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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: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. xii + 411 pp. Notes and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8018856-39. \$25.00 U.S. (pb). 0-80-188564-7.

Review by Thomas W. Maulucci, Jr., American International College.

The Strategic Triangle is a collection of essays by prominent international historians and political scientists about the relationship between France, (West) Germany, and the United States from the creation of the French Fifth Republic in 1958 to the present. The authors focus on six key moments that illustrate the “triangle’s” basic dynamics. These are the Franco-American tensions over the European Community between 1958 and 1963; the French withdrawal from NATO’s integrated military structures in 1966-67; the attempts to create international monetary stability in the late 1960s and 1970s after the collapse of the Breton Woods System; the era of *Ostpolitik* and détente; the growing disconnect between the strategic priorities of the United States and its European allies after the collapse of détente in the late 1970s; and the challenges faced by N.A.T.O. in redefining itself after the end of the Cold War. A conclusion deals with the state of the triangle today after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

What is a “strategic triangle”? The volume does not provide a straightforward answer. Simply conceived, a triangle is the relationship between three independent countries and how that relationship influences their respective freedom of action. The editors believe that such triangles abound in the international system, as do relationships that resemble other geometric shapes. But it is never completely clear whether these triangles must reflect a longstanding community of interests; or if they involve situational cooperation; or if they simply exist (why can’t hostile states be part of a triangle and shape each other’s policies?). In the Franco-German-American case from the 1960s to the present, the editors find it difficult to define the triangle based on common norms or institutions alone. For example, all three states have defined their concepts of security differently, and institutional ties between them are not all-encompassing (for example, the U.S. is not a member of the E.U.).

Their contention that “power and interests” also played a minimal role is more problematic (pp. 4-7). Within the triangle, it is true that American hegemony was contested and that a “balance of power” in the classical sense did not apply. However, realist and neo-realist thinkers might argue that the external Soviet threat helped to hold the three sides of the triangle together until the early 1990s. Moreover, within the triangle itself all three parties had an interest in ensuring American engagement in Europe, at least in the realm of security policy, and safely channeling German power. The editors are on safer ground when they conclude that a strategic triangle is not an “independent variable” but instead an “analytical construct” (p. 7) that exists primarily in the perceptions of the actors involved. Yet why these perceptions first arose after the start of the Fifth Republic as opposed, say, to 1955 or 1949 is also unclear. Luckily, the volume’s cohesion does not suffer as a result of these definitional problems, and its strengths are considerable.

That policymakers in Bonn, Paris, and Washington during the Cold War believed that the fates of their respective countries were bound together, for good or ill, is beyond doubt. The Federal Republic often found itself in an uncomfortable position between the clashing designs of the United States, which it saw as the vital guarantor of its security, and France, which remained its key partner in building a new

Europe. When Franco-American differences became too great, its ability to achieve its own goals or even to act as a mediator became very limited indeed, as Desmond Dinan (pp. 29-53) and Martin Koopman (pp. 55-73) illustrate in their contributions on the European Community between 1958 and 1963 and the related project of a European Political Union. Yet as the editors point out, the Federal Republic sometimes abandoned its mediator role to side with either the United States (e.g. in N.A.T.O. after 1966) or France (think of the cooperation between Helmut Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, especially after the invasion of Afghanistan). Moreover, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* managed to briefly unite Paris and Washington in their suspicion of their partner's initiatives.

The French role as portrayed in the volume proves to be just as nuanced. It is not defined merely by partnership with Germany in Europe and the desire to resist American hegemony, as expressed in Charles de Gaulle's vision of "national independence" and a *Europe puissance* or Jacques Chirac's emphasis on a multi-polar world. The introduction makes a key point that despite their rhetoric policymakers in the Fifth Republic continue to share the belief of their predecessors in the Fourth that France could only play a world role if it was closely linked to both Europe and the United States. Therefore it was important not to establish too much distance from the latter. In addition, there was always a pro-American, "Atlanticist" faction in France, although never as powerful as its counterpart in the Federal Republic and much diminished in influence after the 1950s (pp. 13-18).

As Georges-Henri Soutou demonstrates in his contribution, Georges Pompidou wanted to reemphasize the Franco-American relationship, albeit without abandoning the Gaullist framework of his foreign policy, in response to his uncertainties about détente and *Ostpolitik* in the early 1970s. If American hegemony over Europe was bad for France, a Soviet-American "condominium" over that continent or a loosening of Four Power controls over Berlin would be much worse (pp. 229-257). Among other French presidents Giscard, Chirac, and, most famously, even de Gaulle in 1958 also made attempts to intensify cooperation with Washington. Even the effects of some of the worst Franco-American clashes can be exaggerated. For example, Helga Haftendorn (pp. 77-102), Frédéric Bozo (pp. 103-125), and Thomas A. Schwartz (pp. 127-145) write about the 1966-67 N.A.T.O. crisis, which not only made the Federal Republic the key American military partner in Europe but paradoxically cleared the way for N.A.T.O.'s modernization and adoption of a new strategy embodied in the 1967 Harmel Report based on both détente and deterrence.

Due to its status as a superpower, the United States had and continues to have the least interest in the strategic triangle, nor is it affected by the triangle's dynamics as much as France or the Federal Republic. This has led it to expect the other two states to accept its leadership and produced massive frustration and even overreaction among American policymakers when they have not, as in the case of de Gaulle's first veto of Britain's application for EC membership in 1963 and again with the Franco-German opposition to the Iraq War in 2003. Moreover, starting around 1970 the United States began to act more unilaterally on issues of concern for the triangle than had been the case previously, which has often tightened cooperation between France and Germany. William H. Becker outlines how the Nixon Administration was strongly influenced by domestic considerations in its abrupt dismantling of the Bretton Woods system (pp. 189-206), which as Michael Kreile (pp. 149-169) and Eric Bussière (pp. 171-187) demonstrate helped move West Germany and France towards the idea of European monetary union.

Contributions by Gale A. Mattox on the détente era (pp. 261-285), Samuel F. Wells, Jr., (pp. 287-307) on the Reagan-George H. W. Bush years, and Markus Jachtenfuchs (pp. 309-24) on Germany and the European project in the 1980s and 1990s reveal a growing disconnect between the United States and its partners. This is especially true of the European unification process, which recent American administrations have tended to look upon with benign neglect. As Jachtenfuchs puts it, "whereas the literature is full of accounts of how Washington intervened in the early phases of European institution building, U.S. interference in the 1980s and 1990s is not a theme in later writing" (p. 322). Both he and

Wells conclude that the strategic triangle exists on a much more limited basis today since the E.U. has replaced France and Germany as the chief American negotiating partner on economic issues and the future of Europe no longer seems as strategically important a question as it did during the height of the Cold War.

Does the triangle even exist today, especially after the 2003 Iraq War, which saw Germany abandon its role as a balancer and for the first time side clearly with France and against the United States on an international security issue? In their conclusion, the editors admit that it is no longer as important as it once was. The American co-editors, Stephen S. Szabo and Wells, believe that the political elite in Washington has devalued ties with Europe as opposed to other parts of the world, and the United States is more likely than ever to go off on its own path (pp. 372-375). The French and German co-editors, Soutou and Helga Haftendorn, are somewhat more optimistic about its future but argue that it will be replaced with a U.S.-E.U. ellipse. France and Germany simply have less influence as individual nations within the twenty-seven member E.U. Soutou (pp. 375-379) also stresses mistrust of American policies and increasing emphasis on the differences between Europe and the United States in France, trends that predate the Iraq War, while Haftendorn (pp. 379-384) emphasizes that Europe and N.A.T.O. have become less important to the US in the post-9/11 world. Their conclusion was written before Nicholas Sarkozy's recent electoral victory in France, which has potential for reviving Franco-American relations, but it is hard to dispute the notion that the triangle's best days are behind it.

The Strategic Triangle provides a fine overview of the political, military, and economic relationship between France, Germany, and the United States since the start of the Fifth Republic. Its fifteen essays, expanded versions of conference papers originally delivered in 2000 in Potsdam, are of high quality. With its multi-national and interdisciplinary cast of authors who examine key moments for the triangle from the perspective of each of the three nations, the volume is also a good example of how to approach major themes in contemporary international history.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Helga Haftendorn, Georges-Henri Soutou, Stephen F. Szabo, and Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Introduction: Relations in a Strategic Triangle-Bonn/Berlin, Paris, and Washington"

Desmond Dinan, "Building Europe: The European Community and the Bonn-Paris-Washington Relationship, 1958-1963"

Martin Koopmann, "Germany and the Discord of Its Allies: The Case of the European Political Union"

Haftendorn, "The N.A.T.O. Crisis of 1966-1967: Confronting Germany with a Conflict of Priorities"

Frédéric Bozo, "The N.A.T.O. Crisis of 1966-1967: A French Point of View"

Thomas A. Schwartz, "The De Gaulle Challenge: The Johnson Administration and the N.A.T.O. Crisis of 1966-1967"

Michael Kreile, "The Search for a New Monetary System: Germany's Balancing Act"

Eric Bussière, "France, European Monetary Cooperation, and the International Monetary System Crisis, 1968-1973"

William H. Becker, "The United States and the Search for a New Economic and Monetary System in the 1970s"

Haftendorn, "German *Ostpolitik* in a Multilateral Setting"

Soutou, "President Pompidou, *Ostpolitik*, and the Strategy of Détente"

Gale A. Maddox, "The United States Tests Détente"

Wells, "From Euromissiles to Maastricht: The Politics of Reagan-Bush and Mitterrand"

Markus Jachtenfuchs, "Germany and Relaunching Europe"

Szabo, "Enlarging N.A.T.O.: The German-American Design for a New Alliance"

Kori Schake, "N.A.T.O. and the Balkan Challenge: An American Perspective"

Haftendorn, Soutou, Szabo, and Wells, "Epilogue: A New Geometry?"

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