

chapter two

FOUNDING THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION: CHRONOLOGY 1970-1977*

Holly Sklar

1970: Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*** (New York: Viking Press), a forceful rationale for trilateralism. He called for the formation of "A Community of the Developed Nations," composed of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. These are the "most vital regions of the globe" because "they are in the forefront of scientific and technological innovation," and most advanced in "planetary consciousness" (p. 294).

From the start, Brzezinski stressed the important role of Japan: "Japan is a world power, and in the world of electronic and supersonic communications it is a psychological and political error to think of it as primarily an Asian nation. Japan needs an outlet commensurate with its own advanced development, not one that places it in the position of a giant among pygmies and that excludes it *de facto* from the councils of the real world powers" (pp. 297-8).

Brzezinski outlined "the broad and overlapping phases" in the formation of the Community of Nations: the first "would involve the forging of community links among the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, as well as with other more advanced countries (for example: Australia, Israel, Mexico). The second phase would include the extension of these links to more advanced communist countries," perhaps beginning with Yugoslavia and Rumania, (pp.

*This article is based largely on Trilateral Commission documents, particularly "Progress of Organization," Annex 2 (1) of "Trilateral Commission," 15 March 1973; *Annual Reports* 1-5; and *Dialogue*.

**A technetronic society, according to Brzezinski, is "a society that is shaped culturally, psychologically, socially, and economically by the impact of technology and electronics—particularly in the area of computers and communication." (p.9).

296-297)—the idea being that the Soviet Union would join up with the Western advanced nations or be beaten at the game of ideological, technological, and economic competition for the Third World and Eastern Europe.

The “*emerging community of developed nations would require some institutional expression.*” The seeds of the Trilateral Commission as well as regular Western Economic Summit Meetings are found in Brzezinski’s proposal for a “high-level consultative council for global cooperation, regularly bringing together the heads of governments of the developed world to discuss their common political-security, educational-scientific, and economic-technological problems, as well as to deal from that perspective with their moral obligations toward the developing nations. Some permanent supporting machinery could provide continuity to these consultations.” Such a council “would be more effective in developing common programs than in the United Nations, whose efficacy is unavoidably limited by the Cold War and by north-south divisions”* (p. 297).

Brzezinski emphasizes that the traditional sovereignty of nation states is becoming increasingly unglued as transnational forces such as multinational corporations, banks, and international organizations play a larger and larger role in shaping global politics and the consciousness of the jet-age “transnational elite.”

1971: Relations between North America, Western Europe, and Japan were not solidifying into a “community”; they were rapidly deteriorating. A dangerous low-point was reached in August at the time of the Nixon shocks to the international and economic political system. (See Frieden.)

In December, Brzezinski (then a Columbia University professor), organized the Tripartite Studies under the auspices of the Brookings Institution (Brookings, located in Washington D.C., is commonly known as the think-tank for Democratic administrations). Brookings scholars worked together with their counterparts from the Japanese Economic Research Center and the European Community Institute of University Studies on common problems. It was partly the impressive results of the Tripartite Studies which convinced David Rockefeller that trilateralism was a necessary and desirable

*Brzezinski further aired his views on trilateralism in the context of contemporary politics in two important articles. The first appeared in *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1971: “Half Past Nixon” (this was the article in which Brzezinski issued his famous Nixon Report Card). The second, “U.S. Foreign Policy: The Search for Focus,” appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, July 1973.

process. Rockefeller "was getting worried about the deteriorating relations between the U.S., Europe, and Japan," and initiated the process which led to formation of the Trilateral Commission, recalls George Franklin who helped organize the Commission.*

Winter-Spring 1972: In the Winter Rockefeller proposed the creation of what he was then calling an "International Commission for Peace and Prosperity" in speeches before Chase Manhattan International Financial Forums in Western Europe and Canada. But the most enthusiastic and most crucial response came in the spring when Rockefeller and Brzezinski presented the idea of a trilateral grouping at the annual Bilderberg meeting. (See Thompson.) Michael Blumenthal, then head of the Bendix Corporation, strongly backed the idea.

May-June 1972: Rockefeller asked George Franklin to go to Western Europe and "explore there both degree of interest and possible participants." "As a result of interest found in Europe, David Rockefeller and George Franklin explore situation in Japan and find great interest there also."**

July 23-24, 1972: A seventeen-person planning group for the Trilateral Commission met at Rockefeller's estate, Pocantico Hills, in Tarrytown, New York. In addition to Rockefeller, Brzezinski, and Franklin, representatives from the U.S. included: C. Fred Bergsten, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution;*** Robert Bowie, Professor of International Affairs, Harvard; McGeorge Bundy, President of the Ford Foundation; Bayless Manning, President of Council on Foreign Relations; Henry Owen, Director, Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. Owen is cited as a key Commission conceptualizer and organizer by knowledgeable observers.

Representatives from Western Europe include: Karl Corstens, Christian Democratic Leader in the Bundestag, West Germany****; Guido Colonna di Paliano, President of La Rinascente and former member of the Commission of the European Community; Francois Duchene, Director of the Center for Contemporary European Studies, University of Sussex; Rene Foch, member of the Executive

*See Jeremiah Novak, "The Trilateral Commission," *Atlantic Monthly*, Summer 1977, for a review of these events.

**Up through 1975, all remaining quotes are from the Commission document "Progress of Organization" unless otherwise indicated.

***Positions at the time of the meeting. (See "Who's Who.")

****When Corstens was later elected president of West Germany his background as an ex-Nazi was raised by the media.

Committee, *Partie des Republicans Independents*; Max Kohnstamm, Director of the European Community Institute for University Studies.

From Japan, the members include: Kichi Miyazawa, member of the Diet and former Minister of Foreign Affairs; Kinhide Mushakoji, Professor of International Relations, Sophia University; Saburo Okita, President of Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund; and Tadashi Yamamoto, President of Japan Center for International Exchange.

Other early U.S. participants, not in attendance at the meeting, included: William Scranton, governor of Pennsylvania and former ambassador to the United Nations; William Roth, former chief trade negotiator under President Johnson; and Edwin Reischauer, ambassador to Japan under Kennedy and Johnson.

Fall 1972: Respective delegations designated Gerard Smith, former director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, as United States chairman; Takeshi Watanabe, former president of the Asian Development Bank, as Japanese chairman; and Max Kohnstamm as European chairman. Brzezinski was selected as the director of the Commission to serve from July 1973. Partial funding was obtained from the Kettering Foundation to supplement the seed monies provided by David Rockefeller.

January-February 1973: Smith, Brzezinski, Franklin, and Kohnstamm held consultations with Watanabe and with Japanese planning groups in Tokyo: "Approval of the highest political and financial circles obtained." Formal funding proposal is submitted to the Ford Foundation "to support a major share of the intellectual and research aspect of the Commission's work and some of the administrative and 'selling' aspects." Other funding sources are explored. (See article following.)

July 1973: The Commission was officially inaugurated after a series of regional meetings and extensive consultations. (See chapter on Commission membership for list of founding members.)

October 20-23, 1973: The founding session of the Executive Committee was held in Tokyo. It was attended by Commission director Zbigniew Brzezinski; regional chairmen, Gerard Smith (North America), Takeshi Watanabe (Japan), and Max Kohnstamm (Western Europe); regional secretaries, George Franklin, Tadashi Yamamoto, and Wolfgang Hager; task force rapporteurs Richard N. Cooper, Motoo Kaji, Francois Duchene, and Claudio Segre; and, for North America, Robert Bonner, Robert Bowie, Patrick Haggerty, Jean-Luc Pepin, Edwin Reischauer, David Rockefeller, Paul

Warnke, and Marina Whitman; for Japan Chujiro Fujino, Yukitaka Haraguchi, Kazuschije Hirasawa, Yusuke Kashiwagi, Kiichi Miyazawa, Kinhide Mushakoji, Saburo Okita, and Ryuji Takeuchi; and for Western Europe, P. Nyboe Andersen, Georges Berthoin, Marc Eyskens, Otto Lambsdorff, John Loudon, Cesare Merlini, Alwin Munchmeyer, Myles Staunton, Otto Grieg Tidemand, Sir Kenneth Younger, and Sir Philip de Zuleta. (See "Who's Who.")

A plenary session, with Japanese members, was also held. Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka gave the principal address. The "statement of purposes" formulated by the Executive Committee was adopted (reprinted in *Trialogue* no.2, November 1973).

May 30-1, 1975: First plenary meeting of the full Commission was held in Kyoto, Japan, attended by 113 members—following a consultation with Prime Minister Takeo Miki held on May 29 in Tokyo. Commission discussions were organized around the themes of "Global Redistribution of Power" and "the Trilateral Community: Key Problems and Prospects." The controversial draft Task Force Report on "The Governability of Democracies"—later published in book form as *The Crisis of Democracy* was a focal point of discussion.

Two and a half days of seminars on Japan, organized by the Japanese Office of the Commission, were held for North American and West European members before the plenary session. West European—Japanese relations are considered the weakest link in the Atlantic-Pacific Triangle. Meetings between Europeans and Japanese have continued on a regular basis.

By the time the Commission met in Kyoto the trilateral regions had faced new global shocks: the 1973 Arab oil embargo, 1973-74 OPEC price hikes, April 1975 liberation of Vietnam, rising Third World call for a New International Economic Order. For Brzezinski, Vietnam was the "Waterloo" of the "WASP-eastern seaboard-Ivy League-Wall Street foreign affairs elite" which had dominated foreign policy making before Nixon's administration. The trilateral problem was how to construct with little or no Third World participation an international system which would not be disrupted by Third World initiatives.*

*Earlier, Brzezinski had warned: "While it is difficult to fault the [Nixon] Administration's general priorities, one is struck by Washington's extremely limited interest in what is commonly described as the Third World. It may be true that the Kennedy Administration occasionally overdid its wooing of third-rate statesmen and fourth-rate countries [sic] but the Nixon Administration, far from establishing a balance, appears to be turning its back on most of mankind." (p. 10.)

mid-1975-mid-1976: The Commission's *Third Annual Report* states:

In the United States, there was noticeably increased emphasis on trilateral ties as the cornerstone of American foreign policy—as evidenced in the pronouncements of both Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, an active Commission member*—and “trilateralism” seems to have become a recognized word in the foreign policy lexicon. The Rambouillet (November 1975) and Puerto Rico (June 1976) ‘summits’ indicated a clearer recognition of the importance of economic cooperation among the economies of the trilateral regions.” (p.1) [See Novak for a look at the summits.]

Serving under President Ford, Kissinger (now a member of the Executive Committee of the Commission) moved further away from the unilateralism which Nixon attempted to fashion and closer to the trilateral approach. Concerning the Third World, his earlier confrontationist approach took on more of the trilateral rhetoric of cooperation.

Carter regularly expounded trilateralism in his foreign policy addresses during the campaign. An oft-quoted remark he made in his autobiography *Why Not the Best* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975) reads “Membership on this Commission has provided me with a splendid learning opportunity, and many of the other members have helped me in my study of foreign affairs.” Early on Brzezinski became Carter’s principal tutor. (See Shoup.)

mid-1976-mid-1977: The Commissions *Fourth Annual Report* exclaims: “*An increase in the Trilateral Commission’s impact, resulting in large part from the number of Commissioners entering various governments, was perhaps the principal feature of the year 1976-1977. This entry into government was most spectacular in the case of the United States...The interest in these appointments resulted in greatly increased exposure for the Commission’s work—as reflected in particular by the wide press coverage received by the Commission, and in a substantial boost in the circulation of its reports and other published material.*” [Italics ed.] In this period the North American mailing list grew from 1700 to 2300 individuals.

Widened press exposure presented some problems. “Although the net result was a substantial boost in the public’s interest in the Commission and in the dissemination of its work, some of this

*One Carter activity which pleased the Commission was “his distributing some 400 Task Force Reports to Democratic candidates for office in the 1974 United States elections,” as cited in the *First Annual Progress Report*,” p. 6.

coverage tended to give a largely distorted image of the Commission's role—sometimes raising the old conspiracy theories." Because of this greater public relations efforts were directed at the press and the public—promoting the image that the Commission was an unofficial grouping of concerned citizens trying to suggest ways to address pressing world problems for the good of all humanity.

At the 9-11 January plenary session in Tokyo, trilateralists discussed the task force report *Towards a Renovated International System*. The *Fourth Annual Report* calls it "a broad overview which was conceived as a capstone of the first three years of the Trilateral Commission's efforts" (p. 2). By 1977 the trilateral prescription for revitalizing the world economic and political order had been spelled out.

chapter three

THE COMMISSION'S PURPOSE, STRUCTURE, AND PROGRAMS— IN ITS OWN WORDS*

Holly Sklar

I. Purpose

A. To Foster Cooperation Among the Trilateral Regions

The introduction to the Commission prospectus cautions that "domestic concerns—in Japan, Europe, and the U.S.—make it difficult to resolve [these] problems in ways which will not drive these regions apart...But...because of their *technological and economic interdependence*, these areas have sufficient common interests to make up a *community in fact, if not in form*...

"The choice between these two directions—between drifting apart and closer cooperation among the three advanced regions—will shape the world of the future. *A private group can play a role in making that choice*. To this end, David Rockefeller had proposed the formation of a Trilateral Commission of leading private citizens from Japan, Europe, and North America "*whose primary objective, as I see it, would be to bring the best brains in the world to bear on the problems of the future.*"²

B. To Shape Governmental and Non-Governmental Action

"*Inaugurated in July 1973, the Trilateral Commission is a policy making organization.*"³ The Commission seeks "to formulate and propose policies which the regions and nations within the Regions could follow in their relations with one another, in their foreign relations in general, and in the solution of common domestic problems including particularly relations and problems involving

*The material compiled by the editor in this section is drawn from the following Commission documents: *Constitution of the Trilateral Commission*, 1973; *The Trilateral Commission*, a prospectus issued 15 March 1973; *Statement of Purposes*, issued by the Executive Committee of the Trilateral Commission, October 1973; *Trilateral Commission Annual Reports* 1-6; *Financial Statements*; *Dialogue*; and regular Information Brochures.