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Susan Colbourn. "An Interpreter or Two: Defusing NATO's Siberian Pipeline Dispute, 1981–1982."

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This is an incredibly well-researched, novel, and thorough albeit very concise essay. Susan Colbourn's article has the merit of adding to a somewhat familiar episode in the history of transatlantic relations new nuances and contours that had so far remained unexplored. Ultimately, Colbourn's argument has to do with the idiosyncrasies of different 'ally identities' that animated (and troubled) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the late Cold War, and perhaps continue to do so today. Thus, Colbourn argues that two allies, Britain and Canada, saw themselves as potential intermediaries between the two sides of the intra-alliance dispute, Europe and the United States. On the one hand, this dilutes the commonly held view that the Siberian pipeline question divided the United States from its allies. At least, it dilutes the idea that there was such a thing as a monolithic allied bloc vis-à-vis an entrenched Reagan administration. Colbourn argues that "far from a simple division between the USA and the rest of the Western allies, British and Canadian efforts to bridge the Atlantic belied a far more complex landscape of competing interpretations [...]" (150).

On the other hand, the Siberian pipeline episode unveils peculiar thinking in Ottawa and London, as to what their role was in the late Cold War as part of the Alliance but with 'special' duties and peculiarities, clearly distinct from the rest of the allies. As Colbourn astutely observes, "British and Canadian thinking reflected a paradox that, at once, viewed the transatlantic rift as one between the USA and the rest of the allies, while also seeing themselves as distinct from that binary" (1).

This interpretation has two recognizable limits, however. First, these mediating efforts led to very few concrete results. This begs the question whether good and vague intension constitute full-fledged policies. Colbourn indeed recognizes that "the crisis did not dissipate because of British or Canadian attempts to mediate the dispute" (131). Second, excluding Canada and Britain from the allied monolith does not imply doing without the monolith all together. Did West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Turkey, and Greece all continue to form a cohesive bloc? I wish this had been further discussed in an effort to reject *in toto* the monolith bias.

I found the authors' ability to connect the dots that surround the Polish and Siberian pipeline crises to form a more complete picture of the early 1980s as a whole to be both extremely impressive and refreshing. The Euromissile Crisis, Martial Law in Poland, the follow-on meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), East-West trade and technological exchanges and their centrality in the undermining of the Iron Curtain's impermeability, the internal struggles in Reagan's White House all come together to complicate but also brush up the picture of transatlantic relations at the time.

For instance, Colbourn correctly points out how the 1979 Dual-Track Decision – and, may I add, the 'Neutron Bomb' debacle – had placed a "premium on allied cohesion" on all other issues, including the Siberian pipeline (132). Could NATO see the missile deployments through even though it remained divided on other issues? The Siberian pipeline dispute's broader impact on East-West relations in the 1980s rests heavily on the answer to that question.

Colbourn also highlights the way members of the Reagan administration utilized 'human rights' as a disruptive tool of foreign policymaking and in this case as a tool to cement allied cohesion against the Soviet Union and therefore against the pipeline project. Finally, the Reagan administration's attempt to stop the project as part of a broader effort to coordinate Western trade policies with the East "across the board" as emerged clearly at the tense 1982 G-7 summit in Ottawa loomed in the background (135).

This essay also invites a few additional and broader reflections. Diplomatic historians have been attracted to the Siberian pipeline crisis on account of its presumed uniqueness. Yes, NATO is all too often depicted as an alliance in disarray, but this time the crisis signified a deeper rift. Colbourn, amongst others, warns us against what Mario Del Pero calls "transatlantic crisology."¹ Does NATO truly live in a constant state of crisis, or is that tension part of its identity, and built-in to every mechanism and body by nature of this broad and diverse Alliance? We are left, however, with the sense that there was indeed some uniqueness in the Siberian pipeline case, not so much because of the intensity of the rift but precisely because it pointed to "competing interpretations, foreign policy priorities, and strategic objectives that shaped the transatlantic debates over how to prosecute the Cold War during the early 1980s", as Colbourn puts it (150). The Siberian pipeline crisis shows more clearly than any other rift the true underpinning of transatlantic tension in the 1980s. It was not about specific missiles, targeting options, deterrence, economic interests, natural gas and oil prices, remote islands, or space laser weapons, it was all about détente. As Colbourn correctly argues, "While the Reagan White House envisioned a shift away from the détente of the past decade, their counterparts in [Western Europe] safeguarded the policy" (139).

I would like to submit a final thought on the power struggles internal to the Reagan administration, the role of the Pentagon, and the birth of what we could call 'Shultzology.' It is evident by now that something profound and transformational happened the moment George Shultz arrived at Foggy Bottom. Colbourn and other young scholars seem to be converging on the historiographical idea that Schultz's tenure as Secretary of State was one of the most decisive factors in shifting decisional power within the Reagan administration away from the Pentagon back into the State Department. "Defusing the crisis," Colbourn maintains, "depended on the new Secretary of State" (134). And again, "The crisis did not dissipate because of British or Canadian attempts to mediate the dispute, but because the balance within the Reagan administration began to shift after George Shultz's appointment as secretary of state" (133). As historian James Wilson has pointed out, this shift had long-lasting and deep consequences and was a decisive factor in bringing the Cold War to a peaceful ending.² I have recently made a similar argument, pointing to the centrality of Shultz in undermining Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle's monopoly in dictating the pace of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations.³ In the early 2000s, one scholar coined the term "Kissingerology" to describe the historiographical attention that former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger attracted. Much like Kissinger, Shultz seems now on his way to achieving a similar badge of honor from a new generation of historians.⁴

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¹ Mario Del Pero and Federico Romero (eds.), *Le Crisi Transatlantiche: Continuità e Trasformazioni* (Rome: Ed. Storia e Letteratura, 2007).

² James G. Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

³ Andrea Chiampan, "The Reagan Administration and the INF Controversy, 1981–83," *Diplomatic History*, published online on 27 July 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhaa052>.

⁴ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "Dr. Kissinger" or "Mr. Henry"? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting," *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (2003): 637–676.

NATO's nuclear weapons and strategy. His most recent publications include, "The Reagan Administration and the INF Controversy, 1981-83," published in *Diplomatic History* (2020).