

Preface

In the loneliness and freedom brought about by the Corona Crisis, a light dawned on the author of this volume. Inspired by the public commemoration in 2021 of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the German Empire in 1871, I was astonished to discover that there is no overall account of the 150 years of transatlantic relations between the German nation-state and the U.S. federal state—an entity that first came into its own with the end of the Civil War in 1865. This astonishment was fueled by the simple fact that no country in the world has had a greater impact on German politics, security, economic development, culture, and society in the 20th and 21st centuries than the global power on the other side of the Atlantic: the United States of America.¹

Conversely, no country in the world has contributed as much to the rise of the U.S. as a superpower and to the globalization of its interests as Germany, Europe's central power. While the U.S. had kept its distance from Europe (and Asia) in military and alliance terms in the

1 There are, however, two excellent, German-language comprehensive accounts of U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century. Stefan Bierling, *Geschichte der amerikanischen Außenpolitik. Von 1917 bis zu Gegenwart*. Munich 1st ed. 2003, 3rd ed. 2007; Klaus Schwabe, *Weltmacht und Weltordnung. Amerikanische Außenpolitik von 1898 bis zur Gegenwart. Eine Jahrhundertgeschichte*, Paderborn, 1. Aufl., 2006, XIV, 560 p., 3rd ed. 2011.

While there is an impressive body of research on American-German relations published in English and German for the Cold War years, written by 132 scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, there is no comparable corpus on American-German relations since reunification. The two volumes above are without precedent. Never before was an attempt made to describe and explain in such detail the relationship between two states, economies, societies, and cultures. Cf. *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges. Ein Handbuch*. vol. I, 1945–1968, 977 p., vol. II, 1968–1990, 874 p., hrsg. von Detlef Junker in Verbindung mit Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach und David B. Morris, DVA, Stuttgart/Munich 2001. The English edition was published in 2004. *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War. A Handbook*. vol. I: 1945–1968, 664 p., vol. II: 1968–1990, 590 p., edited by Detlef Junker, Associate Editors Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris, Cambridge University Press, New York 2004.

Partial aspects of American-German relations can be found to varying degrees in comprehensive accounts of the USA: Udo Sautter, *Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, Hamburg 2020 (revised version of an edition published by Kröner); Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2018; Philipp Gassert, Mark Häberlein, and Michael Wala, *Geschichte der USA*, Reclam, Stuttgart 2018; Bernd Stöver, *Geschichte der USA. Von der ersten Kolonie bis zur Gegenwart*, C. H. Beck, Munich 2018.

19th century, it was primarily the three Germany-related challenges of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War that led to the U.S. establishing itself as a military, economic, and social power on the Eurasian double continent.

The unexpected and peaceful resolution of the German question through reunification, which would have failed without the George H. W. Bush administration's strategic support of the Western Europeans, has paradoxically led to a decline in Germany's importance in U.S. global politics. Bush's oft-quoted formulation that the two countries would deal with each other in the future as "partners in leadership" turned out to be merely friendly rhetoric.

On the other side of the Atlantic, by contrast, the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, led to a "half" revolution in U.S. foreign policy. As the attack was on U.S. territorial integrity in the Western Hemisphere, on the World Trade Center (the symbol of capitalism and world trade), and on the Pentagon (the symbol of U.S. global military power), it led to a redefinition of the U.S. role in the world under the presidency of George W. Bush. The hegemonic power of the Cold War was now to take on "global primacy" and expected support from its allies in the fight against terrorism. These opposing trends on both sides of the Atlantic developed into a clash of expectations that has shaped U.S.-German relations to this day.

The Corona Crisis, however, was too short to write a classic monograph that would fill this gap of 150 years of bilateral relations. Therefore, a more modest solution suggested itself: namely, to bring together essays, articles, and lectures that the author has published in the past. This format also has advantages for the reader's time and effort budgets. First off, each contribution can be read individually and understood in and of itself. On the other hand, leitmotifs of the overall interpretation will be seen to recur again and again.

The chapters deal with American-German relations in the Kaiserreich and World War I, with the Weimar Republic, with National Socialism and World War II, with the Cold War and reunification, and, finally, with the increasingly multipolar world of the present, especially after 9/11. The volume concludes with a new contribution that leads up to the immediate present and the end of Donald Trump's presidency. This last contribution is especially important, as only those who can recall the tradition of a century and a half of nation-state relations between the United States and Germany can put into perspective the revolutionary rupture caused by the policies of the 45th president of the United States.

Indeed, Trump simultaneously endangered the democratic order in his own country and the foreign policy position of the U.S. as the West's main enforcer of the international order.

The decision to write the last contribution as an “essay” was based on two reasons. The first was the fact that the dramatic phase of world history this chapter tries to understand and explain has not yet drawn to a close. This prevents historians from having the temporal distance to their subject matter, and it is no accident that “contemporary history” is written primarily by journalists, public intellectuals, and political scientists. The second was that the essay is a preliminary mode of explanation and presentation whose nimbler style allows the reader to more easily participate in the interpretation of the present moment.

Another structural principle arises from the matter itself. One might even doubt that there have been American-German relations in the narrower sense; comparable, for example, to Franco-German relations. For American policy toward Germany was always embedded in the larger framework of European and world politics. At least since 1941, Germany was part of the overarching goal of creating a pro-American balance on the Eurasian double continent. Thus, the volume begins with a broader perspective, “Europe and the United States in Historical Perspective,” with this theme of the European dimension of U.S. policy toward Germany naturally recurring in many of the later chapters.

Finally, the author has tried to utilize both eyes of the historian. Most chapters contain structural analyses of a longer period whose outcome is known. In two other pieces, the time periods of 1940–41 (chapter 8) and September 11, 2001 (chapter 14), the second eye of the historian is used in order to reconstruct open decision situations, thus giving contemporaries back their open future, as it were. With the second eye, one does not necessarily see better, but differently.

PostScript: The German edition of this book was published in 2021. Since then, World History, US Foreign Policy and German-American relations are facing new and extremely dangerous challenges on five continents and seven seas. This development might be covered in a second edition. The tools to understand and explain this next chapter of world history are already present in this book.

