



Emotions and positive anti-communism during the early Cold War: the case of the Bilderberg Group

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Abstract

In the early 1950s, the Bilderberg Group became one of the first high-level informal transatlantic elite networks of the cold war. This article examines how the discussions at the Bilderberg Meetings were affected by the emotional nature of anti-communism on both sides of the Atlantic. On the one hand, ‘negative’ emotions resulting from the fear of communist infiltration and aggression could lead to the strengthening of transatlantic bonds. On the other hand, differences in political responses to communism could also lead to emotionally charged disagreements, as the first Bilderberg Conference in 1954 showed. As a result, the transatlantic discourse about anti-communism shifted towards the search for a strategy of positive anti-communism. The most important expression of this shift was the project of European integration.

Keywords Anti-Americanism · Anti-communism · Bilderberg Group · Cold War · Emotions · European integration · Korean War · Transatlantic elites

In the early 1950s, the rise of anti-American sentiments in Western Europe provided the initial ignition for the creation of the Bilderberg Group.¹ Joseph H. Retinger, the Polish-born, London-based co-founder of the European Movement felt that anti-Americanism needed to be better understood, because it threatened the embryonic transatlantic partnership and provided useful propaganda opportunities for the Soviet Union and its communist allies in Western Europe.² In 1952, he therefore decided to organize a group of European leaders to study the rise of anti-Americanism and,

¹ I want to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Many thanks also to the editors of this special issue and to Johannes Großmann for ideas and encouragement.

² For the first archive-based history of the Bilderberg Group see: Thomas W. Gijswijt, *Informal Alliance. The Bilderberg Group and Transatlantic Relations during the Cold War, 1952–1968* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

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once the report was finished, to request a U.S. response. The participants included Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (who would become the first Chairman of the Bilderberg Group), social-democratic politicians Max Brauer, Hugh Gaitskell and Guy Mollet, conservative politicians Ole Bjørn Kraft, Antoine Pinay and Paul van Zeeland, Unilever chairman Paul Rijkens, and former director of the British Special Operations Executive Major-General Colin Gubbins.

Retinger proposed to write a joint report based on individual papers concerning the situation in their respective countries. He emphasized the importance of their endeavour in a brief memorandum. “The fate of western civilization,” Retinger wrote, “depends on the maintenance of accord between Europe and America [...] an estrangement would be fatal, to Europe first and then to America itself.”³ The words “fate” and “fatal” framed his memorandum in emotionally charged language and the phrase “western civilization” indicated that the threat was aimed at a group of nations and people that shared certain cultural and historical ties. Retinger’s use of the word “estrangement” implied that these ties were personal and several of the individual reports reinforced this notion by talking of transatlantic relations in terms of family ties. Thus, a combination of negative (fear; anxiety) and positive (a feeling of community) emotions appeared in one of the earliest documents produced by what soon would be known as the Bilderberg Group.⁴

This article examines the role emotions played in transatlantic debates about anti-communism and the Cold War. Given the fact that verbatim transcripts are available for the first three Bilderberg conferences in 1954 and 1955, the Bilderberg Group provides an excellent case study to study transatlantic discourses and the interplay of emotions and anti-communism—both at the level of the language used by Bilderberg participants and at the level of the cognitive recognition of the emotional nature of anti-communism. The Bilderberg discussions show that collective emotions could serve to strengthen a sense of community and social connection.⁵ At the same time, differences in the emotional responses to the perceived communist threat could undermine the very unity that the Bilderberg organizers were seeking to enhance. As a result of the Bilderberg debates on anti-communism and the Cold War, calls for a more positive strategy of anti-communism came to dominate the transatlantic discourse.⁶

The importance of emotions in International Relations has long been recognized. Frank Costigliola, one of the pioneers in the field, has emphasized the importance of “images—often symbolic and inflected with emotion—through which individuals,

³ European-American Relations, Box 1336, Paul van Zeeland Papers, Archives Université Catholique de Louvain (AUCL).

⁴ For a good overview of the role of fear during the Cold War see: Bernd Greiner, Christian Th. Müller and Dierk Walter (eds.), *Angst im Kalten Krieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Editionen, 2009).

⁵ On the difference between collective/political and individual emotions, see: Barbara Keys and Claire York, ‘Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat.’ *Political Psychology* 40, no. 6, (2019).

⁶ On the notion of positive anti-communism see: Giles Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network: Cold War Internationale* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



groups, or nations see themselves [...].”⁷ In a similar vein, Richard Lebow has drawn attention to the role of emotions “in bringing about the fundamental disposition to cooperate. Affection builds empathy, which allows us to perceive ourselves through the eyes of others. Empathy in turn encourages us to see others as our ontological equals and to recognize the self-actualizing benefits of close relationships with others.”⁸ Jonathan Mercer has introduced the concept of “emotional beliefs” to show that worldviews rely both on cognition and on emotion.⁹ Simon Koschut, moreover, has highlighted the importance of studying language and elite discourses in order to better understand collective emotions in international relations.¹⁰

Since, much of the existing research has focused mainly on the ‘negative’ emotions associated with anti-communism and has done so mostly in the context of the nation-state, studying networks like the Bilderberg Group can lead to a better understanding of transnational and informal discourses involving collective and individual emotions.¹¹ In addition, the Bilderberg debates inevitably had a certain performative quality, well-suited to the rhetorical use of emotions. The fact that the debates were secret also meant that participants were freer to speak their minds than in official diplomatic gatherings.

After its first transatlantic meeting in May 1954 at the Bilderberg Hotel in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands, the Bilderberg Group quickly established itself as a leading informal elite network, bringing together high-level participants from Western Europe and North America for yearly conferences. On the USA side, influential members of the foreign policy elite such as Joseph E. Johnson, David Rockefeller, Dean Rusk, and Walter Bedell Smith agreed to help organize and fund the Bilderberg meetings. Aimed at solidifying transatlantic relations by increasing mutual understanding at the elite level, debates about (anti-)communism and

⁷ Frank Costigliola, ‘Culture, Emotion, and the Creation of the Atlantic Identity, 1948–1952’ In *No End to Alliance. The United States and Western Europe: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Geir Lundestad (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1998): 21. For a good overview of the study of emotions in international relations see: Maéva Clément and Eric Sanger (eds.), *Researching Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). On the use and ‘performance’ of emotions in diplomacy see: Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy. Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2015).

⁸ Richard Ned Lebow, ‘Reason, Emotion and Cooperation.’ *International Politics* 42 (2005): 304.

⁹ Jonathan Mercer, ‘Emotional Beliefs.’ *International Organization* 64, no. 1, (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309990221>

¹⁰ Simon Koschut, ‘The power of (emotion) words: on the importance of emotions for social constructivist discourse analysis in IR.’ *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0086-0>

¹¹ See for example the volume by Stefan Kreuzberger and Dierk Hoffmann, eds., „Geistige Gefahr“ und „Immunisierung der Gesellschaft.“ *Antikommunismus und politische Kultur in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014) and Sascha Foerster, *Angst vor dem Koreakrieg. Konrad Adenauer und die westdeutsche Bevölkerung 1950* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2013). For a good overview of research on transnational anti-communism see Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). For two recent studies of transnational anti-communism see: Johannes Großmann, *Die Internationale der Konservativen. Transnationale Elitenzirkel und private Außenpolitik in Westeuropa seit 1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014) and Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network*.



the Cold War were a frequent part of the agenda. These debates brought together a diverse group of participants (from business leaders to trade unionists, from Christian-Democrats to Social-Democrats, from journalists to diplomats and government officials) and they exposed a wide range of different attitudes towards communism and the internal and external threat it posed.

The basic mindset of the Bilderberg organizers was internationalist and Atlanticist and was informed by the experiences of the 1930s and World War II. International cooperation, so they believed, was necessary to create an international environment in which democracies could prosper. The shared memory of going to “hell and back” was a key building block for a new sense of community—a Western or transatlantic identity.¹² In the immediate postwar period, this transnational identity was reinforced by the emerging Cold War and the sense that cooperation between the members of the newly founded North Atlantic Treaty Organization was essential. Western Europe’s security, in other words, could only be safeguarded with the active involvement of the United States (and, to a lesser degree, Canada). The security of the United States, by the same token, could only be guaranteed if certain strategic parts of the world—including Western Europe—could withstand the threat of an expansionist communism, which was perceived to be directed from Moscow, but which was also present in many western societies. Most Bilderberg participants would have agreed with Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands who, as chair of the first Bilderberg conference, argued that “the national or even the continental viewpoint is inadequate and should give way to a global one.”¹³

Between anti-Americanism and anti-communism

Anti-communism provided much of the ideological glue that held together the Atlantic Alliance during the early Cold War. However, as the early Bilderberg Conferences showed, anti-communism in Western Europe and North America was so diverse that it could serve both as a unifying force and as a source of conflict.¹⁴ Anti-Americanism in Western Europe in the early 1950s was based to a considerable extent on the fear that the USA response to the Korean War was risking a worldwide escalation. The execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg in 1953, moreover, was strongly opposed by many in Western Europe, as shown by widespread protests and intense public debate.¹⁵ Conversely, many Americans saw the existence of

¹² Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back. Europe 1914–1949* (Penguin Books, 2016).

¹³ Gijsswijt, *Informal Alliance*, 61.

¹⁴ For a nuanced discussion of different forms of anti-communism see: Johannes Großmann, ‘Die „Grundtorheit unserer Epoche“? Neue Forschungen und Zugänge zur Geschichte des Antikommunismus,’ *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 56 (2016).

¹⁵ See: Lori Clune, *Executing the Rosenbergs. Death and Diplomacy in a Cold War World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). On anti-Americanism in Europe more generally see: Jessica Gienow-Hecht, ‘Always Blame the Americans: Anti-Americanism in Europe in the Twentieth Century,’ *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4, (2006). 10.1086/ahr.111.4.1067 and Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism. The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



Communist parties in most Western European countries critically. Differing attitudes towards communism inevitably led to different outlooks on Cold War strategy on both sides of the Atlantic. The ever-present threat of war, coupled with the arrival of the nuclear age, ensured that these debates were highly emotionally charged.

Whereas fear was the dominant emotion in these security-related debates, a number of more positive emotions also played an important role in transatlantic anti-communism. The belief that democratic, market-based political systems were superior to autocratic communist systems, for example, could imbue the transatlantic community with a sense of hope and the feeling of occupying the moral high-ground. George Kennan's early writings on containment relied strongly on such positive emotions in making the argument that time would work in favour of the United States and its allies in the Cold War struggle.¹⁶ And the very idea that something like 'the West' or 'the Atlantic community' existed, also drew on such positive emotions. As the preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty put it, the signatories were "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." Even if strategic necessities meant that some NATO members were decidedly less free than others, the use of the words "common heritage and civilization" was a clear attempt to create emotional bonds among the member states, to be further reinforced by Article 2, which called for "the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions."¹⁷

In the run-up to the first Bilderberg Conference in May 1954, Joseph Retinger and his European partners shared the results of their study group on anti-Americanism with their friends in the United States. One of the main conclusions was that the outbreak of the Korean War had led to a divergence in attitudes concerning communism and the Cold War on both sides of the Atlantic. On the European side, the overwhelming fear of another global conflict dominated public opinion, whereas in the United States a more aggressive anti-communism gained ground. In both cases, strong emotions threatened to undermine the rational arguments in favour of Atlantic partnership. Major-General Gubbins emphasized the importance of what he called "psychological reasons" and wrote:

In the broadest field of human hope, and fears, and aspirations, there exists the deepest cleavage between the state of mind of the American nation as such and that of the peoples of Europe. Fundamentally, the European will not allow himself to believe that a third world war will actually happen – to do so in his present state would be to numb his faculties and endeavours.¹⁸

Even though, by the second half of 1953, the end of the Korean War had reduced "the fear that America aims at a preventive war," as the Bilderberg organizers put

¹⁶ See Kennan's Long Telegram and his Mr. X article, 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947. On the importance of emotions in the early Cold War see: Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances. How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ The North Atlantic Treaty, April 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

¹⁸ Draft American-European Relations, Box 1336, Van Zeeland Papers, AUCL.



it, important transatlantic differences remained.¹⁹ The American report, written as a response to Retinger's initiative, acknowledged as much:

There is [...] widely believed to be an important difference between European and American attitudes toward communism and the nature of the communist threat, and this difference, actual or apparent, is certainly an important source of misunderstanding. To American eyes, the Europeans' intense, understandable fear of war, their desire to do everything in their power to avoid it, often leads them to deceive themselves about the nature of the danger that confronts us all.

The question was, of course, what to do about these different attitudes—precisely the fact that they were not fully rational made them difficult to deal with. Moreover, if emotions mingled with certain stereotypes ('nervous Europeans') or historical experiences ('appeasement'), as the American report seemed to imply, they became all the more powerful.

At the first Bilderberg Conference, a number of participants addressed the importance of emotions and the psychology of the Cold War directly. The former British ambassador to the United States, Sir Oliver Franks, explained in detail how the Korean War (and particularly the Chinese intervention in the war) had shocked public opinion and the body politic in the United States. As Franks put it, "During the past three or four years, massive emotional states had arisen in the United States which had no counterpart in Great Britain or Europe. Real differences of policy or emphasis could in the long run be solved by hard negotiation, but those emotional states rendered a solution impossible." Franks added that, "Although in Britain such feelings were understood, an opposing emotional attitude arose in response to the American attitude; many wondered whether America acted from passion rather than from policy."²⁰ Franks' analysis was interesting, because it showed how a divergence in anti-communist attitudes on both sides of the Atlantic could counteract the effect that a shared fear of Soviet expansionism had had in the run up to the North Atlantic Treaty. The excesses of McCarthyism in the United States were a good example, because they undermined the willingness in Western Europe to accept American leadership. In his report for the first Bilderberg conference, former Italian prime minister Alcide de Gasperi compared the methods of Senators Joseph McCarthy and Patrick McCarran to fascism and warned that the United States seemed to be on a very similar path to Italy in the 1930s.²¹

¹⁹ Report on American-European Relations, Box 1, Bilderberg Archives, National Archives (NA), The Hague, The Netherlands. The report was probably written by George Ball, an international lawyer involved in the Committee for a National Trade Policy. The Committee had been approached by the Eisenhower White House to coordinate the response to Retinger's group. See Gijswijt, *Informal Alliance*, 47–48.

²⁰ Records of the first Bilderberg Conference, May 29–31, 1954, Box 3, Bilderberg Archives, NA.

²¹ Alcide de Gasperi, *The European Attitude towards Communism*, Max Brauer Papers, Box 25/2–1, Staatsarchiv Hamburg. Illness prevented De Gasperi from attending the first Bilderberg conference and he died in the summer of 1954.



The US diplomat Paul H. Nitze, one of the key authors of NSC 68 in 1950, acknowledged the negative impact of McCarthyism in his report on attitudes towards Communism in the United States:

Communism is regarded as something immoral, which threatens religion, is inhuman toward the individual, is cynically untrustworthy, and challenges all people and nations not under its control. It is regarded as an unholy conspiracy whose insidious effects are taken sufficiently seriously to raise questions by Americans about other Americans. There has been a near-hysteria over domestic communism in the United States which seems at long last to be abating although deep scars still remain.

Still, in language that would draw criticism from several European participants, Nitze wrote that most Americans would “prefer war and even death to subservience to what they consider evil and unclean.”²² Foreshadowing later transatlantic debates about evil empires and the axis of evil, Nitze’s use of the words “evil” and “unclean” was deemed unacceptable by several European participants, including trade unionists such as Tom Williamson, General Secretary of the British National Union of General and Municipal Workers, and Ludwig Rosenberg of the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*.²³ Clement Davies, leader of the British Liberal Party, argued that “communism could not be defeated by hatred and persecution” and said that he was “deeply concerned about the way things were now being handled.”²⁴ Interestingly, the debate about the overly emotional nature of anti-communism in the United States thus caused its own emotional response as reflected in words like “deeply concerned.” In an attempt to move beyond what he called “expressions of irritation,” Prince Bernhard highlighted the common ground on both sides of the Atlantic, saying that,

There seemed to be agreement on one crucial point. A basic principle of American political thought was that the educated citizen would defend the best interest of his country; he would recognise for instance that the fight against poverty was the fight for freedom. [...] Mr. De Gasperi had drawn the conclusion that, in order to combat Communism, a basic policy of democratic education should be undertaken, including the improvement of social conditions.²⁵

This call for a more positive form of anti-communism would gain further traction during the two Bilderberg conferences in 1955.

Despite the disagreements over McCarthyism and the methods of anti-communism, a number of European and American Bilderberg participants expressed their fears of communism and Soviet-led expansionism in very similar ways. Images of being under siege or even threatened with extinction were used by different

²² Paul H. Nitze, *The American Attitude Towards Communism*, Box 296, Hugh Gaitskell Papers, University College London (UCL).

²³ See Gijsswijt, *Informal Alliance*, 66–67.

²⁴ Records of the first Bilderberg Conference, May 29–31, 1954, Bilderberg Archives, Box 3, NA.

²⁵ *Ibid.*



participants. The Belgian politician Roger Motz talked of the “Western European bulwark against Communism,” which would “collapse” if Italy was allowed to fall to Communism. Van Zeeland, employing the first-person plural, said that “we are all in [the] same boat and will sink or swim together.” Others portrayed Communism as a monolithic, dangerous, and global enemy. George McGhee spoke of “the Soviet world conspiracy,” Paul Leverkuehn of “world Communism,” Charles D. Jackson of “the imperialistic Soviet regime,” and Max Brauer of “immunity” against the communist disease.²⁶ Prince Bernhard, in his role as chairman of the first Bilderberg conference, simply used the term “the enemy” in his opening address and his co-chairman Paul van Zeeland warned that Communism was “powerful, and clever [...] at finding the weak spots in the ‘Western partnership’ and using them with the scrupulousness and strength available to totalitarian governments.”²⁷ Consciously or not, this type of language had a certain performative quality and served to create an emotional community among the Bilderberg participants by painting a threatening picture of a powerful ‘other.’

In a strategy paper written after the first conference, the Bilderberg organizers lamented that “the Communist side have the enormous advantage of being unified in a general outlook, directed by one policy and possessing a common strategy. Their interests are universal, which enables them to consider local and national issues in their proper perspective.”²⁸ The paper went on to answer the question how to deal with the communist challenge by stressing the need for positive action:

Communism is born out of a desire to apply to mankind’s problems solutions radically different from those we suggest. Without armed intervention the superior solutions will prevail in the last resort, and those who put them forward will win. Success will to a large extent depend on the recognition of the two-fold character of our task; on the one hand, a constructive plan of action in the name of what the West represents, and on the other, a tactical plan to fight Communism and the Communists. In other words, while we must make sure that we shall win in case of war, we must make sure that we also win in case of “peace”.

At the March 1955 Bilderberg conference in Barbizon, near Paris, the participants set out to discuss different ways of winning the peace. The criminalization of communists in Western Europe, as proposed by some, drew little support and was hardly practical given the fact that membership of Communist parties ran into the millions. Instead, most participants highlighted the importance of positive strategies that harboured the power of emotions. This was necessary because, as Dean Rusk told Prince Bernhard after the conference, “the most disturbing point emphasized by a number of speakers was the lack of a moral rallying point for the youth of Western Europe, especially in Germany, France and Italy.”²⁹ The Italian diplomat

²⁶ Ibid. McGhee was an American diplomat, Leverkuehn a member of parliament for the CDU, and Jackson a journalist and White House advisor on psychological warfare.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Draft Note on Agenda Bilderberg II, Box 936, Van Zeeland Papers, AUCL.

²⁹ Rusk to Bernhard March 23 1955, Box 187, Bilderberg Archives, NA.



Pietro Quaroni had argued in 1954 that the American conception of freedom as an ideology could provide Europe with an important lesson.³⁰ Similarly, the Swedish economist and politician Bertil Ohlin now said that those who remained undecided in the struggle between the West and Communism, could best be convinced with “the argument of freedom.” In Denmark, Kraft added, there was no immediate risk of a communist take-over, but Communist propaganda posed a threat. “Now first of all,” he said, “they try to persuade the Danish youths that they are the party which stands for peace, comradeship, peaceful coexistence, understanding the youth’s interest in sport and entertainment and cultural questions. They have some success here.” In order to counter this propaganda, Kraft continued, it was “[...] absolutely necessary to show the European youths what the European cultural heritage can give them, and first of all to make them fully aware of the real difference between democratic and communist ideology and way of living.”³¹

Prince Bernhard argued that as soon as the Soviet Union recognized that a “united Europe” was in the making, Moscow “started sending cultural teams, ballet dancers, musicians and sports teams to Europe” thus “disrupting this idea of a Western European community.” On the American side, the international lawyer George Ball proposed a more active cultural Cold War: “There was a danger [...] that very often the emphasis was on these symbols—the automobiles, the television sets and so on—and that put a stamp on America in the eyes of the world which played rather into the hands of communist propagandists more than was useful to us. I would entirely agree that to the extent that we take these material achievements to the East we should also take our cultural achievements to the East.”³² Discussing the fact that many intellectuals in Europe were attracted to communism, the Norwegian Minister of Justice, Jens Christian Hauge, argued: “I think we should to a great extent give them objective information as to the degree to which the communist system really denies the very basis of their existence, namely free science, free art, free literature.”³³

In some European countries, particularly France and Italy, the possibility of a communist take-over was regarded as a real risk, not just because of the strength of the communist parties, but also because many trade unions were under communist control. Guy Mollet issued a strong warning to the other participants about the situation in France and Kraft indicated that the Cominform might be preparing for a propaganda offensive and strikes throughout Europe. Joseph E. Johnson, the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was particularly impressed with the effectiveness of communist propaganda in France:

³⁰ In Quaroni’s words: “Il faut réussi à transformer l’idée de liberté en idéologie. Les Etats-Unis semblent y avoir réussi. Les pays d’Europe pas assez et en tous cas pas tous dans la même mesure.” Records of the Bilderberg Meeting at Barbizon, Box 4, Bilderberg Archives, NA.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. For recent studies of Soviet cultural diplomacy see: Sonja Großmann, *Falsche Freunde im Kalten Krieg? Sowjetische Freundschaftsgesellschaften in Westeuropa als Instrumente und Akteure der Cultural Diplomacy* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg Verlag, 2019) and Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³³ Records of the Bilderberg Meeting at Barbizon, Box 4, Bilderberg Archives, NA.



I think Mr. Mollet and Mr. Maurois have underlined the fact that [the communists] have placed the words, the propaganda, on their own ground. They have, for example, made the issue communism, which they call popular democracy, against capitalism; whereas the issue is democracy versus ruthless totalitarianism. It seems to me one of our real problems is to recapture the control of the battlefield in the war of words. [...] I know I shall go back always recalling Mr. Mollet's expression, 'the communists are neither to the right, nor to the left, but to the East'³⁴

Although other participants disagreed with Mollet's suggestion that the West was in danger of losing the ideological Cold War, the Bilderberg organizers took the warnings from France and Italy seriously enough to send transcripts of the Barbizon meeting to the Dutch secret service with the request to pass on the main conclusions to NATO headquarters.³⁵ In addition, several participants argued that some type of democratic Cominform might be necessary to counter Soviet-directed communist propaganda more effectively. And, although the discourse at the Barbizon meeting had a less overtly emotional quality compared to the first Bilderberg conference, the focus on positive anti-communism did rely on emotions such as hope and a feeling of superiority on the part of Western democracies.³⁶

Positive anti-communism and the integration of Europe

Already at the first conference in 1954, the French socialist André Voisin had argued that "the best obstacle to Communism is the idea of the European union." The Belgian politician Étienne de la Vallée Pousin likewise drew attention to the psychological aspects of anti-communism and argued that a positive ideal was needed:

[I]n the eyes of a great number of people Communism represents a new gospel, that is, not just the solution to economic problems but to all problems. [...] It follows that one can only fight one religious idea with another and on this point Europe does not have a common front. The idea of 'Europe' is exactly the idea around which Europe could rally as long as she put it over as a great hope.

The Bilderberg participants at the first conference could still have hoped for the ratification of the European Defence Community (EDC), but the French

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Gijswijt, *Informal Alliance*, 124 and Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism*, 25. For official programs in this period see: Linda Risso, 'A Difficult Compromise: British and American Plans for a Common Anti-Communist Propaganda Response in Western Europe, 1948–58.' *Intelligence & National Security* 26, no. 2 (2019): 330–354.

³⁶ On this point, see: Koschut, 'The Power of (emotion) words,' p. 503: "The emotional feeling of superiority is often fixed to certain group-specific physical attributes such as wealth, skills, military force, cultural achievements, demographics, or technological innovation, which underpin the higher status of the established group."



parliament's rejection of the EDC in August 1954 had thrown the European project into disarray.³⁷ Still, despite this major setback, many participants at the Barbizon conference continued to regard the integration of Europe as one of the most effective measures against the Communist threat. Guy Mollet held a long speech on this topic and argued that the best way to challenge the attraction of communism was to raise the standard of living; the best way to accomplish this was to integrate the Western European economies. By integrating Europe, he argued, the impression that communism was the only political ideology that stood for progress and reform could be countered. This was a striking argument to make just months after the European project had seemed to reach its endpoint in the collapse of the European Defence Community. Yet Mollet was by no means alone in making the case for an integrated Europe as the best defence against communism. George Ball made a similar point in his report on the causes of neutralism in Europe and agreed with Mollet that what was needed was "a new element of faith, a new desire to fight for the ideas of the West, and that must necessarily come from the correction of social, economic and political frustrations which tend to create a climate for neutralism."³⁸ The Belgian politician Fernand Dehousse resorted to the more emotional language of anti-communism by saying that the "problem of the unification of Europe was absolutely essential, not just for Europe itself but for the protection of Western civilization as a whole."³⁹

As a result of the Barbizon discussions, the Bilderberg organizers decided to put the topic of European integration high on the agenda for the next Bilderberg conference, which took place in the Bavarian mountain resort Garmisch-Partenkirchen in September of 1955. Drawing on positive emotions connected to a united Europe became all the more important in 1955, because the temperature of the Cold War had shifted. The Soviet leadership had decided to engage in a 'peace offensive' resulting in the Geneva Summit of July 1955. The leaders of the 'big four' met to discuss disarmament and peaceful coexistence and, although no concrete agreements were reached, the 'spirit of Geneva' convinced many Europeans and Americans that the Cold War could be overcome by negotiation. To many Bilderberg participants the Soviet initiative seemed disingenuous and they worried that the struggle against communism would become more difficult if the fear of Soviet expansionism receded. As Pietro Quaroni put it in his report for the Garmisch conference:

All of us here believe that the Russian and Communist danger still exists and that while negotiating, and while taking every opportunity for agreement one

³⁷ On the EDC see: Michael Creswell, *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States Created Cold War Europe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006). For a discussion of the role of emotions in the West-German EDC strategy see: Alexander Reinfeldt, 'Kontrolliertes Vertrauen. Die westdeutsche Wiederbewaffnung und das Projekt einer Europäischen Verteidigungsgemeinschaft,' in *Diplomatie mit Gefühl. Vertrauen, Misstrauen und die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. Reinhold Kreis (Berlin: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2015) 33–47.

³⁸ Records of the Bilderberg Meeting at Barbizon, Box 4, Bilderberg Archives, NA.

³⁹ Ce problème de l'unification de l'Europe qui est vraiment essentiel, non seulement pour l'Europe elle-même mais pour la sauvegarde de la civilisation occidentale toute entière." Ibid.



must remain watchful and above all one must not give up, or even weaken, what has so far been achieved. But in our countries not everybody is in agreement with us; in different degrees there are to be found in our countries, as well as convinced partisans of the Atlantic Alliance, people who are indifferent, non-committed people, and those who hesitate. [...] During the two Conferences which have preceded this meeting we have above all reviewed the dangers of incomprehension which flow from the threat of war. This time we shall have to examine the dangers of incomprehension which might result from the ‘threat of peace,’ and which will certainly be no less serious.⁴⁰

At Garmisch, the discussion on European integration focused less on its ideological impact and more on the concrete plans for a European common market. Several participants who made the case for a *relance Européenne* would later be closely involved in the negotiations leading to the 1957 Rome Treaties, including Walter Hallstein, Robert Marjolin and Guy Mollet.⁴¹ In addition to the discussion of Europe’s economic integration, a number of Bilderberg participants became active in the European Cultural Foundation, which had been founded in 1954 by Denis de Rougemont (participant in the first Bilderberg conference), Prince Bernhard, Robert Schumann and others. The foundation organized a number of high-profile congresses in Amsterdam (1957), Milan (1958), Vienna (1959) and Copenhagen (1960) to raise funds for European cultural projects.

On the American side, the focus on European integration as part of a strategy of positive anti-communism was attractive, because it avoided the pitfalls of McCarthyism and the type of aggressive anti-Communism that had led to such heated debates during the first Bilderberg conference. Indeed, the European project allowed American participants to highlight the advantages of the United States’ example in uniting a continent and creating a market large enough to drive higher productivity and innovation. At the same time, American diplomats appreciated the visionary aspects of European integration, providing young Europeans with a project to rally around.

Conclusion

The negative emotions of anti-communism could serve as important collective emotions underlying the Atlantic Alliance. Fear and anxiety about a common enemy were part of the reason for the creation of the Marshall Plan and NATO, and they also appeared as performative emotions in the informal transatlantic discussions of the Bilderberg Group. As the Bilderberg Conferences showed, however, these emotions, in their different expressions on both sides of the Atlantic, could also undermine that very same Alliance. Perceived anti-communist excesses in the United States—based on “passion” and “emotional states” as Oliver Franks put it—could lead to an increase in anti-Americanism in parts of Western Europe, as many Europeans

⁴⁰ Pietro Quaroni, A Survey of International Events, Box 298, Gaitskell Papers, UCL.

⁴¹ On this point see: Gijswijt, *Informal Alliance*, 119 ff.



asked themselves whether McCarthyism and American attitudes towards the Korean War might pose a greater threat to stability and peace than Soviet communism. At the first Bilderberg Conference in 1954, the realization that a purely 'negative' anti-communism risked weakening transatlantic relations rather than strengthening them, led to an increased emphasis on a strategy of positive anti-communism.

Such a strategy relied partly on positive emotional beliefs such as the idea that Western democracies shared certain cultural and political values based on principles of justice, freedom and human rights. Such a sense of moral superiority could be a powerful collective emotion, the Bilderberg participants seemed to realize. The increased interest in economic and cultural European integration after the failure of the European Defence Community was another direct result of the search for a strategy of positive anti-communism. This is not to say that other factors such as economic considerations and the German question were any less important. Still, the case of the Bilderberg Group shows that positive anti-communism was a real driving force behind the relaunch of Europe in the mid-1950s.

The Bilderberg Group would continue to organize its yearly meetings throughout the Cold War and the West's approach to communism and the Soviet Union frequently returned to the Bilderberg agenda. And even if some of the more apocalyptic language of the early Cold War disappeared, these Bilderberg debates remained deeply emotional affairs. Anti-communism, after all, continued to be a source of unity as well as of conflict.

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