1980.
[21] TNA, FCO98/954, 'Arab/Israel: Venice follow-up,' R. O. Miles, 15 July 1980.
[22] TNA, FCO98/920, Brief, 'Political Committee, Luxembourg, 16-17 July 1980. Item 1: Middle East.'
[23] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980 ('*la volonté et la capacité des Neuf de mener une action propre*').

Palestinians of the occupied territories, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the PLO, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait. It set the four general themes that Thorn should address during his visits: Palestinian self-determination, Israeli security, Palestinian representation in the peace process, and the setting up of a forum for multilateral negotiations. Consultation with the US, the UN, and the Vatican would be left to the presidency's discretion; as for the Soviet Union, its involvement would be the object of further discussion. Reports to the Nine would take place in Luxembourg after each visit, and the presidency would also keep in touch with the member states' embassies in the Middle East. Finally, the exact duration of the mission would be decided after Thorn's first round of visits, on which he was due to report at the next meeting of Foreign Ministers scheduled for 15-16 September[24].

Ultimately, the main reason the Nine chose the presidency formula was to get the mission going as soon as possible. As Miles pressingly argued in a position paper submitted on 17 June, Britain needed to 'push the process along.' He was concerned that the G7 Summit scheduled for 22-23 June in Venice would distract the Italians from their remaining EPC duties. In addition, he also worried that by the time the Luxembourg presidency had settled into its new responsibilities, the fad for the Community's initiative would have lost some of its momentum[25]. The French were also keen on getting the ball rolling as soon as possible. As a *Quai d'Orsay* brief indicated, a quick launch of the mission would add to the Nine's credibility as it would demonstrate how serious they were about getting involved. It would also be a good indication of their capacity to manage this type of diplomatic efforts, thus increasing confidence in the Community as an international actor, and setting the mission on a favourable course[26]. Therefore, pressed by time, they were reluctant to engage in the time-consuming exercise of nominating a special emissary or commission to lead their mission. Unfortunately, they most certainly sacrificed efficiency for expediency in the process.

BECOMING PART OF THE DIPLOMATIC EQUATION

Thorn toured the Middle East between 29 July and 30 September. His mission started with a preliminary visit to Tunis on 29-30 July, where he met with the General Secretary of the Arab

[24] For the Political Committee's report on the mission's modalities see for instance TNA, FCO98/954, 'Rapport du Comité Politique aux Ministres des Affaires Etrangères concernant les contacts prévus par le par. 11 de la déclaration de Venise des Chefs d'Etat and de Gouvernement relatif au Moyen-Orient,' Text définitif. For the summary of the Ministerial Meeting of 21-22 July see MAE, 4152, Coreu 2625, 'Objet: 39è réunion ministerielle de coopération politique (Bruxelles, le 22 juillet 1980) – Projet de relevé de conclusions,' 24 juillet 1980.
[25] TNA, FCO98/919, 'Arab/Israel: European Council follow-up,' R. O. Miles, 17 June 1980.
[26] MAE, 4171, Note, 'A/S. : Réunion du Comité politique (26-27 juin 1980). Moyen-Orient: suites opérationnelles de la déclaration de Venise,' 24 juin 1980.

League, Chedli Klibi, and ended on 29-30 September in East Jerusalem where he met with representatives of the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. The European delegation went to Israel on 31 July-1 August, and to Lebanon on 4-5 August where Thorn met with Arafat. Thereafter, he was in Syria on 6-7 August, in Jordan on 7-10 August, in Kuwait on 19 August, in Iraq on 20 August, in Saudi Arabia on 23 August, and in Egypt on 30-31 August.

As far as improving the Nine's understanding of the various parties' positions on the Arab-Israeli peace process, unsurprisingly, the Thorn mission produced very few results. As the European delegation was touring the Middle East, both France and Britain appeared disappointed with the reports coming from their embassies. British Permanent Representative to the UN Anthony Parsons, for instance, judged the briefings about Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan to be 'all familiar.'[27] And, officials at the *Quai d'Orsay* believed that the answers Thorn was getting were 'inconclusive.'[28] By the time of the EPC ministerial meeting of 15-16 September, where Thorn was supposed to present the results of his mission, these preliminary impressions had only strengthened. The FCO anticipated that '[f]rom the reports we have seen, [Thorn] heard little on his travels new to us.'[29] The French, on their side, were dismayed that regarding the specifics for a peace settlement 'Arab and Palestinian positions are increasingly imprecise.'[30] Ultimately, the Thorn mission did not improve the Nine's understanding of the situation in any relevant way, and it is hard to see how these results would help with the definition of the European initiative, which was supposed to come next. That said, as this section demonstrates, with their mission, the Nine had managed to fill the vacuum in the Middle East to a significant extent, and to become an integral part of the regional diplomatic equation.

Regarding the sources that underpin the following analysis, Thorn's biggest failure, perhaps, was that he never provided any records of his conversations, apart from three very general oral reports[31]. As the British put it in a position paper on reforming the EPC machinery, it was 'appalling that we have never received proper records of Thorn's talks.'[32] As a result, it is very difficult to present a detailed analysis of the first European diplomatic mission to the Middle East. This section, therefore, relies on accounts of Thorn's oral reports to the Community's Foreign

[27] TNA, FCO98/954, From New York to FCO, Tel. No. 1165, 'Middle East – The Thorn Mission,' Parsons, 27 August 1980.
[28] MAE, 4171, TD diplomatie 30408, 'Objet: 99 eme comité politique – Mission de contact de M. Thorn,' Gaillardin, 8 septembre 1980 ('*peu concluantes*').
[29] TNA, FCO98/955, Briefs for the ministerial meeting of 15-16 September 1980, 'Essential facts.'
[30] MAE, 4171, Note nº 235 AN/MO, 'Coopération politique européenne. Réunion ministerielle (Bruxelles, 15-16 septembre),' 11 septembre 1980 ('*les positions arabes et palestiniennes restent de plus en plus imprécises*').
[31] Nothing could be found in the archives of the Luxembourg Foreign Ministry either.
[32] TNA, FCO98/951, 'Records of Conference of Community Heads of Mission, 21 November 1980,' p. 15.

Ministers, reports from the French and British embassies in the Middle East and communications about the mission within the *Quai d'Orsay* and the FCO. That said, the primary focus here is not on the conversations that Thorn had with his hosts during his visits. Instead, this section pay closer attention to the impact that the launch of the Community's mission had on its place within the Middle Eastern diplomatic equation. In particular, it looks at the extent to which the Europeans became a factor in US-Israeli discussions on the Middle East dispute and how Egypt found a utility in the European mission as indicated through its bilateral contacts with both France and Britain. In addition, it focuses on what the establishment of high level contacts between the Community and the PLO meant both for European Middle East policy and the Palestinian cause.

ISRAEL

Unsurprisingly, Israel's reaction to the Venice Declaration had been the most severe. In an emotional statement, which is hard not to see as a dramatic overreaction, the Israeli Cabinet categorically rejected the Nine's principles for peace in the Middle East. 'Nothing will remain from the Venice resolution but its bitter memory,' Begin opened theatrically. He categorically rejected the possibility of negotiation with the PLO, which he referred to as 'the Arab SS,' and an 'organization of murderers.' He quoted *al-Fatah*'s latest declaration which, once more, called for the liquidation of 'the Zionist entity politically, economically, militarily, culturally and ideologically,' and stated that '[n]ever since *Mein Kampf* was written have more explicit words been said, in the ears of the entire world, including Europe, about the desire for the destruction of the Jewish state and nation.' Mocking the Nine for their commitment to Israeli security in the Venice Declaration, he reminded them about 'the consequences of the guarantee given to Czechoslovakia in 1938, after the Sudetenland was torn from it, also for the sake of self-determination.' In an even more theatrical fashion, he qualified the Venice Declaration as 'a Munich-like surrender,' and 'an encouragement to all the elements which are undermining the Camp David Accords and which aspire to defeat the peace process in the Middle East.' He concluded by reaffirming Israel's resolute commitment to Camp David, and its willingness 'to uphold meticulously and faithfully the second part of the Camp David Accords.'[33] Needless to say, after such a statement, it was hard to imagine Israel taking part in the Thorn mission.

And yet, Begin agreed to receive the European delegation between 31 July and 1 August. In response to the Thorn mission's announcement by the Nine's Foreign Ministers on 22 July, the Israeli Foreign Ministry declared that: 'Israel is interested in a dialogue with the EC to advance the

[33] TNA, FCO93/2570, Tel. No. 238, 'Middle East,' 16 June 1980.

cause of peace in the Middle East.' But, it also asserted that the Venice principles could not constitute a basis for discussion. The Israeli cabinet had yet to take a position, and was expected to do so on 27 July. Until then, it was unclear whether Israel would participate[34]. There were real concerns in the Nine's Foreign Ministries that approval would not be forthcoming. For instance, the French Embassy in Tel-Aviv reported that officials at the Israeli Foreign Ministry had said that some Cabinet members were hostile to receiving Thorn if he was to meet with Arafat during his mission[35]. In a meeting with the Nine's Ambassadors in Washington on 23 July, US Secretary of State Edmund Muskie also expressed doubts that Thorn would be welcomed in Israel[36]. Begin, nevertheless, decided to receive the European delegation. He took this decision only four days before the Nine's head of mission was due to arrive in Israel, thus clearly indicating his irritation. Still, it is striking that Israel did not simply refuse to participate. The Europeans were standing by the Venice principles, and the visit to Israel was clearly part of the same diplomatic mission that would include a meeting with the PLO leadership. It seemed, therefore, that Begin had decided to take part in an operation, which, in his own word, aimed at 'undermining the Camp David Accords' to which he had professed his 'meticulous and faithful' attachment.

Ironically, by the summer 1980, Begin's policy was undoubtedly a much bigger challenge to Camp David than the Venice Declaration and the European initiative ever would be. The significant increase in Jewish settlement in the West Bank since the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, for instance, had been a serious obstacle to the negotiations on Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories. More recently, Begin's decision to move his office to East Jerusalem as well as the passing, on 30 July, of the Jerusalem Law by the Knesset, which proclaimed the Holy City to be reunited and Israel's capital, had led Sadat to suspend the autonomy talks, which had only just resumed on 13 July[37]. At that juncture, Israel's every move seemed to indicate that it had no intention to engage seriously with the Palestinian question, something that Thorn's visit to Israel confirmed. As Patrick Wright, the British Ambassador to Syria, reported for example: 'after his talk with Mr. Begin, [Thorn] felt that any solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute was now more remote than ever.'[38] As another British report put it, the Nine's head of mission 'was convinced that the

[34] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 302, 'EC Mission,' Robinson, 23 July 1980.
[35] MAE, 4171, TD Tel-Aviv 261, 'Objet: réactions israéliennes à l'annonce de la mission de la Communauté Européenne au Proche-Orient,' 23 Juillet 1980.
[36] National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (hereafter NARA), RG59, Subject Files of Edmund S. Muskie, 1963-1981, Entry 10, Box 2, 'Memorandum of conversation. The Secretary/EC Ambassadors', 23 July 1980.
[37] For an account of Begin's challenge to the autonomy talks see for instance: Jørgen Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 170-76.
[38] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 225, From Damascus to FCO, 'M Thorn's visit to Syria,' Wright, 8 August 1980.

present Israeli government had absolutely no intention of moving on the West Bank.'[39] Tellingly, many Middle East experts in Carter's administration also shared this assessment[40]. The Thorn Mission had, therefore, confirmed what virtually all Western observers already knew: the peace process would remain deadlocked until Israel was ready to deal on the West Bank, and with Begin at the helm, it was doubtful that this could happen anytime soon.

As explained in the previous chapter, Camp David's second accord was essentially 'a smokescreen' for Carter and Sadat to cover the fact that they had failed to get Israel to agree to multilateral negotiations with adequate Palestinian representation[41]. But, in effect, it also served as a shield for Begin's provocative policy. This was obvious with his reaction to the Community's involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy for example. His vigorous defence of Camp David systematically occurred when commenting on the European initiative. This was clearly a tactic to discredit the Nine's diplomacy in American eyes. By opposing European efforts to American policy, he was trying to put pressure on Washington to rein in its allies' ambitions, or, at the very least, prevent any US support for the Nine's actions. This was all the more effective at a time when the presidential campaign was running full steam. In that sense, Carter had, given Israel more than a bilateral peace treaty with Egypt that considerably increased its security and strengthened its hold over the occupied territories. He had also given Begin the diplomatic means not to deal on the West Bank

As this analysis does not rely on Israeli sources, it is difficult to explain the exact rationale behind Begin's policy in the Summer of 1980. From the European perspective though, it appeared full of contradictions. Israel was participating in the European initiative it had so harshly rejected, while undermining Camp David, to which it claimed to be committed. At first glance, it is indeed hard to understand Begin's decision to take part in the Thorn mission, since Israel's refusal would have dealt a serious blow to the Nine's initiative. Instead, the Community could now claim to be talking to both sides of the dispute, which considerably strengthened its credibility as a legitimate peace broker. Understandably, the Nine could not but be perplexed by the contrast between Israel's reaction to the Venice Declaration and its participation in the Thorn Mission. In that respect, a French memorandum noted that it was a significant evolution, which it explained by the fact that

[39] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 1165, 'Middle East – The Thorn Mission,' 27 August 1980.
[40] See for instance NARA, RG59, Records of Anthony Lake, 1977-1981, Entry P9, Box 18, from Bruce Kuniholm to Mr. Lake, 'The Next Six Months,' 8 July 1980.
[41] William B. Quandt, "H-Diplo Article Review of Nigel Ashton. "Taking Friends for Granted: The Carter Administration, Jordan, and the Camp David Accords, 1977-1980"," Review, *H-Diplo*, no. 740 (2018).

Begin was concerned not to let the Europeans deal with the Arabs alone[42]. If this was the case, it is an indication that the Israelis were concerned about the potential influence of European involvement to a significant extent. Hence, contrary to what Begin had claimed, something more might remain from the Venice Declaration than a 'bitter memory.'

In many ways, the Venice Declaration could potentially compromise Israeli interests in the peace process. The Nine's increasing backing of the Palestinian cause was problematic in two main respects: First, it was significant because it constituted support from outside the Arab/Muslim world. It was thus more difficult to dismiss it as being ethnic or religious in nature. That said, the Israelis still tried to delegitimise the Nine's position by pointing to their dependence on Arab oil. Second, the fact that a Western actor was openly defending Palestinian interests, made it more complicated to exploit Cold War antagonisms. Israel fashioned itself as the bastion of the West in the Middle East, and, in part, justified its opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state based on the PLO's ties with the Soviet Union. However, that America's closest allies in the Cold War were giving increasing support to Arafat's organisation weakened that argument. Winning American favours against the Arabs was one thing, but it was quite another for Israel to do so against the Europeans. The 1970s, might have been an age of global expansion in the Cold War conflict, but Europe remained the key locus of the superpower confrontation[43]. In that respect, the Venice Declaration and its follow-up initiative certainly put pressure on the Israelis, as it meant that they would need to compete for Washington's ear with the Europeans, who, ultimately, were more important for US global interests than they were.

Looking at the transatlantic discussion on the Middle East in the summer 1980 confirms that Israel should have been concerned that US support was dwindling. In his meeting with the Nine's Ambassadors in Washington on 23 July, for instance, Muskie made revealing comments about the state of American-Israeli relations. 'We face severe frustration over the actions of Begin and particularly his intent to move his office to East Jerusalem,' said the Secretary. 'However,' he continued, 'Begin is epitomizing the sense of pressure, which the Israelis feel from all sides and is a beleaguered politician, and therefore whatever we do we have to keep in mind the man and his domestic context.' Muskie was saying this as he tried to convince the Nine to vote against an upcoming Arab resolution to be tabled at the next UN General Assembly. Significantly, Washington's concern was not simply that this would be one more international condemnation of Israel, in a now very long list, which Muskie believed could only lead to more extreme actions on

[42] MAE, 4171, 'Réunion ministèrielle de Bruxelles (15 septembre 1980) – Moyen Orient,' 17 septembre 1980. ('*manifestement soucieux de ne pas laisser les Européens en tête-à-tête avec les Arabes.*')
[43] Federico Romero, "Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads," *Cold War History* 14, no. 4 (2014): 685-703.

the part of the Begin government. The problem also was that the Americans would once again be the only member of the international community to stand by Israel, when in fact they had grown very frustrated with Begin's actions. Muskie applied further pressure on the Europeans, and argued that 'the whole effect of the [Arab] resolution is to undermine Camp David,' and that by abstaining they were 'damaging [Camp David] whether they realized it or not.' As the Nine remained unmoved by this argument, he added that failing to vote against it would further compromise Thorn's chances of being received in Israel the following month, but the Ambassadors did not budge. As the European went on abstaining, this meeting is a prime example of European cohesion on the Middle East in the face of American pressure at the time[44].

The Israelis could withstand increasing international condemnation as long as the US stuck by them. But, this was precisely what the Venice Declaration threatened to change. Begin's government could not ignore that, since his election, Carter had made several attempts to shift Washington's approach to the Middle East peace process towards something that closely resembled what the Europeans had in mind. Hence, Israel had to be concerned about what would happen should Carter win re-election. In a meeting with Muskie in Washington on 17 September, Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir expressed his government's mounting anxieties about the European initiative. Having just returned from Cairo, he explained that he had grown worried about Egypt's commitment to Camp David. He believed that Sadat was still committed to the Autonomy talks, but that public discontent with his policy had considerably increased, to the point that support within his administration was dropping alarmingly. According to Shamir, the Europeans were, to a large extent, responsible for Egypt's weakening commitment to Camp David. They not only undermined the peace process by offering a potential alternative course, but also actively put pressure on the Egyptians by accusing them of betraying the Palestinians. In short, he was blaming the Nine for giving ammunition to those in Egypt actively working against the completion of peace with Israel. Here, Shamir was clearly using Camp David in the hope that it would create a transatlantic row, and, by extension, weaken the Nine's ability to pursue their initiative[45]. This was a clear sign of Israeli anxiety towards European diplomatic activism.

Shamir also complained about what he felt was a diminishing US support for the Jewish state, and again explicitly identified the Europeans as a major factor. According to him, the Nine were spreading rumours that the Americans were in fact very close to agreeing with the Venice

[44] The National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), RG59, Subject Files of Edmund S. Muskie, 1963-1981, Entry 10, Box 2, Memorandum of conversation, The Secretary/EC Ambassadors, 23 July 1980.
[45] NARA, RG59, Subject Files of Edmund S. Muskie, 1963-1981, Entry 10, Box 2, Memorandum of conversation, The Secretary/Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir, 17 September 1980.

principles for peace, and that a change in US policy was likely after the elections. He concluded that this loss of confidence in Washington's support for Israel was the reason for the deadlock in the peace process. Muskie agreed that US support for Israel was crucial for progress in the peace process, but did not deny that the administration had drawn closer to the Community's position. Instead, he said, talking about recent Israeli actions, that '[i]f the US is constantly put in the position of seeming to condone what most responsible people in the world regard as unreasonable actions, our situation is very difficult indeed.' By the summer 1980, the US administration might not have been in a position to express its discontent with Begin publicly because of the presidential campaign, but its frustration was building as US isolation on the Palestinian question came with increasing international political cost. And, now, the Secretary of State was giving clear signals that American support for Israel was neither unconditional nor indefinite[46]. Under such circumstances, Begin could not but be concerned that Washington might be more easily swayed towards endorsing the international consensus on the Palestinian question, which the Venice Declaration had considerably strengthened.

Despite a public rhetoric that sought to minimise, ridicule, and discredit a potential European role in the peace process, it is clear that the Israelis were concerned about the potential impact of the Nine's initiative. It is in that context that Israel's participation in the Thorn Mission can best be understood. It gives greater plausibility to the French view that the Israeli government was eager not to let the Europeans deal with the Arabs alone. Moreover, as we saw, there had been no US rejection of either the principles of the Venice declaration or the launch of a European initiative. This time, therefore, Begin could not use the US shield to justify his decision not to take part in simple discussions about peace in the Middle East. Israel might have considerable influence over US public opinion, but, ultimately, all their eggs were in the American basket. As such, they could not afford to lose this crucial support, and any sign that they might was of grave concern to them. Given this situation, even Begin could not slam the door in Europe's face.

EGYPT

Egypt was in an awkward position towards the European initiative. On the one hand, Cairo was concerned that it would challenge Camp David, but, on the other hand, the negotiations on Palestinian autonomy were in an impasse. Sadat had sold peace with Israel to the Egyptian people as a first step towards a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict. But, Begin's intransigence in the Autonomy talks prevented any serious progress, and, by the summer 1980, it

[46] Ibid.

became increasingly difficult for Sadat to justify his country's continued participation in Camp David. As the final details of peace were still being worked out with Israel, popular opposition to Sadat's policy was growing, and hostility towards Israel was increasing. It was in this particular context that the European initiative came to serve a purpose for Egyptian diplomacy.

Initially, the Egyptian authorities welcomed the Venice Declaration cautiously. Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali, for instance, said in the press that he was open to any efforts for peace as long as it did not encroach on Camp David[47]. As for Sadat, he expressed his interest in the European initiative only on 18 June, after he had received the British Ambassador, who delivered a letter from Margaret Thatcher, which clearly stated that the Nine did not intend 'to criticise or interfere with the Camp David process in any way.'[48] This was an important reassurance for someone who had made Camp David the cornerstone of his regional diplomacy, and had thus staked his domestic and international prestige on its success.

Understandably, Sadat's priority in the summer of 1980, was to preserve the Autonomy talks, or at least to ensure that a semblance of activity be maintained until after the American elections. Meeting with Ali in early July, Carrington enquired anxiously about Egypt's take regarding the future of the peace process while Begin was in office. In response, Ali said that progress could not be ruled out entirely under current Israeli leadership, and that, in any case, he did not expect Begin to last as Prime Minister beyond the end of 1980. In that context, Ali praised the European initiative for helping 'Egypt in her efforts to keep negotiations going and stop Israel from changing the position on the ground irretrievably.'[49] By that stage, it seemed that Egypt believed that the Autonomy talks could be kept alive until after the US elections, and that it would then be a matter of waiting for a change of government in Israel. At that time, however, Israel had not yet passed the Jerusalem Law, and another round of negotiations was due to start on 13 July.

It was not until the start of the Thorn mission that Sadat's commitment to Camp David appeared to be seriously compromised. Begin's provocative policy left Sadat with no choice but to suspend negotiations once more. Thereafter, the Egyptians seemed even more interested in the European initiative as a means to keep the momentum for peace going. As the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, explained to the British, the Thorn Mission was keeping the diplomatic door open at a difficult time, and thus helped maintain stability in the Middle East. He believed that European diplomatic activism constituted an important support for the moderate

[47] MAE, 4170, TD Le Caire 394, 'Réactions egyptiennes à la déclaration des Neuf sur le Proche-Orient,' 16 Juin 1980.
[48] TNA, FCO93/2570, Tel. No. 241, 'European Council: Middle East,' 14 June 1980.
[49] TNA, FCO93/2382, 'Call on the Secretary of State by the Egyptian Foreign Minister,' 8 July 1980.

element of the PLO, and strengthened the position of Arab moderates more generally, at a time where radicalisation was rampant in the Arab world[50]. As we saw, this was one of the Nine's main objectives with the launch of their diplomatic initiative.

When Thorn met with Sadat and Boutros-Ghali on 30-31 August, they both emphasised, once again, that the Europeans should pay particular attention not to challenge Camp David. Nicholas Barrington, a counsellor to the British Ambassador in Egypt, reported that '[s]ome of Thorn's impressions were contradictory' regarding Sadat's attitude towards the European initiative. On the one hand, the head of the Nine's delegation felt that the Egyptian President was 'generally unenthusiastic' towards a European involvement in the peace process. Sadat believed that, ultimately, only the Americans could break Israeli obstructionism, and thus 'insisted that the Community should not diverge from US policies nor cut across Camp David.' On the other hand, Barrington also reported that 'Sadat did say there was room for some European initiative to increase pressure on Israel.'[51] As a summary of the Thorn Mission's result from the *Quai d'Orsay* also confirmed, the Egyptians believed that a European involvement was being helpful at the moment[52]. It appears, therefore, that Cairo was anxious about the possibility of a long-term European involvement in the peace process. But, in the short-term, in the absence of any other alternative, they realised that the Nine were helping avert the complete collapse of the negotiations until after the American elections, thus preventing further regional destabilisation.

A meeting between Thatcher and Egyptian Vice President Hosni Mubarak in early September confirmed Cairo's positive attitude towards the European initiative. Mubarak said that he did not expect Begin's provocations to stop at least until the Israeli elections, which had not yet been scheduled. When Thatcher enquired about Egypt's intentions until then, Mubarak explained that Sadat wanted to call for a summit with Begin, but recognised that this would not be achievable until after the American elections. He nevertheless appeared confident that the situation could be managed, and said that the European could continue to be helpful by maintaining pressure on the Israelis. He also reported that Sadat was now 'very satisfied' with the Venice Declaration, which he thought constituted 'a valuable support for the peace process.'[53] In effect, the Egyptians recognised that the Thorn mission was filling the diplomatic vacuum, and, ironically, in doing so, it seemed that it was helping keep Camp David afloat.

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[50] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 484, 'My Telno 482: Autonomy Talks,' 4 August 1980.
[51] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 563, From Cairo to FCO, 'Visit of M. Thorn to Egypt,' Barrington, 1 September 1980.
[52] MAE, 4171, Direction D'Afrique du Nord et Moyen-Orient, Note, 'A.S. Mission the M. Thorn,' 30 septembre 1980.
[53] TNA, FCO93/2384, 'Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and the Vice-President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Mr. Husni Mubarak,' 2 September 1980.

Summing up the situation in the summer 1980, it appears that European diplomatic activism was having a significant impact. Begin was clearly uninterested in making progress in the autonomy talks; the US were in no position to engage with the peace process, and had no clear plan to manage the situation until after the presidential elections; and Egypt had to temporarily withdraw from negotiations in large part because of growing popular discontent, and had no plan either to manage the hiatus in the Camp David peace process. The Europeans, therefore, were the only international actor playing an active diplomatic role at this most difficult time, and were, in fact, filling the vacuum as they intended to, and as the Egyptians openly acknowledged.

THE PLO

The PLO's reactions to the Venice Declaration had been somewhat chaotic. As usual, there had been very critical statements directed at Palestinian and Arab public opinion, and more moderate ones for a Western audience. On 15 June, the PLO's Executive Committee, meeting in Damascus, had harshly condemned the European Council's statement. It argued that it was the result of 'American blackmail', and denounced it as an attempt to entice the Arab countries to join the Camp David peace process. Farouk Kaddoumi, the PLO's *de facto* Foreign Minister, followed with a more moderate statement. He recognised that there were some positive elements in the Venice Declaration, but was naturally disappointed that the Nine had not gone as far as to recognise the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, and had fallen short of calling for a Palestinian state. Assurances were subsequently given to the Europeans that Kaddoumi's reaction represented the official position, not the Damascus statement[54]. In Beirut, for instance, the French Ambassador was told that Arafat regarded the Venice Declaration as a positive step, and was particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of a European initiative[55]. Arafat avoided any official reaction, but gave his opinion in an interview transcribed in the Arabic language weekly '*al-Majalla,*' published in London on 9 July. In it, he tried to strike a balance between the moderate and more radical views that had so far emerged. He said that '[t]he European declaration contains some new indicators, but they are not what we were expecting.' And, he also expressed the common belief among Palestinians that the Nine's stance 'was the result of a conflict between the Europeans states and American and Zionist pressures.'[56]

Despite some of the more critical comments in Palestinian circles, Arafat welcomed Thorn with open arms. The meeting took place at his headquarters in Beirut, during the European delegation's

[54] See for instance: TNA, FCO93/2570, Background Note, 'Reactions to the European Council statement.'
[55] MAE, 4170, TD Beyrouth 655, 'Réactions palestiniennes aux déclaration du Sommet de Venise,' 17 juin 1980.
[56] TNA, FCO93/2571, 'Venice Declaration: Arafat's views,' 9 July 1980.

visit to Lebanon on 4-5 August. On that occasion, the Palestinian leader naturally denounced Camp David, and also denied that the PLO was unwilling to negotiate with Israel. But, as Thorn tried to get into the specifics, Arafat remained vague. Asked if he would be willing to start negotiations with Israel before the Palestinian people had a chance to vote on self-determination, for instance, he cryptically answered that he could consider 'a package.' He implied that there were many ways to a solution, and said that, eventually, 'the PLO would be ready to make a special arrangement with Jordan.' However, when Thorn said that 'it would be enormously helpful if the PLO could unilaterally declare that it accepted Israel's right to exist,' Arafat stayed silent. He deliberately sought to remain ambiguous on this most delicate of issues for the PLO. Clearly, by the summer 1980, he did not have enough backing to take such a step, but when he talked of being ready to negotiate with Israel, or stated that he was willing to accept the creation of a Palestinian state existing alongside Israel, he implied a *de facto* recognition of the Jewish state[57]. Ultimately, though, the Nine did not learn anything that Arafat had not already said publicly.

That said, the relevance of this visit lay elsewhere. By meeting with Arafat at ministerial level for the first time, the Nine were strengthening his authority both internationally and within the PLO. It was a statement of confidence that Arafat was the man the West could do business with, as well as a statement of hope that his influence would continue to grow in Palestinian politics. Ahead of the Venice European Council, Carrington had to update the UK's official policy on the PLO, to be in phase with the new Community position. On that occasion, he explained the rationale behind the new European approach: 'We wish to gain insight into PLO thinking and activities and to influence it as far as possible in the direction of peaceful political methods and compromise.'[58] With the Thorn mission, the Nine were giving substance to their new position, and it seemed that Arafat was responsive to the new Community policy. As Thorn reported to his Community partners, for instance, for the PLO 'the EC counts for a great deal and so does the EC initiative.'[59]

There is circumstantial evidence that the support shown with Thorn's visit had a positive impact in terms of encouraging Arafat to keep up his diplomatic offensive in the West, which he had launched in the aftermath of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. As explained in the previous chapters, Arafat had toured Western Europe and the US in 1979 trying to give reassurance about Palestinian intentions, and present the PLO in a more positive light. In line with his recent attitude, he gave an interview to the *International Herald Tribune* on 5 August, just after his meeting with Thorn, in which he said that 'reports that *al-Fatah* had called for the complete liberation of

[57] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 197, 'M. Thorn's Mission,' 6 August 1980.
[58] TNA, FCO93/2482, To certain Missions Tel. No. Guidance 48 of 21 May 1980, 'The Palestinians and the PLO.'
[59] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 197, 'M. Thorn's Mission,' 6 August 1980.

Palestine, and the liquidation of the Zionist entity politically, economically, militarily, culturally and ideologically were incorrect.'[60] Here, the reference to Begin's accusation against the Palestinian organisation, which the Israeli Prime Minister had made in his reaction to the Venice Declaration, indicates a connection between European diplomatic efforts and Arafat decision to set the record straight. This was a further sign of moderation on the part of the PLO leader, one that was not necessarily easy to make in the face of Begin's numerous provocations in recent months. If *al-Fatah* had in fact issued such a statement, Arafat was either taking a considerable political risk in denouncing the words of the PLO's biggest faction, or he had managed to convince those who had issued the statement that his denunciation would serve the Palestinian cause. If, as Arafat claimed, the statement had never been made, it is noteworthy that he waited until after Thorn's visit to address Begin's disinformation campaign. Either way, it was a striking gesture of moderation, only a few days after the Knesset had passed the Jerusalem Law, and as we shall see in the remainder of this dissertation it would not be the last one.

The significance of Thorn's meeting with Arafat was also important in terms of raising the Community's diplomatic profile. Thorn's oral report at the EPC ministerial meeting of 15-16 September confirmed that his mission had gleaned very little result in terms of gaining a better understanding of Arab and Israeli positions[61]. Yet, the Nine did not conclude that the initiative had been a failure, quite the opposite in fact. As a French memorandum explained, that Thorn had managed to make contact with both Begin and Arafat 'allowed the Nine to pursue their efforts.'[62] The FCO agreed as well:

> 'The Nine are now in contact with both sides and have a position with the Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, which the Americans cannot match. We should exploit this and aim to be in a position to give a new US administration a clear reading of Arab/Palestinian views, and influence their policy making accordingly.'[63]

By the end of the summer 1980, the Europeans were no closer to bringing a concrete contribution to peace in the Middle East. But, they were in a unique position to continue their diplomatic engagement. This was for from having been a foregone conclusion. There was a very real possibility that Begin would have refused to participate. Had he done so it would have made it

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[60] Quoted in Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 54.
[61] For assessments of both Thorn's report and the reactions of Community member states to it see TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 856, 'European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Ministers, Brussels, 15 September. Arab-Israel: Thorn Mission. Summary,' 16 September 1980; MAE, 4171, Note, 'Réunion ministerielle de Bruxelles (15 septembre 1980)' 17 septembre 1980.
[62] MAE, 4171, Note nº 235 AN/MO, 'Coopération politique européenne. Réunion ministerielle (Bruxelles, 15-16 septembre),' 11 septembre 1980 ('*c'est là un résultat qui autorise les Neuf à poursuivre leurs efforts*').
[63] TNA, FCO98/955, 'Arab-Israel: The Future of the European Initiative,' J. M. Crosby, 28 August 1980.

very difficult for the Nine to continue their initiative. But, the European were now in a position to keep filling the vacuum, and cultivate their relationship with the Palestinians. And now that the Nine had formally engaged in a dialogue with Arafat's organisation, they were in a stronger position to steer US policy in a new direction. For a first diplomatic mission outside of the European continent, this was not an insubstantial outcome.

CONCLUSION

When assessed against the Venice Declaration's stated goal, it is indeed hard to see the Thorn mission as a positive first step towards a larger European peace initiative. Unsurprisingly, the Nine did not learn anything new about the already well-known positions of the various parties involved in the Middle East conflict, and they did not manage to get Arabs and Israelis to take a step towards each other. The way the Nine went about choosing their head of mission, though, backs up the previous chapter's argument that, beyond the loftier goal of contributing to Arab-Israeli peace, there was an important security dimension. The Europeans believed that they had to intervene rapidly to prevent any further deterioration of the Middle East situation. Going with the presidency formula was the easiest and quickest way to avoid a lengthy EPC debate that would have stalled the launch of the Community's diplomatic mission. This sense of urgency therefore explains why, despite significant downsides, the Community member states still went ahead with Thorn's nomination. Under different circumstances, there would have been no need to rush the decision on the mission's leadership as the Nine did, and Thorn would have most likely not been selected.

This chapter also reveals that, despite their earlier exclusion from the peace process, the Nine managed, with the Thorn mission, to become an integral part of the diplomatic equation in the Middle East. By going beyond declaratory diplomacy, the Community had become a source of genuine concern for the Israelis as it appeared to put a serious strain on their crucial relationship with Washington. As a result, Muskie used European diplomatic activity to apply pressure on Begin as we saw. In total contrast, it was a source of hope for the Palestinians. It was a significant indication that Arafat's efforts to commit the PLO to a diplomatic solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict through his quest for international recognition was paying off. Strengthening Arafat's hand was a key component of the European strategy to promote peace and stability in the region, and, on that count, the Thorn mission also produced some results. There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that it helped the Palestinian leader maintain the upper hand over the more radical elements within the PLO, and as we shall see in the remainder of this dissertation there were other similar instances. The Community's diplomacy also proved an effective support for both American and Egyptian

policy. At the time, Washington and Cairo were struggling to stop Begin's provocations, and keep the Camp David negotiation going until after the US presidential election. With the autonomy talks deadlocked, and no alternative forum to keep the dialogue alive, paradoxically, the Nine's shuttle diplomacy acted as a life line for the peace process during these very difficult times.

All in all, the Thorn mission helped fill the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East. It is obviously impossible to say what would have happened without a European involvement in the summer 1980, and to push the present argument further one would need to look at Israeli and Arab sources. But, there is enough evidence here to suggest that the Nine undoubtedly played a role. In fact, in sharp contrast with their position throughout the 1970s, they found themselves at the centre of Western diplomatic efforts towards the Middle East. In that respect, the Thorn mission should be regarded as a first success for European diplomacy in the region, instead of the unmitigated failure currently portrayed in the literature. Granted, there were no spectacular results. But, to be fair, ever since the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the Americans were also failing to push the peace process forward and, in fact, their actions were being increasingly counterproductive in terms of the security of Western interests. The Europeans, therefore, came to play an important role in the international politics of the Middle East by providing a life line to the West's friends in the region as we shall see next.

CHAPTER 6

THE VAN DER KLAAUW MISSION, JANUARY – JUNE 1981

WESTBINDUNG IN THE MIDDLE EAST

INTRODUCTION

If the Thorn mission barely features in the historiography, it is even more so for the second European mission to the Middle East, this time headed by Dutch Foreign Minister Christoph van der Klaauw[1]. To be fair, this second round of visits attracted far less contemporary attention than the first, and in large part it was due to the widespread perception that the Community was failing to achieve its objectives. Ever since the Venice European Council, there had been much anticipation about what was vaguely referred to as the 'European initiative.' The Community member states, with their lofty rhetoric of peace, created unreasonable expectations about what they could actually achieve in Middle Eastern diplomacy. This was a classic case of the 'capability-expectation gap' that Christopher Hill conceptualise to explain the often negative view of European foreign policy[2]. In addition, the false impression of a major clash with the US over the Middle East strengthened the perception that the Europeans were getting ready for a bolder move than they ever intended. Hence, when the Heads of state and government gathered in Luxembourg on 1-2 December 1980, expectations were high. And, when the European Council did not announce any new step other than another round of consultation, and did not even issue another declaration that brought the Community's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict further, many observers were naturally disappointed. As it stands, the state of the historiography reflect this contemporary disappointment.

Admittedly, in terms of making a concrete contribution to peace the van der Klaauw mission was another failure. But, as had been the case with the Thorn mission, there was another more important objective that the Europeans sought to achieve. They hoped to keep the Arabs engaged diplomatically both until the new US administration had had time to define its Middle East policy

[1] For the only account of the van der Klaauw mission see: Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 59-63.
[2] Christopher Hill, "The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 3 (1993): 305-05.

and the Israeli elections due to take place in June 1981 had occurred. This chapter, therefore, shows that security continued to be the European initiative's main purpose and that the van der Klaauw mission contributed to this objective. By first focusing on the discussions within European Political Cooperation (EPC) about the future of European diplomatic activism in the Middle East after the Thorn mission, it begins to refine what the Community member states actually meant when they talked of their 'initiative.' This term together with the rhetoric of peace that accompanied it created great confusion – even within EPC sometimes – as to what European intentions actually were. Naturally, many came to expect a peace plan even though the member states of the European Community (EC) never seriously envisaged such an option, and in fact never mentioned it publicly. This chapter then takes a closer look at the impact of European diplomatic activities in the Middle East in the first half of 1981, and reveals that, more than with the Thorn mission, there were clear signs that the Community played a significant role in the international politics of the Middle East. Most notably, it contends that during this period, at the political level, the Europeans had grown more important for Arab interests than the Soviet Union, and ended up acting as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world.

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN PEACE PLAN?

After reporting on his mission to the Community's Foreign Ministers on 15-16 September 1980, Gaston Thorn turned his attention to his upcoming task as President of the European Commission. With their head of mission out of the picture, the main question before the nine EC member states (the Nine) was how to preserve their initiative's momentum. They needed to maintain their credibility to keep filling the diplomatic vacuum and possibly make a concrete contribution to peace. On the whole, the Arabs looked favourably on the idea of a European initiative, although it was not clear what their expectations were exactly. At this juncture, they spanned from Egypt's hope that it could prove an effective support for Camp David, to the elaboration of a European peace plan, or putting pressure on Israel and the US[3]. Saudi Arabia's position probably was the most representative. As British Ambassador in Riyadh James Craig reported, Thorn believed the Saudis to be '75% convinced' by the 'credibility and utility of the European mission.' And, the main problem for the Saudis appeared to have been the strong American influence on certain EC member-states. As for the future of the European initiative, like a majority of their Arab counterparts, they seemed to be mostly interested in having the Europeans

[3] For Arab expectations of the European initiative see for instance: The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FCO98/954-6.

influence US policy[4]. By the end of the summer, therefore, the Nine still had some convincing to do about their credibility as an independent actor, and it was still not clear what their diplomatic initiative would entail.

Thorn suggested three follow-up actions to his touring mission: refining the Venice principle for peace; keeping in touch with all the parties to the conflict; and announcing a clear line of conduct at the next European Council meeting in Luxembourg on 1-2 December[5]. During their next meeting in New York on 23 September, on the margins of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers endorsed Thorn's recommendations. The Political Committee was thus tasked with preparing another report on the Middle East, which should outline the Nine's ideas for reaching a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute in more detail[6].

In the meantime, they kept the Luxembourg presidency in charge of the follow-up contacts. Maintaining Thorn in his leadership position, however, was not to everyone's liking. The Luxembourg Foreign Minister had made it clear in his oral report that he did not intend to organise a second round of visits to the Middle East. He would, of course, go back to East Jerusalem on 29-30 September to meet with Palestinian representatives of the occupied territories, since this visit had had to be postponed due to Israeli obstructionism. But, beyond that, he said that he would only organise meetings on an *ad hoc* basis. The British were unhappy about this state of affairs, and tried to push for the nomination of a special emissary to replace Thorn. To their considerable frustration, they did not find much support[7]. In part, this was because it could be interpreted as a rebuff of Thorn's leadership[8]. But, also, some Community members, most notably Germany, insisted that it would contribute to creating unreasonable expectations of Europe's ability or willingness to move the peace process along[9].

The British did not drop the matter that easily. In a last-ditch attempt to convince their partners, they argued that unless contacts were maintained at least until the end of the year, the definition of the Venice principles 'could all too easily become academic.' While this was indeed a risk, the presidency, along with the rest of the Community, had always intended to keep the dialogue going with the Arabs and the Israelis, just not at ministerial level. British Foreign Secretary Peter

[4] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 609, From Jedda to FCO, 'EC mission to Middle East,' Craig, 25 August 1980.
[5] *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (hereafter MAE), 4171, 'Réunion Ministerielle de Bruxelles (15 Septembre 1980),' 17 septembre 1980.
[6] MAE, 4171, TD New York 2048, 'Objet: reunion ministerielle des Neuf,' 24 septembre 1980; TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 1343, 'Arab-Israel: Thorn Mission,' Parsons, 24 September 1980.
[7] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 114, 'Middle East: Follow-up to Thorn Mission,' 12 September 1980.
[8] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 401, 'Middle East follow-up to the Thorn Mission,' Carrington, 10 October 1980.
[9] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 856, 'European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Ministers, Brussels, 15 September. Arab-Israel: Thorn Mission. Summary,' 16 September 1980.

Carrington, however, believed it crucial that the Nine's diplomatic engagement remain 'visible.' He worried that failure to maintain high-level contacts would create the false impression that the Europeans were toning down their ambitions and that 'the Arabs will conclude that we have thrown in our hand under US pressure.' A less visible diplomatic engagement, he was afraid, would compromise Europe's ability to fill the vacuum in the Middle East[10]. At this juncture, therefore, it appears that the British were more concerned about losing momentum than creating unreasonable expectations. As Ian Gilmour, the Lord Privy Seal and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister put it: 'we should be in an even worse position if expectations had not been aroused.' Accordingly, his advice was to 'push ahead with [the initiative]' because 'it is the best means we have of influencing the Americans and the PLO; and it is in our economic interest to do so.'[11]

The French also shared the British concern. But, at this stage, they believed that to maintain momentum and fill the diplomatic vacuum, touring the Middle East would be counterproductive[12]. They concurred with the Presidency that the Community should only arrange contacts on an *ad hoc* basis. Organising another round of visits at ministerial level 'merely to ask further questions,' said French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet, 'would soon make the Nine ridiculous.'[13] According to him, the Community needed to be in a position to present concrete proposals for peace before embarking on another contact mission. The French were convinced that failing to do so would be most damaging to the Nine's credibility. Only with 'a complete scenario for a settlement,' they argued during the EPC ministerial meeting of 15-16 September, could the Nine further engage the conflicting parties, fill the diplomatic vacuum, and manage tensions in the Middle East[14]. The British, while sceptical about the value of elaborating a full-scale European peace plan at this time, recognised nonetheless that 'activity with no specific focus cannot be maintained for much longer without the Arabs seeing it as too obviously designed only to fill the gap.'[15] By mid-September, the British had lost the argument, and until the end of the year EPC activities essentially focused on drafting the Middle East report for the next European Council.

Britain was quite anxious about the use that the Community would make of this report. This created tensions with France, and naturally the Americans were at the centre of this dispute. At first, the two countries sought to settle their differences outside of the Community context. To

[10] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 125, 'Arab-Israel: Thorn Mission,' 1 October 1980.
[11] TNA, FCO93/2665, From Gilmour to the Secretary of State, 'The Middle East,' 19 February 1981.
[12] MAE, 4171, Note, 'Réunion ministerielle de Bruxelles (15 septembre 1980)' 17 septembre 1980.
[13] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 856, 'European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Ministers, Brussels, 15 September. Arab-Israel: Thorn Mission. Summary,' 16 September 1980.
[14] MAE, 4171, Note nº 235 AN/MO, 'Coopération politique européenne. Réunion ministerielle (Bruxelles, 15-16 septembre),' 11 septembre 1980 ('*un scénario complet de règlement*').
[15] TNA, FCO955, Briefs for the ministerial meeting of 15-16 September 1980, 'Essential facts.'

clear things up, François-Poncet met with Gilmour on 19 September in Paris. The French Foreign Minister explained that it was time for the Nine to formulate 'genuine European proposals,' because it was the only way for the Community to preserve its growing reputation as a credible actor in the Middle East. He said that 'the only way to deal with Camp David was not to mention it, either favourably or unfavourably, and to show by our actions a different approach.' He also noted that the Americans were 'in such a rut that somebody had to re-direct them,' and given the seriousness of the situation, the Europeans should not be afraid to play a role even if it meant causing 'some storms over the Atlantic.' Gilmour recognised that the Community needed to clarify the Venice principles, appeared even more concerned about the situation in the Middle East, and voiced a similar dissatisfaction with the current American leadership. He conceded that '[i]t was right that the Nine should give the Americans a lead,' but immediately added that 'they should not get so far ahead that the Americans would not follow.' He then reasserted the British belief that 'we had to maintain that we were building on Camp David.'[16]

In an attempt to convince François-Poncet, Gilmour advanced the argument that working to help fulfil Camp David's second agreement had the major advantage of bringing Egypt back into the Arab fold. Going beyond Camp David would certainly satisfy the majority of the Arabs and allow for a more adequate treatment of the Palestinian question, as the French argued, but it would leave the Egyptians out on a limb. François-Poncet did not appear receptive to this argument. He replied that his recent talk with Egypt's vice-President Hosni Mubarak suggested, on the contrary, that Egyptian dissatisfaction with the Americans had reach a tipping point, and that they would now be ready to drop out of Camp David, provided that a credible alternative existed. Such talk coming from the French Foreign Minister was alarming to the British as it strengthened their suspicion that, fundamentally, the French sought to use the Community to challenge US policy. Besides, the FCO had a very different take. They were convinced neither about Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's readiness to abandon what had become the cornerstone of his regional diplomacy, nor about Europe's ability to set up a credible alternative to Camp David. As Gilmour put it 'at the end of the day only the Americans could impose a settlement upon the Israelis,' and he remarked that, in any case, mounting a challenge to US policy before the presidential elections would prove counterproductive. François-Poncet conceded that 'we should not seek to antagonise the Americans but neither should we let ourselves be paralysed into inaction.'[17] Ultimately, this

[16] TNA, FCO98/955, 'Record of conversation between the Lord Privy Seal and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay on 19 September 1980 at 11.45 AM.'
[17] Ibid.

meeting ended with a reaffirmation of the *status quo*, and Franco-British suspicions about each other's intentions continued until the Luxembourg European Council.

These tensions came to a head when on 14 November, the *International Herald Tribune* published an article, which quoted 'British officials' as saying that they 'have decided to oppose any major European initiative on the Arab-Israeli problem for the next few months.' It further stated that 'Lord Carrington acknowledged in an interview that now he does not expect any significant European movement on the issue at the Common Market summit on Dec[ember] 1[st].' Still according to the *International Herald Tribune* 'British officials,' again, 'indicated that the Common Market intends to postpone another major step until next spring.' Apparently, the British believed that '[b]y then, a new US policy will have had time to take shape. Meanwhile, Lord Carrington [was reported to have] said [that] Europe should continue formulating its own Middle East policy in hope of influencing the Reagan administration.'[18]

This publication put the British in an awkward position *vis-à-vis* the rest of the Community, most particularly the French. The FCO immediately issued a statement, which read:

> 'The UK is not seeking to delay any European initiative on the Arab/Israel problem, nor is it opposed to such an initiative as some press reports have suggested. The FCO had acknowledged however that, while this remains for Heads of state and government to decide, they do not expect a major initiative at this stage. This does not mean a postponement: the process of consultation and of refining the key concepts of the Venice Declaration is going forward.'[19]

But, despite this swift reaction, the *International Herald Tribune* article proved damaging to Britain's reputation both in the Arab world and within the Community. One of the two main Arabic newspaper in Jordan, for example, pointed out the discrepancy between Carrington's interview and his previous statements on the topic, and contrasted the British position with the French one, before concluding that given Britain's Atlanticism such a reversal of policy was 'not surprising.' Alarmed by the recent press reports, the PLO office in Amman also got in touch with the British embassy, which denied, again, that Britain was seeking to block the European initiative[20].

Despite British disclaimers, however, at first, Arabs and Europeans were all too ready to believe what had been reported in the press. The French reacted publicly without even getting in touch with British officials first. One article, for instance, quoted a source from the *Quai d'Orsay* rhetorically asking 'how one could advocate strengthening political cooperation at the same time

[18] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 815, 'Arab/Israel and the EC,' 16 November 1980.
[19] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 443, 'Interview with Fitchett in Herald Tribune,' 15 November 1980.
[20] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 475, 'Arab/Israel,' 17 November 1980.

as declaring that Europe should refrain from any initiative and make her action dependent on the political situation in the United States.'[21] Unfortunately for the British, these press reports automatically fed into the popular perception of Britain as the American Trojan Horse within the Community. And, British diplomats once again had to do damage control with their European partners, especially the French. To that end, Kenneth James, a Minister at the British embassy in Paris, met with Jacques Dupont, the deputy Political Director at the *Quai d'Orsay* on 17 November, and reiterated that the British were not opposed to a European initiative[22]. The British Ambassador, Reginald Hibbert, undertook the same exercise with the *Elysée* General Secretary, Jacques Wahl, and by the end of their meeting it seemed that this misunderstanding had been resolved[23].

Tellingly, the obstructionist attitude attributed to London through the press did not affect EPC discussions on the future of the European initiative. During their meeting on 18 November, for instance, the Political Committee easily reached a general agreement on the substance of the Middle East report[24]. The British, in fact, had been actively cooperating with the efforts to refine the Venice principles for peace. Their priority was to re-establish high-level contacts in the Middle East, and they understood that the definition of a more advanced European position on the Arab-Israeli dispute would serve to justify another touring mission[25]. But, once more, their Atlanticist reputation preceded them.

Britain also came to harbour suspicion about France's objectives. In particular, the fear was that French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was getting ready to push for a major peace initiative on the Middle East that would create friction with Washington. It was not clear what the British fear was exactly. It seemed that the main concern was that France might push for the publication of the Middle East report. This could be construed as a European attempt to offer an alternative to US policy and the FCO believed that 'all 3 Camp David parties would take seriously amiss a substantive move by the Nine now.'[26] James got in touch with the *Élysée* and the *Quai d'Orsay* in late November, and was each time given assurances that there would not be any surprise coming

[21] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 942, 'Your interview with Fitchett in Herald Tribune,' 15 November 1980. [Translated from the French by the author of this telegram]
[22] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 945, 'Interview with Fitchett in Herald Tribune,' 17 November 1980.
[23] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 944, 'French expectation of the European Council,' 17 November 1980.
[24] TNA, FCO98/956, Tel. No. 164, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee: Luxembourg 18 November, Middle East: Follow up to Thorn Mission,' 19 November 1980.
[25] TNA, FCO98/955, 'European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, 4 November,' 31 October 1980.
[26] TNA, FCO98/955, 'European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, 4 November, Item 2: Middle East,' 31 October 1980.

from France at the next Council meeting[27]. Nonetheless, London remained suspicious. Following up on James' report, Hibbert argued that oil and other economic factors meant that France 'want[s] to appear as the leading defender of Arab interests within the Nine,' and that as a result 'it is impossible to forecast exactly what line President Giscard will take at the European Council.' France's attitude following the *International Herald Tribune* article weighed heavily in Hibbert's thinking. He believed that the French had used this opportunity as 'an easy way of showing pro-Arab zeal without commitment.'[28] In fact, during his meeting with Dupont, James had expressed surprise at the fact that the French did not ask the British embassy for clarification before reacting publicly, to which his French counterpart had simply replied that his superiors felt it necessary to make its views known[29]. Very little could be found in the French archives about this episode. Hence, one can only speculate about the reasons for the *Quai d'Orsay*'s attitude, but Hibbert's assessment was in line with France's current strategy of using its EC partners as a strawman to enhance its pro-Arab reputation.

Contrary to British fears, the French attitude was in fact not a prelude for a pro-Arab push in EPC. Towards the end of 1980, Giscard's attention started to turn towards the upcoming presidential election of May 1981, and during the campaign his record on the Middle East often played against him. The bombing of a synagogue in Paris on 3 October 1980, the first anti-Jewish attack in France since the end of the Second World War, naturally moved public opinion. It exacerbated the criticisms of Giscard's pro-Arab policy, which had been particularly prominent since his latest trip to the Middle East. As the election was drawing closer, his relationship with the Jewish community became increasingly tense and prevented him from taking any action that would further confirm his pro-Arab reputation such as mounting a challenge to Camp David in EPC. One example of his changing attitude can be found in his memoirs where he recalls a meeting with the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France* (*CRIF*) in early May 1981. As he recounts, the Arab-Israeli conflict 'weighed on our interview,' and he deemed it undesirable to address the issue as he did not want to 'introduce this theme in the French electoral debate.' He therefore chose to take the 'reasonable and justified' pledge that the *CRIF* expected of him in order not to make any waves[30].

[27] TNA, FCO98/956, Tel. No. 961, 'Middle East: Follow up to Thorn Mission,' 21 November 1980.
[28] TNA, FCO98/956, Tel. No. 968, 'Mr James Telno 961 (not to all): Political Cooperation: Middle East,' 24 November 1980.
[29] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 945, 'Interview with Fitchett in Herald Tribune,' 17 November 1980.
[30] Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Le Pouvoir et la Vie: Choisir*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Compagnie 12, 2006), 444. ('*Bien qu'il ne soit pas évoqué, le conflit israélo-palestinien pèse sur notre entretien.*'; '*Il ne me semble pas souhaitable d'introduire ce theme dans le débat éloctoral français, aussi je préfère m'en tenir aux demandes raisonnables et justifiés du CRIF.*')

Unfortunately for him though, François Mitterrand, his main opponent in the campaign, was the only one of the four major candidates to have supported the Camp David Accords, something which he repeatedly use to denounce Giscard's pro-Arab bias[31]. To illustrate his attacks, and go after the Jewish vote, Mitterrand often referred to a photograph that had been put up all over Paris, and which depicted Giscard supposedly looking towards Israel with binoculars from a Jordanian fort during his last visit to the Hashemite kingdom in March 1980[32]. This dispute made it all the way to the presidential debate, during which Giscard explained that this photograph had, in fact, been taken at an hippodrome in Paris[33]. In any case, far from getting ready to make another sensational move towards the Palestinians, in the months leading up to presidential election, Giscard, on the contrary, sought to avoid any action that could give further ammunition to his opponent.

If the French sought to score points in the Arab world at Britain's expense, it was precisely because at the time they could not push for a more spectacular initiative. There were, in fact, signs of France's increasing uneasiness at the idea of challenging Camp David. For instance, during a meeting of the EPC Middle East Working Group on 16-17 October 1980, the French had surprised everyone by blocking a proposal aimed at defining an active role for the Nine in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Tellingly, the Germans attributed the French attitude 'to a combination of electionitis, […] and recent anti-Semitic outrages in Paris.'[34] Similarly, in mid-November, after a meeting at the French embassy, FCO Minister Adrian Fortescue reported that 'a view had been taken in Paris to apply the brakes on the European initiative.' The unnamed French diplomat, who had just returned from Paris where he had had meetings at the *Élysée* and the *Quai d'Orsay*, volunteered his own personal take on this apparent policy reversal. Among other things, he mentioned Giscard's desire not to open his flank to 'domestic criticism,' 'the increased politicisation of the large Jewish community,' and Parliamentary pressure[35]. These were fairly predictable signs that Giscard would not seek to mount a challenge to Camp David in the near future. Nonetheless, British suspicions remained until the Luxembourg European Council[36].

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[31] For Mitterrand's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict before his election in May 1981 see: Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 61-134.
[32] See for instance the interview of Mitterrand in *Valeurs Actuelles*, 19 January 1981 found in *Archives Nationales*, Paris (hereafter AN), AG/5(4)/FC/110.
[33] Giscard d'Estaing, *Le Pouvoir et la Vie: Choisir*, 3, 460.
[34] TNA, FCO98/955, Tel. No. 131, 'European Political Co-operation: Middle East Working Group 16/17 October: Thorn mission – Lebanon,' 20 October 1980.
[35] TNA, FCO98/955, 'European Middle East initiative: French attitude,' J. A. Fortescue, 14 November 1980.
[36] See for instance: TNA, FCO98/956, Tel. No. 458, 'Middle East: Follow up to the Thorn mission,' 21 November 1980.

To be fair, the French attitude was ambiguous in the second half of 1980. If domestic politics constrained Giscard's Middle East policy, France remained particularly concerned for the European initiative not to peter out. The reason was clearly explained in a briefing for François-Poncet ahead of the EPC ministerial meeting of 15/16 September. It indicated that the Community should not appear to relax its efforts in the upcoming months because it would be considered a renunciation by Europe, which in turn would be perceived as a failure for France, which had been 'largely credited' in the Arab world for the Venice Declaration[37]. The tensions between domestic and international interests, therefore, made French intentions within EPC harder to read as the Community was trying to define the future of its initiative. The use of such phrases as 'genuine European proposals,' or 'a complete scenario for a settlement,' created some confusion and apprehension about France's objectives. And, the very public row with Britain over the *International Herald Tribune* article exacerbated the perception of a struggle between the pro-American British and the pro-Arab French in the definition of the European initiative. That said, there is nothing in the French archives to suggest that the option of a fully developed peace plan that would challenge Camp David had, at any point, been considered. And, as the *Élysée*'s diplomatic adviser Patrick Leclercq, concluded in a memorandum on 27 November, the objective at the upcoming European Council 'was not to announce a new initiative.'[38] Ultimately, just like the perception that Britain sought to limit European ambition on behalf of the US was misleading, so was the fear that France was trying to push for the launch of a European peace plan.

Hence, in Luxembourg, the Heads of state and government easily agreed on the future of their Middle East initiative. They endorsed another report on the Middle East, which defined in more detail their positions on four main issues: Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories; Palestinian self-determination; security in the Middle East; and Jerusalem[39]. The final communiqué described the various problems pertaining to a comprehensive settlement that the Nine had discussed but did not mention any of the conclusions they had reached. It stated that 'different formulas were possible,' that these needed to be discussed in more detailed with the concerned parties, and it announced another touring mission[40].

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[37] MAE, 4171, Note pour le Ministre, N°44/A.N.M.O., 'Suite de la mission Thorn: Questions de méthode et questions de fond,' 11 Septembre 1980. ('*largement crédité*').
[38] AN, AG/5(3)/918, Note pour le Président de la République, 'a.s. Conseil Européen, 1er-2 décembre,' P. Leclercq, 27 novembre 1980.
[39] For the Luxembourg report on the Middle East see for instance: MAE, 4170, 'Rapport de Luxembourg concernant les principes de la déclaration de Venise sur le Moyen-Orient.'
[40] TNA, FCO98/956, Tel. No. 377, 'European Council 1/2 December,' 2 December 1980.

Ultimately, as the discussions within EPC ahead of the Community's second touring mission demonstrate, there never was any chance that the Europeans would launch their own peace plan. The French never seriously pushed for it despite what their ambiguous rhetoric might have implied, and in any case many within the Community would have opposed such a move. In that respect, the Luxembourg report, which outlined in greater detail a common EC stance on the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, was never envisaged as a European peace plan. As the British explained, it was 'not a blueprint for a settlement, but an internal document for the Nine's own guidance.'[41] Clearly, this report was essentially meant to justify another touring mission in order to keep filling the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East. That said, with their lofty rhetoric the EC member states continued to entertain ambiguities and hopes about an eventual European initiative, whatever that meant. On the one hand, this helped preserve their credibility in Arab eyes, but on the other hand they kept on raising unreasonable expectations.

TOURING THE MIDDLE EAST (AGAIN!)

Officially, the goal of the van der Klaauw mission was to establish new contacts with the parties to the conflict 'with a view to a more thorough exploration of the formulas, as these have been listed in the report of Luxembourg, aimed at giving substance to the Venice principles and with the determination to encourage a climate more favourable to negotiations.'[42] On 20 January, the now ten EC member states (the Ten[43]) agreed on the new mission's modalities[44]. As already explained in the previous chapter, there were doubts about a potential Dutch leadership. Ahead of the Thorn mission, the Foreign Ministers had agreed that their choice to put the presidency in charge should not be regarded as a precedent. It proved difficult, however, to switch formula without running the risk of offending the Dutch, who now, after having given signs the previous summer that they did not want to assume a leadership position, seemed keen to take on this responsibility[45]. Despite some concerns, there was no resistance to van der Klaauw touring the Middle East with an all-Dutch team[46]. It had been accepted for Luxembourg, albeit reluctantly, and thus could not be rejected for The Netherlands. That said, based on the experience of 'the

[41] TNA, FCO98/956, Guidance Telegram Number 124, 'Middle East: European Council,' 2 December 1980.
[42] TNA, FCO98/1129, Draft mandate for the Dutch presidency, 'Follow-up to given to the conclusions of the European Council of December 1 and 2, 1980, concerning the Middle East (Mission of the European Presidency to the Middle East'.
[43] Greece entered the Community on 1 January 1980.
[44] MAE, 1930INVA, 4987, CPE/MUL ETR 230, 'Relevé de conclusions de la réunion ministerielle extraordinaire de coopération politique (Bruxelles, 20 janvier 1981), 21 Janvier 1981.
[45] TNA, FCO98/956, 'Nine Foreign Ministers meeting, 15-16 December: Arab-Israel,' Miles, 15 December 1980.
[46] TNA, FCO98/1165, Tel. No. 41, 'EC Middle East mission,' 3 February 1981.

rapid and superficial Thorn mission' as the British put it, the Dutch agreed both to the drafting of a guiding document with a list of specific questions, and to sending written reports after each visit[47].

This time, the Community embarked on a much more extensive tour of the Middle East. The presidency believed that restricting consultation only to the parties directly involved in the conflict would offend the '*amour propre*' of the others[48]. The FCO was concerned that this would divert attention from the most important parties and issues, and suggested that visits to North African and Gulf states, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, not be conducted by van der Klaauw himself; but the Dutch rejected the British proposal[49]. The mission started on 16 February by a meeting with the head of the Arab League, Chedli Klibi, in The Hague, and ended on 10 June with a visit to Oman. In the course of the five months, the European delegation visited Syria – where a meeting with PLO leader Yasser Arafat would also take place –, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt, the Vatican, Israel and the occupied territories, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kuwait, Bahrein, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman. In addition, van der Klaauw would meet three times with Alexander Haig, the new US Secretary of State.

If the Luxembourg report had advanced European thinking on the specifics of a comprehensive settlement, the Arabs were generally not ready to engage with it, to say nothing of the Israelis. Unsurprisingly, consultations with the parties not directly involved in the conflict did not yield much. They stuck to a very general defence of the Palestinians, reiterated their support for the PLO, and criticised US policy[50]. As for Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, they were not ready either to engage in any meaningful way in a discussion on the details of a peace settlement. The most

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[47] TNA, FCO98/1129, European Political Cooperation, Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Brussels, 20 January, 'Middle East'; TNA, FCO98/1118, Tel. No. 016, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 13-14 January – Middle East,' 14 January 1981.

[48] TNA, FCO98/1118, Tel. No. 016, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 13-14 January – Middle East,' 14 January 1981.

[49] TNA, FCO98/1165, European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 13-14 January 1981, 'Item 1: Middle East'.

[50] For the Maghreb countries see for instance: TNA, FCO98/1165, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE Mul Etr 1040, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient: Maroc,' 2 April 1981; TNA, FCO98/1165, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE Mul Etr 1059, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient: Tunisie,' 2 April 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1706, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient/Algérie,' 27 mai 1981.
For the Gulf countries see for instance: MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1914, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Koweit,' 11 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1987, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Bahrein,' 17 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1988, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient Oman,' 17 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1914, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Koweit,' 11 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1987, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Bahrein,' 17 juin 1981; TNA, FCO98/1165, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE/Mul Etr 606, 'Mission au Moyen-Orient – Baghdad,' 27 février 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1643, 'Mission CPE Moyen-Orient – Arabie Saudite,' 22 mai 1981.

significant information that van der Klaauw managed to glean came from King Hussein. He warned that the so-called 'Jordanian option,' which consisted in an association of the West Bank with Jordan in some sort of federal arrangement, could only be considered after a Palestinian vote on self-determination[51]. The Lebanese authorities remained primarily concerned with the ongoing civil war, and essentially found interest in a European role as the Arab voice in Washington[52]. As for the Syrians, they stuck to their uncompromising stance toward the Jewish state[53]. Naturally, Egypt and Israel did not find much interest in discussing the terms of peace outside of the Camp David framework[54]. For his part, Arafat still saw a utility in the Community's activism, although not as an alternative to Washington, and he naturally regretted that, in Luxembourg, the Europeans had not advanced their stance on the Palestinian question. As with Thorn, he remained cryptic about the sort of compromise he would be willing to make. Asked about the possibility of a PLO recognition of the Jewish state, he cryptically answered: 'I am accepting my state and I am not playing my cards easily.'[55] As for the Palestinians of the occupied territories, they did not present a united front. Some openly envisaged a federation with Jordan, while others believed that Arafat should launch 'a peace challenge' to Israel. But, given the heavy political restrictions imposed by the Israelis in the occupied territories, they remained dependent on the PLO for any sort of initiative, and hence ultimately unanimously recognised its legitimacy[56].

In term of advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East or the Ten's understanding of the situation, the van der Klaauw mission proved to be another failure. That said, as a result of the Luxembourg report they succeeded in strengthening their credibility in Arab eyes, which was its fundamental purpose. Klibi, for example, was 'pleasantly surprised' with the Community's positive and concrete approach to the Middle East conflict. And, he noted with satisfaction that it was the first time that such an in-depth discussion had taken place between Arabs and Europeans on this most fundamental issue[57]. The Ten had thus demonstrated that they were a serious actor ready to

[51] TNA, FCO98/1165, Tel. No. 77, 'Dutch Foreign Minister's visit to Jordan,' Urwick, 26 February 1981.
[52] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1337, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient: Liban,' 24 avril 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1309, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Liban entretien aver le Président Sarkis,' 23 avril 1981.
[53] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 610, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Damas – visite au Président el Assad,' 27 février 1981.
[54] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1668, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient, entretiens avec le premier ministre israélien Begin,' 25 mai 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1582, 'Mission CPE Moyen-Orient,' 15 mai 1981.
[55] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1312, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient: OLP – Entretien avec Yasser Arafat,' 23 avril 1981.
[56] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1702, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient: entretiens avec plusieurs maires et notables des territoires occupés,' 27 mai 1981.
[57] TNA, FCO98/1165, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE Mul Etr 462, 'Mission CPE relative au Moyen-Orient: visite de M. Klibi, Secretaire Général de la League Arabe à La Haye les 11 et 12 février 1981,' 16 février 1981.

work towards a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict. And, in so doing, they legitimised the launch of their second touring mission. Importantly, this allowed them to continue filling the diplomatic vacuum and help secure Western interests in the Middle East. But, the drawback was that they continued to increase the capability-expectation gap about their upcoming initiative.

EUROPE *VERSUS* THE SOVIET UNION

The invasion of Afghanistan had been an instrumental event in the collapse of superpower *détente*. It exacerbated Western and Middle Eastern fears of Soviet expansionism in the Persian Gulf, and led the Americans to reassess their policy priority away from the Arab-Israeli conflict and towards Cold War security concerns. This shift was one of the main reasons that led the Europeans to get involved in the international politics of the region. While they were alarmed by Moscow's actions, unlike Washington, they did not find the eventuality of a direct Soviet military intervention in the Middle East to be credible as shall be further explained in the next chapter. That said, they also worried about Communist subversion in the region, but, like the Arabs, they believed that it was primarily Camp David that was responsible for this increase in the Soviet threat. Interestingly, more than at any point since the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978, during the van der Klaauw mission, Arab leaders expressed their concerns in Cold War terms. The Gulf emirates, for instance, had done so during Giscard's visit in March 1980, but it did not appear to have been a major theme during the Thorn mission, even though it took place after the Afghan crisis[58]. Six month later however, the Cold War was on most, if not all, Arab leaders' lips.

Mainly, this was a reaction to the announcement of a Soviet peace plan for the Middle East. On 23 February 1981, Leonid Brezhnev, speaking at the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union outlined proposals to resolve the four main issues destabilising the Middle East at the time: Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Robert Freedman puts it in his overview of Soviet policy in the Middle East, Brezhnev's speech 'seemed aimed at placing Moscow at the centre stage of Middle Eastern diplomacy, a diplomatic position not enjoyed by the Soviet Union since the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.' On this occasion, the Soviet leader denounced Camp David, called for Israel's withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, defended the idea of a two-state solution to the conflict, and proposed the setting up of an international conference that would also include the PLO and the Europeans[59]. With a call for

[58] For summaries of Thorn's meetings during his touring mission see: TNA, FCO98/954-6.
[59] Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy since the Invasion of Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 99, 98-102.

both a Palestinian state and a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, the Soviets were fully answering Arab demands. Interestingly, though, Arab 'moderates' and 'radicals' alike, did not vigorously rally behind the Soviet proposal. As we shall see now, European diplomatic activism played a part in moderating Arab support for Brezhnev's peace plan.

For reasons already explained in chapter 2, the Gulf emirates were particularly concerned not to get caught in the superpower rivalry, and had hence shown great interest in a European initiative from the start. When van der Klaauw visited Kuwait and Bahrein on 6 and 7 June respectively, for example, he found leaders who were particularly concerned about Moscow's attempt to claim a political role in the region with its recent call for an international conference that would include the PLO. They were afraid that continued US obduracy towards Camp David would make the Palestinians flock to the Soviet proposal. In that respect, the value of the European initiative stemmed from its offering an alternative to the two superpowers. The launch of the Soviet initiative had thus reinforced their support for European efforts, and now they went as far as arguing that the Community should act as a mediator in the conflict[60]. Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadoun Hammadi also regarded the Community's involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy as a much needed challenge to the bipolar world order. During his talk with van der Klaauw on 24 February, for instance, he praised 'the growth of a strong and independent Europe,' which together with 'a strong Arab world were important as a means of breaking the monopoly of power held by the USA and the USSR.'[61] The idea of a Euro-Arab bloc as a challenge to the Cold War order was obviously a quixotic approach to the problems of the Middle East. But it nevertheless served as a powerful justification for the Ten's diplomatic initiative.

Even Egypt, which was initially highly suspicious of European intentions had come around and now found an interest in having another external actor intervene in Middle Eastern diplomacy. During van der Klaauw's visit on 24-25 April, Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Boutros Boutros-Ghali were both enthusiastic about the European initiative, and the fear that it would challenge Camp David seemed to have disappeared. In fact, the Egyptians now attached 'great importance' to the Community's diplomatic activity. In particular, they believed that it could be an effective counterweight to Brezhnev's peace plan, and

[60] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1914, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Koweit,' 11 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1987, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Bahrein,' 17 juin 1981. Oman also made a similar argument even though it was the only Gulf State to openly support Camp David: MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1988, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient Oman,' 17 juin 1981.

[61] TNA, FCO98/1165, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE/Mul Etr 606, 'Mission au Moyen-Orient – Baghdad,' 27 février 1981.

went as far as telling the Dutch Foreign Minister that thanks to the European initiative Moscow 'would loose [*sic*] its cause in the Middle East.'[62] Coming from Egypt, this was a damning indictment of US policy. Essentially, what this meant was that, at the political level, it was the Europeans, and not the Americans, that were in a position to prevent the Soviets from regaining some of their influence in the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation. In other words, the Ten's opposition to Camp David now allowed them to act as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world.

Saudi Arabia expressed similar concerns and also framed its interest in the European initiative in Cold War terms. During his meeting with van der Klaauw on 16 May, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud began by qualifying the Ten's efforts for peace as being of 'extremely great importance for the stability of the region.' Again, Brezhnev's peace plan was central to this increased interest in a European role. Since Camp David continued to infuriate the Arab world, something had to be done to prevent the Soviets from exploiting the situation. Prince Saud confided in the Dutch Foreign Minister that the Ten's initiative was, in fact, more appealing to Arafat than the Soviet one, and he therefore hoped that the Community's diplomatic activism would help pull the PLO towards the Western camp. The Saudis still did not believe that anyone could replace the Americans in the search for Middle East peace. As Prince Saud reiterated they were the only ones who could influence the Israeli 'psychological and political make-up.' In conclusion, though, he said that if the Ten could move the Americans away from Camp David, his country would be willing to use its influence to push Arab opinions towards a compromise[63]. In effect, what the Saudis were now suggesting was a Euro-Arab intervention to strengthen Western dominance over the peace process. This marked a notable evolution of the Saudi stance towards the European initiative, and again Cold War concerns seem to have been the deciding factor.

In their meeting with van der Klaauw in Damascus on 17 April, Arafat and his *de facto* Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi did not explicitly confirm Prince Saud's claim that they were more interested in the European than the Soviet initiative. Kaddoumi, for instance, warned that Brezhnev's peace plan was more acceptable to the PLO, which was obviously true. But, at the same time, he recognised that no solution was possible without the US and urged the Ten to

[62] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1494, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Egypt,' 8 juin 1981.
[63] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1643, 'Mission CPE Moyen-Orient – Arabie Saudite,' 22 mai 1981. ('*qu'il estimait comme revetant une importance extrememement grande pour la stabilité de la région*'; the other quote was already in English).

influence the Americans on the Palestinian question[64]. This was a clear indication that the PLO leadership would rather deal with the West, and at that stage the Europeans were the most influential advocates of the Palestinian cause in Washington. Endorsing Brezhnev's peace plan, especially as Cold War tensions were intensifying, would therefore be counterproductive to Palestinian political interests and the PLO leadership could not ignore this reality.

Van der Klaauw was in Damascus during the 15th session of the Palestine National Council (PNC), which was taking place between 11 and 19 April. A British assessment of the PNC's final declaration identified several elements of moderation. Tellingly, one of those was that while Arafat welcomed Brezhnev's speech on the Middle East, he did so in very general terms, and did not endorse his call for an international conference[65]. As PLO Central Committee member Muhammad Abu Mayzar had told Patrick Wright, the British Ambassador to Syria, back in February, the Soviet plan did not fit with the current Palestinian strategy. The priority was to gather widespread international support for a new United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution, which would recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination, before agreeing to participate in any sort of negotiations[66]. In that respect, getting the Americans on board was key, and this was not something that the Soviets could deliver. The Europeans, on the contrary, were in a much better position.

The Syrians were of great concern to the Europeans and the 'moderate' Arab states, both because it was the Arab country with the closest ties to Moscow, and because it had a significant influence over the PLO. The British, for example, took it upon themselves to maintain contact with Damascus ahead of van der Klaauw's visit. Reporting to his Community partners on his meetings with President Hafez al-Assad and Foreign Minister Abdul Halim Khaddam, which took place in Damascus on 5 February, Gilmour struck an encouraging tone. He said that when it came to the search for Middle East peace the 'Syrians had no faith in Israel and the United States, and therefore felt that if anyone could do it, it would have to be Europe.' Interestingly, Gilmour also noted that neither Assad nor Khaddam had made any reference to the Soviet Union[67]. Admittedly, Brezhnev had not yet announced his Middle East initiative, but this was nonetheless very unusual. During the Thorn Mission, for example, Khaddam had made several reference to his country's relationship with Moscow. He had explained that 'Syria had had to build up her relationship with the Russians in the face of Israeli pressure, Egyptian treachery, Arab indifference and American hostility,' and

[64] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 1311, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient (OLP),' 23 avril 1981.
[65] TNA, FCO93/2801, 'Palestine National Council, 15 session, April 1981,' 23 April 1981.
[66] TNA, FCO93/2801, 'Call on official PLO spokesman: 26 February 1981,' Wright, 26 February 1981.
[67] TNA, FCO93/2665, 'Briefing given by Lord Privy Seal to EC head of mission, 18.30, Thursday 5 February.'

that if there was no other choice he would continue to develop this partnership[68]. The Soviets were indeed 'physically and economically entrenched' in the country, as Gilmour reported to Carrington. But, contrary to the Europeans who had the Americans' ear, they were in no position to help promote Syria's most pressing interests, namely rebuilding Arab unity and getting back the Golan Heights. According to Gilmour, these goals were more important to the Syrian regime than maintaining its relationship with Moscow, and he concluded from his visit that the Ten had a card to play in Damascus[69].

The Europeans, therefore, seemed to enjoy a privileged position in Damascus in so far as the Syrians realised that, on the off chance that progress towards peace might happen, the Community constituted their best bet. This was a striking example of how far EPC had come since the 1973 October War as it appeared that the Europeans were now competing with the Soviets for political influence in Syria. For a European role to be acceptable, however, the Ten needed to demonstrate clearly that their initiative was entirely detached from Camp David, and on that count Syria continued to harbour some doubts[70]. During his time in Damascus, Gilmour spent considerable energy trying to assuage his interlocutors' suspicion. He went through the text of the Venice Declaration point by point with Khaddam, and painstakingly countered every criticism that came his way[71]. As Wright subsequently reported, Gilmour's 'vigorous' defence of the European initiative's independence from Washington had made 'a considerable impact' on the Syrian Foreign Minister. As he remarked, '[i]t is not often that one hears an admission by Khaddam that he might possibly have been mistaken.' He also noted that while it was not the first time that the Syrians had welcome a European role, this time he had 'detected a considerably warmer tone' coming from Assad[72].

Encouraged by the apparent evolution of the Syrian attitude, Gilmour was eager for van der Klaauw to build on the result of his visit. As he reported to his Community partners, Khaddam had been impressed by his explanation of the Venice principles. And he said that if the Syrian Foreign Minister heard something similar from the European delegation, he would reconsider his

[68] TNA, FCO98/954, Tel. No. 225, From Damascus to FCO, 'M. Thorn's visit to Syria, 5-7 August,' Wright, 8 August 1980.
[69] TNA, FCO93/2665, From Gilmour to the Secretary of State, 'The Middle East,' 19 February 1981.
[70] TNA, FCO93/2664, From Damascus to FCO, Tel. No. 16, 'Your Tel No 4. Following from NENAD: visit of Lord Privy Seal,' Wright, 13 January 1981.
[71] TNA, FCO93/2665, 'Record of a meeting between the Lord Privy Seal and the Syrian Foreign Minister in Damascus on 4 February 1981 at 1230 Hrs.'
[72] TNA, FCO93/2665, 'The Lord Privy Seal's visit to Syria: 4-6 February,' Wright, British Embassy, Damascus, 11 February 1981.

position on the European initiative[73]. During his visit to Damascus on 22-23 February, the Dutch Foreign Minister made it clear that the Ten's efforts were independent from Camp David. And based on his meeting with Assad, he reported that the Syrians had gained confidence in the European initiative's independence from Washington. Moreover, judging by the various reports of the van der Klaauw mission, it was Khaddam who most actively engaged with the Luxembourg report, and he seemed to have been reassured by what he had heard from the Dutch Foreign Minister[74]. Ultimately, the Ten's head of mission concluded that his visit to Damascus 'had gone rather better than he had expected at the beginning.'[75] The evolution of the Syrian attitude towards the European initiative was a significant indication that the Community had gained in credibility. Now, one cannot say from the source base used here the extent to which the European initiative translated into greater Syrian moderation. But what is clear, is that the Community was now regarded as a serious player in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

It is obviously impossible to say what the PLO and the Syrian reactions to the Soviet initiative would have been without the Community's involvement. And, the objective here is certainly not to suggest that the Europeans single-handedly prevented a Soviet return at the centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy. Already before the Venice Declaration, the PLO and Syria acknowledged that eventually they would have to deal with the US, and had already distanced themselves from Moscow, and even more so after the invasion of Afghanistan. But, at that juncture, it was clear to them that if the road to peace went through Washington, the road to Washington went through Europe. In that sense, the Community played a significant part in keeping the Arabs looking West at a time when an unprecedented wave of anti-Americanism was sweeping through the Middle East. In doing so, at the very least, they helped navigate the intensification of the superpower confrontation by offering a Western pole of attraction at a time of multiple crises, a situation which had traditionally benefited the Soviet Union. In any case, this further confirms that the Community was playing a meaningful diplomatic role in the Middle East at the beginning of the 1980s, one that certainly deserves a place in the historiography.

[73] TNA, FCO93/2665, 'Briefing given by Lord Privy Seal to EC head of mission, 18.30, Thursday 5 February.' See also TNA, FCO93/2665, 'Record of a meeting between the Lord Privy Seal and the Syrian Foreign Minister in Damascus on 4 February 1981 at 1230 Hrs.'
[74] MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, CPE/Mul Etr 610, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Damas – visite au Président el Assad,' 27 février 1981.
[75] TNA, FCO98/1165, Tel. No. 52, 'Dutch Foreign Minister's visit to Syria,' Wright, 23 February 1981.

CONCLUSION

Since the start of 1980, talks of a 'European initiative' in the media and within diplomatic circles had raised much expectations about the Community's intentions. But, the rhetoric of peace that accompanied European efforts to get involved in Middle Eastern diplomacy proved highly misleading. The EC member states all agreed that they had to pursue their diplomatic engagement, and some of them had grown concerned about raising unreasonable hopes in the Arab world. The international community was now expecting some sort of concrete peace initiative on the part of the Community, whether it be a fully-fledged peace plan, a modification of UN Security Council Resolution 242, or something else. As this chapter has demonstrated however, at this point, the Europeans never seriously envisaged the launch of such an initiative. With the advent of Ronald Reagan to the White House and the upcoming election in Israel, they all agreed that the timing was not right. Instead, they decided to draft another report on the Middle East which would refine the principles announced in Venice. In effect, this was essentially designed to justify another round of consultations without making it obvious that, at least in the short term, the Community's priority was to fill the diplomatic vacuum, and not making a concrete contribution to Arab-Israeli peace. The van der Klaauw mission, therefore, continued to be primarily motivated by European security concerns in the Middle East.

Mutual mistrust and prejudices between France and Britain created tensions within EPC. As their dispute eventually made its way through to the media, it strengthened the common contemporary perception that Britain was seeking to limit European ambitions on behalf of the US, and that France was trying to impose a pro-Arab initiative. The mediatisation of Franco-British tensions had a significant impact in shaping not only the contemporary perception of Community dynamics on the Middle East, but the scholarly one as well. The only account that focuses in any significant way on both the Thorn and the van der Klaauw mission, relies on the *International Herald Tribune* article[76]. The reality, however, was very different from what transpired through the media. As the upcoming presidential election came to constrain Giscard's room for manoeuvre on the Middle East, France seized the easy opportunity of Carrington's interview to play up its pro-Arab credentials. And, Britain was once again portrayed as the American Trojan horse within EPC, albeit unfairly this time. The British were, in fact, committed to the drafting of the Luxembourg report and the launch of another touring mission, while the French, along with the rest of the Community, never seriously envisaged anything more than what was announced by the European

[76] Greilsammer and Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance*, 56. This book often serves as a basis for the various accounts of European foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Council on 2 December 1980. In the end, Franco-British mistrust and France's ambiguous rhetoric further increase the perception that, if it was not for internal disagreement, the Community would have launched its much awaited peace initiative, whatever that would have been.

If initially the van der Klaauw mission was essentially meant to keep filling the diplomatic vacuum, it also came to serve a clear Cold War purpose. Brezhnev's attempt to bring Moscow back to the centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy reintroduced a Cold War dimension to the search for Arab-Israeli peace, which had largely disappeared since the 1973 October War. In that particular context, there is clear evidence that, at the diplomatic level, the Ten came to matter more to the Arabs than the Soviet Union. This is quite an accomplishment for the decade old EPC. Not only did the Europeans become part of the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation with the Thorn mission, but with the van der Klaauw mission they became a political asset for the Americans by serving as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world. In some respect, the Community played a role akin to the one it played with West Germany in the early Cold War. This pursuit of *Westbindung* in the Middle East was a clear demonstration of how an independent European foreign policy, firmly embedded within the transatlantic framework, could serve Western interests as Cold War dynamics were coming back to the forefront of international relations. It is, indeed, striking that Moscow never managed to build an effective anti-Western Arab front in the Middle East. Of course, the invasion of Afghanistan did not help. But still, the level of anti-Americanism in the region was unprecedented[77]. In that respect, in 1981, the elusive search for a European third way in international relations did materialise to some extent. It certainly did not transcend the logic of the Cold War, but it did offer an alternative to the two superpowers. It is obviously hard to say the extent to which European diplomatic activism actually frustrated Soviet diplomatic ambitions in the Middle East, but it certainly helped.

[77] Salim Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

CHAPTER 7

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVE, JANUARY 1981 – JUNE 1982

TWO STRATEGIES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

INTRODUCTION

With the drafting of the Venice Declaration, the nine Community member states (the Nine) had in effect started to define their own strategy to protect Western interests in the Middle East. In doing so, they identified the Palestinian question as the main source of regional instability. And, they argued that a political engagement with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was the *sine qua non* condition for both reducing tensions, and allowing the West to strengthen its military capabilities to defend the Middle East against the threat of Soviet subversion and expansionism. As explained in chapter 4, US President Jimmy Carter recognised that dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict was a necessity to secure Western interests in the region. But, as a result of events in Iran and Afghanistan he started to give priority to a direct military build-up in the Middle East over a continued political engagement with the Palestinian question. This trend then intensified with the start of a heated presidential campaign in 1980. Initially, the emerging European strategy had been largely premised on the hope that Carter would win re-election. With the imperatives of the presidential campaign behind him, the member states of the European Community (EC) believed that Carter would go back to dealing with the peace process as an integral part of his Middle East strategy, and that he would again try to push for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute. With the advent of Ronald Reagan to the White House, however, US Middle East policy became part of a larger doctrine, which aimed at fighting the expansion of Communism throughout the Global South, and thus forced the Europeans to adapt their diplomatic initiative accordingly[1].

[1] For an overview of Reagan's policy towards the Global South see: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 331-63.

There is currently a dearth of historical studies on the definition of Reagan's early Middle East policy[2]. This is largely explained by the fact that the relevant *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) volumes have not yet been published. In recent years, however, documents from the Ronald Reagan Library (RRL) and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) have been declassified, and allow for the beginning of an historical analysis[3]. On the European side, there are a couple of publications that deals with Western engagement towards the peace process in the early 1980s[4]. But, they all frame the Palestinian question within the context of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and do not deal, as this dissertation does, with its implications for Western security and Cold War interests in the Middle East.

This chapter presents the first dedicated historical account of transatlantic relations over the Middle East in the early 1980s. It argues that from the moment that Reagan took the oath of office in January 1981 until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, the now ten Community member states (the Ten) systematically confronted the new US administration with their own strategy for dealing with the Middle East situation. It demonstrates the extent to which the unprecedented cohesion within European Political Cooperation (EPC) since the Venice European Council enhanced the Community's stature in Washington. This dynamic was particularly obvious when looking at the role of France and Britain, which led the European initiative's transatlantic dimension. In addition to using French and British sources, this chapter also brings in the American archival perspective. What this reveals is the prominence of the Europeans in

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[2] For a contemporary account of the definition of Reagan's Middle East policy see: Juliana S. Peck, *The Reagan Administration and the Palestinian Question: The First Thousand Days* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984). There is one book, which relies on the author's first-hand experience of US policy making towards the Middle East and that deals with the Reagan years: William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2005). For general accounts of US Middle East policy during the Cold War era see: Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009); Salim Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For accounts of US policy during the 1982 war in Lebanon see: Naseer H. Aruri and Fouad M. Moughrabi, "The Reagan Middle East Initiative," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, no. 2 (1983): 10-30; Naseer Aruri, "The United States and Palestine: Reagan's Legacy to Bush," ibid.18, no. 3 (1989): 3-21; Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon, 2013).

[3] For a recent account based extensively of US and Israeli sources see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[4] From the British perspective see for instance: Nigel J. Ashton, "Love's Labours Lost: Margaret Thatcher, King Hussein and Anglo–Jordanian Relations, 1979–1990," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 4 (2011): 651-77; Azriel Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). From the French perspective see: Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). There is also an account from the Jordanian perspective: Nigel J. Ashton, *King Hussein: A Political Life* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2008). From the collective European perspective see for instance: David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). There is also a recent monograph on EPC during the 1980s, which touches on the collective European dimension: Maria Eleonora Guasconi, *Prove Di Politica Estera. La Cooperazione Politica Europa, L'atto Unico Europea E la Fine Della Guerra Fredda*Mondadori Università, Forthcoming).

Washington's thinking towards the region, and in its dealings with Middle Eastern actors. This chapter uncovers the triangular dynamic between Europeans, Arabs, and Americans which characterised the international politics of the Middle East at least until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. And, it shows that, if ultimately the Europeans failed to have any significant impact on the definition of US policy, the Reagan administration still faced a solid Euro-Arab front, which systematically rejected its Middle East strategy.

FRANCE, BRITAIN, AND THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVE'S TRANSATLANTIC DIMENSION

By early 1981, the Ten's priority was to influence the definition of Reagan's Middle East policy, and, initially, they appeared confident that they would be able to weigh in on American thinking. During their meeting on 13-14 January, the Political Directors unanimously agreed to target the new US administration as part of their efforts to advance the Middle East initiative. The British appeared particularly enthusiastic about this prospect. UK political director Julian Bullard, for instance, expressed great optimism about the Ten's ability to promote 'real progress' in the peace process. He believed that the months ahead constituted a 'unique opportunity' because of 'the fluid situation in the Middle East' and the chance to 'explain European ideas to the new US administration soon while their own policies were in a formative stage.' As could be expected, the French added their usual caveat about the danger of conspicuous contacts with Washington. But, ultimately, they also agreed, along with the rest of the Community, that it was indispensable to intensify transatlantic contacts over the next few months[5]. With this task at hand, in the first half 1981, France and Britain took a firm lead in the European initiative's transatlantic dimension.

EXPLAINING BRITISH OPTIMISM

At this juncture, Britain's optimism contrasted with the somewhat more restrained attitude of its Community partners. This was essentially due to Britain's reading of the Middle East situation after Lord Privy Seal and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) minister Ian Gilmour's trip to Jordan on 1-4 January, and Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington's visit to Egypt on 11-12 January. As King Hussein told Gilmour, for instance, 'President Reagan's overwhelming victory, the defeat of some leading Zionists in the Senate and the deterioration of the internal situation in Israel created favourable conditions.' And, in that context, he argued that the European role 'would be

[5] The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FCO98/1129, Tel. Nº 016, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 13-14 January – Middle East,' Taylor, 14 January 1981.

of primary importance' to influence the new US administration's policy in a direction that would no longer seek to bypass the PLO. Hussein also believed that there was a chance that Yasser Arafat would soon be ready to adopt a more flexible stance on Israel. In that respect, the King briefed Gilmour on the two recent meetings he had had with the Palestinian leader. He essentially painted the picture of a man struggling with internal divisions and radical external pressure from Syria and Libya, and who 'seemed nervous' that time might have come for him to choose, once and for all, the political road to a Palestinian state. Hussein asserted that he would do all he could to 'liberate' the PLO from radical forces, and that 'the European role would be crucial in this.'[6] Elaborating on Jordanian expectations from the European initiative, Alan Urwick, the British Ambassador in Amman, explained that it needed to give 'some hope of reward' to Arafat to encourage him to take the necessary risk for peace[7]. As we shall see, this was exactly the spirit in which the British would approach the European initiative for the remainder of the year.

In addition, Carrington's visit to Cairo confirmed President Anwar Sadat's and Foreign Minister Kamal Hassan Ali's heightened enthusiasm towards a European involvement. And, it also revealed significant changes in the Egyptian attitude towards the peace process. According to Michael Weir, the British Ambassador to Egypt, Sadat's offer to 'drop the offending label of Camp David' was a promising sign that he was becoming both more flexible towards the peace process and eager for a reconciliation with its Arab counterparts[8]. Apart from this sign of detachment from Camp David, Egypt's more positive attitude towards the PLO also fuelled British optimism. An assessment of Carrington's meeting with Sadat, for instance, suggested that the Foreign Secretary's defence of the Venice principles 'may have prompted second thoughts' in his interlocutor about the PLO's role in the peace process[9]. On his part, Ali had expressed his belief that a PLO involvement was needed[10]. As one of Weir's reports to the FCO then concluded, this was a 'distinctive shift' in Egypt's thinking, which further indicated its readiness to get back into the Arab fold[11]. But more importantly, if Sadat came to support the association of the PLO to the peace process, it would

[6] TNA, FCO93/2665, 'Record of an audience of King Hussein by the Lord Privy Seal at the Royal Palace, Amman, on 2 February 1981 at 1715 HRS.'
[7] TNA, FCO93/2664, From Amman to FCO, Tel. No. 44, 'Visit of Lord Privy Seal to Jordan, 1-4 February: Arab-Israel,' 3 February 1981.
[8] TNA, FCO93/2663, Tel. No. 8, 'Your telno 3 to Jedda and Jedda telno 7: Meeting with President Sadat,' Weir, 6 January 1981.
[9] TNA, FCO93/2663, 'Visit to Egypt by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs and Lady Carrington – Summary.'
[10] TNA, FCO93/2663, 'Record of a meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Mr Kamal Hassan Ali, the Egyptian minister of Foreign affairs at 6.00 PM, on 11 January 1981 in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.'
[11] TNA, FCO93/2663, From Michael Weir, British Embassy, Cairo, to Lord Carrington, 28 January 1981.

put serious pressure on the US to change its approach to the Palestinian question, and there the Europeans would have a major role to play.

All in all, one of the major conclusions from both Carrington's and Gilmour's trips was that the increasing Arab alienation from the US continued to enhance Europe's diplomatic stature. The Lord Privy Seal, for instance, was in Jordan when Reagan declared that Israeli settlements were not illegal. As he then reported, this comment had unleashed severe criticism from the Jordanian authorities, and had translated into more pressing support for a European role[12]. Carrington had also witnessed a similar trend in Egypt and, as a result, he now hoped that Sadat might be brought to support the Venice principles[13]. That said, this increasing interest in a European role was not envisaged in opposition to the US. At this point, there was no discussion of setting up an alternative negotiating framework. Instead, what the Jordanians, the Egyptians and most of the other Arab states wanted was for the Europeans to influence the definition of Reagan's Middle East policy. This was also made clear to Dutch Foreign Minister Christoph van der Klaauw as he was leading the Community's diplomatic mission in the first half of 1981. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), for instance, also believed in the value of the Ten's activism, but essentially told the European delegation, which stopped by on 8 and 9 June respectively, that the Community members should focus on getting the US to abandon Camp David[14].

EARLY CONTACTS WITH THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

Reagan was a hands-off President when it came to foreign policy, and he heavily relied on his advisers[15]. His top foreign policy team was composed of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, and National Security Adviser Richard Allen, and cooperation between them was notoriously difficult. It was Haig who first took charge of the Middle East issue. The new Secretary of State had served as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) between 1974 and 1979, and before that he had been Kissinger's deputy at the White House, as well as Nixon's chief of staff. His nomination was meant, in part, to send a signal to the European allies that transatlantic cooperation would be an essential component of US foreign

[12] TNA, FCO93/2665, From Gilmour to the Secretary of State, 'The Middle East,' 19 February 1981.
[13] TNA, FCO93/2663, Tel. No. 24, 'Secretary of State's meeting with President Sadat,' Carrington, 9 January 1981.
[14] *Archives du Minitère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (Hereafter MAE), 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE/Mul Etr 1984, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Emirats Arabes Unis,' 17 juin 1981; MAE, 1930INVA, 5004, Mission de M. Van Der Klaauw, From La Haye to all Coreu, CPE/Mul Etr 1989, 'Mission CPE au Moyen-Orient – Qatar,' 17 juin 1981.
[15] Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, 247-48.

policy[16]. Haig had a much more sophisticated understanding of foreign policy making than Reagan, something that was reassuring to the Europeans. That said, like the President, he still apprehended international relations predominantly in Cold War terms, and the Middle East would be no exception[17]. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Nicholas Veliotes, would play a central role in the definition of the administration's early policy. He had all the relevant experience to deal with the Arab-Israeli peace process. He had served in the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, held various positions at the State Department between 1976 and 1978, and had been Carter's Ambassador to Jordan between 1978 and 1980.

The new US administration had barely had time to settle in that the Europeans were already in Washington to start their lobbying campaign. On 17-18 February, FCO deputy under-secretary John Graham, and the head of the Near East and North Africa Department (NENAD), Oliver Miles, were in Washington for a round of talks at the State Department. On 23-24 February, it was French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet's turn to travel to the American capital. And, on 25-28 February, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Foreign Secretary went to the US on a state visit. On each of these occasions, the Middle East was one of the main topics of discussion, and French and British officials virtually spoke with a single voice. A briefing for Thatcher's trip laid out European objectives clearly. The main goal was to encourage the new administration 'to take a fresh look at the Palestine question with a view to a co-ordinated allied approach to the problems of the area.' And, this meant, essentially, to 'look at alternatives to Camp David' that would allow for Palestinian participation[18].

In their early contacts with the Reagan administration, both France and Britain sought to strike a reassuring tone about European intentions. The British, for instance, believed that they should emphasise that 'European Political Cooperation pulls in the same general direction as US interests,'[19] and that on the Middle East 'we want to complement, not compete with US efforts.'[20] Paris was on the same page, and when François-Poncet met with Haig on 23 February, he also addressed US concerns. He gave assurances that, for the moment, the European initiative would remain in an exploratory phase, and that, in part, this had been decided to give Washington time

[16] MAE, 91QO/916, Note pour le Ministre, nº1/AM, 'A.s. – L'administration Reagan et la politique étrangère américaine,' Ph. Cuvillier, Paris, 6 janvier 1981; TNA, FCO98/1104, Tel. Nº 47, 'Lunch for Community Ambassador,' Carrington, 13 March 1981.
[17] Alexander M. Haig Jr., *Caveat, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 20-33.
[18] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, 'Steering Brief', FCO, 19 February 1981.
[19] TNA, FCO82/1108, Annex A, 'United Kingdom objectives.'
[20] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, 'Steering Brief,' FCO, 19 February 1981.

to define its policy. He made it clear, however, that afterwards the Americans should expect increased diplomatic activism on the part of the Europeans. And, he added that the Ten's only intention would be to advance the interests of the West as whole. In response, Haig acknowledged that the Europeans had legitimate reasons to want to get involved, but insisted that whatever they were planning, it should not complicate US efforts[21].

More than any of their EPC partners, the British deployed considerable energy to influence the Reagan administration's early thinking on the Middle East as Graham's and Miles' trip to Washington shows. During their meetings at the State Department, they conveyed the British government's strong belief that 'progress towards a settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem is important, if not essential, if the whole-hearted cooperation of the regional states is to be obtained for the defence of the region.' In sum, as Graham put it, 'it was not possible to proceed with the latter, and leave the former in a separate compartment.' While acknowledging Camp David's past success, they expressed their concern that it had become a major obstacle to the implementation of Western strategy in the Middle East, and suggested that it should be revamped and renamed to allow for Palestinian participation. In response, however, State Department officials questioned the strong link that the British had drawn between the Arab-Israeli dispute and the security of the Persian Gulf[22].

To convince their hosts, the two British diplomats presented an optimistic assessment of both Arab dispositions to negotiate peace with Israel, and European ability to help that process along. They said that 'many moderate Arabs were now in a mood to take steps, which might make their inclusion [in the peace process] possible,' and, they asserted that the PLO 'was now beginning to move towards a conditional recognition of Israel's right to exist.' Embedding their role entirely within the framework of the European initiative, they said that they were in a privileged position to encourage Arafat towards more moderation, and proceeded to outline how the Ten could be helpful in that respect. They explained that one of the decisions adopted by the Venice European Council had been the resumption of the Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD), which the Arab League had suspended after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In Venice, the EC member states had agreed to organise, for the first time, an EAD meeting at ministerial level. The plan was to

[21] For the American and French report of this meeting see respectively: RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC File, Country File, Box 24, Telegram, 2 March 1981, Secretary of State to American Embassy Paris, 'Object: The Secretary's meeting with François Poncet'; MAE, 91QO/906, Visite du ministre aux Etats-Unis, 21-25 février 1981, TD Washington 484, 'Objet: Entretien du ministre avec le secretaire d'etat,' Laboulaye, 26 février 1981.
[22] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, From Graham to Hurd, 'Visit to Washington: Talks on the Middle East and Afghanistan with the State Department, NSC, and Congressman Lee Hamilton, 17 and 18 February 1981,' 19 February 1981.

convene this meeting, have PLO representatives included in the Arab delegation, and issue a collective communiqué that would indicate a conditional recognition of Israel. But, there again, US officials raised serious doubts about the utility of having the PLO recognise the Jewish state. US Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis, who was present at this meeting, was very sceptical that the European plan could bring much progress towards peace. Even if Labour won the upcoming election, he believed that 'no Israeli government could ever negotiate in any way with the PLO.'[23] This was obviously bad news for the European strategy, essentially because it indicated the Reagan administration early reluctance to put the necessary pressure on Israel.

In fact, Veliotes made it clear to Graham and Miles that 'we must at all costs avoid ending up with the EC cast in the role of delivering the Arabs and the US delivering Israel.' Interestingly, an FCO memorandum, drafted by Miles' department a couple of days before his departure for Washington stated that '[i]t is contrary to our interest for the idea to become established that the USA is the champion of Israel while Europe (together with the Soviet Union!) is the champion of the Arabs. This formula will create great tension in the alliance and make no contribution to peace in the region.' That said, it goes on arguing that while '[t]here can be no absolute division of labour, […] the contacts and influence of the members of the European Community and of the US are different. This should be used.'[24] The British were in effect suggesting a transatlantic division of labour, albeit an informal and discreet one. However, the new US administration was clearly reluctant to adhere to such a strategy. Following Graham's and Miles' visit, for instance, Haig told the President that if the Europeans followed through with their policy they 'would be on a slippery slope,' and he advised Reagan to 'warn' them not to proceed with their plan[25]. Nonetheless, despite clear indications that State Department officials did not look favourably towards the European strategy, the two British diplomats still came out of their visit with the sense that steering US Middle East policy closer to European views remained a possibility. Graham, for example, reported that '[t]here was a clear implication in [Veliotes'] private remarks that he agreed with our approach.'[26]

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[23] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, From Graham to Hurd, 'Visit to Washington: Talks on the Middle East and Afghanistan with the State Department, NSC, and Congressman Lee Hamilton, 17 and 18 February 1981,' 19 February 1981.
[24] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, 'The Arab-Israeli Dispute in 1981,' Near East and North Africa Department, 26 January 1981.
[25] The Ronald Reagan Library (hereafter RRL), Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Department of State, Briefing Paper, 'Middle East Peace Process,' 21 February 1981.
[26] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, From Graham to Hurd, 'Visit to Washington: Talks on the Middle East and Afghanistan with the State Department, NSC, and Congressman Lee Hamilton, 17 and 18 February 1981,' 19 February 1981.

The tone emerging from France's contacts with Washington did not appear more positive. During his meeting with François-Poncet, for example, Haig appeared very suspicious of the PLO essentially for Cold War reasons[27]. And, the French Foreign Minister's conversation with Reagan further confirmed that it would prove extremely difficult to get him to agree to engage with the Palestinian organisation. Prefacing his comments by saying that 'it would perhaps make him sound naïve,' Reagan expressed his belief that the Palestinian refugee camps were essentially 'organized propaganda' by the PLO leadership to impose the creation of a Palestinian state, that the Palestinian people themselves did not want. He further elaborated that 'several Arab countries' perceived the establishment of such a state 'as a potential threat to their own societies.' He then proceeded to offer his take on how to solve the conflict: 'The Arab countries, after all, have a common language, a common religion – it is not impossible to think that given a choice, many of the present-day Palestinians would opt for an international resettlement project.' François-Poncet politely replied that 'there was much truth in what the President was saying,' before expressing his belief that a Palestinian state would not be 'the formidable danger that the Israelis believe it to be.'[28]

Reagan's intervention, certainly did make him sound naïve, but, more problematically, utterly uninformed about the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and severely biased against the Palestinians. He demonstrated a complete lack of sophistication as he basically argued that all Arab states were essentially the same, and that they should, therefore, have no problem absorbing large numbers of Palestinian refugees. More strikingly still, he completely misunderstood their positions towards the creation of a Palestinian state. It was precisely because they feared that integrating Palestinian refugees would be a threat to their internal stability that they eventually came to support the creation of a state for the Palestinians. Clearly, here, Reagan was simply regurgitating Israeli propaganda, and this did not augur well either for the Ten's ability to influence the new US administration's stance on the PLO.

If the Europeans had much convincing to do on the Palestinian question, it also became clear quite early on that Reagan was set on intensifying the strategic shift in the Middle East that had begun under his predecessor. In preparation for François-Poncet's trip to Washington, for instance, Laboulaye cautioned that the Americans were looking at the problems in the region primarily through the Cold War lens. He reported that US engagement in the peace process seemed

[27] MAE, 91QO/906, TD Washington 484, 'Objet: Entretien du ministre avec le secretaire d'etat,' Laboulaye, 26 février 1981.
[28] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject File, Box 13, Memorandum of Conversation, 'Summary of the President's meeting with French Minister of Affairs [sic] François-Poncet,' 25 February 1981.

to be taking a backseat, and that, for now, Camp David would remain, at least officially, the new administration's policy. Considering this, he deplored the fact that Washington still intended to push for a military build-up in the Middle East. Laboulaye explained that this initial attitude towards the peace process was due to the fundamental belief that the Arab-Israeli dispute would be easier to solve after the Soviet threat had been neutralised. In terms of the new administration's apparent decision to stick with Camp David, he also explained that it was essentially due to the US Congress' attachment to Camp David, the usual increased influence of the Israel lobby at the beginning of presidential terms, and the conviction that nothing could be achieved before the Israeli elections[29].

Haig's memorandum for the President ahead of François-Poncet's visit confirms European concerns about the direction of Washington's Middle East policy. The Secretary advised that the basic message the new administration should convey was that the Americans remained committed to Camp David, that European activities should not cut across US efforts, and that the European initiative should be postponed. In other words, the same attitude the US had adopted ever since the Community had issued the Venice Declaration. More problematically still, the President should 'stress' the view that a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict 'would be facilitated' by a stronger Western commitment 'to bolster Persian Gulf security and to meet the Soviet challenge.'[30] It appeared, therefore, that even more so than at the end of the Carter Presidency, under Reagan, Washington was giving priority to a military build-up in the Middle East over a diplomatic engagement with the Palestinian question. The Europeans had the exact opposite reading of the situation. According to them it was not the Middle East conflict that would be easier to solve after dealing with the Soviet threat, but the Soviet threat that would be easier to fight by solving the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Aware of this fundamental difference between the two sides of the Atlantic, France's and Britain's lobbying strategy essentially relied on framing their approach to the Middle East in Cold War and security terms. During his meeting with Haig, for instance, François-Poncet argued that the value of a European involvement was to prevent Arab leaders from facing a straight choice between Washington or Moscow[31]. And, as an FCO brief for Thatcher's visit explained, one of the main

[29] MAE, 91QO/906, Visite du ministre aux Etats-Unis, 21-25 février 1981, TD Washington 416, 'Objet: Dossier du ministre N° 5 – Moyen Orient,' Laboulaye, 18 février 1981.
[30] RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Background Papers for the Visit of French Foreign Minister François-Poncet, February 23-25, 1981, 'The Peace Process'.
[31] For the American and French report of this meeting see respectively: RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC File, Country File, Box 24, Telegram, 2 March 1981, Secretary of State to American Embassy Paris, 'Object: The Secretary's meeting with François Poncet'; MAE, 91QO/906, Visite du ministre aux Etats-Unis, 21-25 février 1981, TD Washington 484, 'Objet: Entretien du ministre avec le secretaire d'etat,' Laboulaye, 26 février 1981.

goals of the trip should be to convince the Reagan administration that letting the Palestinian question fester was 'the greatest single threat to regional peace,' not Moscow[32]. François-Poncet further pleaded with Reagan that 'we need to adopt a sophisticated attitude' on the Middle East conflict, and that 'we will not solve the problem through military strengthening alone.'[33]

Based on their early contacts with the Reagan administration, therefore, it appeared that the Europeans had much convincing to do. But, this did not seem to have affected their enthusiasm in any significant way. During a Community briefing on Thatcher's visit to the US, for instance, Carrington painted quite an optimistic picture of European chances of influencing American thinking on the Middle East. He stuck to the idea that there was a significant enough difference between the White House and the State Department that the Ten could exploit. He reported that Haig seemed generally more open to the European initiative than the President. He then pointed out that the Secretary of State had more nuanced views on the peace process than Reagan, and that he did not show great attachment to Camp David. Based on the report of Carrington's account from the *Quai d'Orsay*, the French generally appeared to share his assessment[34].

HANDLING THE COMMUNITY: THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S EUROPEAN DILEMMA

This sense of optimism was not just wishful thinking on the part of the French and the British. The Reagan administration had, in fact, been careful not to reject the idea of a European role out of hand, and deliberately sought to appear open to the Atlantic Allies' input on the Middle East. Allen, for instance, suggested to the President that he should emphasise in his meeting with Thatcher that he 'will carefully consider any European initiative,' provided that it be 'responsible.'[35] In their initial contacts with the Europeans, the Reagan administration's message was deliberately vague. On the one hand, they wanted to calm down the Ten's diplomatic ardours. But, on the other hand, they tried not to appear dismissive of their allies' ideas and legitimate desire to play a role in a part of the world where they had considerable interests to defend. The reason for

[32] TNA, FCO82/1110, Prime Minister's visit to the United States, 25-28 February 1981, , 'Regional Questions: Near East,' FCO, 18 February 1981..
[33] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject File, Box 13, Memorandum of Conversation, 'Summary of the President's meeting with French Minister of Affairs [sic] François-Poncet,' 25 February 1981.
[34] MAE, 1930INVA, 5222, TD Washington 496, 'Visite de Mme Thatcher aux Etats-Unis: information communautaire,' Laboulaye, 28 février 1981.
[35] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Allen to the President, 'Your meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher (Thursday, February 26).'

Washington's carefulness in handling the Europeans was that both France and Britain, and by extension the Community, were an integral part of their Middle East strategy.

The new administration appeared genuinely concerned about the Community's unprecedented diplomatic engagement in the Middle East, and sought to 'channel' it in a way that would not challenge the development of its own policy. Unsurprisingly, the State Department had identified the French as the 'key architect[s]' behind the European initiative, and targeted them to try 'to limit EC activities.' Similarly, the State Department understood that over the past few months, the British had 'increasingly taken the lead in efforts to find a role for the EC in resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute.'[36] Hence, one of the main objectives during Thatcher's visit was 'to urge her to limit the EC initiative' until the new administration had had time to define its own policy[37]. At this stage, the Americans had not yet decided upon their own approach to the peace process, but they did not want the Ten to keep filling the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East as they had done since the summer. To that end, ahead of his meeting with François-Poncet, for example, Haig recommended to the President that he should tell the French Foreign Minister that he remained committed to the current peace process[38]. The Reagan administration's early commitment to Camp David, in fact, was not about believing that it was the right course to follow. Instead, it was about using it as a shield to limit European diplomatic activism. The Europeans, therefore, were not totally wrong to think that there might be room to influence the Americans approach to the peace process.

The new administration was naturally concerned about the traditional French inclination to oppose US foreign policy. As Haig put it, France had a 'psychological need to appear independent,' and 'to be regarded as a major power.'[39] For that reason, officials at the State Department mistakenly believed that Paris had 'pushed aggressively for EC recognition of Palestinian rights,' and that, unlike London, they 'do not appear particularly concerned if their efforts are in conflict with our own.'[40] That said, at the time, the Reagan administration seemed generally optimistic about improving cooperation with France. In a memorandum for the President, for instance, Haig noted that the French had been 'increasingly willing to cooperate bilaterally on defense issues.' Indicating

[36] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Department of State, Briefing Paper, 'Middle East Peace Process,' 21 February 1981.
[37] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Haig to the President, 'Visit of Prime Minister Thatcher,' undated.
[38] RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Background Papers for the Visit of French Foreign Minister François-Poncet, February 23-25, 1981, 'The Peace Process'.
[39] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Haig to the President, 'Visit of Jean François-Poncet, Foreign Minister of France, February 23-25, 1981.'
[40] RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Background Papers for the Visit of French Foreign Minister François-Poncet, February 23-25, 1981, 'The Peace Process.'

in parenthesis that the following information was 'very sensitive,' Haig revealed that, in recent years, they had even been willing 'to coordinate [their] European defense planning, nuclear and conventional, with SACEUR.'[41] Haig also hoped that the forthcoming presidential election in May would limit the likely challenges coming from Paris[42]. According to Allen, Laboulaye had 'confided' in him that François-Poncet's 'primary objective' in meeting with the President was 'to help refurbish Giscard's international stature' in the context of a difficult re-election campaign. The National Security Adviser thus noted that 'for once, it is the French government, rather than our own, which feels the need for "sensitive" public management of its high-level contacts with an American President.' He, therefore, advised that Reagan should oblige in order to get 'a reciprocally helpful French attitude,' on issues like the Middle East[43].

This means of pressure on the French notwithstanding, at this stage, the Americans were especially concerned about their ability to control the Ten's ambitions, because Britain was demonstrating an unprecedented commitment to Europe. Naturally, they understood that Thatcher was facing the traditional British dilemma of 'strengthen[ing] the "special relationship" without disturbing the UK's ties to Europe.' The Reagan administration, therefore, expected that London 'will need to be cautious in dealing with us in order to allay their EC colleagues' suspicions about the UK-US "special relationship" permitting the US to impinge on the EC consultative and decision-making process.' But, at the same time, they worried that the British government would be more careful than usual not to upset their Community partners by being Washington's advocate within EPC. They thought that this was especially likely because Thatcher 'appears to be motivated by a desire to heal the bruises caused by the budget controversy and to become a more co-equal partner with the FRG and France in Community affairs.' One consequential manifestation of this British attitude, they believed, was that '[u]nder Thatcher and Lord Carrington, the UK is playing a vigorous role in EC political cooperation.'[44] Not only was this analysis spot on, but, for a new administration, it demonstrated a surprisingly sophisticated understanding of the complexity of Community dynamics.

Interestingly, at this point, Washington was unusually concerned about Britain's commitment to the Atlantic Alliance, and unusually confident that French Gaullism could be kept under control.

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[41] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Haig to the President, 'Visit of Jean François-Poncet, Foreign Minister of France, February 23-25, 1981.'
[42] RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Background Papers for the Visit of French Foreign Minister François-Poncet, February 23-25, 1981, 'The Peace Process.'
[43] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Allen to the President, 'Your meeting with French Foreign Minister François-Poncet (Wednesday, February 25, 10 a.m.).'
[44] RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Department of State, Briefing Paper, 'US-UK-West European relations,' 11 February 1981.

This general trend of French foreign policy towards increased *Atlanticisation* under Giscard had been crucial in the making of the Venice Declaration. As already explained, the same went for the Europeanisation of British foreign policy. From an American perspective, these evolutions seemed to have strengthened the Community's diplomatic weight in transatlantic dealings over the Middle East, as Washington lost more out of the lessening of British Atlanticism than it gained from a tempering of French Gaullism.

The Americans needed to tread carefully with European diplomatic ambitions, because France and Britain were an integral part of their plan to beef up Western security in the Persian Gulf. As Haig explained to the President: 'In fact France does play an independent and very important role on the world stage.' He pointed to its 'credible nuclear deterrent,' and its 'effective conventional forces' which 'promote Western security interests' in the Middle East[45]. Haig also noted that France's popularity in this part of the world could be beneficial in terms of establishing stronger security cooperation between regional actors and the West[46]. As he told Laboulaye in early February, he appreciated the particular value of France's friendships in the Global South. The Secretary recognised that for these to translate into effective advantages for the Alliance, the Americans had to keep their distance. However, he made it clear that the price for French independence towards the Global South was a firm stance towards the Soviet Union. In that respect, he insisted that France's conception of a common European foreign policy could not be one of equal distance between the two superpowers[47]. As explained in previous chapters, beyond the Gaullist rhetoric, this was, in fact, precisely France's conception of the European initiative in the Middle East.

As for the British, Haig explained to the President that they 'have been steadfast in support of our Southwest Asian strategy.' On top of their political backing for the establishment of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), they had also agreed to station three to four of their warships in the Indian Ocean through 1981. Furthermore, he added that they had granted the US navy access to the strategically located island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, still under their control, and that they had agreed to a request to improve the facilities there. In addition, the Secretary of State underlined that Britain had maintained 'strong political' and 'arms sales relationships with the Gulf

[45] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Haig to the President, 'Visit of Jean François-Poncet, Foreign Minister of France, February 23-25, 1981.'
[46] MAE, 91QO/906, TD Washington 405, 'La France et la politique étrangère américaine,' Laboulaye, 17 février 1981.
[47] MAE, 91QO/906, TD Washington 406, 'La France et la politique étrangère américaine,' Laboulaye, 17 février 1981.

states,' which should also prove useful in the implementation of the administration's Middle East policy[48].

In sum, politically, France and Britain constituted a crucial asset for an American diplomacy, which had sustained a major reputational blow in the Arab world as a result of Camp David and the fall of the Shah in Iran. And, militarily, they still played a significant role in securing the Southwest Asian region, one that the Reagan administration fully intended to utilise. It was, therefore, difficult for the Americans to ask for their cooperation in the Middle East, while rejecting the European initiative, which was presented to them as an essential component in the rebuilding of the Western security framework in the region. In that sense, the Ten's diplomatic activism since the Venice Declaration had enhanced France's and Britain's influence in Washington as it gave them a significant bargaining chip that they would not have had otherwise. Conversely, their unprecedented commitment to collective European action in the Middle East forced the Reagan administration to deal with the Community as an international actor in its own right. In that respect, both Haig's and Allen's briefings for the President ahead of his meetings with François-Poncet and Thatcher were clear evidence of that. They all dealt with the European initiative quite extensively, and the French and the British role in the peace process were entirely seen through the collective European angle[49].

The Ten, in fact, had made great efforts since the Venice European Council to present a common front on the Middle East, and, by 1981, it seemed to be paying off. When, on 17 February, the EPC Foreign Ministers discussed the modalities of transatlantic consultation, for example, they agreed that, while this would essentially be done on a bilateral basis, 'the Ten should stay in close touch and aim to speak along similar lines to the new Administration.' And, to maximise their impact, they decided that they should systematically emphasise 'the range and intensity of consultation among the Ten on foreign policy questions.'[50] The Community member states knew that this unity enhanced their respective diplomatic stature in Washington. Laboulaye, for instance, reminded François-Poncet of that fact ahead of his meetings with Haig and Reagan[51]. Essentially,

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[48] RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Department of State, Briefing Paper, 'Southwest Asian and Persian Gulf security,' 17 February 1981.

[49] See: RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Background Papers for the Visit of French Foreign Minister François-Poncet, February 23-25, 1981, 'The Peace Process'; RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Allen to the President, 'Your meeting with French Foreign Minister François-Poncet (Wednesday, February 25, 10 a.m.)'; RRL, Charles P. Tyson Files, Box 1, Memorandum from Haig to the President, 'Visit of Prime Minister Thatcher,' undated; RRL, Executive Secretariat: NSC VIP Visits, Box 1, Department of State, Briefing Paper, 'US-UK-West European relations,' 11 February 1981.

[50] TNA, FCO98/1104, 'Relations between the Ten and the United States,' European Political Cooperation, Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Brussels, 17 February 1981.

[51] MAE, 91QO/906, Visite du ministre aux Etats-Unis, 21-25 février 1981, TD Washington 405, 'Objet: La France et la politique étrangère américaine,' Laboulaye, 17 février 1981.

this approach succeeded because, as explained in the first two chapters, from 1980 onward, France and Britain no longer envisaged their respective role in the Middle East outside of the Community framework.

The Americans, therefore, faced a dilemma towards the European initiative. While they were not convinced by the Ten's strategy for a transatlantic management of the Middle East situation, they nevertheless had to take it into account in the definition of their own policy, if only to manage the very real challenge that it posed to their leadership in the Arab world. This particular concern translated into the appearance of greater openness to European inputs than the Reagan administration was actually prepared to receive. This explains, in part, France's and Britain's excessive sense of optimism about their ability to influence the making of US Middle East policy. That said, Paris and London did find their bargaining position considerably strengthened as a result of the Community's unprecedented diplomatic activism, their strong commitment to collective European action, and vocal Arab support for the Ten's involvement. Tellingly, as we shall see now, once the Reagan administration was ready to present its strategy for the region it sought to convince its transatlantic partners as much as its Middle Eastern allies.

WASHINGTON'S DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE: SELLING THE 'STRATEGIC CONSENSUS'

Between 4 and 12 April 1981, Haig embarked on a diplomatic marathon that would take him to Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Spain, Britain, France, and West Germany, all of this in just eight days. This trip had three main objectives: to reassure America's allies about its leadership, to sell Washington's new Middle East strategy, and to take over from the Community in filling the diplomatic vacuum in the search for Arab-Israeli peace. The strategy papers that Veliotes put together for Haig's trip confirm that, for the new administration, the Soviet threat was the main problem, from which virtually everything else derived. Hence, ensuring Western military dominance in the region would take priority over advancing the peace process[52]. In addition, the briefing papers reveal the centrality of Israel in the US strategy. It established a list of five goals that the administration should pursue to further American interests in the Middle East, and, tellingly, Arab-Israeli peace did not make the list. 'The continued existence of a strong Israel,' though, ranked second, right after solving the crisis of confidence in US leadership, but ahead of

[52] National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (Hereafter NARA), RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Veliotes to the Secretary, 'Middle East Trip Strategy Paper,' 19 March 1981.

'access to oil,' 'close relations with moderate Arab states,' and 'ability to transit the region.'[53] This is revealing of a very strong commitment to the Jewish state, that actually matched Reagan's campaign rhetoric.

The Ten's lobbying efforts had thus so far failed to produce any significant results. If, at that juncture, the Americans had not yet defined their position towards the Middle East conflict, they continued to reject the link between Arab-Israeli peace and regional security. Accordingly, Haig was to insist during his trip that 'however we structure the US role [in the peace process], it can be played most effectively if the regional balance of power is clearly in the West's favor.'[54] The link that Reagan officials sought to establish between US efforts for Arab-Israeli peace and regional support to fight the Soviet threat, is what would henceforth be known as America's new 'strategic consensus.'[55]

While Haig had no strategy to engage with the Middle East conflict as he embarked on his trip, he nevertheless had a plan for dealing with his lack of a plan. Veliotes, for example, recommended that Haig should 'leave each leader with the conclusion that his views on the peace process will be taken fully into account as our policy review proceeds.' But, he also cautioned not 'to create any unrealistic expectation about how fast or how far we will be able to move, or to deprecate the gains made since Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem.' [56] Essentially, Haig's tactic would consist in giving his hosts assurances that once the Middle East had been secured against the Soviet threat, he would turn his focus on making progress towards Arab-Israeli peace. In the meantime, he should appear open to his hosts' ideas on how best to do that, all the while managing expectations about a prompt resumption of the peace process. As another briefing put it, '[m]ore than any other issue you will be dealing with, the peace process requires a very different approach with each of the governments you will be addressing if you are to achieve your objectives.' Hence, to the Israelis and the Egyptians, Haig should confirm that 'the US remains firmly committed to the Camp David Accords.' But, to the Jordanians and the Saudis, he should emphasise that he is 'open to suggestions as to how best to build on Camp David.'[57] In essence, Haig's diplomatic offensive aimed at telling his hosts what they wanted to hear, or at least give them the impression that they

[53] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Richard Burt to the Secretary, 'Your Middle East Trip/Approach to Regional Security,' 20 March 1981.
[54] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Veliotes to the Secretary, 'Middle East Trip Strategy Paper,' 19 March 1981.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Cluverius, through Veliotes, to the Secretary, 'Approach to Middle East Peace,' 19 March 1981.

could influence the new administration's thinking on the topic, in order to extract an early approval for a US military build-up in the region.

TARGETTING JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

At this juncture, the Reagan administration appeared confident that it could at least rally Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the 'strategic consensus.' State Department officials knew that their ability to achieve their objective 'is in large part related to how our management of the peace process is perceived by key states in the region.' They had defined four separate guidelines for each of the Middle Eastern host countries, which listed their various concerns about Camp David. In the case of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, they clearly recognised that the main obstacle was the treatment of the Palestinian question, and they acknowledged the serious domestic difficulties that they would both face if they agreed to participate in negotiations that excluded the PLO[58]. However, as much as the new administration acknowledged the problems preventing the two Arab monarchies from joining Camp David, or any other form of negotiations that would not include proper representation for the Palestinians, it ultimately dismissed them.

One important reason for overlooking these obstacles was the widely held opinion amongst US officials that it was Carter's failure to give strong enough security guarantees to America's Middle Eastern friends, which had been responsible for the widespread Arab rejection of Camp David. By failing to turn his doctrine into a 'coherent policy,' they believed, the former President had bred 'scepticism' about the US willingness to protect its allies in the region, thus creating a crisis of confidence in American leadership[59]. Accordingly, Haig's first objective during his trip was to reassert Washington's commitment to the security of Arab regimes friendly to the West. As one briefing explains, it was 'extremely important' to convey 'the sense that the new administration has a clear concept of the strategic posture it wishes to assume in the region vis-à-vis the Soviet threat and knows how it plans to develop it.'[60] One core argument that Haig should use to demonstrate the US seriousness of purpose was that despite 'across the board budget cuts' in the federal budget, Reagan had proposed 'substantially increased defense spending and security assistance.' Accordingly, the Secretary should 'put appropriate stress on the substantial domestic social and

[58] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Cluverius, through Veliotes, to the Secretary, 'Approach to Middle East Peace,' 19 March 1981.
[59] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Veliotes to the Secretary, 'Middle East Trip Strategy Paper,' 19 March 1981.
[60] Ibid.

political cost' of this policy[61]. Ultimately, the new administration's strategy relied, in part, on putting pressure on two of its regional allies, which were heavily dependent on American economic and military aid. As one brief put it: '[i]n short, we are ready to demonstrate that it pays to be an American friend, and it may cost to be an American foe.'[62] This accurately summed up the new administration's tactic to implement its Middle East strategy.

Furthermore, the Americans thought that both Amman and Riyadh privately accepted the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and that, therefore, they could both be brought to support the autonomy talks. In particular, Veliotes, the former Ambassador to Jordan, seemed confident that King Hussein could be brought in as he had not completely relinquished his claim over the West Bank. He took as evidence the fact that he carefully avoided equating Palestinian self-determination with a Palestinian state. And, ultimately, he had some hopes that the Hashemite Kingdom could be brought to accept bilateral negotiations on the West Bank with an Israeli Labour government[63].

Beyond Carter's failures, and the prospect of Jordan and Saudi Arabia joining the Camp David negotiations, there was another important reason that explains the Reagan administration's confidence that it would be able to rally its regional allies to the 'strategic consensus.' Again, a State Department memorandum acknowledged that the Palestinian question 'was an essential prerequisite to implementing a coherent strategy to protect our interests in the region.' However, it also suggested that a 'strong' argument to convince the regional allies otherwise was that the Soviet threat was too pressing to wait for the inevitably tortuous progress towards Middle East peace, especially since nothing could be done until after the Israeli elections. In addition, US officials fundamentally believed that '[o]nly when local states feel confident of US reliability and secured against Soviet threats will they be willing to take the necessary risks for peace.'[64] The implication here was that the 'moderate' Arab states' support for the PLO did not stem from a genuine belief in the Palestinian cause. Instead, it was about fear that failing to show the appropriate amount of support for the PLO would threaten the stability of their regime. Hence, the Americans were confident that they could convince their Arab allies to agree to a US military build-up before tackling the peace process if only they assured them of a strong enough

[61] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Veliotes to the Secretary, 'Approach to Economic Issues,' 19 March 1981.
[62] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Richard Burt to the Secretary, 'Your Middle East Trip/Approach to Regional Security,' 20 March 1981.
[63] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Cluverius, through Veliotes, to the Secretary, 'Approach to Middle East Peace,' 19 March 1981.
[64] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Richard Burt to the Secretary, 'Your Middle East Trip/Approach to Regional Security,' 20 March 1981.

commitment to the stability of their regimes. Not only that, but, at this stage, they also thought that they could get the 'moderate' Arabs to drop their support for the PLO. Ultimately, as Veliotes put it, the Reagan administration fundamentally believed that 'Jordanian and Saudi leaders have convinced themselves that […] we have been pursuing an approach to the problem that they cannot share.'[65]

NEUTRALISING THE EURO-ARAB FRONT

Haig's subsequent trip to Western Europe was, in part, meant to break the Euro-Arab front on the Palestinian question, which had emerged since the Venice European Council, and put the Community's diplomatic ambition to rest. To that end, the Secretary of State sought to convey to his European hosts that differences between Washington and the 'moderate' Arab states were minimal. In a briefing to the Atlantic Council, for instance, Veliotes reported that Haig had found that his Middle Eastern hosts all shared US concerns with the Soviet threat. He mentioned that the Secretary got a sense that the Arab states had understood that for the US there was no hierarchy between Arab-Israeli peace and regional security, and that the two needed to be dealt with together[66]. Veliotes also claimed that the administration now recognised that the Palestinian question was inextricably linked to regional security, and that progress on this issue was urgent[67]. Clearly, this stood in sharp contrast with the positions he had developed in his briefings for Haig's trip.

The Secretary of State spoke on the same line when he met with Carrington in London. Asked about whether the Jordanians and the Saudis expected Washington to abandon Camp David in return for their agreement to the 'strategic consensus,' for instance, Haig asserted that they did not. He argued that '[t]hey were looking mainly for an insurance that the US would back their existing regimes,' and that, unlike his predecessor, Reagan was 'not interested only in maintaining the security of the Gulf oil installations and the shipping lanes through the Strait of Hormuz.' While Carrington agreed that Jordan and Saudi Arabia were looking for a stronger US commitment against internal threats to their regimes, he insisted that it had to go hand in hand with progress on the Palestinian question. Gilmour, who was also attending the meeting, made the point that '[i]f Arab states were strongly pro-Western at a time when the West seemed to be leaning towards Israel, this would weaken them domestically, so undermining their security.' But Haig dismissed

[65] NARA, College Park, Maryland, RG59, Entry 26, Box 16, Briefing memorandum from Veliotes to the Secretary, 'Middle East Trip Strategy Paper,' 19 March 1981.
[66] MAE, 91QO/984, TD RPAN Bruxelles 222, 'Voyage de M. Haig au Proche-Orient,' 9 Avril 1981.
[67] MAE, 91QO/984, TD RPAN Bruxelles 223, 'Voyage de M. Haig au Proche-Orient (suite),' 9 avril 1981.

the idea that popular Arab discontent could seriously threaten the stability of the two Arab monarchies. Instead, he appeared confident that an increase in arms sales, which had been a central topic of discussion during his visits, should prove enough to promote security from both external and internal threats[68].

Of course, the Reagan administration's efforts to minimise differences between themselves and 'moderate' Arab leaders did not fool the Europeans. In their contacts with France, for instance, Jordanian and Saudi authorities categorically rejected Haig's 'strategic consensus', and complained that the Americans were focusing too much on the Soviet threat and not enough on the Palestinian question. They also maintained that the Arab-Israeli dispute was the main regional security issue, and that it was in large part responsible for opening up the Middle East to Soviet subversion[69]. The British Ambassador to Jordan, Alan Urwick, reported similar conclusions about Haig's visit to Amman, and added that while 'the Jordanians had much appreciated the frankness and sincerity shown by Mr. Haig,' they considered 'that the new US administration was not yet in a position to offer what was needed to achieve a Middle East settlement.'[70] Clearly, the two Arab countries central to the implementation of the 'strategic consensus' did not agree with Washington's new policy.

This attempt to put a positive spin on Haig's Middle East trip was, in large part, designed to convey to the Europeans that the Americans were back in the lead, and that the services of the Ten were no longer needed. The Reagan administration, therefore, sought to demonstrate that it was making good progress towards the implementation of its Middle East strategy. For this reason, US diplomats repeatedly insisted on the quality of the contacts that Haig had established during his trip. In his meeting with Thatcher, for example, Haig himself emphasised that he had been 'very successful in building relationships in each capital,' and that he had manage to reverse 'the legacy of distrust' inherited from the Carter administration. In that respect, he believed that 'the mere expression of an intent to visit the area had been helpful.' He admitted that '[o]f course differences remained, particularly in relation to policy towards the Palestinians,' but argued that these disagreements had mostly emerged as the result of 'doubts about America's reliability.'[71] Hence,

[68] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Record of conversation between the Secretary of State and United States Secretary of State Haig at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at the Admiralty House on Friday, 10 April: Middle East issues.'
[69] MAE, 91QO/984, TD Amman 111, 'Visite de M. Haig en Jordanie,' Harel, 7 avril 1981; MAE, 91QO/984, TD Djedda 226, 'Visite de M. Haig en Arabie Saoudite,' Drumetz, 9 avril 1981.
[70] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, Tel. No. 125, 'US Secretary of State's visit to Jordan, 6-7 April,' Urwick, 7 April 1981.
[71] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Alexander Haig, at 10 Downing Street on Friday 10 April at 1700 hours.'

what Haig was telling the British Prime Minister was that, by remedying the US leadership crisis, he had taken a major step towards turning Jordan and Saudi Arabia around on the Palestinian question. He further explained to Carrington, that his success was 'not of the kind that would be reflected in the press or in immediate changes of policy,' and that the 'real – undeclared – purpose of this visit was to deflect Mr Begin from asking to visit Washington before the Israeli elections.' He therefore warned the Europeans that they should not disturb his efforts, which were already paying off[72].

Naturally, the FCO seized the opportunity of Haig's visit to London to explain again the nature of the Ten's objectives in the Middle East, and outlined once more how they intended to complement US efforts. Graham, for instance, brought up the plan for an EAD ministerial meeting. He presented an even more optimistic assessment of the chances to extract a conditional recognition of Israel from the PLO than he had done in Washington back in February. But, Haig showed great scepticism at the European plan. He said that 'this tactic might fragment the PLO,' 'give Israel an excuse for intransigence,' and concluded that a '[f]ailure would humiliate the West and make the situation much worse.' These objections were rather unconvincing. The PLO was already fragmented, and Israel under Begin did not need any more excuses for intransigence. Besides, from the record of this meeting, it was not clear why a European failure would be such a humiliation for the West or make matters worse.

More than being worried about the Community's failure, the Americans, in fact, were concerned about a possible success, which, at this stage, could not be ruled out. During his meeting with Carrington, for example, Haig asked if, in case of success, the Europeans would expect Washington to deliver Israel. The answer was quite obviously yes, but, instead, Carrington replied that Israel would probably deliver itself since it would no longer have any reason not to negotiate with the PLO[73]. This was a dubious claim, which most likely reflected the fact that, as Graham and Miles had been told in Washington, the Americans did not want to be put in the position of having to deliver Israel. In that respect, the supposed humiliation that Haig appeared so concerned about had more to do with the fact that, in case of success, the Community would put the Reagan administration's back against the wall. Such an outcome would either reveal Washington's inability

[72] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Record of conversation between the Secretary of State and United States Secretary of State Haig at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at the Admiralty House on Friday, 10 April: Middle East issues.'
[73] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Record of conversation between the Secretary of State and United States Secretary of State Haig at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at the Admiralty House on Friday, 10 April: Middle East issues.'

to pressure Israel on the Palestinian question, or its unwillingness to do so. A European success, in short, would put the Americans in an embarrassing situation.

This probably explains why Haig sought to minimise the scope of the European initiative. For example, he described it to the British press as limited to 'making inquiries,' something that Carrington made a point of correcting at the end of their meeting[74]. Here, the Secretary was obviously feigning a misunderstanding. Not only had the Europeans explained extensively the nature of their ambitions, but, during Haig's visit to the Middle East, Arab leaders had also expressed strong support for the European initiative, which they clearly believed to be more than just a touring mission. The Egyptian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for instance, reported to the British Ambassador that he had emphasised during his meeting with Haig the 'great importance' that Egypt attached to the European initiative. And, apparently, this point was met with 'a distinct lack of enthusiasm.'[75] The Arab press was also vocally supporting the Ten's diplomatic activism. As Urwick reported, in Jordan '[t]he editorials also called on Mr Haig, as a former NATO commander, to understand the depth of Arab/European relations and to allow the Europeans to play a role in the search for a settlement.'[76] From an American perspective, the strength of the Euro-Arab front on this issue certainly increased the prospect of a success for the Community's diplomatic initiative, and put a fair amount of pressure on the Reagan administration not to leave the field open for further European advances.

In addition, Haig's visit to Israel had further revealed the extent of Israeli anxieties towards the European initiative, something which indicated that the Ten were doing more than just making enquiries. The Begin government depicted the European activism as a major obstacle to peace because, they argued, it only encouraged the 'moderate' Arab states to be less compromising. According to a report given by a US embassy official to his British counterpart, the Secretary had dismissed these complaints by downplaying again the significance of the European initiative. He said that he had seen the Dutch Prime Minister, Dries van Agt, whose country was now holding the Community's presidency, before leaving on his trip, and that he had given him the impression that 'there was no European initiative in any real sense.' Haig, apparently, even wondered why the Israelis were making such a fuss about it[77]. These comments might have been meant to appease

[74] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Record of conversation between the Secretary of State and United States Secretary of State Haig at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and at the Admiralty House on Friday, 10 April: Middle East issues.'
[75] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, Tel. No. 233, 'My Telno 213: Visit of US Secretary of State,' Weir, 7 April 1981.
[76] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, Tel. No. 125, 'US Secretary of State's visit to Jordan, 6-7 April,' Urwick, 7 April 1981.
[77] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, Tel. No. 140, 'Haig's visit to Israel,' Robinson, 7 April 1981.

the Israelis, but it was also part of a larger campaign to neutralise European ambitions. Haig knew that the Ten would remain discreet about their activities until after the Israeli elections, and thus was trying to use this hiatus to prevent the European initiative from gaining even more momentum than it already had.

The Community's diplomatic efforts since the summer 1980 had certainly strengthened the 'moderate' Arab states' resolve not to rally Camp David, or any other negotiating frameworks that would not include proper representation for the Palestinians. And, Haig's diplomatic offensive did not seem to have broken the Euro-Arab front on the need for an alternative to the current peace process, and on the fact that the Palestinian question was the main threat to the region. The Secretary had nonetheless succeeded in creating the perception that he was willing to listen as he defined his policy. For example, Marwan Qassim, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, concluded his meeting with Claude Harel, the French Ambassador in Amman, by saying that, although Haig had nothing to offer, he was open to suggestions and in a good frame of mind. Qassim also added that this constituted a positive contrast with Brzezinski's last visit in 1979[78]. The FCO was on the same page. As one briefing for Carrington's visit to Bonn on 23-25 April explained, despite some disagreement, 'evidence at the moment points to a much greater warmth between the USA and her major allies than at the end of the Carter administration.'[79] Two of the main objectives of Haig's trip were to mark a break with the Carter years, and give the appearance that he was willing to listen to his European and Middle Eastern allies. In that respect, his charm offensive had succeeded. However, with the exception of Israel, he had failed to convince his hosts to rally to the 'strategic consensus.'

Clearly, neither the Arabs nor the Europeans had managed to convince Haig to change his policy either. There was, however, some small indications that the Secretary had gained a better understanding of the link between Arab-Israeli peace and regional security. His discussions in Jordan and Saudi Arabia had revealed that a stronger American commitment to these regimes' internal security would not suffice to bring them to join Camp David. US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Walter Stoessel, for instance, said to Laboulaye that Haig now understood the extent of Arab discontent with Camp David, and that the State Department would no longer use this label, but simply make reference to the 'peace process'[80]. This was obviously a small cosmetic evolution that would not change the situation much. But still, it demonstrates the extent to which

[78] MAE, 91QO/984, TD Amman 112, 'Entretien avec le ministre des affaires étrangères: visite de M. Haig,' Harel, 9 avril 1981.
[79] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Secretary of State's visit to the FRG: 23-25 April 1981, Brief No 2 (b): US foreign policy and transatlantic relations,' North America Department, 15 April 1981.
[80] MAE, 91QO/984, TD Washington 909, 'Voyage de M. Haig au Proche Orient,' Laboulaye, 14 avril 1981.

European and Arabs alike had spoken with a single voice on the Palestinian question, both in term of its centrality for solving the Middle East conflict and of it importance for regional security more broadly.

Ultimately, despite US objections to the Community's diplomatic initiative, both France and Britain believed that the sharp Arab rejection of Haig's 'strategic consensus' meant that Europe still had a role to play. The British were as enthusiastic as ever about the possibility of influencing US policy. And, they thought that '[e]fforts to keep the Americans with us on major issues such as […] the Middle East were paying off.'[81] The French were more circumspect about the potential for Washington's acceptation of a European role, but they had slightly better hopes that the results of Haig's trip would force him to change his approach to the Middle East[82]. If, by the summer 1981, the Americans were clearly back at the centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy, they had nonetheless failed to close the door on the European initiative.

CONCLUSION

The basic picture of Western diplomatic activism in the Middle East in the first half of 1981 was one of expectancy. The Europeans waited on the new US administration to define its policy, and everyone hoped that the upcoming Israeli election in June would bring a change in leadership. In the meantime, the Ten sought to influence the making of Reagan's Middle East policy, and the transatlantic discussions that took place, confirms once more that security was an essential objective behind the Venice Declaration. France and Britain took charge of the European initiative's transatlantic dimension, and in doing so acted primarily as members of the Community. This contrasted sharply with their attitude in 1979, when they had each tried to cooperate with the US over the Middle East on a purely bilateral basis. This exceptional level of Franco-British commitment to EPC not only strengthened France's and Britain's diplomatic stature in Washington, but it also prevented the Americans from closing the door on the European initiative by sowing division amongst the Ten for instance. Besides, it was difficult for the Reagan administration to reject the Community's diplomatic involvement, which was presented as an essential component for the rebuilding of the regional security framework, while at the same time asking for French and British political and military support in the Middle East. In that respect, the extensive interrelation between the national and the collective dimensions of foreign policy making

[81] TNA, FCO82/1113, Haig's visit to the UK, 1981, 'Secretary of State's visit to the FRG: 23-25 April 1981, Brief No 2 (b): US foreign policy and transatlantic relations,' North America Department, 15 April 1981.
[82] MAE, 91QO/984, 'Réactions Arabes à la "nouvelle stratégie américaine" au Moyen-Orient et au voyage de M. Haig,' Paris, 14 avril 1981.

in Western Europe had played a key role in managing US uneasiness about European diplomatic activism. Moreover, it also reveals that there was a significant extent of transatlantic interdependence over the Middle East at the time. Most tellingly, when the Reagan administration finally settled on its Middle East strategy, Haig went on a tour of both the Middle East and Western Europe to sell it.

By the summer 1981, there were two distinct and fully-fledged Western strategies for the Middle East. On the one hand, the Europeans, backed by the Arabs, advocated an engagement with the PLO as a means to reduce regional tensions, and secure the Persian Gulf against the Soviet threat. On the other hand, the Americans, supported by the Israelis, rejected the link between the Palestinian question and regional security, and put the accent on building up Western military capabilities in the Middle East to secure their interests against Moscow's supposed expansionist intent. The Ten's dependence on Arab oil and the fact that they did not look at the Middle East situation primarily through the Cold War lens explain, in part, their focus on the Palestinian question. As for Washington, the definition of the 'strategic consensus' was partly a result of its traditional support of Israel, the rise of neoconservatism in US politics, and Reagan's personal obsession with the Cold War. But, the difference in power status between the two sides of the Atlantic was also an important element in this transatlantic disagreement over the Middle East. As a superpower, the US tended to think that it could just flex its muscles to get much less powerful actors to rally its position. In that respect, the Reagan administration initially believed that it could get 'moderate' Arab states to drop their support for the Palestinians by simply assuring them of its commitment to their internal and external security. By contrast, the Europeans, who had been somewhat humbled by the steady decline of their international stature throughout the twentieth century, had become more attuned to the need for international cooperation. And, the American struggle to impose the 'strategic consensus' in the face of the Euro-Arab front was a perfect example of the US relative decline in international relations by the early 1980s.

Ultimately, if the Europeans had not had much of an impact on the definition of Reagan's Middle East policy, the Americans had also failed to convince them to endorse their strategy. Remarkably, this transatlantic diplomatic battle ended up in a draw. The Euro-Arab front proved solid enough to confront Washington with an alternative strategy to deal with the Middle East situation. And, the Jordanian and Saudi rejection of the 'strategic consensus' ultimately left the door open for a continued European diplomatic engagement. In the early Reagan era, the Ten remained concerned enough about the evolution of US Middle East policy to keep pushing their initiative forward, and,

as we shall see in the remainder of this dissertation, the transatlantic partners' respective diplomacies ran parallel until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982.

CHAPTER 8

THE ROAD TO LEBANON

WHAT OUTCOME FOR THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVE?

INTRODUCTION

Now that the previous chapters have demonstrated that the Europeans did play an active role in Middle Eastern diplomacy after the Venice Declaration, one of the main questions left to answer is why did their peace initiative failed to materialise?

Again, very little has been written about the European Community's (EC) diplomatic activities in the Middle East from the end of the van der Klaauw mission in June 1981 to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. The only account can be found in a book written in 1987 by Ilan Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler entitled *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: the Quest for a Unified Stance*. In it, the authors identify seven main factors that, according to them, explain the Ten's failure: First, the election of François Mitterrand in France in May 1981, which led to the collapse of the European front against Camp David; second, a peace initiative from Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia in the summer 1981, which took momentum away from the European initiative; third, concerns not to provoke the Israelis until their planned withdrawal from the Sinai by April 1982 as agreed in the Camp David peace treaty; fourth, American pressure for European participation in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai to monitor Israel's withdrawal; fifth, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's assassination in October 1981, which paralysed the Camp David peace process for several weeks and discouraged any alternative initiatives until the new President, Hosni Mubarak, had made up his mind about his policy; sixth, the election of Socialist Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou in Greece on 18 October 1981, whose close relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) destabilised the Venice consensus; and seventh, the outbreak of the Falklands war in April 1982, which diverted the Community's attention away from the Middle East[1]. This assessment still informs the current understanding of the end of the

[1] Alain Greilsammer and Joseph Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 64-69.

European initiative, and further confirms the literature's conclusion that Europe never played any meaningful role in the Middle East during the Cold War era[2].

This chapter presents a completely different picture of European activism in the year prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Of course, it agrees that the Community failed to make a concrete contribution to Middle East peace. However, it argues that none of the factors mentioned above really mattered. The single most important explanation for the Ten's failure to fulfil the Venice Declaration's promise was Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's provocative policy towards the Arab world and US support for it. In his recent book *Preventing Palestine*, Seth Anziska presents an important new analysis of the Middle East peace process from Camp David to Oslo based on American and Israeli sources. In particular, he sees the invasion of Lebanon as the military continuation of the Camp David Accords, which he argues were essentially designed to prevent Palestinian self-determination. The problem for the Israelis at the time was that, as the talks on Palestinian autonomy between themselves and the Egyptians were stalling, the PLO's political legitimacy kept on growing. To remedy this situation, as early as August 1981, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon elaborated a plan, which consisted in destroying the PLO militarily to weaken it politically. This plan was implemented on 6 June 1982 with a "green light" from the Americans who essentially considered the PLO as a Soviet agent, and thus, from a Cold War standpoint, saw a benefit in weakening the Palestinian organisation[3]. Ultimately, this chapter shows that given the radicalisation of Israeli policy on the Palestinian question and the American unwillingness or inability to restrain the Begin government, no EC peace initiative, or any other for that matter, would have been possible at the time. That said, the Europeans continued to play an important role in Middle Eastern diplomacy at least until the invasion of Lebanon.

If the Europeans failed to achieve the Venice Declaration's stated goal of making a concrete contribution to Arab-Israeli peace, what about the unstated objective of contributing to Western security in the Middle East? At first glance, the answer appears to be that the Europeans failed in that respect as well since another war broke out in the summer 1982. That said, this failure needs to be qualified. This time, the outbreak of hostilities was the result of Israel's desire to destroy the PLO, and US *laissez-faire*, not Arab provocation and belligerence. In fact, this war would more accurately be described as a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians rather than a more general Arab-Israeli war. This more limited Arab engagement was of course in large part the result of

[2] See for instance: David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
[3] For this account of Israel's road to the invasion of Lebanon see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 194-202.

Camp David. With Egypt now at peace with Israel, the Arabs no longer had the military capability to wage war against the Jewish state. They had other means of pressure, however, most notably the oil weapon, which they had used in the aftermath of the 1973 October war. The Europeans in particular were concerned that they might use it again, and this fear had motivated their diplomatic engagement since the Venice Declaration. Interestingly though, this time, as Israel intensified its provocation towards the Arabs, instead of cranking up the economic and political pressure on the Europeans as they had done in the past, they sought closer cooperation with the West.

This chapter contends that Europe's sustained diplomatic engagement in the Middle East since the summer 1980 played a significant role in this turn of events. It created a general atmosphere that convinced Arab 'moderates' that diplomacy was the best course of action, and in fact there is evidence that PLO leader Yasser Arafat also believed that to be the case. After giving a brief account of Israeli provocations ahead of the invasion of Lebanon, this chapter demonstrates that the Europeans did not abandoned their efforts for peace as a result of any of the factors mentioned above. Instead, it shows that what happened in 1981 was a reorientation of the Community's tactics from an attempt to mount an initiative on its own to supporting a Saudi peace plan and American efforts to secure peace between Egypt and Israel.

THE RADICALISATION OF ISRAELI POLITICS AND AMERICAN *LAISSEZ-FAIRE*

After two diplomatic missions essentially designed to fill the diplomatic vacuum in the Middle East, by the summer 1981, the Europeans had no way forward other than to try to honour their promise to make a concrete contribution to Arab-Israeli peace. Another round of visits would lack credibility, and the only way to keep on managing regional tensions, they believed, was to bring the PLO to take a step towards Israel. However, by then, European optimism about the future of their initiative was being seriously tested. Most problematically, to everyone's surprise, on 30 June, Menachem Begin won the elections in Israel by a one seat majority. This was a fateful event, which was largely responsible for precipitating another Arab-Israeli war the following summer. During the campaign, Likud exploited the electorate's fear of Israel's destruction. As the Political Director at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Julian Bullard, noted in May, for instance, at the moment 'the dominant strain [in Israel] was […] a jingoistic one.' Syria's deployment of the Soviet-made Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) in Eastern Lebanon, became the focus of attention,

and was portrayed as an existential threat[4]. Iraq's nuclear program was depicted in a similar way, and Begin's decision to bomb the Osirak nuclear reactor, just outside Baghdad, in early June played an important role in his re-election[5]. Likud's victory also dealt a severe blow to both the Camp David peace process and the European initiative, which by now had largely been premised on a Labour victory[6].

In addition, tensions on the Israeli-Lebanese border had escalated steadily since the beginning of the year. In early May, after pleading with Begin to give a chance to diplomatic actions, Reagan dispatched veteran US diplomat Philip Habib to the region to help manage the crisis[7]. And, as Bullard put it during the Political Committee meeting of 19-20 May, 'Habib's activities had at least bought some time.'[8] Nevertheless, skirmishes between PLO fighters and the Israeli army on Lebanon's Southern border continued, and tensions culminated when Tel Aviv conducted airstrikes on PLO positions between 10 and 17 July. Habib managed to negotiate a ceasefire, which was signed on 24 July, but the situation remained extremely tense[9]. This US diplomatic involvement was a first significant sign that the Americans were adjusting their Middle East strategy. Evidently, at the time, growing Arab-Israeli tensions appeared more threatening to the stability of the region than the Soviet threat, something that vindicated what the Europeans and the Arabs had been telling the Reagan administration since the beginning of the year.

Beyond the Lebanese quagmire, after his re-election, Begin doubled down on his provocative policies in the occupied territories. The most hardline of his supporters, on which the fragile Likud coalition depended, were against returning the Sinai to Egypt by April 1982 as agreed in the Camp David peace treaty. As a means to appease their anger, he decided to consolidate Israel's grip over the remainder of the occupied territories, counting on the fact that Egyptian and American reactions would be constrained for fear of derailing the peace treaty's last stage. Hence, for instance, he proceeded to extend Israeli jurisdiction over the West Bank settlements[10]. He also pushed ahead with his plan for a Mediterranean-Dead Sea canal, which would inevitably go

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[4] The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), FCO98/1122, Tel. No. 151, 'European Political Cooperation, Political Committee, The Hague 19-20 May – Middle East,' Mansfield, 20 May 1981.
[5] Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, 2nd ed. (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 394-401.
[6] See, for instance, TNA, FCO98/1149, 'Arab-Israel: the way forward,' Miles, Near East and North Africa Department, 27 April 1981.
[7] The Ronald Reagan Library (hereafter RRL), Executive Secretariat, NSC, Subject Files (K-M), box 13, 'Meeting of the President with Ambassador Evron,' Allen, 5 May 1981.
[8] TNA, FCO98/1122, Tel. No. 151, 'European Political Cooperation, Political Committee, The Hague 19-20 May – Middle East,' Mansfield, 20 May 1981.
[9] For a useful chronology of events in Lebanon in the early 1980s see: *Archives Nationales* (hereafter AN), AG/5(4)/FC/111, Dossier A08-03 – Opération "Paix en Gallilé", 'Chonology.'
[10] TNA, FCO98/1124, From London to All Coreu, CPE/Mul/Etr 2343, 'Oral Report, Middle East Working Group meeting on 9-10 July 1981.'

through the occupied territories, thus, in effect, treating these lands as part of Israel[11]. In addition, in December, he extended Israeli law to the Golan Heights, thus provoking further outrage in the Arab world[12].

Begin's provocative policies considerably complicated the implementation of Washington's Middle East strategy. By the autumn 1981, the Reagan administration was clearly struggling to pull off its balancing act between Israel and the 'moderate' Arab states to secure the Middle East against the Soviet threat. In effect, the US Middle East strategy translated, on the one hand, into Washington's decision to sell F-15 fighter jets and Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia, something that created considerable friction in US-Israeli relations. On the other hand, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Israel, which formalised cooperation in the fight against Communism in the Middle East angered the Arabs[13]. By the second half of 1981, therefore, Washington was clearly failing to implement its Middle East strategy, and it had become increasingly difficult to argue that the Palestinian question was not the main regional security issue.

Reagan reacted to these Israeli provocations but only did the bare minimum. Following the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, for instance, the US were forced to suspend the planned sale of F-16 fighter jets to Israel temporarily. Reagan apologetically explained to Israeli Ambassador Ephraim Evron that '[i]n order to carry out our efforts for peace, we must maintain credibility with both sides,' and that in that respect this sanction was the 'minimum' he could do. To Evron's relief, he also gave reassurances that 'we are <u>not</u> retreating in our basic commitment to the security of Israel.' The Ambassador, however, still applied pressure on the President by qualifying his decision as 'a grave step – a kind of ultimate step.' He also argued that as a result 'others may perceive a weakening in the US-Israeli relationship,' which in turn would put the security of the Jewish state at risk.'[14] The annexation of the Golan Heights, again, forced the Americans to denounce Israeli actions, and impose sanctions. This time the Reagan administration had decided to suspend the strategic cooperation agreement included in the Memorandum of Understanding. Meeting again with Evron in January 1982, the President began by 'reaffirm[ing] the unshakable American commitment to Israel's security despite differences at the moment.' And, the

[11] TNA, FCO98/1124, From to London to The Hague Coreu, CPE/Bil/Etr 178, 'Middle East Working group: Mediterranean-Dead Sea Canal,' 2 June 1981.
[12] Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, 401-06.
[13] On the Reagan administration's treatment of Israel as a strategic ally and the impact on the Arab world see: Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, 167-73.
[14] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Subject Files (M), Box 14, 'Summary of the President's meeting with Ambassador Ephraim Evron of Israel,' 11 June 1981.

Ambassador pleaded again for the lifting of the most recent sanctions[15]. These exchanges exemplify perfectly Reagan's inability or unwillingness to seriously restrain Israeli action.

In his memoirs, Carrington, reflecting on US Middle East policy at the time, offers a perceptive explanation for Washington's indefatigable support for the Jewish state:

> '[Israel's] dependence [on the Americans] was so considerable that it made almost impossible pressure of the kind the Arabs desired – most of the time. America was wholly committed to Israel's independent existence, and to cut off economic support would destroy it. Americans knew it and Israelis knew it. And Israelis knew Americans wouldn't do it. Short of that extreme and (it must generally appear) unthinkable step there was not a great deal of graduated pressure that could be applied.'

Interestingly, though, he added:

> 'I believe there were occasions (the invasion of Lebanon by Israeli forces was one) when the tide of world opinion ran so strongly against Israel that the United States might have brought decisive influence to bear. If they had turned tough with Israel then, instead of trying to settle the Lebanese problem by more direct intervention, they might have brought all parties to the negotiating table, and perhaps moved on thence to the issue, the fundamental issue, of Palestine.'[16]

This analysis is representative of the FCO's thinking under Carrington's leadership. As explained throughout this dissertation, at the time, the British, along with the rest of the Community, genuinely believed that they could bring the Arabs to compromise if only the Americans were willing to put the necessary pressure on Israel. At that particular juncture, both Europeans and Arab 'moderates' were ready to engage in a new diplomatic process, but US willingness to restrain Israel was the missing ingredient for an effective diplomatic management of the Middle East crisis.

MITTERRAND AND THE EUROPEAN INITIATIVE

The idea that Mitterrand's election obstructed the Community's efforts for peace was a popular one amongst contemporaries and still dominates the current understanding of European Middle East policy in the early 1980s. His support of Camp David during the presidential campaign and his conspicuous attempt, early on in his presidency, for a *rapprochement* with Israel created the perception that the Arabs had lost their most fervent supporter within the Community[17]. In an

[15] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Subject Files (M), Box 14, 'Summary of the President's meeting with Ambassador Ephraim Evron of Israel,' 28 January 1982.
[16] Peter Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1989), 342.
[17] On Mitterrand's relation with Israel see the first three chapter in: Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

assessment of French Middle East policy in late April 1982, for instance, one of Arafat's political advisers wrote: 'When Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was President in France the main obstacles to a constructive move by the EEC in the Middle East were Germany and Great Britain. Since then, a fundamental change occurred in Bonn's and London's attitudes and the essential obstacle has become François Mitterrand.'[18]

Initially, the attitude of the new French President created some confusion not only outside but inside the Community. At his first European Council meeting on 29-30 June in Luxembourg, for instance, he opposed a specific reference to the Venice Declaration in the final communiqué, and insisted that the Ten only speak of their pursuit of a 'peace settlement' instead of a 'comprehensive' one as they usually did[19]. During the follow-up press conference, he was asked to clarify his position and replied that he agreed with the content of the Venice Declaration, but that he did not approve of the method, namely a comprehensive approach to the exclusion of all others[20]. This was naturally interpreted as a distantiation from the European initiative and a confirmation of his support for Camp David, something that naturally worried France's Community partners. At the Middle East Working Group meeting on 9-10 July, however, the French representative insisted that 'France was totally committed to the Venice Declaration and the principles contained in it.' He further elaborated that France only 'wished to add a new sensitivity in order to give a new impetus to European efforts.'[21] Presumably, this 'new sensitivity' was a less antagonising stance towards Israel, and, as the British believed, the French 'intended to use their (supposedly) better relations with Israel to this end.'[22] In any case, after providing further reassurances on a bilateral basis to the British, by mid-July the FCO believed that France was ready for a 'firm endorsement' of the Community's Middle East policy[23].

During a Council of Ministers meeting at the *Élysée* in late August, Mitterrand confirmed the position outlined to the European partners. He also explained his general view of French policy towards the Middle East conflict. He believed that since de Gaulle, France had moved too close to the Arab side and that a more balanced approach would be preferrable[24]. To that end, during

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[18] AN, AG/5(4)/GE/27, 'Texte d'un conseiller politique d'Arafat – 19 Avril 1982 – Traduction.' (*'Quand Valéry Giscard d'Estaing était Président en France les obstacles majeurs pour une action constructive de la CEE au Moyen Orient étaient l'Allemagne et la Grande-Bretagne. Depuis lors un changement fondamental est intervenu dans les attitudes de Bonn et Londres et l'obstacle essentiel est devenu François Mitterrand.'*)
[19] TNA, FCO98/1155, 'European Council: Middle East,' Cooper, 1 July 1981.
[20] AN, AG/5(4)/FC/111, Conseil Européen de Luxembourg, 'Conférence de presse,' 30 juin 1981.
[21] TNA, FCO98/1124, 'Record of Middle East Working Group meeting, London, 9-10 July 1981,' 13 July 1981.
[22] TNA, FCO98/1131, Brief, European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, 22 June, 'Middle East,' 19 June 1981.
[23] TNA, FCO98/1124, Brief, European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, London, 16-17 July 1981, 'Middle East,' 14 July 1981.
[24] AN, AG/5(4)/FC/111, Conseil de Ministres (d'après les notes manuscrites), 'Propose du Président,' 26 aout 1981.

the presidential campaign, he had promised that he would be the first French President to go to Israel. This visit would take place on 3-5 March 1982, and until then he would be careful not to compromise this historic event. Most notably, Mitterrand would refrain from any strong personal reactions to the many Israeli provocations towards the Arab world. His condemnation of the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, which had caused the death of a French national, for instance, was strikingly weak[25]. Interestingly, on that occasion, Jacques Servant, the deputy Middle East director at the French Foreign Ministry told US embassy officials that 'there is a certain amount of "innocence" among the new Mitterrand people both at the Élysée and at the Quai concerning Israel.'[26] After the annexation of the Golan Heights, however, the new President was forced to react, and reluctantly postponed his visit to Israel, which had initially been scheduled for 10-12 February 1982[27]. While he still went to Israel the following month, Begin's belligerent policy, which culminated with the invasion of Lebanon, prevented a durable *rapprochement* between the two countries. And, ultimately, it would lead France to play a crucial role in rescuing Arafat from Israeli destruction that very summer[28].

Contrary to popular perception, Mitterrand's position on the peace process was essentially in line with the rest of the Community. When referring to Camp David, he was actually talking of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty exclusively, and not the autonomy talks. During a ministerial Council meeting at the *Élysée* on 26 August, for instance, he praised Camp David for having brought Israel and Egypt to the negotiating table. And, he expressed his belief that if bilateral talks were feasible again, he did not see why the Europeans should not support them[29]. At the next Council of Ministers meeting, the President admitted that Camp David had reached its limits[30]. He further explained his position during an interview with several American newspapers in late October, when he said that Camp David had not solved the Palestinian question and that therefore something else was needed[31]. In other words, Mitterrand, like his Community partners, supported Camp David's first accord but not the second. However, his desire for a *rapprochement* with Israel,

[25] See chapter 3 in Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*.
[26] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (France), Box 24, Paris 17382, From Paris to Washington, 'Israeli Raid on Iraqi nuclear facility,' 11 June 1981.
[27] For Mitterrand's reluctance to denounce Israeli provocation see chapter 3 in: Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*.
[28] On this episode see chapters 4, 5 and 6 in: ibid. For France's role as a backchannel between the US and the PLO during the war see: Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: P.L.O. Decisionmaking During the 1982 War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
[29] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, Conseil des Ministres (d'après les notes manuscrites), 'Propos du Président,' 26 aout 1981.
[30] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, Conseil des Ministres (d'après les notes manuscrites), 9 septembre 1981.
[31] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, Verbatim non official, 'Breakfast entre le Président de la République and Jim Hogland (WP), Don Shannon (LA Times), Joe Kraft (Columnist), Kledman (International Herald Tribune), Robert Kleiman (New York Times),' 19 octobre 1981.

initially created the false impression of a fundamental break between France and the rest of the Community.

The new French administration also shared European concerns about security in the Middle East. When Mitterrand met with Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia in Paris on 8 September, for example, he conveyed his concern that the intensification of Arab-Israeli confrontation always increased the influence of the superpowers in the region, and thus praised his guest for his recent peace initiative[32]. The *Élysée*'s diplomatic adviser, Hubert Védrine, for his part, understood the strategic implications of European political involvement in the Middle East. He warned the President, for example, that '[t]he Soviets want[ed] a division of the Near East in zones of influence with the United States,' and he explained that '[a]n eventual Franco-European position [would] disturb the game.'[33]

Admittedly, Mitterrand's early focus on his historical visit to Israel together with the presidential campaign during which he had courted the Jewish vote quite aggressively overshadowed the continuation of France's Arab policy for a while. In fact, even during his first year in office he had not abandon France's traditional support for the PLO. Most notably, he had his Foreign Minister, Claude Cheysson meet with Arafat in Beirut on 30 August 1981, and he talked of a state for the Palestinians in front of the Knesset of all places[34]. Ultimately, within EPC, Mitterrand's election only translated into a short period of confusion that was quickly cleared up, and the Ten's effort to promote security in the Middle East continued unhindered by France. That said, the French no longer pushed the European initiative as hard as they had done under Giscard, and the British ended up largely by themselves in the driving seat as we shall see now.

THE BRITISH PRESIDENCY AND THE LAST PUSH FOR A CONCRETE EUROPEAN CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE

The British had great ambitions for their EC presidency during the second half of 1981, and their efforts would largely focus on EPC. As a series of papers put together by Giles Fitzherbert, the head of the European Integration Department, reveals, in addition to working for a settlement of the British Budgetary Question (BBQ), the main priority would be to 'reaffirm the United

[32] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, 'Entretien du Président de la République avec le Prince Fahed,' Hubert Védrine, 8 septembre 1981.
[33] AN, AG5(4)/FC/110, Note de Hubert Védrine, 6 November 1981 ('*Les Soviétiques souhaitent un partage de zones d'influence au Proche Orient, avec les Etats-Unis. Une éventuelle position franco-européenne dérange le jeu.*').
[34] See chapter 3 in: Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*.

Kingdom's political commitment [to the Community].'[35] He argued that EPC 'may provide more opportunities for achieving tangible results and for enhancing UK prestige in Europe and elsewhere,' and, of course, pushing the Middle East initiative forward was at the top of the list[36].

At the time, Britain's Middle East policy was entirely embedded within the Community framework. As Ian Gilmour, the Lord Privy Seal and FCO Minister, stated during a press conference in Amman in early February, 'Britain's main role [in the region] will be as a member of the EC.'[37] British economic and security concerns in the Middle East together with European interdependence and disagreements with American policy continued to sustain Britain's unprecedented solidarity with the Community in foreign policy. That much was clear from a paper entitled 'Arab-Israel: the way forward,' that Oliver Miles, the Head of the Near East and North Africa department, circulated in late April. In it, he warned that '[a]s US policy awakes, we may be in a very difficult situation.' He was concerned that American attempts to enrol British help to 'block European moves,' or get the Arabs to join Camp David would 'ruin British credibility with both Europeans and Arabs.' And, he concluded that in such a scenario 'the damage to our interest would be greater from tagging along behind the Americans.'[38] This situation stood in sharp contrast with the FCO's approach back in 1979, when it sought to pursue its own initiative in cooperation with Washington. Now, the FCO's entire strategy consisted in working through Europe, and to an astonishing extent, EPC had come to act as a substitute for British Middle East policy.

Before the end of the van der Klaauw mission, the Ten had easily agreed that there would not be another touring mission during the British presidency, as they all realised that another fact-finding exercise would lack credibility. During their weekend of informal meetings in Venlo, on 9-10 May, the EPC Foreign Ministers settled on three options designed to take their initiative forward: amending United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian rights, the formulation of a European peace plan, and the use of the Euro-Arab Dialogue (EAD) to obtain a conditional recognition of Israel from the PLO[39]. The first two continued to meet with US opposition, and were quickly dismissed. Hence, the last one, which did not directly depend on Washington's acquiescence, became the focus of European efforts until the end of the summer.

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[35] TNA, FCO98/948, 'The second UK presidency: opportunities and pitfalls,' Fitzherbert, 22 July 1980.
[36] TNA, FCO98/1141, 'UK presidency: political cooperation,' Fitzherbert, European Community Department, 6 February 1981.
[37] TNA, FCO93/2664, From Amman to FCO, Tel. No. 45, 'For New Department,' Urwick, 3 February 1981.
[38] TNA, FCO98/1149, 'Arab-Israel: the way forward,' Miles, Near East and North Africa Department, 27 April 1981.
[39] TNA, FCO98/1166, 'Informal week-end meeting, Venlo, 9-10 May – Presidency account of conclusions – Middle East,' 20 May 1981.

Since the EAD's establishment in 1973, it had essentially been, at European insistence, a forum for economic cooperation[40]. But in Venice, as part of their attempt to play a more active role in the Middle East, the then nine EC member states (the Nine) had agreed, at least in principle, to use it for political purposes as well. The first of the EAD meetings dedicated to political discussions, had taken place in Luxembourg, on 12-13 November 1980, and it had been agreed that a meeting at ministerial level should be organised by the summer[41].

The British were the main proponent of the EAD option, and they were responsible for putting it on the EPC agenda as early as the Political Committee meetings of 13-14 January 1981[42]. Basically, the idea consisted in getting the Arab delegation, which would include PLO representatives, to endorse the Venice principles in a final communiqué issued after the first ministerial meeting. At first, it seemed that this plan might work. By late February, the Arabs had agreed to discuss the European proposal, and this had been crucial in convincing most of the EPC partners to give the British scheme a chance. Most notably, the Germans, who had initially opposed it[43], now 'firmly' supported the idea[44]. The French, however, felt that it would be risky for the Ten to add preconditions after having already agreed to a meeting at ministerial level. Not only did they believe that it might lead the Arabs to ask for preconditions of their own, but they were afraid that it would also compromise the European initiative, since this request would inevitably be perceived as resulting from Israeli and American pressures[45]. Nevertheless, Britain managed to impose its initiative and convince most of its EPC partners that 'there was just a chance that during 1981 the PLO might be brought to say in public what some of its members were saying in private,' as Bullard put it to the Political Committee on 10-11 March[46]. At that stage, Giscard's focus on the Presidential election certainly helped Britain to successfully push their idea in EPC.

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[40] On the EAD see for instance: Haifa A. Jawad, *Euro-Arab Relations: A Study in Collective Diplomacy* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1992); Allen and Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89."

[41] TNA, FCO98/1119, 'Euro-Arab dialogue,' Miles, 2 February 1981.

[42] TNA, FCO98/1118, From The Hague to FCO, Tel. No. 10, 'European Political Cooperation – Political Committee, The Hague 13/14 January: Euro Arab Dialogue,' Taylor, 14 January 1981.

[43] *Archives du Minitère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris (Hereafter MAE), 1930INVA 4987,Sous direction d'Europe occidentale, 79/EU, note pour le ministre, 'A.S. : Réunion ministerielle de coopération politique, Bruxelles, 17 février 1981, Dialogue Euro-Arabe,' 16 février 1981.

[44] TNA, FCO98/1120, European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 10-11 March 1981, 'Item 5: Euro-Arab Dialogue,' Near East and North Africa Department, 9 March 1981.

[45] MAE, 1930INVA, 4987, 123/EU, note de synthèse, 'A.S/ Réunion ministerielle extraordinaire de cooperation politique. – Bruxelles, 17 février 1981,' 16 février 1981.

[46] TNA, FCO98/1120, From FCO to The Hague, Tel. No. 45, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee, The Hague, 10-11 March 1981,' Carrington, 12 March 1981.

By the summer, however, it became clear that a PLO endorsement of the Venice principles would prove difficult. At the end of May, the Arabs asked that the Ten agree to support the idea of a Palestinian state in exchange for their endorsement of the Venice principles. And, by October, they also wanted a recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people[47]. These demands were obviously unacceptable for the Ten, and the idea of an EAD ministerial meeting petered out.

By the end of the summer, the British realised that '[e]xaggerated Arab expectations must be let down lightly.'[48] This new attitude appeared clearly from Carrington's speech on behalf of the Community at the 36th UN General Assembly on 22 September. He then said: 'The Ten will pursue their efforts to promote a peace settlement energetically. Nevertheless we must be clear about what the European Community can and cannot achieve. Ultimately, it is for the parties to negotiate a lasting settlement themselves.'[49] This was a notable change of tone for the Community, especially since part of the rationale for the Venice Declaration was precisely that there was a need for an external mediator to break the deadlock in the negotiations.

By the time the British took over the EC presidency, the Ten still had a glimmer of hope that they could contribute to the management of the Middle East situation. This was essentially because of Washington's evident difficulties in implementing its Middle East strategy, and the rising tensions in its relations with Israel. But, ultimately, after Begin's re-election, it prove impossible for the Europeans to bring the PLO to take a step towards Israel. And, the EAD option was their last serious attempt to mount an initiative on their own. That said, as we shall see now, they continued to play an important role in the Middle East until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

THE FAHD PLAN: A EURO-ARAB SCHEME FOR PEACE?

By contrast to the Israeli provocative attitude, at the time, the Arabs appeared much more cooperative, and not just the so-called 'moderates.' Following the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, for example, the UN Security Council issued resolution 487, which unanimously condemned Israel for its military intervention. That the Iraqis, along with their Arab counterparts,

[47] TNA, FCO98/1127, From London to All Coreu, CPE/Mul/Etr 359, 'Euro-Arab dialogue ad hoc preparatory group: fourth meeting: London 27-28 October 1981,' 30 October 1981.
[48] TNA, FCO98/1131, European Political Cooperation: Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg 22 June, Brief No 1, 'Agenda Item: Middle East,' Near East and North Africa Department, 19 June 1981.
[49] TNA, FCO98/1171, 'Speech delivered by the Right Honourable the Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of the European Community and its ten member states at the thirty-six session of the United Nations General Assembly,' 22 September 1981.

had been willing to compromise over the terms of the resolution, thus allowing it to pass unanimously, was, according to the FCO, a sign of Arab 'readiness to work with the West.' In part, this explains why, despite ever mounting tensions in Arab-Israeli relations, by the summer the British still entertained some hopes for the EAD option. At the EPC ministerial meeting of 22 June, for instance, Carrington planned on arguing that the Ten should continue 'to work for a joint text endorsing the Venice principles until (not yet) it is clear that one is unobtainable.'[50]

Beyond the European initiative, another opportunity arose, when, in early August, in an interview published in several newspapers worldwide, Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia enumerated eight points, which, according to him, constituted the basic principles for peace in the Middle East. The seventh point, which stated that 'all states' had the right to live in peace, became the focus of attention as it implied a *de facto* recognition of Israel[51]. The Ten were encouraged by this development, which they saw as another sign that the Arabs were looking for a diplomatic way out of the current crisis. They, therefore, started discussing within EPC how they should react to the so-called Fahd Plan. During the Middle East Working Group meeting of 1-2 September, for instance, the Germans recognised that 'the manner of public presentation was significant.' Even the Dutch agreed that, despite the content, it 'was a sign of constructive Saudi attitude, demonstrated also in oil policy and Lebanon.' The French, on their part, noted that 'Arafat's reaction, again in the press but noteworthily through a US newspaper, was strikingly positive.'[52] Other clear signs of support came from the Palestinian leader in the following weeks. During his visit to Japan in late October, for instance, he talked of 'coexistence' with Israel, approved the Fahd plan once more, and sent signals to Reagan of his willingness to negotiate. He did this at great political risk, and ended up being severely criticised within the PLO. This prompted Védrine to comment in a note to the President that 'positions of goodwill and diplomatic overtures become that much more difficult to hold as for the past eight years the Palestinian people has not seen any concrete results.' He therefore recommended that France should support the Fahd Plan[53].

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[50] TNA, FCO98/1131, European Political cooperation: Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Luxembourg, 22 June, 'Brief No 1, Agenda item: Middle East,' NENAD, 19 June 1981.

[51] For an interesting take on Saudi Arabia as a coordinator of Arab efforts for peace with Israel from the 1970s onward see: Joseph Kostiner, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab–Israeli Peace Process: The Fluctuation of Regional Coordination," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 417-29.

[52] TNA, FCO98/1125, Draft of record of MEWG, 'Middle East Working Group, Lancaster House, 1-2 September,' Near East and North Africa Department, 4 September 1981.

[53] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, 'Note pour le Président de la Répubique,' Hubert Védrine, 28 Octobre 1981 ('*Yasser Arafat à parlé de coexistence avec Israël, a approuvé le plan Fahd et lancé un appel à Reagan*'; '*Les positions de bonne volonté et d'ouverture diplomatique deviennent d'autant plus difficile à tenir que depuis huit ans le peuple palestinien n'a vu venir aucun résultat concret*').

In general, the Community welcomed the Saudi initiative and hoped to link it somehow to the Venice Declaration[54]. However, the express mention of a Palestinian state as part of the eight points made an openly supportive stance delicate[55]. During his speech at the UN General Assembly, for instance, Carrington pointed to the Fahd Plan as a positive development, but only implicitly indicated the Community's readiness to support it[56]. At the EPC ministerial meeting of 13 October, the Ten agreed for the Presidency to go to Riyadh in order to discuss the Saudis' intentions in more detail, before deciding on the extent of their support[57]. The British Foreign Secretary's visit on 4-5 November strengthened European interest for what had clearly evolved into a peace initiative. Carrington reported that the Saudis told him that 'everyone knew that their reference to the right of states to live in peace included Israel, in the context of a settlement.' They had decided to seek approval for their plan at the upcoming Arab League summit in Fez on 25 November, and appeared 'reasonably optimistic' that they could 'gain adequate support.' Should they succeed, they had 'strong hope' that the Ten could support their initiative, and that together they could put pressure on the Americans[58]. Here, again, the significance of Europe in the Middle Eastern diplomatic equation was clear. And, by the end of 1981, it appeared that the Euro-Arab front was still holding firm in its collective attempt to deal with the shortcomings of Washington's Middle East strategy.

Unfortunately, the Arab Summit was adjourned, in part, for lack of a consensus on the Fahd Plan. Syria and Libya would not have it, and given the divisions within the PLO, Arafat had no choice but to follow[59]. If the Saudi initiative had not been approved, it had not been rejected either, and it would actually be endorsed in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, albeit in a watered down form, which nonetheless still indicated an implicit recognition of Israel. For the time being, though, the Ten, who had agreed to voice their support for the Fahd Plan provided that it was adopted by the Arab summit in Fez, remained silent[60]. Saudi Arabia had thus failed where the Community had as well. But their initiatives still served a purpose.

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[54] TNA, FCO98/1125, Tel. No. 720, 'European Political Cooperation: Political Committee London 8, 9 September: Middle East,' Carrington, 10 September 1981.
[55] TNA, FCO98/1127, From FCO to Jedda, Tel. No. 585, 'My visit to Riyadh,' Carrington, 6 November 1981.
[56] TNA, FCO98/1171, 'Speech delivered by the Right Honourable the Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of the European Community and its ten member states at the thirty-six session of the United Nations General Assembly,' 22 September 1981.
[57] TNA, FCO98/1133, From London to All Coreu, CPE/Mul/Etr 3397, 'Projet de relevé de conclusions de la reunion ministerielle: Londres: 13 octobre,' 14 October 1981.
[58] TNA, FCO98/1127, From FCO to Jedda, Tel. No. 585, 'My visit to Riyadh,' Carrington, 6 November 1981.
[59] AN, AG5(4)/FC/111, Note, N116/ANMO, 'Les déclarations palestiniennes sur les proposition de paix du prince Fahd d'Arabie Saoudite,' 24 novembre 1981.
[60] TNA, FCO98/1158, 'European Council: Foreign Ministers' dinner, 26 November.'

The absence of an adequate American response to the Middle East crisis remained a source of concern for the Europeans and continued to motivate their involvement. Their attempt to draw a link between the Venice Declaration and the Fahd Plan, was in part designed to bridge the gap between Arabs and Americans. Douglas Hurd, the FCO Minister of State for Europe, went to Washington on 11-13 November for a round of talks on the Middle East, and this is what his speaking notes had to say:

> 'The European position provides a foundation of hope for those Arab states that accept the principle of a settlement by negotiations. Without it, they only have the Soviet Union to turn to and military options to concentrate on. Without it, we doubt whether the Saudis would have felt confident enough to set out their proposals (if the Fahd points are a 'beginning-point for negotiation', why should Venice, which is less definitive, not be?). Without it, US policy might well seem to the international community to be dangerously out on a limb. The value of Venice is its tenure of the central ground, where there would otherwise be a vacuum.'[61]

Again, the security dimension of the European initiative comes out clearly here. Importantly, it also shows that while its finality was to bring a concrete contribution to peace, arguably, the process of trying to hold the middle ground in order to limit the influence of radical forces in the Middle East was more important.

In many respect, there was a continuity between European and Saudi efforts. Hurd's claim that the Community's diplomatic activism had set the ground for the Fahd Plan is obviously hard to substantiate without access to the Saudi archives. And, the source base for this research does not indicate that any consultation took place between Saudis and Europeans on this issue prior to Fahd's announcement. There is currently very little in the literature on how the Fahd Plan came about. Interestingly, though, it has been suggested that the main motivations were to heal the bruises in the Arab world caused by Camp David, and prevent Soviet subversion of 'radical' Arab states, in order to reduce the chances of a military confrontation with Israel and secure oil exports[62]. These were also the European objectives behind the Venice Declaration.

Based on the evidence gathered in this dissertation, it seems fair to say that this Arab initiative was at the very least embedded within the emergence of a coherent Euro-Arab bloc, which, since the Venice European Council, had sought to deal with the Palestinian question as the foremost threat to regional stability. As we saw in chapter 6, for example, Prince Saud had told the Dutch Foreign Minister that his country would be willing to try to moderate the collective Arab position if the

[61] TNA, FCO93/2666, Mr Hurd's visit to Washington: November 1981, Arab-Israel, 'Speaking notes.'
[62] Kostiner, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab–Israeli Peace Process: The Fluctuation of Regional Coordination."

Europeans worked on the Americans. Admittedly, as the previous chapter explains, the Ten did not manage to influence the definition of Reagan's Middle East policy in any significant way. Nevertheless, the Euro-Arab front proved strong enough to reject the US strategy and allow Europeans and Arab 'moderates' to pursue their own. Importantly, their common objective necessitated cooperation between the two regions. At the time, the Saudis knew that the Community was struggling to bring the PLO to recognise Israel on a conditional basis in the context of the EAD. They came up with a proposal which granted Palestinian demands that the Ten could not, and obtain an implicit recognition of the Jewish state from Arafat, before Arab politics temporarily compromised this achievement. Moderating the Arab stance was only one part of the equation though. The other one was to bring the Americans to change tack on the Palestinian question. And, in that respect, as we saw throughout this dissertation, the Arabs were convinced that the Europeans were indispensable.

Admittedly, the Fahd Plan took momentum away from the European initiative, but still, the Europeans continued to be an effective part of the diplomatic equation. Given the unprecedented degree of Israeli provocation at the time, which even created friction with the US, it is quite astonishing that the Arab response had not been more belligerent. Strikingly, it is at that particular moment that the Saudis chose to intervene in Arab-Israeli diplomacy for the first time. And, at that juncture, Arafat also gave clear signs of his willingness to negotiate. It is, therefore, in this general context of unprecedented Euro-Arab cooperation that the Palestinian leader took the risk of supporting the Saudi initiative. Given how difficult it had been for him to support the Fahd plan, the chance that he could have agreed to a conditional recognition of Israel through the EAD seemed highly unlikely. But, Saudi Arabia's and Arafat's efforts had certainly been emboldened by the fact that they had a Western ally at their side. In that respect, the Europeans along with Arab 'moderates' contributed to managing regional tensions. From that perspective, the Community's sustained diplomatic activism had played an essential role in the international politics of the Middle East since the Venice European Council. And, this, in effect, was the European initiative.

THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE AND OBSERVERS IN THE SINAI: THE END OF EUROPEAN UNITY?

The literature takes European participation in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai as one of the main examples of Europe's inability to conduct an independent Middle East policy from Washington. This peacekeeping mission was meant to monitor the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai due to take place by April 1982. According to the current analysis,

France, Britain, Italy and the Netherlands (the Four) bowed to US pressure and agreed to participate in the MFO thus breaking ranks with the rest of the Community. It appears, therefore, that the Americans had once again managed to divide the Europeans and impose their views. The symbol of having four EC member states take part in an operation designed to ensure the completion of the Camp David peace treaty, after having openly criticised it since the Venice Declaration supposedly dealt a devastating blow to the credibility of Europe as a coherent international actor[63]. However, the following analysis – the first one to rely on archival research – offers a very different take.

By the summer 1981, the Americans started to focus their attentions on the planned Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. In August, Tel Aviv and Cairo agreed on the terms of the MFO. The Americans would have to take the leadership of this peacekeeping mission since Cold War dynamics and Camp David's unpopularity made the use of the UN umbrella difficult. Washington therefore looked for support from its allies to give the MFO some form of international legitimacy. By the end of the summer, however, Washington was struggling to find volunteers, and had grown concerned that 'it will not be possible to secure Israeli withdrawal without the MFO in place.'[64] Initially, the Europeans had not been asked to participate as their position on Camp David and their strained relations with Israel since the Venice Declaration could complicate matters[65]. But, when Australia and New Zealand made their participation dependent on Britain's, the whole Community was dragged into this affair.

By late August, only Fiji and Colombia had agreed to participate, and Canada had refused[66]. At this stage, the Americans had little choice but to turn to their European allies, and they approached The Netherlands and Italy first. The Italians, however, were reluctant to participate without approval from their Community partners. Hence, in early September, US Secretary of State Alexander Haig asked Britain for its participation in the MFO. According to Carrington, he argued that 'only a UK contribution will overcome the reservation of the Italians and Australians, […] and that therefore British participation is essential to the Force's formation.' The British Foreign Secretary made it clear that this request put his country in an awkward position towards the Arabs, and that it would compromise European efforts to convince the PLO to recognise Israel

[63] Greilsammer and Weiler, *Europe's Middle East Dilemma: The Quest for a Unified Stance*, 66-67; Allen and Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," 101.
[64] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Trip File, Box 2, Department of State, Briefing paper, 'Sinai Multinational Force.'
[65] TNA, FCO82/1113, Lord Carrington's talk with Mr Haig on 10 April, Essential facts, 'Arab-Israel,' Near East and North Africa department, 8 April 1981.
[66] TNA, FCO98/1157, Informal meeting of Foreign Ministers, Brocket Hall 5/6 September 1981, Record of conversation, 'Middle East.'

conditionally. At the same time, he was also concerned about the considerable transatlantic tensions that would result from a British refusal[67]. The French on their part had not been approached by the US but by Egypt, and, despite their apparent commitment to Camp David, they were also embarrassed by this demand. When they met in New York in late September, Cheysson explained to the US Secretary of State that France's participation in the MFO, would compromise its standing in the Arab world and affect its ability to act in Lebanon. The French would therefore have to make a choice between playing a more active role in the Lebanese crisis or contributing to the completion of the Camp David peace treaty. Naturally, Haig urged the French Foreign Minister to choose the latter[68].

The Ten first discussed this issue at the informal EPC ministerial meeting on 5-6 September, and most member states did not have a clear position yet. Their ambivalent feeling towards European participation notwithstanding, they all hoped for a successful Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai as they realised that it would open up new opportunities for peace. Carrington, for instance, argued that the Community's '[a]im should be a fresh start after April 1982 with US and Europe working together on the basis of European views.' The rationale was that Egypt would then be freer for a rapprochement with its Arab counterparts, and that the US would be more inclined to put pressure on Israel. Also, the fact that at this point the Ten were running out of options to advance their initiative further increased their interest in seeing the successful completion of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty[69]. In the meantime the Europeans would try to support the Fahd Plan, and do everything else they could to keep managing regional tensions. Ironically, this led them to play a key role in the Camp David peace process, but only as means to advance their own initiative and continue to manage Middle Eastern tensions. In that respect, their participation in the MFO was in line with the main objectives they had sought to achieve since the Venice Declaration.

During the next ministerial meeting on 13 October, France and Italy now said that they would participate if Britain did, and if the Community agreed to support their involvement[70]. What tilted the balance for Paris and Rome was Sadat's assassination on 6 October. As Mitterrand told Haig on 18 October during his visit to the US: 'After the death of Sadat a new "mission" became

[67] TNA, FCO98/1125, Tel. No. 399, 'Sinai Multinational Force,' Carrington, 4 September 1981.
[68] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country Files (France), Box 25, From Washington to Paris, 'The Secretary's luncheon with French FONMIN Cheysson: Middle East,' Clark, 25 September 1981.
[69] TNA. FCO98/1157, Informal meeting of Foreign Ministers, Brocket Hall 5/6 September 1981, Record of conversation, 'Middle East.'
[70] For a useful chronology of how the Europeans came to participate in the MFO see: TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO – Catalogue of events.'

necessary.'[71] While the French priority now seemed to be to ensure the completion of the Camp David peace treaty, initially the British believed that the Egyptian leader's death could 'improve prospects for the acceptance of Venice,' and that therefore there was 'no need for the Ten to change course.'[72] But, faced with French and Italian pressure, the FCO concluded that they would need to take part in the MFO to prevent Britain from being blamed for the Camp David peace treaty's failure.

Carrington, however, intended to use European participation as leverage to push for an evolution in the US stance on the Palestinian question. This attempt angered State Department officials and triggered a crisis in Anglo-American relations[73]. On 21 October, Veliotes warned Haig that Carrington had 'spoken of a "small price" he will want in return for British and EC participation,' and conveyed his concern that 'his price will be too high.'[74] In any case, in the face of US discontent, and lack of support within EPC to push the Americans too far on this issue, by late October, the British agreed to participation in the MFO without any *quid pro quo*[75]. That said, Haig in particular remained suspicious of Carrington's intentions[76]. And, when in early November the British Foreign Secretary appeared to welcome the Fahd Plan during his trip to Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Ten, his US counterpart believed that he had done so to entice the Israelis into rejecting Britain's participation in the MFO[77]. In large part, Haig's discontent stemmed from the fact that without the British, the Americans would most likely fail to set up the multinational peacekeeping force. Quite astonishingly, at this juncture, it appears that Britain had replaced France as the difficult transatlantic partner on the Middle East in the eyes of the Americans.

The Ten now had to draft a statement that would announce their involvement in monitoring Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai. Their dilemma was to find a way to justify their participation without appearing to endorse the Camp David peace process in its entirety. It proved difficult to reconstruct France's decision to participate in the MFO because of the many gaps in the archival records, and therefore the present analysis relies mostly on British and American documents. For the FCO, the two member states, which were most problematic to deal with during the drafting

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[71] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (France), Box 25, Memorandum of conversation, 'Haig-Mitterrand conversation at Yorktown,' 18 October 1981.
[72] TNA, FCO98/1133, European Political Cooperation: Foreign Ministers: 13 October 1981, Middle East, 'Points to make.'
[73] For an overview of these tensions, most particularly between Haig and Carrington, see: Azriel Bermant, *Margaret Thatcher and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 69-87.
[74] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (UK), Box 10, From Veliotes to Secretary of State, 'Dealing with Carrington on the MFO,' 21 October 1981.
[75] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO – Catalogue of events.'
[76] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (UK), Box 10, State 293209, 'Message to Lord Carrington,' 4 November 1981.
[77] Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington*, 344.

process were France and Greece. Bullard, for instance, remarked that the French attitude was 'puzzling.' He explained that Paris had been unable to convey its intention clearly, and that this was due to differences between the *Élysée* and the *Quai d'Orsay*. He also deplored Cheysson's 'irresponsibility and self-importance,' and the fact that the new French Political Director, Jacques Andréani, had not 'quite grasped' the importance of his role for the good functioning of EPC. As for the Greeks, the problem seemed to have been the election of Socialist leader Andreas Papandreou on 18 October, and Athens' close relationship with the Palestinians[78]. During the Political Directors' dinner on 10 November, for example, the Greeks announced that they were going to grant the PLO the same diplomatic status as Israel. This prompted Bullard to remind his Greek colleague that 'the Middle East was the subject on which the Ten had the most comprehensive and much-worked out position,' and that for this reason a unilateral 'change in policy or practice' from any member states would prove highly damaging for the Community's international stature[79].

By mid-October, Greece was the only EPC partner still opposing a Community statement to support the Four's decision to participate in the MFO. On that occasion, the Community put a significant amount of pressure on its newest member. Writing to the British embassy in Athens, for example, Carrington instructed Ambassador Iain Sutherland to get in touch with the Papandreou government, and convey that cooperation in foreign policy was part and parcel of EC membership. He should also explain that the Community umbrella would minimise the impact on Greece's relations with the Arab world, and that 'a weakening of European solidarity […] would be much regretted by many Arabs.' Carrington concluded that 'we do not want to gang up on the Greeks, but the French in particular may be in a good position to influence them.'[80] The FCO had hoped that Mitterrand could use his socialist credentials to convince Papandreou to change his mind, but he apparently refused to do so[81]. Fitzherbert also believed that the Community 'need[ed] to do all possible to bring the Greeks in,' and encourage Carrington 'to keep up the pressure.'[82] And, by the end of October, Athens finally accepted the idea of a joint statement by the Ten.

Initially, the Greeks wanted an explicit mention that involvement in the MFO was not an endorsement of Camp David. The Ten managed to agree on such a statement, and the British

[78] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO: Lessons for the future,' Bullard, 24 November 1981.
[79] TNA, FCO98/1127, 'Greece and the Arabs,' Bullard, 11 November 1981.
[80] TNA, FCO98/1168, Tel. No. 228, 'Sinai peacekeeping,' Carrington, 28 October 1981.
[81] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO – Catalogue of events.'
[82] TNA, FCO98/1168, 'Political Cooperation: Sinai MFO,' Fitzherbert, 29 October 1981.

presidency communicated an advanced copy to the Reagan administration on 4 November[83]. At this stage, the plan was to deliver the Community's statement together with the Four's to the Israelis and the Egyptians on 5 November, and to make them both public on 6 November. However, the Americans urged the Community to hold on because they were certain that these versions would not be acceptable to the Israelis. Haig feared that the US would 'face a massive and disastrous problem,' because it would be put in a position to side either with Israel or the Europeans. In the first instance, it would trigger a transatlantic crisis, and in the second instance it would put further strain on the already tense relationship with Israel. Either way, it would compromise the establishment of the MFO. The Americans, therefore, asked for a redraft, and they also argued that it would be easier to get Israeli approval if the Ten's statement was issued at least ten days after the Four's[84].

The Community agreed to revise its statement. A Greek draft was unanimously rejected at the Political Committee meeting of 10-11 November because it would still cause problems with Israel[85]. By the ministerial meeting of 17 November, discussion had made some progress, but an argument between France and Greece created further delay. Concerned about the chances of bringing the Greeks on board, the British consulted with France and the Netherlands about going ahead without a Community statement, but the French categorically rejected such an option[86]. Ultimately, it seemed that the prospect of disunity was the biggest concern within EPC, and on 21 November, the Ten reluctantly agreed to the latest Greek draft, and the final text read:

> 'The Ten consider that the decision of France, Italy, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom to participate in the Multinational Force in Sinai meets the wishes frequently expressed by the members of the Community to facilitate any progress in the direction of a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East on the basis of the mutual acceptance of the right to existence and security of all the states in the area and the need for the Palestinian people to exercise fully its right to self-determination.'[87]

In the end, the statement only distanced the Ten from Camp David implicitly, but it had a much more pro-Arab tone, than most member states would have liked. Most notably, it did not explicitly refer to Israeli security, but made a direct reference to the Palestinian right to self-determination. Haig was again dissatisfied with the new statement but this time the Europeans did not budge.

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[83] For a version of these texts see: RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (France), Box 25, State 294593, 'MFO: Statements of the Four and the Ten,' 4 November 1981.
[84] RRL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Country File (France), Box 25, State 294810, 'MFO: European participation,' 4 November 1981.
[85] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO – Catalogue of events.'
[86] Ibid.
[87] TNA, FCO98/1168, CPE/MUL/ETR 3827, 'Sinai MFO,' 23 November 1981.

Interestingly, it was Cheysson and not Carrington who convinced him to accept this draft, making it clear that otherwise France would not take part in the MFO[88]. On 23 November, the Four announced their decision, and the presidency issued the Ten's statement of support. Washington then managed to win over the Israelis, and thus secured European participation in the MFO[89].

This account reveals a very different picture than that of the Ten's unity crumbling under US pressure and internal disagreements. If the Americans rejected a first version of the statements by the Ten and the Four, they were forced to accept another one which they did not like either. Besides, against Washington's wishes, the Europeans issued both statements at the same time. While the source base here does not allow for an account of how Washington went about convincing Israel, it is nonetheless clear that the second time around Haig had no choice but to put pressure on the Begin government instead of the Community. Again, as in the case of the Venice Declaration, the Ten's willingness to compromise on the substance of their statements was more about self-restraint than American constraint. In that case, the Ten's main objective was to ensure that the Israelis would withdraw from the Sinai. To that end, their participation in the MFO was imperative, and they needed a statement that Begin could approve. It was therefore in their interest to come up with a document that would allow for them to take part in this peacekeeping mission. In that respect, Haig's initial rejection of the Community statements was not about getting something that would be satisfactory to Washington, but that he could sell to the Israelis.

The episode of the MFO clearly highlights the remarkable extent of transatlantic diplomatic interdependence over the Middle East at the time. The Americans believed that they could not successfully conclude peace between Egypt and Israel without the Europeans, even though they had initially tried. And, the Ten had grown convinced that the advancement of their Middle East initiative depended on the completion of the Camp David peace treaty. In that sense, the Community ended up rescuing Camp David's first accord about Egyptian-Israeli peace, but only as a means to move past the more problematic second accord, which had given rise to the failing autonomy talks. With Israel out of the Sinai, the Europeans believed that together with the Americans they would finally be able to bring a concrete contribution to Middle East peace on the basis of the Venice Declaration. But, unfortunately, Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982.

As for the Ten's unity, it seemed to have resisted quite well in the end. Miles made an interesting comment about the difficulties of reaching an agreement on the Community's statements:

[88] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO: Lessons for the future.'
[89] TNA, FCO98/1168, CPE/MUL/ETR 3837, 'Sinai MFO,' 23 November 1981.

> 'It was not a coincidence that the two Governments who gave us most trouble, the Greek and the French, were both new. Both joined the Venice band wagon quite a long time after it set out for the new frontier. In both cases there were genuine differences of policy, with which we were able to deal with realistically and I hope sympathetically, but the greater difficulties were caused by inexperience and lack of confidence on the part of the Greeks and incoherence on the part of the French. The worrying thing is that at any given moment there is always going to be at least one new Government in the Ten, is there not?'[90]

Ultimately those governments amongst the Ten which had been there since the Venice Declaration had been willing to compromise further than they usually would have in order to compensate for French and Greek inexperience in Community affairs. This was most obvious in the case of Britain. Fitzherbert, for instance, reflecting on the episode of the MFO wrote:

> 'Looking back over the whole exercise it seems that the UK got very little that it originally wanted. We did not want to participate; then we wanted to extract a price from the United States. We accepted progressively less acceptable statements. Even when we wanted to go ahead without the Ten, the French and the Dutch would not let us.'[91]

Remarkably, the British continued to stick with their European partners as they had done since the Venice Declaration, and this was mostly because at the time their Middle East policy was embedded to an unprecedented extent within the European framework. That said, the episode certainly challenged the popular perception of Britain as the American Trojan horse within the Community.

Admittedly, not all ten EC member states took part in the MFO. While this might be taken as a sign of division as the current literature does, there is currently no real explanation as to why those who did not participate did so, and unfortunately the source base used here does not provide an answer to that question. One can note, however, that the countries that took part were only those that the US had solicited, and coincidentally they were also the main European military powers. In addition, with the exception of Greece, there never was any issue about the Ten's support of the Four's decision, which tends to indicate that if there was a split within the Community it was not between participants and non-participants. Moreover, remarkably, France, Britain, Italy and The Netherlands agreed for their respective statements to be drafted within EPC along with that of the Ten. Ultimately, if European participation in the MFO was done on a national basis, the decision to participate at all had been taken collectively. This indicates that the Ten's interest in seeing the Israelis withdraw from the Sinai was intimately linked to their desire to promote stability in the Middle East and advance their initiative. This further reveals that national and European

[90] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai: MFO: Lessons for the future,' Miles, 24 November 1981.
[91] TNA, FCO98/1169, 'Sinai MFO: Lessons for the future,' Fitzherbert, 24 November 1981.

foreign policies are not necessarily opposed. In that respect, the Four's participation in the MFO, did not mark the end of European unity on the Middle East. Instead, it simply reveals the multi-levelled nature of foreign policy making in Western Europe by the early 1980s.

CONCLUSION

From the time of Begin's re-election, Israel had been getting ready for a major military offensive against the PLO. As the Reagan administration proved reluctant to restrain its ally, the Europeans continued to act as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world. Their sustained diplomatic activism since the Venice Declaration had played a significant role in giving the 'moderate' Arab states the confidence to respond to the many Israeli provocations by demonstrating their desire for peace instead of escalating the situation. In particular, the Saudis made the unprecedented gesture of proposing a peace plan which, if it was to work, would entail close cooperation with the Europeans. Their move was essentially designed to extract an implicit and conditional recognition of Israel by the PLO, just as the Community had tried to do through the EAD. Unfortunately, both initiative failed, but the Fahd plan nevertheless revealed that Arafat was in fact trying to commit his organisation to negotiate with Israel. Had the Saudis been successful, the Europeans would have had a central role to play in convincing the Americans to change tack on the Palestinian question.

The only concrete contribution to peace that the Europeans could bring at the time was to encourage more moderation in the Arab camp and convince the Americans to put the necessary pressure on Israel. While they clearly failed on the latter, they were in fact quite successful on the former. This partial achievement, however, was useless for promoting peace between Arabs and Israelis. But, it still had a significant impact in terms of securing Western interests in the Middle East. Most notably, it mitigated the very negative effect that Washington's support for Israel and antagonising attitude towards the Arab world could have had on European interests in the region. In 1973, for instance, US policy had created a major rift between the Arab world and the Americans, which threatened the Western economies, enhance the Soviets diplomatic stature in regional diplomacy, and brought the superpower on the brink of war[92]. Interestingly, this time none of this happened. Of course, the Europeans were not singlehandedly responsible for this, but as this chapter has further revealed they played a part that deserves its place in the

[92] On the real danger of a superpower confrontation over the Middle East as a result of the October war see: Craig Daigle, *The Limits of détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

historiography. The Community's diplomatic engagement ahead of the invasion of Lebanon ultimately produced one major outcome: it kept the Arabs looking West during this most crucial period of geopolitical transformation in the Middle East, when traditionally, under such circumstances, they would have sought Soviet support.

Moreover, by agreeing, collectively, to participate in the MFO, the Europeans helped preserve the peace between Egypt and Israel. This was no small achievement for the stability of the region. If the completion of the Camp David peace treaty proved counterproductive in terms of the chances of setting up a comprehensive framework for negotiation as the Community had advocated since the early 1970s, from a Cold War perspective, it was to the West's advantage as it further anchored Egypt into the American camp. In addition, it allowed the West to put boots on the ground in the Middle East under the cover of a peace keeping mission. In the aftermath of the Israeli offensive in Lebanon, Washington set up a similar peace keeping force together with France, Britain and Italy. Here again, the Europeans had played a central role in allowing the American intervention, and this time the participants were NATO members only[93]. As a result of transatlantic cooperation, by the early 1980s, the West had significantly increased its military presence in the Middle East. These were officially peace keeping forces of course, but in case of a major conflict they could naturally be used for another purpose.

By 1982, the Soviet Union thus found itself completely excluded from the Arab-Israeli diplomatic equation and was powerless to prevent this increase in Western military presence in the Middle East. This prompted some historians to argue that, in effect, the Cold War in the Middle East was over by the early 1980s[94]. As this dissertation has revealed, the Europeans had in fact played a crucial supporting role to the Americans, both politically and to a lesser extent militarily, in this major geopolitical transformation. It is, therefore, fair to say that they helped Washington assert its dominance over the Middle East, and in so doing contributed to shaping the post-Cold War order in the region. Ultimately, it was the quest for an initiative itself, which in effect should be regarded as the European initiative.

[93] For two accounts that emphasise the French role in particular see: Khalidi, *Under Siege: P.L.O. Decisionmaking During the 1982 War*; Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*.
[94] See for instance: Salim Yaqub, "The Cold War and the Middle East," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

To go back to Peter Carrington's question of whether the rise of an independent European foreign policy was in America's interest or not, the answer of this dissertation is a resounding yes. Admittedly, the initial motive was to emancipate Europe from US hegemony, and develop an independent voice in world affairs capable of opposing Washington if necessary. This discomfort with the bipolar world order, the preponderance of American power within the alliance and the decline of the European nation state was clearly expressed in the European Community's (EC) Declaration on European Identity issued on 14 December 1973:

> 'Although in the past the European countries were individually able to play a major role on the international scene, present international problems are difficult for any of the Nine to solve alone. International developments and the growing concentration of power and responsibility in the hands of a very small number of great powers mean that Europe must unite and speak increasingly with one voice if it wants to make itself heard and play its proper role in the world.'

The Community had decided to publish this statement in a tense and emotional context where Europe's sense of powerlessness was at its peak. It was the situation in the Middle East, which at the time endangered international peace and threatened the Western economies, while the Europeans stood aside and watch, that exacerbated this painful reality.

Disagreement with US policy, and Washington's patronising attitude and unwillingness to listen to their Atlantic allies added to the feeling of helplessness that prevailed in Europe in the early 1970s. In that context, the Declaration on European Identity was quite obviously aimed at the Americans, and was taken as such, even though it claimed that 'European unification is not directed against anyone, nor is it inspired by a desire for power.' That the EC member states felt the need to assert their identity at that particular juncture was a clear sign of panic at the lack of answers that they could bring to their current predicament. And, as had so often been the case in the postwar history of European integration and cooperation they opted for a *fuite en avant*. More unity seemed to be the only way forward, and this was reflected in this statement's lofty ambitions. In it, the Nine revived the old dream of a common defence policy 'to preserve their independence,' and they concluded that a 'European foreign policy […] will help them to tackle with confidence and realism further stages in the construction of a United Europe thus making easier the proposed transformation of the whole complex of their relations into a European Union.' To this day,

however, while we now have a European Union, it falls short of having a genuine foreign and security policy as envisaged at several stages of the integration process during the Cold War era.

But, if these goals were never reached, something else still came out of the EC member states' quest for independence and influence in world affairs, something that did significantly improve their ability to navigate the disintegration of the postwar/Cold War order in the 1970s and 1980s. Contrary to the Europeans' first instinct, though, their answers to the numerous challenges pertaining to the situation in the Middle East were to be found in closer cooperation with the Americans, not opposition. Even at a time of great frustrations and disappointments with the US attitude, they still realised that '[t]he close ties between the United States and Europe of the Nine […] are mutually beneficial and must be preserved,' as the Declaration on European Identity also asserts. It further adds that '[t]hese ties do not conflict with the determination of the Nine to establish themselves as a distinct and original entity.' And, it indicates their intention 'to maintain their constructive dialogue and to develop their co-operation with the United States on the basis of equality and in a spirit of friendship.'[1] It was not easy, however, for the Europeans to live by those words as their pride often took over. As for the Americans, despite repeated pledges to pay closer attention to their allies' opinions, more often than not policy divergences were taken as a challenge to their leadership and cooperation was envisaged primarily on the basis of their own views.

Despite these various obstacles, the Europeans persevered with their attempt to develop a more balanced approach to transatlantic cooperation. In that spirit, the EC Foreign Ministers adopted the Gymnich formula back in 1974. This did not herald Europe's subservience to American hegemony in world affairs as sometimes suggested in the literature[2]. Instead, it was a sign that the EC member states were coming to grips with the reality of increasing interdependence or as they put it that 'consultations are a matter of course in any modern foreign policy.'[3] Naturally, this interdependences was more restrictive for the Europeans than for the Americans, but relatively speaking the emergence of EPC had still improved Europe's weight in transatlantic and international relations by the end of the 1970s. The Gymnich formula was thus the result of a formative process, which saw the emergence of a more mature approach to foreign policy, whereby the Europeans came to accept that their scope for action in international politics

[1] For the Declaration on European Identity see: Christopher Hill and Karen E. Smith, eds., *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), 93-97.
[2] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy During the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009).
[3] For the Gymnich formula see: Hill and Smith, *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents*, 97-98.

necessarily had some limits as Aurélie Gfeller has argued[4]. And, as this dissertation has shown, within these limits, they still had enough leeway to play a significant role and have some influence on the course of events.

The collective acceptance of their limitations, which was indispensable for the emergence of Europe as an international actor, was a complex and ambiguous process. It had to start first from the nation state and it proved particularly difficult in the case of the Middle East because of the prominent historical role that France and Britain had played in the region and, by contrast, the relative insignificance of their EPC partners. Not only did the two former colonial powers have to accept their replacement by the Americans as the dominant Western actor in the region, but also they had to come to terms with the need to listen to the rest of the Community on this issue. Apart from these common challenges, the French and the British roads to the Venice Declaration were almost symmetrically opposed if ultimately complementary. For Britain, it was essentially about choosing its allegiance to Europe over the US. For France, the challenge was to accept that the Community could not be used as an instrument to oppose the Americans in the Middle East.

In the case of Britain, the extent of EC interdependence by the end of the 1970s, best exemplified in this dissertation by the row over the British Budgetary Question, played a significant role in curbing British Atlanticism. Eager to settle their differences and improve their relationship with the Community, the British identified EPC as an area of cooperation where they could more easily demonstrate their *esprit communautaire*. Problematically, by early 1980, they found themselves in the situation of having to back down on their intention to amend United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (SCR) 242 in favour of Palestinian rights because of US opposition. This happened precisely at the time when the Community was getting ready to mount a diplomatic initiative towards the Middle East and assert its difference of opinion with Washington on the Arab-Israeli peace process. London was therefore once more faced with its traditional foreign policy dilemma. It needed to reconcile its special relationship with the US, which had been at the core of its approach to international relations since the end of the Second World War, with the increasing importance of Europe for its economic and political interests. At this juncture, their concern not to substantiate their reputation as the American Trojan Horse within the Community helped tip the balance in favour of their European allegiance. In addition, the cover that EPC provided played a crucial role in overcoming Margaret Thatcher's refusal to lend her support to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). And, it also facilitated the acceptance of an initiative

[4] Aurélie Élisa Gfeller, *Building a European Identity: France, the United States, and the Oil Shock, 1973-1974* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012).

with which Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) mandarins agreed, but which ran the risk of putting a strain on transatlantic relations. Ultimately, EPC helped Britain in its pursuit of a Middle East policy which, while in its best interest, could not have been pursued at the national level.

As in the British case, France's road to the Venice Declaration started on the basis of close bilateral transatlantic cooperation. And, its attempt at a diplomatic initiative in the second half of 1979 to manage the deteriorating situation in Lebanon was unsuccessful for lack of American support as well. At the time, the French were also facing a foreign policy dilemma of their own. In their attempt to defend their interests in the region, they had to juggle the necessity of transatlantic cooperation and the preservation of their international identity as the Atlantic rebel. This *Atlanticisation* of their Middle East policy ran contrary to their Gaullist reputation in the Arab world from which they derived significant economic and political benefits. They, therefore, had to find a way to increase their cooperation with the Americans without affecting their international reputation for independence. In this respect, the Community proved to be a crucial tool as it allowed for a *rapprochement* with Washington while giving the Arabs the impression that they were intensifying their opposition to US policy.

By the end of the 1970s, Paris had grown preoccupied that its leadership on the Palestinian question in Europe was eroding. This was both the result of its idleness on this issue in recent years and Yasser Arafat's successful diplomatic offensive for European recognition of the PLO, which had intensified after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. This played a central role in France's decision to try to get involved in Middle Eastern diplomacy by the end of the decade. And, it largely explains why after the failure to launch an initiative over Lebanon, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing seized the opportunity of his planned trip to the Gulf states and Jordan in March 1980 to come out in favour of Palestinian self-determination and call for the association of the PLO to the peace process.

At the time, though, the Arabs were not simply interested in greater French support for the Palestinian cause. They wanted a collective European endorsement of their position on the Middle East conflict and saw France as their main asset within the Community. With his statement, Giscard seemingly delivered on Arab expectation as, one after the other, the EPC partners came to support the new French position. But, in truth, by that time, most of them, especially Britain, already agreed with the principles contained in his declaration. In effect, at that juncture, the French used their Community partners as a strawman to reassert their Gaullist credential in the Arab world. Constrained by the imperative of transatlantic cooperation, they could not go any

further on this issue on their own for fear of antagonising the Americans, and in fact they did not want to. Their only option, at the time, was to create the impression that they were leading their EC counterparts on the Palestinian question. By 1980, therefore, they were also forced to rely on the Community to advance their interests in the Middle East, albeit for different reasons than the British. In that respect, EPC also played a central part in France's national strategy towards the region.

The simultaneous French and British commitment to EPC created a new dynamic whereby the Community could affirm a Middle East policy that diverged from Washington without attracting any significant opposition. The Europeans sought to pre-empt Americans obstructionism by setting reasonable goal for themselves. They went out of their way to communicate their intentions to their Atlantic ally and systematically emphasised the complementary nature of their efforts. This self-restraint naturally limited their scope for action, but much less than has traditionally been assumed in the literature . Most notably, they never watered down the principles for peace outlined in the Venice Declaration contrary to the common contemporary and scholarly perception[5]. If they refrained from answering further Arab demands, it was not because of US pressure, but because they were simply not ready to do so. The only restrictive impact that Washington had on their ambition was on the nature of their initiative. But even this was more about self-restraint than American obstructionism. Initially, the Community hoped to make a move at the UN to amend SCR 242 in favour of Palestinian rights. That said, they only envisaged such an initiative because of their belief that it would be acceptable to the Carter administration. And, as soon as they came to the conclusion that the Americans would oppose such an initiative they agreed to drop it. This attitude towards transatlantic relations ultimately made it much more difficult for Washington to oppose European ambitions in the Middle East and consequently allowed the Europeans to go beyond declaratory diplomacy.

This more realistic approach, while fundamentally stemming from their weakened international stature, nevertheless allowed the EC member states to regain some influence in the region. In particular, it increased their cohesion, which allowed them to defend collectively a distinctive position towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Not only were they better equipped to face American anxiety over the rise of an independent European actor, but it also attenuated their own concerns about asserting their divergence with US policy. This put them in a much more advantageous position, both collectively and individually, to react to events in the Middle East than they had

[5] See for instance: David Allen and Andrin Hauri, "The Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, and Beyond: The Limits of a Distinct EC Policy, 1974-89," in *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq*, ed. Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

been in earlier in the decade. And, in the end, it allow them to play a significant complementary role to the American hegemon in the region. Importantly, this shows the extent to which their approach to foreign policy making had been transformed in the course of the 1970s.

The advent of Jimmy Carter to the White House in 1977 also played a crucial role in preparing the ground for a European intervention in Middle Eastern diplomacy in the early 1980s. His policies towards the Cold War and the Middle East created a curious blend of European discontent and opposition as well as a more favourable context for cooperation. The signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978, for instance, catalysed the transatlantic divergences over the Arab-Israeli peace process and proved instrumental in the emergence of the Venice consensus. Simultaneously, Carter's unsuccessful attempts throughout his time in office to change the US stance on the Palestinian question towards something that resembled more closely the EC position was a crucial factor that allowed the Europeans to go beyond declaratory diplomacy. It made it easier for them to approach this issue in a spirit of transatlantic cooperation and to depict their initiative as complementary to US efforts. More generally, Carter's attempt to decentre the Cold War from US foreign policy making, increase cooperation with his allies and embrace the new realities of interdependence created a more propitious environment for the rise of Europe as an international actor. That said, his focus on post-Cold War priorities also had a destabilising effect on European leaders, who came to harbour serious doubts about his ability to lead the Alliance as the East-West conflict intensified towards the end of his presidency. Ultimately, this loss of confidence in US leadership was an important background element in prompting the Community member states to intervene in the Middle East.

Most importantly, as this dissertation has revealed, the European decision to get involved was primarily motivated by security concerns, and not, as has traditionally been assumed, the promotion of peace between Arabs and Israelis. This finding has allowed for a completely new interpretation of European diplomatic activism in the Middle East from the Venice Declaration to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. At the time, the Europeans genuinely believed that the Middle East was on the brink of chaos and that US policy was inadequate to deal with a situation that threatened their considerable interests in the region. Unlike the Americans, they were convinced that the Palestinian question was the bigger threat to the region, not the Soviet Union. Hence, they believed that Washington's shifting priorities in the region away from the peace process and towards an anti-Soviet military build-up stemmed from a fundamental misreading of the situation. As they saw it, Camp David's exclusion of the PLO had encouraged unprecedented levels of anti-Americanism and radicalisation in the Arab world. And according to them, Washington's approach

to the peace process was primarily responsible for opening the door to Soviet subversion in the Middle East. While they agreed that a Western military build-up was in order, like many US State Department officials in fact, they thought that it could not be achieved unless the Palestinians were brought into the peace process. As a result of their policy, therefore, the Americans were clearly struggling to deal with the collapse of the Western security framework in the region following the events of Iran and Afghanistan. In that respect, the Venice Declaration should be regarded as a European attempt to rescue Washington's Middle East policy, both from its failure to address the Palestinian question and the resulting uncertainty about its ability to secure Western interests in the region.

Interestingly, in the postwar era, the Soviets had always managed to increase their influence in the Middle East in periods of upheaval, and each time regional tensions had ran high, Cold War dynamics had come to dominate the Arab-Israeli dispute, but not this time. The invasion of Afghanistan had seriously damaged the Soviet reputation in the Arab world, and Camp David had proved equally detrimental for the Americans, if not more. This general discontent with the superpowers increased Europe's diplomatic stature. The Europeans offered the advantage of being a Western actor, with which most Arabs felt more comfortable. And, they had the Americans' ear, which was indispensable for any peace settlement as Washington was the only actor with any means of pressure on Israel. By the early 1980s, the Europeans had thus become a credible Western alternative to the two superpowers. And, this was a major sign of the extent to which the international order had been transformed by the end of the 1970s.

From today's perspective, after decades of apparent failures for EPC, it is easy to forget that, by the early 1980s, the rise of Europe as a diplomatic actor was a new phenomenon in international relations. By that time, Americans, Arabs and Israelis all regarded Europe as a coherent international actor. And, in spite of all the talk of inefficiency and powerlessness that came along with the European initiative, there were also considerable Arab hopes and Israeli fears that it might actually produce some results. Importantly, it was the first time that the Community was getting involved in Middle Eastern diplomacy and, at the time, it seemed that the Europeans were getting their act together. At that juncture, there certainly were doubts about Europe's ability to succeed, but there was no disillusionment yet.

Ultimately, with their diplomatic activism between 1980 and 1982, which in effect constituted their so-called initiative, the Europeans played a significant role in the international politics of the Middle East at a time of extreme tensions. They filled the diplomatic vacuum during the US presidential elections and the first few months of the Reagan presidency while the new

administration was defining its policy. They acted as a Western pole of attraction in the Arab world and helped thwart the Soviet ambition to return at the centre of Middle Eastern diplomacy. In the face of repeated Israeli provocations, they encouraged moderation in Arab politics as exemplified by the Fahd plan. And, they also played a crucial part in the establishment of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai, without which peace between Egypt and Israel could not have been completed thus potentially damaging the Western security framework even further. With all that, as this thesis has revealed, the Europeans helped bring about American dominance in the Middle East and contributed to shaping the post-Cold War order in the region.

In doing so, the fact that they had been able to adopt an independent strategy for the Middle East had been crucial. This differentiated policy between the two sides of the Atlantic allowed for a more flexible approach to the Middle East situation, and ultimately helped the West fare better in the face of the multiple regional crises and challenges of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Importantly, though, this was not the result of a self-conscious design. The Americans rejected Europe's suggestion for a transatlantic division of labour to deal with the Arab-Israeli dispute, and in the face of the Euro-Arab front they did not succeed in implementing their own strategy either. In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Washington was forced to deal with the peace process thus vindicating the European stance. The so-called Reagan peace plan was an acknowledgement that managing the Palestinian question was an indispensable component of Western security in the Middle East. Palestinian self-determination was still not in the cards though, but the Reagan administration now seemed determined to crack down on Israel's settlement policy[6]. Ultimately, it was the Americans who changed strategy, albeit more as a result of events than direct European influence.

The transatlantic discussions over the Middle East that had taken place since the Venice Declaration had been inconclusive. In many respect, this reflected the extent to which European power had been transformed by the early 1980s, and how their influence had increased both in Washington and in the Middle East. While in 1973-4, the Americans had been able to impose their strategy against virtually the whole of the international community, in 1980-2 they had failed to do so. The EC member states' ability to hold their own in the transatlantic debate was essentially due to the fact that, this time, they had approached it in a spirit of cooperation and accepted their role as junior partner within the Alliance. Ultimately, this allowed them to play an important political

[6] For a recent take on the Reagan plan see: Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 209-12.

role in the Arab world which, while not explicitly sanctioned by Washington, served the West as whole.

The analysis of European foreign policy towards the Middle East presented in this dissertation contributes to the reassessment of the 1970s both as a decade of profound transformation in the international order and of dynamism in the process of integration and cooperation in Western Europe. Most notably, it shows, for the first time, that by the early 1980s, the EC member states were in a position to play a significant diplomatic role outside of the European continent. As a result of sustained efforts to coordinate their Middle East policy in EPC throughout the 1970s, the EC member states had in fact managed to enhance their influence in the region. In that respect, the contrast between their complete exclusion from crisis management in 1973-4 and the supporting role to the Americans that they managed to play in 1980-82 is quite striking. This provides for a reassessment of Europe's role as an international actor during the Cold War era as it shows that the pursuit of European *détente* was not the only policy area where EPC managed to have some success[7].

The methodology used in this dissertation to evaluate the role of Europe in the Middle East was crucial in this reassessment. By refraining from taking EPC as a fully-fledged foreign policy and comparing it to traditional international actors like the nation state, it reveals a more positive and relevant picture of the Community's achievements. In fact, it does not make much sense to look at EPC on its own. Instead, it needs to be integrated within the context of a nascent and multi-levelled European polity where the national and bilateral dimensions play an important complementary role to the collective exercise of foreign policy making. Also, understanding the evolution of the EC member states' approach to transatlantic relations proved crucial. If the rise of European Middle East policy had started in opposition to the US, by the time of the Venice Declaration, the Community no longer sought to stand up to the Atlantic hegemon. At the time, cooperation more than competition characterised transatlantic relations over the Middle East and looking at it this way allows for a fairer assessment of Europe's performance, which does not pit the Europeans against America's superpower status. In addition, this methodology highlights the fact that foreign policy making towards the Middle East in Western Europe by the end of the 1970s was no longer simply a national affair. This finding has important implications for future

[7] For a recent overview of the Community's Eastern policy see: Angela Romano, "The EC and the Socialist World: The Ascent of a Key Player in Cold War Europe," in *Europe's Cold War Relations: Towards a Global Role*, ed. Ulrich Krotz et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academics, 2019).

research on this topic as it emphasises the need to merge the national and collective dimensions, which have so far been studied separately, into one coherent analysis.

Based on the present state of the historiography of European Middle East policy in the 1980s, it is difficult to say whether the episode of the Venice Declaration was an exception to Europe's supposed irrelevance in the Middle East from the 1970s onwards or if it marked the beginning of a more permanent presence in the international politics of the region. The conclusion of the political science literature and the very few historical accounts seem to indicate that it was the latter. But as this dissertation has demonstrated, our current understanding of European Middle East policy needs revising. Going forward, in order to understand more fully what this episode means for the history of Europe and the Middle East, further research into the 1980s is needed. In particular, it is worth looking into the nature of transatlantic relations during the Lebanese war and the making of the Reagan peace plan. If the sort of European engagement that occurred between 1980 and 1982 did not repeat itself, why was that? Is it because the Palestinian question no longer threatened Western interests as it came to do in the 1970s and early 1980s? Is it because the European were reassured about the US ability to defend Western interests? Or is it because the Americans managed to restrain their Atlantic allies? Also, it would be interesting to know why the Europeans did not issue any further declaration on the Middle East during the Cold War era. Was it the result of internal divisions or the fact that they were not ready to go further than the Venice principles for peace? And, it would also be worth looking into Europe's role in the PLO's diplomatic engagement with the US in the aftermath of the first intifada in 1987. This thesis, therefore, sets the ground for a potential reassessment of Europe's role in the Middle East and opens up new perspectives for research.

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- Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
    - FCO33: Western European Department
    - FCO82: North America Department
    - FCO93: Near East and North Africa Department
    - FCO98: European Integration Department

- Prime Ministerial Private Office Files (PREM)
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- Direction Afrique du Nord – Levant, 1973-1979
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- Fonds François Mitterrand – AG/5(4)

- Jimmy Carter Library (JCL), Atlanta, GA [None of the documents appear in the final version of this dissertation]
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- National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD
- CIA Record Search Tool (CREST)
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