**THE GENESIS AND FORMATION OF THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION, A TRANSNATIONAL ELITE NETWORK [[1]](#footnote-1)**

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On July 23, 1972, a group of influential citizens from the US, Western Europe and Japan met at the Rockefeller family estate in Pocantico Hills, half an hour's drive north of New York City. They were welcomed by David Rockefeller, grandson of the oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller and chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank. David Rockefeller had summoned the group to express his concern that the advanced industrialized states were drifting “aimlessly into a situation in which they may inflict harm upon each other and other states.” According to Rockefeller, the “impact of growing economic competitiveness and the accelerating pace of technological and social change on policy-making in major industrialized states” had made it imperative that governments transcended the “issues of the moment” and devoted themselves to the strategic problems of the future. “Now“, he declared, “is a propitious time for persons from the private sector to make a valuable contribution to public policy.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

No sooner said than done.

The small circle of men agreed to form the Trilateral Commission (TRICOM). The Commission would, eventually, gather highly influential people in business, politics and academia – from the “trilateral” regions of North America, Western Europe and Japan. And it was soon to be perceived, by many, as an extremely powerful ”rich man’s club”, influencing even the outcome of presidential elections in the US. But what were the more precise reasons for establishing the TRICOM? Who took the initiative and played the leading role? How was the Commission formed and what were its main aims? To answer these questions, this paper will investigate: 1) the thinking behind the formation of the TRICOM; 2) the response to the idea of forming the Commission; 3) the formation process itself, with focus on the initial formulation and negotiation of the TRICOM.[[3]](#footnote-3)

These are issues that have neither been investigated in depth, nor in detail, in academia so far, since until recently the central archive of the TRICOM was closed for research. Nevertheless, in the spring of 2011, as the first researcher ever, I was granted access to the archive – the collection of the Trilateral Commission at the Rockefeller Archive Center. I have thus been able to base this paper on three types of sources: 1) Unpublished primary sources located at the Rockefeller Archive Center and the archive of the TRICOM’s European office (which I visited last year); 2) Published primary sources of the TRICOM and the main protagonists involved in it; 3) Published secondary sources, that is the existing academic literature on the TRICOM. Nevertheless, I only based this paper on a small amount of them, since I still need to go through a lot of the material.

The TRICOM has only been the subject of one ”and a half” academic work.[[4]](#footnote-4) Stephen Gill’s *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* is a very valuable study of the Commission, based on published sources and an impressive number of interviews with members of the TRICOM. Applying a Gramscian theoretical framework, Gill interprets the TRICOM as an organic expression of a new transnational alliance – or “historic block” – between capitalist elites and states, and as contributing to a re-structuring of a US-led hegemonic world order. Gill, who is a political scientist, has studied the TRICOM with the aim of contributing to the development of a historical materialist theory of international relations. Because of his focus, I suspect, and because of his lack of access to unpublished sources from the Commission, Gill doesn’t make a detailed analysis of the genesis and formation of the Commission.[[5]](#footnote-5)

”Trilateralism. The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management” edited by Holly Sklar is an anthology composed of a mixed variety of contributions from scholars, graduate students, journalists and activists, hence my characterization of it as ”half” an academic work. It is written mostly in a Marxist terminology and applies theories of imperialism to interpret the Commission. Many of its contributions have, in my opinion, flaws with respect to methodological consistency and analytical sustainability, but at the same time, the book has a wealth of information on the TRICOM, including some on its foundation.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**1. The Genesis of the Trilateral Commission**

The idea of the TRICOM can be traced back to the thinking that David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Bzrezinski developed, individually, in the late 1960s and the following years.

**1.1 An International Commission for Peace and Prosperity**

In the early 1970s David Rockefeller realized that the constellation of power internationally had changed drastically. Although the US was still dominant, it had declined relatively in terms of its economic power compared to West Germany and Japan, which it had defeated and occupied a few decades ago. Both the reconstruction of Western Germany and Japan had taken place with American aid, but the tremendous economic growth in the decades that followed, now propelled the two countries out of the American orbit. As a consequence of the changing international power constellations, the relationship characterizing the ”three centers of democratic capitalism” in the previous decades had ”deteriorated alarmingly”, according to Rockefeller.[[7]](#footnote-7)

During March 1972, David Rockefeller spoke on this phenomenon before investment forums of Chase Manhattan Bank in both Montreal, London, Brussels, and Paris, calling for an international commission for peace and prosperity to be formed. A message he repeated in front of a Japanese audience at a meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan, in June the same year. The Commission, Rockefeller envisioned, was to be composed of private citizens from the NATO countries and Japan, and it should meet the challenges posed by international trade and investment developments, environmental problems, population control, the situation of the less developed nations and more.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**1.2 A Community of Developed Nations**

In 1970 Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Director of the Research Institute on Communist Affairs, Columbia University, published the book *Between Two Ages. America’s Role in the Technetronic Era,[[9]](#footnote-9)* which became an influential work. The bookdealt with the transitional problems of the industrial societies and was a contribution to the discussion that later became associated with Daniel Bell’s thesis on the coming of a post-industrial society. But in his work, Brzezinski also dealt with the repercussions of this process for international relations and politics.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Brzezinski’s thinking was that the world was experiencing a widening gap between the developed and the less developed nations, making the world unstable and increasing the danger of super-power confrontation and world war. According to Brzezinski, politics was suffering from being constrained within the nation state. Earlier centuries’ transnational aristocracy had essentially faded away, and strong universalist ideologies and movements – notably the Christian Church, socialism and communism – had become nationalized. At the same time, he argued, the world was experiencing the emergence of a new transnational elite, composed of international businessmen, scholars, professionals and public officials. Before long these elites would ”be highly internationalist or globalist in spirit and outlook,” noted Brzezinski, and could easily get into conflict with the ”politically activated masses” who tended to oppose cosmopolitarianism with nativism.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In this situation, Brzezinski argued, it was necessary to forge a new universalist ideology, which had to be both abstract, flexible and highly adaptable. ”Its ideological content must… be highly generalized, more ethical than practical, and more humanistic than nationalistic.” In a historical perspective, according to Brzezinski, Marxism had contributed to the development of such humanistic ideology, but because it had turned dogmatic and rigid, Marxism had failed in providing a rational and internationalist outlook that could be continuously updated and adapted to the changing world. Instead, Brzezinski emphasized, the new ideology had to be a synthesis of the two big ideas marking the present era, liberty and equality – and free of utopianism. America, which in Brzezinski’s analysis was undergoing a third revolution as the first entering the post-industrial – in his terms the technetronic – society, should play a leading role in formulating such an ideology.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Brzezinski also emphasized that the old framework of international politics – ”spheres of influence, military alliances between nation-states, the fiction of sovereignty, doctrinal conflicts arising from nineteenth-century crisis” – were not compatible with the new reality. Instead, Brzezinski wrote, it was time to move forward and create a global consensus on which global cooperation could arise, thus developing a ”common effort to shape a new framework for international politics.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

To promote this agenda and contain the global tendencies towards chaos, that he identified, Brzezinski proposed to form a community of developed nations.

”A community of developed nations is less ambitious than a world government, but more attainable. It attempts to create a new framework for international affairs, creating openings for eventual reconciliation. The developed nations have a great affinity.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Initially, such a community had to be comprised of the allies of the US, he thought. Brzezinski singled out Western Europe and Japan, because they: 1) would continue to grow economically; 2) would maintain relatively democratic political forms; 3) would have a more crucial weight on the gradual evolution of a new international system (than US-USSR relations); 4) represent the most vital regions in the world, since they are in the forefront, together with the US, of scientific and technological innovation.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

”To postulate the need for such a community and to define its creation as the coming decade’s major task is not utopianism”, Brzezinski concluded, but noted that the approach toward building such a community had to be piecemeal.[[16]](#footnote-16) He envisioned a first step where a ”high-level consultative council for global cooperation” would regularly bring heads of governments of the developed world together. It would be more than the OECD, noted Brzezinski, more ”diffused” than NATO, but it would be more effective in developing programs” than the United Nations, whose efficacy was ”unavoidably limited by the Cold War and by north-south divisions.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

**1.3 A Fragile Blossom**

In 1971, Brzezinski visited Japan on a six-month stay, funded by the Ford Foundation. Prior to and during his trip, he engaged himself in a wide range of activities to investigate how Japan was changing and the corresponding domestic and international implications. Among these activities were meetings and interviews with high-ranking politicians and influential academics in Japan and its neighboring countries, the organization of seminars and conferences on the subject, and the study of relevant literature. As a result of his stay, Brzezinski published the book *The Fragile Blossom. Crisis and Change in Japan* in 1971*.*

In the book, Brzezinski argued that Japan was a new vital power center in the world, although not an emerging superpower. Furthermore the summer of 1971 signified, according to Brzezinski, a fundamental shift and a new era in the American-Japanese relations, due to the Nixon Adminstration’s opening up towards China. But the American-Japanese relationship had to be seen in a wider framework, including the emergence of Western Europe, added Brzezinski. ”The emergence of the Common Market highlights the fact that, increasingly, the three economic pillars of a possible global stability and cooperation are the United States, Japan, and Western Europe.” A wide cooperative framework would place Japan in the forefront of a global effort, Brzezinski argued, to ”provide for more orderly and satisfactory international political and economic relations”.[[18]](#footnote-18)

What was the ”cooperative framework” that Brzezinski mentioned? Nothing but his earlier suggestion of a ”community of the developed nations”. He described how this community was already emerging – since all three regions were leaping into the technetronic age – and proposed three measures to help the process along: 1) annual meetings of the trilateral heads of state and government officials; 2) the institutionalization of consultations between trilateral parliamentarians; 3) a continual dialogue among the trilateral social elites. To exemplify the latter point, he mentioned how both the Monnet Action Committee and the Bilderberg Conferences had contributed enormously to the emergence of a European identity and to an Atlantic cooperative spirit. And for the American-Japanese relationship, such interaction between the trilateral elite would encourage the internationalization of Japan without that internationalization being tantamount to Americanization. Brzezinski added: ”The latter is understandably resented; the former is needed.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

**2. The Formative stage of the Trilateral Commission**

The analysis of Zbigniew Bzrezinski and thoughts of David Rockefeller were the embryonic ideas that years later materialized in a concrete and revised form: The formula of the TRICOM. But how were ideas put into practice and what transformation did they experience during that process? These are important questions to answer in order to understand the end result. I will investigate this, focusing on the concrete initiative to form the Commission, how the Commission was formulated and negotiated, and the roles of the main protagonists in this process.

**2.1. Bilderberg**

According to a document on the formation of the TRICOM, Rockefeller’s call to form a Commission received an ”enthusiastic response”. But according to other sources, the process was much more complex.

Rockefeller’s initial call, did not get much reaction, and therefore he was on the verge of skipping it. Another event put him back on track. For several years, Rockefeller had suggested to the Bilderberg Steering Committee that Japanese representatives should be invited to attend the Bilderberg Conferences.[[20]](#footnote-20) For two decades, the conferences had provided the transatlantic elite with a private forum to meet, exchange views on and discuss the interests of the so-called Western world. At this point, Rockefeller felt that ”the best thing to do, rather than start another organization, would be to persuade the members of Bilderberg to include Japan.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Rockefeller repeated his suggestion at the Steering Committee meeting at the Bilderberg Conference in Knokke, Belgium, April, 1972. But he was again ”politely but firmly told no”, especially by Dennis Healey, the then British Chancellor of the Exchequer.[[22]](#footnote-22) Nevertheless, when Michael Blumenthal (earlier trade advisor to President Kennedy and Johnson, later Secretary of the Treasury under Carter) at the Bilderberg Conference expressed concern about the deterioration of relationships among the advanced democracies, and wondered if some private group could change the situation, Rockefeller repeated his idea of forming a private, trilateral Commission. Accordingly, the next eight speakers at the Conference were very enthusiastic about the idea, although the leadership of the Conferences did not change their position.[[23]](#footnote-23)

On his way home, Rockefeller invited Brzezinski to board his private jet. They further discussed the matter, and Brzezinski urged Rockefeller to continue his efforts. Already a few years earlier, in *Between Two Ages*, Brzezinski had stressed that the Atlantic concept was outmoded because it was associated with ”the conditions of post-World War II Europe and the fear of Soviet aggression.” While he recognized that the Atlantic concept had been a bold idea at the time, it was now ”historically and geographically limited” and had to be replaced by a ”broader, more ambitious, and more relevant approach”. He thought that this would be better in line with the problems of the 1970s, which he described as being less overtly ideological, more diffuse and reflective of the ”the malaise of a world that is still unstructured politically and highly inegalitarian economically.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Back home, Rockefeller and Brzezinski decided that if Bilderberg did not understand the importance of the idea, they would have had to start a new organization themselves. A contributing cause to this initiative was that the speech by Rockefeller in Paris had been reported in the Herald Tribune. A month later, Henry Owen and Robert Bowie came to see Rockefeller at Chase. They had read the article and thought highly of it. They urged him to carry on, and Rockefeller included them in the discussions with Brzezinski. Together they singled out George Franklin, who had just left as Executive Director of the Council on Foreign Relations, to carry out the needed preparatory work.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**2.2 Defining and negotiating the Commission**

Rockefeller now asked George Franklin to tour Europe to explore the precise degree of interest in the Commission and possible participants in it. In Europe, Franklin found futile ground, and the same was the case when he and David Rockefeller visited Japan later in June (where Rockefeller spoke at the American Chamber of Commerce). Before going to Japan, Franklin had taken charge of a temporary office at the Rockefeller Plaza to advance the cause. And during May, a small group of Americans and Europeans met to discuss the Commission. In the summer and fall, Rockefeller and a core group of people from the trilateral regions met several times to further advance their visions.[[26]](#footnote-26)

* July 23-24: The first meeting of ”The Trilateral Commission’s Planning Group”, including representatives for all trilateral regions, at Pocantico.[[27]](#footnote-27) They agreed ”strongly” to go ahead with the project and Rockefeller agreed to act as ”Organizing Chairman”.
* September 5 and October 11: In September Rockefeller and three other Americans gathered to discuss the formation, and in October the core group of the American members present at the Pocantico Meeting – Bergsten, Bowie, Brzezinski, Franklin, Manning, Owen, Perkins and Rockefeller – met again.
* November 25: The Japanese representative had to cancel his participation; instead a meeting of a few Americans and Europeans took place, postponing decisive decisions to later.[[28]](#footnote-28)

At these meetings, ideas and guidelines on the organization were presented, discussed and refined. And as a shared understanding and agreement developed, basic decisions were taken. This led to the formulation of a formal proposal for the Commission in March 1973. Throughout this process, possible donors for the Commission were briefed and consulted, and they also played a part in establishing the TRICOM through offering advice, express reservations, etc.

First, we shall take a closer look at the discussions in the preparatory meetings, then at the formal proposal itself.

**2.2.1 Name**

Commission for Peace and Prosperity was still used as the organization’s designation in a memo from May 1972. But in June the organization was now, in a letter, called ”the Tripartite Commission”. The next month, Joseph Nolan listed different alternative names in a letter to David Rockefeller. Among them were ”International Commission for Human Advancement”, ”World Council on Common Problems and Priorities” (Rockefeller deleted ”World Council” and replaced it with ”Commission” in handwriting), ”Global Alliance on Human Goals” and ”Multinational Council on Mutual Concern”. But at the Pocantico meeting, the organizers chose to designate the enterprise The Trilateral Commission”.[[29]](#footnote-29)

**2.2.2 Purpose and character**

In a document dealing with the formation of the TRICOM, the central idea of the private sector contributing to public policy was sharpened (in comparison with the remarks of Rockefeller cited initially). According to Rockefeller, it was now the ”inability of governments to analyze, plan and deal with major range economic and political problems” that had prompted him to take the initiative to form the Commission.[[30]](#footnote-30)

At the meeting in May, the purpose of the Commission had been described as ”to strengthen cooperation among the advanced industrial nations”. More specifically, that meant to:

”1) Advance thinking on common approaches to major problems.

2) Deepen the understanding of the influential men and women involved in the Commission and its proposed sub-Commissions.

3) Sell the ideas developed to the public and governments of the various nations.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

When it came to seeking justification and legitimation for the commission, Rockefeller stated, at the Pocantico meeting, that ”a successful attempt to induce the governments of the three democratic, industrialized regions concerned to pursue common or parallel policies in the face of powerful disintegrative trends would amply justify the effort entailed in forming such a (’trilateral’) commission.[[32]](#footnote-32)

At the same meeting, Max Kohnstamm talked about the need for a new ”conception” of the international order. And he suggested to learn from how Keynes seized the moment after WWII, and how the Monnet Committee had accomplished, in a world of ”growing inter-regional dependencies”, to implement the new conception in Europe. MacGeorge Bundy of the Ford Foundation posed the question if ”the underlying community of interest in preventing political conflict” between the trilateral regions did not, itself, provide the necessary conception for the commission. And Mushakoji observed that the commission should ”reduce the walls dividing power and economic blocks from one another.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

**2.2.3 Size, Scope and Membership**

In the first meeting, in May 1972, it was stressed as ”obvious” that the commission would need both men and women. Discussing the more precise personal criteria for membership, inspiration from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund’s panel was mentioned as relevant. It was composed of persons with a combination of:

1) General wisdom;

2) Expert knowledge in particular fields;

3) The standing necessary to enable them to contribute importantly to acceptance of reports in desired quarters;

At the same meeting, Al Neal mentioned that the power structure in Western Europe and Japan was much less diffused than in the US, therefore, he stated, it was important to include ”leaders of the various power centers”.[[34]](#footnote-34)

At the Pocantico Meeting, Rockefeller suggested that individuals from academic communities, labor and religious groups, and business in the trilateral regions were to populate the Commission. Earlier on, the suggestion of defining the criteria of membership as belonging to the ”developed non-Communist nations”, had been discussed. MacGeorge Bundy thought that this criterion should be replaced by the concept of ”large advanced economies”, so as to open up for future U.S.S.R. inclusion – although he added that he doubted the Soviets would participate in a non-governmental group. This was in line with Brzezinski’s thinking in *Between Two Ages*. In it, he had ventilated the idea that the advanced socialist countries could eventually be drawn to his community of developed nations. And that such a step could open the prospect of even including the USSR. “The Soviet Union”, wrote Bzrezinski, ”may come to participate in such a larger framework of cooperation because of the inherent attraction of the West for the Eastern Europeans – whom the Soviet Union would have to follow lest it lose them altogether…” Progress in this direction, Brzezinski noted, ”would help to terminate the civil war” that had ”dominated international politics among the developed nations for the last hundred and fifty years”.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Brzezinski repeated the same ideas in his later work on the Japanese blossom. Nevertheless, he also reiterated that the three vital centers of the world consisted of North America, Western Europe and Japan, and stressed that because of growing similarities between these regions, they were the pillars of a world community taking shape. The organizers also discussed participation in the Commission of people from less developed nations. Brzezinski had already covered this topic in *Between Two Ages*, where he concluded that the Third World might have some sort of institutional expression, but that it was ”premature” at the moment. The organizers concluded at the outset that the members should be drawn only from the three trilateral regions, and that others might be invited as observers, so that nobody felt excluded.[[36]](#footnote-36)

When it came to the size of the Commission, Rockefeller suggested a number of 30-40 ”leading private citizens”. He preferred a rather small commission because it would be conducive to a better discussion. But the negative aspect of delimiting the number was the problem of representativeness, i.e. ensuring that different ”power centers”, political views, professions etc. be present in the Commission.[[37]](#footnote-37)

At the meeting in September, the organizers decided that if any one of the Europeans that had attended the Pocantico Meeting was not able to participate, a substitute ”from his country should be invited” instead.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**2.2.4 Leadership**

How should authority and decision-making be distributed in the new commission? At the meeting in September, the participants discussed Kohnstamm’s suggestion that all three regions should have its own regional chairman, but ”with one designated as the leader of the enterprise” who would be responsible for directing the staff and the general directions of the Commission. A decision on this issue was postponed to later. In view of the difficulty of finding a suitable European Co-Chairman, who could ”speak for all of the EEC countries,” Kohnstamm had suggested that the position could rotate ”among men from the major countries”, but this proposal was rejected.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In the October meeting, the participants decided that Rockefeller should invite Gerard Smith (diplomat and chief U.S. delegate to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, SALT, in 1969, and Rockefeller’s in-law) to become US Co-Chairman of the Commission (Canada was not yet included). Also, Rockefeller should indicate to Smith that this position was possibly the leading one among the Co-Chairmen in the Commission.[[40]](#footnote-40) But at the meeting in November, Rockefeller had abandoned the idea of a leading Co-Chairman. Nevertheless, the center of the new enterprise would still be in the US. Rockefeller referred to how both European and Japanese representatives had agreed on that in Pocantico. Instead of a leading Co-Chairman, Rockefeller proposed a Director of the Commission, who should assume the leadership of the staff and the day-to-day business. The new director, Rockefeller suggested, should be Brzezinski both ”because of his personal qualities and his great interest in Japan.” And after two years, the directorship should be assumed by another region. There was ”a great enthusiasm” for this at the meeting, and it was decided, provided both the Europeans and the Japanese agreed.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Also, during the fall, the Europeans and the Japanese involved in the preparations designated their future Co-Chairmen of the Commission, respectively Max Kohnstamm and Takeshi Watanabe.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**2.2.5 Output, consensus and impact**

The organizers of the TRICOM also discussed the future output of the commission. The dominant opinion was that the TRICOM should not undertake original research, but draw on work by others. The Commission should not aim at producing books like some of the Council on Foreign Relations projects, but on ”agreed reports and recommendations”. Again, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund was highlighted as an example. Fifteen years earlier its panel had conducted some study projects, and Franklin explained that the panel did not try to force unanimous conclusions, ”but permitted both dissenting opinions and dissenting footnotes. Some such technique seems essential if reports are to avoid the least common denominatorism so usual in group efforts.” Nevertheless, Franklin’s sentence was deleted and replaced with the following sentence: ”strove instead for general consensus.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

At the Pocantico meeting, the first reports to be issued by the TRICOM were discussed. Brzezinski and Kohnstamm agreed that it was important that the Commission achieved ”visibility quickly and in a manner which would merit the attention of governments and the enthusiasm of influential private citizens.[[44]](#footnote-44) The question of impact was a recurrent theme for the organizers. In October, Franklin wrote in a letter that the Commission should not only make ”concrete recommendations with respect to policy but also press for adoption of the recommendations by governments and others.”[[45]](#footnote-45)

In November, 1972, Henry Owen consulted several influential Congress members, high-ranking people in the White House and in the American media. Owen asked each of them if the Commission under preparation ”would exert much influence” on the US. executive branch, the Congress, and the press. Their answers were, according to Owen, ”remarkably similar”: It would depend, they told him, primarily on who served in the Commission and, secondly, how impact was sought. With respect to the former, the members of the TRICOM had to have some ”eminence” or an ”entree to the White House” or ”respected on the Hill”, and not discounted because of ”known and perennial attachment to internationalism and Atlanticism.” With respect to the latter, they needed to be devoted and use a fair amount of time to discuss their work with members of Congress, executive branch officials and members of the press. ”If these two conditions were fulfilled,” Owen was assured, ”the Commission could be very influential, indeed.”

Owen received suggestions that the Commission should either have regular briefings for leading Congress members, informal dinners with selected members of Congress, and in any case personal meetings between Commission and Congress members ”would be essential”. ”Mere documents” would not have much effect. Also, Owen was encouraged to include Congress members in the Commission, because that would enhance impact.[[46]](#footnote-46)

**2.3 Formal Proposal and Launching**

The formal proposal for the Trilateral Commission is a 13-page document, with 3 appendices on task force reports, budget and organization. No author is mentioned, but Brzezinski might have written it – at least it literally borrows some sentences from his earlier book *The Fragile Blossom*. No date is printed on the document, but someone has written March 15, 1973 in handwriting.[[47]](#footnote-47)

In the introduction, the document highlighted the trilateral regions for their economic, industrial and technological resources. These resources made them carry a ”global responsibility”. Nevertheless, they all faced environmental and security problems, and the challenge of leaping into a post-industrial society. Their relationship was threatened by serious problems, mainly in the economic field, and the possibility of domestic concerns working as a hindrance for effective collaboration. Such cooperation, the document stated, did not involve ”setting up of super-government to run the advanced world”, the establishment of a new anti-Communist alliance, or ”foreshadowing a rich man’s club”. On the contrary, the TRICOM would help the more systematic ”jointly transferring of larger resources from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere”. And in the future ”more advanced Communist states” might become partners.[[48]](#footnote-48)

According to the document, two paths were being outlined: one, in which technological and economic interdependence paved the way for common stability, security and welfare, in the trilateral regions themselves, and progress in the Third World and in relations with the socialist states. Another, where the regions drifted apart.[[49]](#footnote-49) The choice between these paths, would, according to the document, ”shape the world of the future.”

David Rockefeller was quoted for saying that the primary objective of the TRICOM would be to ”bring the best brains in the world” to bear on the problems of the future. More formally, the objectives were listed as:

1) Lessening communications breakdowns and developing a shared understanding of the leaders of the trilateral regions.

2) Proposing policies, with respect to economic, political and defense relations for the trilateral regions (if that was not possible, then at least agreement on what *not* to do), and domestic problems.

3) Fostering understanding and support of Commission recommendations both in governmental and private sectors in the trilateral regions.[[50]](#footnote-50)

An earlier memorandum had limited the objectives to two (no. 2 and 3), and also described them in more ambitious formulations, e.g. the ”acceptance” of policies by leadership groups, and their ”adoptions” by governments.[[51]](#footnote-51)

With respect to leadership, the preparatory work led by David Rockefeller was now being taken over by appointed Co-Chairmen of the three regions, Gerard C. Smith (North America), Takeshi Watanabe (Japan) and Max Kohnstamm (Western Europe). Zbigniew Brzezinski would serve as the Director of the Commission, leading its work on a day-to-day basis, with responsibility to the three Chairmen. An Executive Committee (EXCOM) would be the principal organ of the TRICOM, responsible for its policy recommendations.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Through wide consultations in the trilateral regions, the members of the EXCOM and of the Commission itself were being chosen by the Chairmen (in collaboration with ”a group of individuals”). Professional and geographical diversity was a priority. As well as involvement in the production of specific task force reports. Because ”only if Commissioners feel they have had a significant part in the development of recommendations, will they be interested in promoting recommendations”.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The purpose of the TRICOM Program of Policy Studies would be three-fold:

1) Providing policy recommendations;

2) Cultivating cooperation among members;

3) Developing ”longer-range” trilateral studies;

The document listed different types of studies envisaged and different topics worth investigating[[54]](#footnote-54) and ended with some remarks of Kohnstamm about the Commission not becoming a tool for negotiations (i.e. traditional diplomacy).

In the spring of 1973, the TRICOM was officially pronounced.

**Discussions and Conclusions**

Certainly, Brzezinski was one of the chief architects of the TRICOM. Not only did he urge Rockefeller to go on with his vision and took part in the preparatory work, but he also contributed with substantial thinking. Nevertheless, his writings on ”the community of developed nations” are to some extent ambiguous. The concept of community is never clear. Was it a community of interest, as one was inclined to infer from his allegation that it was ”gradually emerging”? Or was he referring to some sort of organization that needed to be formed? The tension between these two options of interpretations was reconciled, eventually, with the formation of the TRICOM, both reflecting the interdependence of the developed nations and their social elites, and the need to put politics in control of the integrative processes and the turmoil they created.

Another ambiguity was the quasi-Marxist assumptions that sustained the line of Brzezinski's thinking. Was it a mere tactical concession to the dominating *zeitgeist* in the late sixties that led Brzezinski to praise vital Marxism for its contribution to the forging of a universalist, humanistic ideology and to open the perspective of an East-West reconciliation? Or was he himself a materialist thinker on beech felling in the enemy camp? The central ideas that international economic changes, summarized in the later concept of interdependence, had paved the way for parallel political institutions to be created in order to manage the transformations processes – and the notion that a new social class, a transnational elite, should command this process, being the bearers of progress and internationalism (in contrast to the nationalistic masses) – could indicate something more than just a materialist analysis. Especially when what was suggested as the cure eventually got to be seen by many as something similar to a reverse communist international. Most likely though, Brzezinski’s ideas was rooted in his earlier writings in which he and Samuel P. Huntington focused on possibilities for the convergence of American and Soviet societies.[[55]](#footnote-55)

It is very doubtful if something similar to the TRICOM had ever been formed, had not David Rockefeller taken charge of the matter and added his prestige, money and connections to the aspirations. In that light, and the role played by Rockefeller as the convener and organizer of the Commission, Rockefeller became the principal architect of the endeavor. But to put it simple, it was the dynamic meeting and convergence of ideas between the thinker Brzezinski and the “private politician” and patron Rockefeller, which catapulted the idea of some sort of developed world council into the formula of the TRICOM. Brzezinski had dreamed of a trilateral process including meetings of both heads of state and parliamentarians from all regions, but had to settle for less. But the TRICOM was not so far from his vision of a first step toward organizing a ”high-level consultative council for global cooperation”, except that it was now to be considered private council of the trilateral social elite. And that was an achievement in itself.[[56]](#footnote-56)

At this point it is hard to conclude what led the Bilderberg Steering Committee to reject Japanese inclusion, but perhaps it was no coincidence that it was a European representative who rebuffed Rockefeller’s proposal. After all, through the Bilderberg Conferences, the Europeans were in a privileged position to influence the Americans. Most likely, they didn’t want to loose that position. But in all eventualities, the Steering Committee’s rejection of Rockefeller’s proposal, and the support he received from the ground floor, from Brzezinski and others, led Rockefeller to form a new organization, with the purpose of advance thinking on how to solve common problems, deepen the common understanding and, principally, ”sell the ideas to the public and governments of the various nations.”

In this paper, I have omitted to go deeper into the background situation of the Commission’s formation. But it is natural to see the 1930s and the WWII as one of the principal experiences leading both Brzezinski and Rockefeller to conclude that the industrial centers of the democratic world should not be allowed to drift apart, during a new economic crisis and transition, and fall into nationalist thinking and approaches that would harm, possibly even destroy the world order established after WWII. Furthermore, as is quite evident from the writings of especially Brzezinski, he had come to believe, in 1970, that this order was already disintegrating, and that common efforts from the three vital world centers were needed in order to shape a new – what later was termed a “renovated” – world order, that would cope with the problems and challenges of a much more interdependent world.

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With regard to the membership, the ambition of a considerable participation of women in the Commission was never fulfilled. At the center of concern was recruitment of the right commissioners according to power and influence, not gender. At the November meeting, Kohnstamm mentioned the trouble of achieving a balance of various sectors of leadership and stated that the choice on Executive Committee members of the TRICOM depended on whether the primary motive was to ”get good recommendations or whether it is action on the recommendations.”[[57]](#footnote-57) To put it simple, this was a choice between experts and politicians.

A related topic was whom the members represented when participating in the Commission. Their profession, branch, company, nations? Or just themselves? Here were also some tensions present. As we have seen with the example of Europeans being substited with people from their own countries, some certainly considered TRICOM members to be national representatives. And when labor leaders from the US were selected for the TRICOM, Franklin asked experts in this field for advice, including John Thomas Dunlup (labor scholar and later US Secretary of Labor) and David Abner Morse (former Deputy Secretary of Labor and later Director-General of the ILO). Both recommended Lane Kirkland (later president of the AFL-CIO). But Morse mentioned that Kirkland had to operate ”under the Meany line”, referring to the then powerful President of the AFL-CIO, George Meany. And he cautioned Franklin to seek diversity with respect to the second labor leader representative in the Commission.[[58]](#footnote-58) Was it possible to have people attending, officially in their individual capacity, but at the same time representing something close to a party line?

During the Pocantico meeting, the Trilateral Commission was conceived as a group of 30-40 persons, but the dilemma of securing both representativeness – that is essentially balancing the power centers referred to earlier on – and influence led the organizers to enlarge the Commission to more than 150 people. This led to another dilemma, between having both quite large and at the same time effective consensus building groups. That problem was solved through creating the EXCOM of the TRICOM, who initially were meeting more often than the rest of the Committee and who were supposed to be able to take positions on issues of the day – something that was later abandoned because it was neither possible, nor desirable.

Also the geographical scope of the Commission was in contest. What in the end determined the composition of the Commission, with respect to nationalities, was the social system governing the country and the level of development of the nation. Thus both the socialist and third world countries were left out, but not designated as enemies. On the contrary, the Commission continued to stress the importance of collaborating with these countries, perhaps also clinging to the idea put forward by Brzezinski of the possibility of inviting the Eastern European socialist states. Such inclusion could both open the door to the USSR and isolate it if it didn’t follow suit.

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The TRICOM was launched with high ambitions. The organization was unique. For the first time Asians were included into the unofficial, private engine room of international order making – at least according to the TRICOM itself. Also, the TRICOM was combining different aspects of existing private councils, mixing a closed forum for debate and policy shaping of the elite (such as Bilderberg) with public press conferences, issues of reports and bulletins (such as known and influential think tanks). As mentioned, Rockefeller had noticed that the justification of the TRICOM would be ”a successful attempt to induce the governments of the three democratic, industrialized regions concerned to pursue common or parallel policies in the face of powerful disintegrative trends, which would amply justify the effort entailed in forming such a (’trilateral’) commission.[[59]](#footnote-59)” The question was what would justify the TRICOM in case this ambition was not fulfilled in the coming years?

**Appendix:** **Present at the Pocantico Meeting,** **July 23-24, 1972**

**- Americans:** C. Fred Bergsten (economist and former assistant to Henry A. Kissinger, then Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution), Robert Bowie (Professor at the Center for International Studies, Harvard University, and later Deputy Director of the CIA), Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski (earlier Director of the Research Institute on Communist Affairs, Columbia University, then member of the Policy Planning Council of the US Department of State and the Council on Foreign Relations), McGeorge Bundy (former National Security Advisor, then President, the Ford Foundation), George Franklin (Executive Director, Council on Foreign Relations), Henry Owen (Brookings Institution), and David Rockefeller (President and Chief Executive, Chase Manhattan Bank, lifelong member, Council on Foreign Relations, and former participant, Bilderberg Conferences).

**- Europeans:** Karl Carstens (former Director of the Chancellors office, then CDU member of the Bundestag, later president of the Federal Republic of Germany), Prince Guido Colonna di Paliano (diplomat, earlier Deputy Secretary of NATO and European Commissioner, then President of Rinascente), François Duchene (Director, International Institute for Strategic Studies), René Foch (…), Max Kohnstamm (former private secretary to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, Secretary and High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community and Vice President, Action Committee for the United States of Europe, then member of the Club of Rome’s ’inner group’ and President, European Community Institute for University Studies), Bayless Manning (President, Council on Foreign Relations).

**- Japanese:** Kiichi Miyazawa (earlier Japanese Minister of International Trade and Industry, then member of the Japanese House of Representatives, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance and Prime Minister) Kinhide Mushakoji (Director, Institute of International Relations, Sophia University), Saburo Okita (then President, Japan Center for international Exchange), later minister of foreign affairs), Tadashi Yamamoto (…).⁠[[60]](#footnote-60)

1. Because of teaching obligations and the time consuming effort of collecting the source material for my dissertation, I have not had time yet to really investigate and think through the theoretical aspects of my work. So, even though I don’t touch on these issues in this paper, I will very much appreciate thoughts and comments on those aspects. Also, beside the relevant question of how to measure the influence of TRICOM, I am interested in suggestions on how I extend my research project from a more narrow focus on the Trilateral Commission to larger questions such as: ”What is the role of unofficial diplomacy?”, ”what implications do private counsels, such as the TRICOM, have for democracy?”, and ”what is the relationship between the state and private councils (and their like)?”. Besides raising questions about source materials, this also involves the difficult issue of how to generalize particular studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I will not give the full reference for the sources in this paper, only a title and a date. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ideally, I would also have investigated the initial funding of the Commission, where Ford Foundation played a role (as indicated with the participation of MacGeorge Bundy). And even more importantly, I find it necessary to investigate and establish the international situation - economically, politically, diplomatically etc. - that formed the background to the formation of the TRICOM. This will be done later. At this point, the situation will only be described indirectly, through the thoughts and ideas of the organizers of the TRICOM themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Plus an academic article on the Japanese group of the TRICOM. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Stephen Gill: *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* henvisning til litteratur, New York, 1990, see p. p. 137ff. concerning the foundation of the TRICOM. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Holly Sklar (ed.): *Trilateralism. The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management,* South End Press, Boston, 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. David Rockefeller: *Memoirs*, Random House, New York, 2002, p. 415-416. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rockefeller, 2002, p. 415-416; Reforms and the World Economy: A Banker's Overview - Address by David Rockefeller, June 19, 1972; Progress of Organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Viking Press, New York, 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Daniel Bell: *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, Penguin Books, New York, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Brzezinski, 1970, p. 47f., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., p. 123ff, 177, 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 1970, p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., p. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., p. 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Zbigniew Brzezinski: *The Fragile Blossom. Crisis and Change in Japan*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 4-7, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., p. 140-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Fore more on the Bilderberg Conferences, see Ingeborg Philipsen: *Diplomacy with Ambiguity. The History of the Bilderberg Organization 1952-1977*, Unpublished PhD.-dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Progress of Organization; Collection of Memorandums, 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rockefeller, 2002, p. 416; Collection of Memorandums, 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Franklin to McWilliams, August 18, 1977. Franklin was not present at the conference, and the letter is written several years later, therefore the number can easily be an exaggeration. Even though the Steering Committee insisted on the transatlantic nature of the conferences, they also discussed possible Japanese inclusion the rest of the year, including in the fall where they reached a consensus that Japanese could be invited on an ad hoc basis when it was relevant. See Minutes of 2 Meetings of the Steering Committee... [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Collection of Memorandums, 1972; Brzezinski, 1970, p. 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Collection of Memorandums, 1972; The Trilateral Commission at 25; Between Past...and Future. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Franklin to McWilliams, August 18, 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See the apendix for a list of participants and short biographies. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Informal Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, November 25, 1972, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Memorandum from George S. Franklin, May 11, 1972; Nolan to Rockefeller, July 5, 1972; Duchene to Franklin, June 27, 1972; Nolan to Rockefeller, July 5, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. DR and RES marginal notes, The Trilateral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Meeting of May 9, 1972 - Memorandum from George Franklin, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Meeting of May 9, 1972 - Memorandum from George Franklin, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972; Brzezinski, 1970, p. 141, 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972; Brzezinski, 1970, p. 295ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Meeting of May 9, 1972 - Memorandum from George Franklin. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Luncheon Conversation of September 5 About the Trilateral Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Meeting of October 11, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Informal Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, November 25, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Progress of Organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Meeting of May 9, 1972 - Memorandum from George Franklin, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Franklin to Cooper, October 9, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Trilateral Commission - Memorandum of Conversation from Henry Owen, November 30, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The Trilateral Commission - A Proposal; see p. 140f. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The Trilateral Commission - A Proposal, p. 1f. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. In his speeches to the Chase Manhattan Bank forum, Rockefeller had described this path and warned that ”trends towards isolationism, protectionism, and nationalism” was already evident. See Collection of Memorandums, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The Trilateral Commission - A Proposal, p. 3f. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Collection of Memorandums, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The Trilateral Commission - A Proposal, p. 4ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Zbiegniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington: *Political Power: USA/USSR*, New York Viking Press, 1964. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Different influences and inspirations in the formation processes will be investigated in the future. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Informal Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, November 25, 1972, p. 3f. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Possible Labor Leaders for Executive Committee - Memorandum from Franklin, December 21, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Meeting on Proposed Trilateral Commission, Pocantico, N.N., July 23-24, 1972. Present also, was S. Frederick Starr and Edward Morse, both described as ”Rapporteurs”?? All biographical information is from TRICOM bibliographical materials and/or entries at wikipedia.org (english). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)