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**Helga Haftendorn, Georges-Henri Soutou, Stephen F. Szabo, and Samuel F. Wells, Jr., eds.** *The Strategic Triangle: France, Germany, and the United States in the Shaping of the New Europe.* Washington and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. pp. xii + 411. Index. ISBN 978-0-8018-8564-8 (paper).

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Review by **William Glenn Gray, Purdue University**

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## ***Fractal Geometry***

The concept behind this conference volume is significant and innovative: in a world full of studies on bilateral relationships, the editors sketch out a complex triangular dynamic between France, the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany in the past half-century. Every milestone in Franco-German “friendship,” including the landmark consultation treaty of 1963, had consequences for American policy toward both France and Germany; every strain between Paris and Washington, such as de Gaulle’s withdrawal from NATO’s unified military command, touched off reverberations in Franco-German and German-American relations.

The editors recognize that this particular triangle was not the *only* one of consequence during the Cold War. One could just as easily point to London-Paris-Bonn within Europe or, during the era of *Ostpolitik*, Washington-Moscow-Bonn.<sup>1</sup> They acknowledge further that this triangle took on different dimensions in the three capitals under consideration. West Germans habitually agonized over how to even out their relations with France and the United States; for Paris, the need to take account of the German-American relationship represented an unwelcome constraint on its own actions. For the United States, it was a simple matter of choosing a preferential European partner while ensuring that its choice did

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<sup>1</sup> On this latter count, see Jürgen Fuchs, “Dreiecksverhältnisse sind immer kompliziert.” *Kissinger, Bahr und die Ostpolitik* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1999). The newly published FRUS volume *Germany and Berlin, 1969-72*, edited by David Geyer, underscores on virtually every page just how intertwined American, West German, and Soviet diplomacy became during these years.

not have damaging consequences for the Franco-German relationship and European integration more generally.

The entire volume is therefore built around the assumption of varying national perspectives. At the original conference, held in Potsdam in the spring of 2000, twenty-one papers examined seven key episodes from a French, an American, and a German angle. Consequently, nearly all of the fifteen published papers on offer in this volume operate from a particular national standpoint. At its best, this approach allows the authors to present detailed archival evidence on, say, French decision-making. The reader can then juxtapose this against an American or German account of the same events.

Yet the net effect serves to highlight the shortcomings of certain essays, limited as they are by one-sided representation. Taken in its own right, Eric Bussière's chapter on French monetary policy has much to tell us; it presents one of the first English-language accounts of planning and priorities at the Bank of France and the Ministry of Finance and Economics during the pivotal years 1968-73. But the author ends up reproducing the attitudes of the historical actors under investigation. French policy makers, he writes, "realized that the decision of March 1973 [to undertake a group float of European currencies] was an experiment and a test of the willingness of the partners of France, especially Germany, to play the card of European solidarity. For its part, the French government was ready to pay the price." (p. 184) This sounds very much like the voice of official Paris. Surely a critical examination the French understanding of "European solidarity" is in order here? Bussière's essay, so richly documented from French archival sources, does not even draw upon English- or German-language secondary literature. Nor does William H. Becker, author of the corresponding American chapter on Bretton Woods, use anything *but* English-language secondary sources. Becker's analysis of the politics behind Nixon's monetary policy is admirably clear, but it is still unfortunate that he and Bussière are scarcely in dialogue with one another.

Other sections mesh together more successfully. Helga Haftendorn, Frédéric Bozo, and Thomas A. Schwartz all find different ways of underscoring a single significant point: namely, that in 1966-67 NATO successfully weathered its most significant internal crisis of the Cold War. To Bozo, the explanation lies in de Gaulle's brusque withdrawal from the alliance's integrated military command structure, which precipitated just the sort of reappraisal of strategy that de Gaulle had hoped for. Schwartz acknowledges the impetus provided by de Gaulle but stresses instead Lyndon Johnson's patient and surprisingly astute diplomacy, which averted too sharp a break between France and the Alliance.<sup>2</sup> Haftendorn, in turn, supplies a wider perspective on the multiple issues confronting NATO during the crisis, emphasizing the extent to which France's absence removed an

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<sup>2</sup> Although this volume was not published until 2006, Schwartz's contribution pre-dates the publication of his book *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2003), but anticipates many of the arguments found there. For Bozo's further thoughts on de Gaulle, see *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

impediment to forward progress on alliance problems.<sup>3</sup> But in that case, was the “strategic triangle” even in effect? As Haftendorn observes, it was really a different set of trilateral talks – between Britain, West Germany, and the United States – that forged the requisite political solutions relating to burden-sharing, nuclear strategy, and other hot-button issues.

Georges-Henri Soutou distances himself from the “strategic triangle” altogether in his own contribution, a pathbreaking exploration of French diplomacy during the presidency of Georges Pompidou (1969-74). Soutou observes that France did not rely upon the United States (or even Britain) to balance out the growing assertiveness of West Germany; instead, that role fell largely to the Soviet Union. In Soutou’s rendering, Pompidou pursued a highly contradictory policy toward Moscow. On one hand, he fended off Brezhnev’s pressure for some kind of renewed Franco-Soviet friendship treaty. On the other, he deliberately accommodated Soviet interests with respect to the CSCE and human rights in Eastern Europe. Scholars have long recognized that Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* sounded alarm bells in Paris, but few before Soutou have elaborated upon these French fears on the basis of internal documentation from the Elysée Palace.<sup>4</sup> Fearing the “Finlandization” of Western Europe under Soviet pressure, Pompidou looked first to NATO and then to an intensified European Community to contain the danger posed by German-Soviet cooperation. But Gaullists in the foreign ministry warned also of the danger of a Soviet-American condominium in Europe, reinforced by Washington’s efforts in 1973-74 to organize a common Western energy policy. The picture that emerges to this reviewer is of a France paralyzed by mistrust, working feverishly to avert the consequences of potentially hostile combinations among the USSR, the Federal Republic, and the United States. Soutou identifies certain successes for French diplomacy during this fluid period, but overall, the essay would appear to underscore France’s isolation.

Considering that Soutou, one of the book’s editors, does not himself embrace the “strategic triangle” model, it is unsurprising that the volume offers something less than a consistent exploration of this particular construct. The introduction is strikingly under-theorized: the editors disavow any interest in rehashing neo-realist theories and offer nothing more than a passing nod to constructivism. The closest they come to a theoretical pronouncement is the following banality: “the best combination is a balanced, equilateral triangle, where Washington, Paris, and Bonn/Berlin agree or compromise on major issues.” (p. 17) That may well be the case, but a more extended discussion about the general properties of triangular relationships might have given the book’s contributors a more precise vocabulary to work with when presenting their case studies.

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<sup>3</sup> Haftendorn’s views on this can be explored in greater detail in *NATO and the Nuclear Revolution: A Crisis of Credibility, 1966-1967* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Wilkens, *Der unstete Nachbar. Frankreich, die deutsche Ostpolitik und die Berliner Vier-Mächte-Verhandlungen 1969-1974* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990); also various essays in Horst Möller and Maurice Vaisse, eds., *Willy Brandt und Frankreich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005). For an alternate reading of Franco-Soviet relations, see Marie-Pierre Rey, “Chancellor Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, France, and the Soviet Union,” in *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Responses*, eds. Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming December 2008).

A theoretical framework might have helped to delineate one of the more acute puzzles of this particular “strategic triangle”: why exactly did the Franco-American split create more headaches than opportunities for West Germany? Why did the Federal Republic fail to exploit its pivotal position in the 1960s to reshape the alliance and the European Community in accord with its preferences? Martin Koopmann’s perceptive essay sheds some light on this with a close reading of Franco-German relations in the early 1960s. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s almost romantic attachment to de Gaulle in 1962-63 is well known, thanks to an abundant literature on the diplomacy surrounding the Franco-German treaty of January 1963.<sup>5</sup> Koopmann winds this story back by several years, demonstrating just how uncritically Adenauer responded to the French president’s early and heavy-handed proposals for European political cooperation independent of the United States. Especially telling is Koopmann’s rendering of the internal split within the West German cabinet, as the foreign ministry and economics ministry forced the chancellor to backtrack and adopt a more pro-American line. In effect, the German political system reproduced the emerging gulf between Washington and Paris. The Federal Republic was paralyzed rather than emboldened.<sup>6</sup>

The volume shifts gears in the final one-third, presenting a series of outstanding policy studies penned by Washington-based analysts (the fruits of a separate workshop at the Woodrow Wilson Center). These essays are less handicapped by the dictates of presenting a “national” perspective, rendering them more effective in exploring trans-Atlantic relationships. Stephen F. Szabo offers a riveting account of how the United States and Germany alternatively took the lead in pushing through the enlargement of NATO in the 1990s. Drawing upon interviews with high-placed sources, Szabo highlights personal ambition (Volker Rühle and Richard Holbrooke) as well as strategic considerations (the vacuum in East Central Europe) in explaining why concerns about Russian opposition were pushed to the side.

Szabo’s essay complements a provocative piece by Markus Jachtenfuchs on the “relaunching” of Europe in the 1990s. His take on Franco-German cooperation is mercifully unsentimental: despite the warm public rhetoric, he does not see “friendship” or even a genuine convergence of political views between Paris and Bonn/Berlin. Even so, decades of institutionalized consultation have had an impact, teaching them to take “the other’s preferences into account for the formulation of one’s own policies.” (p. 318) This is *not* the same thing as a harmony of preferences, which Jachtenfuchs claims have remained

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<sup>5</sup> The definitive account is Ulrich Lappenküper’s 2,000-page habilitation, *Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1949-1963. Von der “Erbfeindschaft” zur “Entente élémentaire”* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001). For English-language studies on the wider diplomatic context, see Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Oliver Bange, *The EEC Crisis of 1963: Kennedy, Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer in Conflict* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> On this topic, see also Ronald J. Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949-1966* (New York: Berghahn, 2003).

remarkably consistent on both sides since the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> European monetary unification and other achievements of the 1990s came about as a result of compromise – not a grand barter (French agreement to German unification in exchange for Germany’s sacrifice of the D-Mark) but rather a more narrow sectoral agreement on the proper contours of the new European currency. Taken together, Jachtenfuchs and Szabo depict a world where policies run on completely independent tracks: the EU unfolded with little reference to American geopolitical concerns, while NATO expanded without much heed to market considerations. The implication is that functional differentiation makes for better policies, particularly when compared Kennedy’s ill-fated “grand design” of the early 1960s.

Is there a future for the “strategic triangle”? Except for an epilogue by the editors, the contributions pre-date the outbreak of the Iraq War. But the editors agree that the events of 2002-3 essentially smashed the triangle. For the first time, Germany sided fully with France against the United States. (One might argue that a comparable “triangular” dynamic operated still, with America, pro-war, and anti-war European countries constituting the corners of this new triad.) In place of the old triangle, Haftendorn proposes a new and evocative geometric metaphor, a Euro-American ellipse. This she defines as “an integrated structure in which independent states assemble around two nuclei, a European and a North American one, but cooperate closely with each other as issues and resources dictate.” (pp. 384-85) Though necessarily vague, Haftendorn’s “ellipse” model appears to offer a more realistic projection than a complete dissolution of the trans-Atlantic relationship.

Overall, this collection boasts an impressive variety of well-written essays. It is unfortunate that six years elapsed between the conference and final publication; translation time may explain some of this delay, but the upshot is that some of the pieces no longer reflect the state of the field. More troubling is the organizational principle of relying upon “local” experts for the historical essays – French scholars writing on France, Germans on Germany, etc. Why should a community of scholars deliberately reinforce the same national divides already inherent in the archival record? International history is more than just a concatenation of independent national perspectives. One can hope that future work on the “strategic triangle” will involve more direct attempts to synthesize the various national viewpoints – covering all the angles, so to speak.

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<sup>7</sup> Here Jachtenfuchs points ahead to his book-length publication, *Die Konstruktion Europas. Verfassungsideen und institutionelle Entwicklung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002).