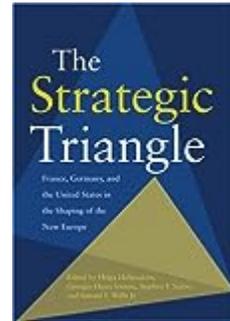




Helen Haftendorn, Georges-Henri Soutou, Stephen F. Szabo, Samuel F. Wells Jr., eds. *The Strategic Triangle: France, Germany, and the United States in the Shaping of the New Europe.* Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006. 432 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8018-8564-8; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8563-1.



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Similar to Henry Kissinger's characterization of the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq as "the gravest crisis in the Atlantic Alliance since its creation five decades ago," a coalition of European states led by France and Germany also criticized the US-led invasion, calling into question the future of transatlantic relations (p. 372). The defection of Germany to France's position was particularly striking; for the duration of the Cold War, West Germany sought to avoid choosing between Paris and Washington, preferring instead to act as a mediator between its two allies. During the Iraq War, however, Germany strongly sided with France, publicly denouncing the United States and its allies.

The Strategic Triangle places this crisis of inter-alliance relations into historical perspective, tracking the evolution of US, French, and German trilateral relations since the late 1950s. Published in 2006, the collection of essays emerged from an interdisciplinary conference held in Potsdam in the spring of 2000 that explored what the editors call "the strategic triangle." Assuming that the strategic triangle had a significant impact on the foreign policy behavior of Washington, Berlin/Bonn, and Paris, each essay considers one of six key moments in the evolution of the trilateral relationship from a national perspective (p. 22). These include the development of the

European Community in the late 1950s and 1960s, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) crisis of the late 1960s, the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, the opportunities and threats posed by *Ostpolitik* and *détente*, the disconnect between American and European priorities after the collapse of *détente*, and the challenges that NATO faced after the end of the Cold War. An epilogue explores the contemporary relevance of the strategic triangle in the wake of the Iraq War. The editors prudently note that the strategic triangle was not the only triangle at play in the postwar era. A thorough treatment of *Ostpolitik* or the collapse of Bretton Woods clearly demands a more complicated and expansive geometry. The goal here, however, is to examine the effects of major events on the strategic triangle over the past half century by comparing American, French, and German policymaking at critical moments. The value of this volume lies in the trilateral methodology. In contrast to the scores of studies of bilateral relations, the collection seeks to take the analysis one step further and challenge readers to consider the reciprocal effects of trilateral relations.

This methodology works well in most cases. The three chapters on the NATO crisis of 1966-67, for example, complement each other well. That allied drama

was triggered by French president Charles de Gaulle's declaration in February 1966 that France would disengage from the Western alliance. Several months later, France withdrew from the integrated structure of NATO, and Paris demanded that Allied forces leave the country by April 1967. France had failed to overturn the existing Atlantic order, and de Gaulle saw the French withdrawal as a tactic to reconstruct transatlantic relations and transcend the unnatural Cold War division of Europe. In his chapter on French policymaking during the 1966-67 NATO crisis, Frédéric Bozo contends that de Gaulle's decision paradoxically led to a strengthening of NATO and of U.S. leadership, as well as to a much-needed adaptation of the alliance (p. 104). Bozo concludes that the crisis did not fundamentally alter the geometry of the strategic triangle, but rather caused the triangle to become more equilateral and actually strengthened the French-US relationship with the adoption of the Harmel Report of December 1967 (pp. 119-120). Thomas A. Schwartz credits American president Lyndon B. Johnson for providing an appealing countervision to that of French president de Gaulle (p. 141). Echoing the argument that he makes in *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (2003), Schwartz challenges the interpretation made by many who study the Vietnam War that Johnson's foreign policy was a failure. In the case of the NATO crisis, Schwartz contends, Johnson managed to keep the American relationship with Germany strong and paved the way for NATO's adoption of the Flexible Response in December 1967. Finally, Helga Haftendorn shows that Germany managed to balance American and French demands. Claiming that Germany had the biggest stakes in the NATO crisis, she shows that Bonn was caught between Washington and Paris. Although the French withdrawal from NATO damaged German-French relations, the Germans could not risk alienating the French. Haftendorn credits Bonn with using the Harmel exercise to get France back into an alliance context (p. 97).

In other cases, however, the strategic triangle as an analytical tool does not seem particularly illuminating. In their two chapters on German and French policy-

making regarding *Ostpolitik* and détente (the American perspective is conspicuously absent), for example, Haftendorn and Georges-Henri Soutou are at odds about whether the strategic triangle was even relevant. Although Haftendorn concludes that the strategic triangle constituted a strong enabling factor for Germany to pursue *Ostpolitik*, Soutou claims that there was no real French-German-American triangle about détente (pp. 224, 230). Instead, Soutou argues that there were two other triangles at play: one linking France, Germany, and the Soviet Union; and one between France, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Soutou's chapter provides a revealing analysis of French policymaking in the early 1970s, but his rejection of the strategic triangle is at odds with the premise of the book.

This points to the larger issue in the volume: the authors do not consistently construct their narratives around the concept of the strategic triangle. Some chapters, such as that of Soutou (an editor of the volume), conclude that the strategic triangle was not as important as other issues, while William H. Becker's expert synthesis of Richard Nixon's foreign economic policy eschews the concept almost entirely. Similarly, the strategic triangle as an interpretive tool may have benefited from a more precise explanation and greater analysis. The introduction lacks a rigorous exploration of what defined the trilateral relationship. What were the enduring elements of the strategic triangle as it went from crisis to crisis? The collective answer of the essays about whether the strategic triangle was important is both yes and no, but the editors do not help the reader make sense of this equivocal conclusion.

The Strategic Triangle poses a significant question: how will American-French-German relations evolve in the contemporary world? When the book was published in 2006, American attention was focused on the Middle East and transatlantic relations no longer seemed quite so urgent in the post-Cold War world. The recent crises over Ukraine and Greece, however, may present an opportunity to rekindle the strategic triangle as the security and stability of European institutions have once again been put into question.

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