



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386



Conference

NATO at 70: Trust and Mistrust among Allies

April 8 and 9, 2019

Heidelberg Center for American Studies

Since the foundation of the transatlantic alliance after World War II, historians and political scientists discussed whether and how the “West” is able to cooperate on security issues despite existing diversity and distinct national interests. Already Karl Deutsch’s concept of a pluralistic security community highlighted the possibility of an “identification in terms of self-images and interests” between sovereign states. Following Deutsch, scholars have updated the security community concept and assumed that trust provides an important resource for cooperation. However, mainstream approaches on transatlantic relations and NATO have seldom substantiated the claim on the importance of trust empirically and theoretical concepts remained vague.

We think that a focus on the aspect of trust might therefore yield new insights both for the understanding of past and current crises within the alliance. For example, Donald Trump’s America First policy weakens the level of confidence European allies put in NATO’s traditional lead nation, in particular regarding the alliance’s core security provision, Article 5, which Trump repeatedly questioned. The crisis of transatlantic relations during the Kennedy era was also connected to the question of trust: whether West Germany could still rely on US security provisions and at the same time, whether Europe, and Germany in particular, were trustworthy allies of the US. Furthermore, during the 1980s, debates surrounding the dual-track decision or President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative were heavily contested within the security community. Here, trust might have served as a resource that contributed to the resilience of the alliance. More recently, the dispute over the war in Iraq damaged mutual trust and harmed the legitimacy of the United States.

Our conference thus intends to systematically analyze the role of trust for transatlantic conflict management during internal crises. Against the backdrop of 70 years of transatlantic cooperation within the framework of NATO, the conference aims to tackle the following questions:

- Which role does trust play during phases of internal contestation within the transatlantic alliance?
- In terms of theory and concepts, how can the role of trust be operationalized and examined in a comparative fashion?
- What are the processes of trust-building, loss of trust and trust-repair within the transatlantic alliance and who are the actors and institutions that entertain these processes?
- What is the relationship between trust, common interests, collective identities and other types of relationships, such as friendship in international relations, fear and uncertainty?

While the trusting relationship between transatlantic leaders might be an important source of transatlantic resilience, trust is also connected to shared norms and values, which originate from social relationships beyond personal interactions. Trust can rely on the diffuse expectations of reciprocity as well as on specific expectations that cooperation partners will honor existing norms.

By looking into both historical case studies and current issues of transatlantic relations, this conference aims to bring scholars from history and political science together. The conference is neither limited to a specific disciplinary understanding of transatlantic relations nor confined to particular methods and theoretical approaches.

Florian Böller & Wilfried Mausbach (Heidelberg Center for American Studies)