7 The United States and the European Pillar in the late 1970s and the 1980s

AMERICAN AMBIVALENCE TOWARD EUROPEAN UNITY

With the development of the EC's political cooperation since the early 1970s, and with movement toward West European defence cooperation as well, US support for a European pillar in an Atlantic framework continued as a staple of US public diplomacy. As in earlier formulations linking the Atlantic and European ideas, US statements typically have included assumptions and expectations that the emerging West European pillar(s) would reinforce the overall solidarity and strength of the West. Barely more than two years after the bruising Atlantic crisis had challenged the proposition, Henry Kissinger, still Secretary of State during the Ford administration, could affirm to European audiences that the most meaningful Atlantic cooperation 'will occur only after Europe has achieved political unity' (ignoring the earlier pain to the US of European attempts to do just that), and that 'European unity and Atlantic partnership are both essential and mutually reinforcing'.1 In his address to the European Parliament in 1985, President Reagan invoked Kennedy's Atlantic partnership theme, including its twin pillar imagery, as a continuing aim of US policy.2 In two major speeches in 1987, Reagan stated that 'the Alliance must become more and more an alliance among equals' and that the US must 'welcome a European identity in defense which . . . is bound to spur Atlantic cooperation'.3 And while in Europe for the NATO summit in May 1989, President Bush affirmed that the drive toward European unity 'and the transatlantic partnership reinforce each other'.4

However, despite the constancy of official US public support for European political unity since the early 1950s, the assumptions and qualifications associated with that support have offered a clearer
indication of actual American policy. And the twin pillar model of evolving US–West European relations is at a level of abstraction that provides only limited and often misleading guidance. Public rhetoric notwithstanding, US policy has often manifested reserve, suspicion and even hostility toward the idea of a European pillar, particularly though not exclusively in matters of security and defence – traditionally the turf of NATO. This was particularly the case after the 1973/74 Atlantic crisis and in response to developments in West European political and defence cooperation during the 1970s and 1980s.

Thus during the Ford administration, State Department Counselor Helmut Sonnenfeldt affirmed that the United States would continue to work with European institutions and respond to European initiatives as they emerge, but cautioned that the American attitude would be 'determined by the contribution which can be made to the promotion of our common interests'. Thomas Enders, US Ambassador to the EC during the early part of the Reagan administration, captured the essence of American ambivalence toward EC actions in the political field. Noting that the EC had generally taken positions supportive of or complementary to those of the US, he also observed:

Nevertheless, from the US point of view, the new dynamism of political cooperation is a two-sided development. Where interests or tactics differ, it may work to dramatize differences. More subtly, political cooperation may reinforce the existing European tendency to emphasize political as against security measures, because this is the only avenue open to Europe to act together beyond its borders. And political cooperation caters to the desire of some EC members to define their positions in the world at least partly in opposition to the US.

In 1983, Richard Burt, then Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, noted the efforts by EC countries to expand their political cooperation to seek common positions on security issues also of concern to NATO. Then, in what clearly amounted to both a description and an expectation, he observed that the EC countries 'have been careful to insure, however, that questions of defense are left to NATO. The EC does not have, and does not foresee acquiring, an independent defense capability. Our partners clearly understand that the Atlantic alliance is the vital underpinning of Western security'. Official US support for the revival of the Western European Union in 1984 (see Chapter 9) was qualified by clear signals that Washington