English Abstract

*The Trilateral Commission. The Global Dawn of Informal Elite Governance and Diplomacy, 1972-1982* is the first historical study of The Trilateral Commission based on unpublished, primary sources from its archives. It is about the creation and development of the Commission and its significance for how we understand governance and diplomacy.

The Commission arose out of fear in US elite circles that the democratic industrial centers of the world were drifting apart, heading towards crisis and conflict, and in specific opposition to the unilateral actions of the Nixon Administration. David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski founded an informal and exclusive, elite organization, comprised of North Americans, Western Europeans, and Japanese. In just a few years some of its central tenets, principally the inclusion of Japan as an equal partner of the US and Western Europe, were formally institutionalized in the G7 meetings.

In the US the Commission reflected the transition in the foreign policy elite, from the old East Coast Establishment to a new and more fragmented, professionalized and politicized elite. In the context of the Vietnam War and a demand for democratization of foreign policy decision-making, it served as a refuge from the public for these elite circles, thus manifesting a democratic contradiction embedded in its own nature. It aimed to formulate a new foreign policy consensus, which would accommodate the declining US superpower in a broader trilateral framework and in an adjusted world order, which in perspective would include the Eastern Block and Third World countries.

This dissertation demonstrates the extensive links and flows between the Commission, governments, and international organizations. The Commission had to strike a balance between being close to and independent from government, and between challenging and complementing the formal sphere. Policy-making and diplomacy are conventionally understood as being government functions, or, alternatively, that the informal sphere impact on formal policy processes. On the basis of the case of the Trilateral Commission I argue that it is more accurate to conceptualize contemporary policy-making and diplomacy as carried out collectively in overlapping transnational elite networks. Accordingly the concept of Informal Governance Actor has been developed and the concept of informal diplomacy reinterpreted.