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Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and **Federico Romero**, eds. ***International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991.*** Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014. ISBN: 9780415729840 (hardback, $155.00).

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Reviewed by **William Gray**, Purdue University

Global shocks have a way of bringing forth new institutions and new approaches to international cooperation. The years 1945-49 have long been understood as a watershed for global organization. Increasingly, historians are billing the 1920s as a crucial early stage in the "emergence of international society."[1] In both cases, the enormous devastation wrought by world wars gave rise to efforts to restructure the world's affairs in the interests of peace and prosperity.

Following the analogy of postwar settlements, some have looked to the end of the Cold War in the 1990s as the third formative era of the twentieth century.[2] Yet a case could be made for the 1970s as the more significant foundational decade. Confronted with fears of economic collapse – precipitated by the breakdown of fixed exchange rates and the 'oil shock' of 1973 – leaders in the capitalist West chose to concert their responses at face-to-face gatherings. Summit meetings were not new, but what was novel from the mid-1970s onward was the willingness of leaders to meet routinely to discuss economic as well as security challenges. The G-7 embraced a pattern of annual meetings in alternating member states. For member countries, the European Council brought heads of state or government together three times each year – an astonishing increase in European leaders' shared face time. Both of these institutions (but especially the G-7) graduated from improvised, informal meetings to heavily scripted media events.

Political scientists have, of course, long puzzled over the meaning and impact of this uptick in personal diplomacy. Why did leaders continue to meet together year after year, and what was accomplished at

[1] Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge, 2012).

[2] Paul Kennedy and William I. Hitchcock, eds., *From War to Peace: Altered Strategic Landscapes in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

these gatherings?[3] The volume at hand revisits these questions using the broad palate of archival sources now available across the G-7 countries. The result is a series of snapshots into the origins, internal workings, and external impact of the shift toward 'international summitry' in the 1970s. Thanks to the recent trend which finds European historians writing in English, the results of this first-rate research are readily available to readers of H-Diplo. (The volume's high retail price may be off-putting, but Kindle rental deals can be had from Amazon for as low as U.S. $19.99.)

In a brisk romp through the history of twentieth-century summits – pausing only to contemplate the significance of mountaintop imagery – David Reynolds suggests a rough typology of face-to-face meetings. 'Personal' summits involved risky one-on-one encounters, such as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's hapless meetings with German Führer Adolf Hitler. 'Plenary' summits were, by contrast, more predictable because they were backstopped by a lot of staff. (Reynolds's example is the Yalta conference in 1945, but the four-power Geneva summit in 1955 is another obvious case.) Finally, 'Process' summits were as much about the act of assembling as they were about reaching agreement. Media presence was an essential feature at all of them.[4] Reynolds's brief essay provokes a number of questions for this reviewer. What exactly was the difference between 'personal' summit meetings and the widespread practice of exchanging visits? Why was it a 'summit' when French and German leaders met twice each year, or when presidents Georges Pompidou and Richard Nixon met in the Azores in 1971 – but not when German chancellors visited Camp David or the Lyndon B Johnson Ranch? Perhaps, as Reynolds suggests, the concept of a summit implied a juxtaposition of adversaries. If that is the case, then do the routinized summits of the G-7 and European Council actually deserve that name?

In a focused essay on the origins of the 1975 economic summit at Rambouillet, Elizabeth Benning shows that the main impetus came from West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.[5] During his time as Finance Minister (1972-74), Schmidt had come to relish face-to-face meetings with his French, British, American, and Japanese counterparts – the so-called 'Library Group' or G-5. When Schmidt and his French conversation partner, Finance Minister Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, ascended to the top leadership posts in their respective countries, it was only natural that they would aspire to a comparable form of intimate communication among the G-5. A fresh impetus came in the summer of 1975, when fears of a worldwide recession, the prospect of confrontation with the oil-producing states, and panic over the communist gains in Italy persuaded Schmidt and Giscard that top-level discussion was needed. Outwardly, the initiative came from France, but Schmidt played a formative role from the start in defining the agenda and urging his Western colleagues to accept Giscard's invitation. As Schmidt explained to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson in July 1975, "The world economy now needs a 'management from the top'" (49). Did the G-7 eventually supply this "management"? Benning's essay has

[3] Nicholas Bayne and Robert Putnam, *Hanging Together: Cooperation and Conflict in the Seven-Power Summits*, revised and enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard, 1987). See also Nicolas Bayne, *Economic Diplomat: The Memoirs of Sir Nicholas Bayne KCMG* (Durham: The Memoir Club, 2010).

[4] David Reynolds, "Twentieth Century Summitry and the G7 Process," *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991*. Routledge, 2014, 11-22.

[5] Elizabeth Benning, "The Road to Rambouillet and the Creation of the Group of Five," 39-63.

less to say on this count; we learn what Schmidt *wanted* to achieve at Rambouillet, but not how well he succeeded.

Further essays in the volume provide a range of perspectives on what the G-7 meetings accomplished. Nicholas Bayne reproduces the grading scale he first developed with Robert Putnam in the 1980s for judging the achievements of specific summits.[6] Piers Ludlow's contribution examines the internal effects of routine summitry. In his analysis, the summit structure sounds more like a plateau than a peak. On one hand, the G-7 represented a "flattening out of the hierarchy" (143); the United States was but one power among many, and it had to concert its decisions with several partners. At the same time, the cleft between the Seven and the smaller European powers was far steeper than in older Western groupings – NATO, for example, or the Organization for Ecomomic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Ludlow takes the G-7 seriously as a significant departure in international relations. It reduced drama by eliminating any guesswork as to which Western leaders would agree to meet with one another: they all met together on an annual basis. Furthermore, the widely publicized nature of the gatherings generated pressure to fly home with concrete results.[7]

Other contributors are less certain that public exposure was sufficient to guarantee meaningful outcomes. Federico Romero points to the stark contrast between the economic philosophy of Germany and the United States, favoring stability, and the British preference for full employment.[8] Far from resolving these disputes, the G-7 summits merely papered over for public consumption: "Ultimately, the summit function was psychological and cultural." (126) Key constituencies had to be reassured that the daunting challenges of the 1970s could be mastered through concerted dialogue. Rambouillet in November 1975 was convincing enough on this count to invite a follow-up just seven months later. The Puerto Rico summit of June 1976 – the first to feature all seven members of the newly fashioned club – "signalled that relief had been achieved from the nightmarish image of uncontrolled, cascading disintegration" (131).

Deepening this theme of external impact, Noel Bonhomme treats the G-7 summits as a "tool of public diplomacy" (92). The White House wanted to use the meetings to convey a message about U.S. leadership; the Elysée Palace, by contrast, sought to show that France's views were heard and respected. As a result, the two countries learned to pursue distinctive media strategies rather than spin the summit results for their respective publics. By implication, the degree of internal consensus among the G-7 was less relevant than how the outcome was packaged to individual national media outlets. Taking Bonhomme's argument to its natural conclusion: it almost did not matter what was agreed at these summits so long as national governments could plausibly claim that their own aims had been achieved. It is not clear that the end result was an "internationalisation of national public opinions" (109), as

[6] Nicholas Bayne, "The Foundations of Summitry," 23-38. See especially the chart on page 26, showing a grade distribution from A through D for the summits in the years 1975-83.

[7] Piers Ludlow, "Creating the Expectation of a Collective Response: The Impact of Summitry on Transatlantic Relations," 138-151.

[8] Federico Romero, "Refashioning the West to Dispel its Fears," 117-137.

Bonhomme concludes, except for the trivial fact that newspapers in various countries reported on the same meeting at the same time.[9]

The most satisfying essays in the volume avoid focusing exclusively on the G-7 and European Council summits. Angela Romano identifies the OECD as the central locus for Western bargaining over the appropriate conditions (interest rates, volume, duration) for extending credit to Soviet-bloc governments. Within Europe, it was the foreign ministers, operating through the mechanism of European Political Cooperation (EPC), who set the tone. The European Council merely endorsed the earlier conclusions. As for the G-7, Romano argues that summits could just as easily end in bitterness as in harmony. In particular, the 1982 Versailles summit yielded a hostile rupture over Eastern trade, with the Reagan administration demanding the implementation of sanctions against the Soviet Union and the European states steadfastly refusing. All told, Romano aims to challenge the centrality of the two summit institutions at the heart of this volume – at least on the question of trade with the Soviet bloc.[10]

Hitoshi Suzuki takes this strategy even further, albeit in pursuit of an argument that foregrounds Japanese foreign and trade policy rather than Western summitry per se. He traces U.S. and European trade conflicts with Japan across multiple forums in the 1970s – including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the OECD, the G-7, and the European Council. According to Suzuki, Japanese leaders used every opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to expanding world trade. This did not work out as planned, though: rather than reaping words of approbation, they had to endure a steady barrage of complaints from U.S. and European summit partners. The end result was a substantial reorientation of Japanese trade policy in the direction of more open domestic markets and a more appropriately valued currency.[11] For many readers, it will be treat enough to see the world reflected in Japanese Foreign Ministry sources. Yet Suzuki's patiently argued essay also suggests two important conclusions about the pace and significance of summit diplomacy. First, there was no single breakthrough moment that yielded a change of heart in Tokyo. Ferociously independent ministries needed time and a long succession of conferences to line up in support of a new trade philosophy. Second, it seems entirely plausible that Japanese leaders would have made different (and less cooperative) choices without the steady pressures they faced in GATT, the G-7, and the OECD. The upshot is that summitry mattered.

Or some of it did, anyway. Historians (including this reviewer) often struggle to get a firm grasp on the explosion of conferences in the 1970s. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) has yielded an entire sub-branch of historical literature.[12] The 'North-South dialogue' has been harder to

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[9] Noel Bonhomme, "Between Political Messages and Public Expectations: G7 Summits in French and US Public Opinion (1975-1985)," 92-113.

[10] Angela Romano, "G7 Summits, European Councils and East-West Economic Relations (1975-1982)," 198-222.

[11] Hitoshi Suzuki, "The Rise of Summitry and EEC-Japan Trade Relations," 153-173.

[12] See, for example, Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge, 2011); Matthias Peter and Hermann Wentker, eds., *Die KSZE im Ost-West-Konflikt. Internationale Politik und gesellschaftliche Transformation 1975-1990*, (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012).

distill into readable form. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) plenaries (1972, 1976, 1979), UN special sessions (1974, 1975, 1980), and the Conference for International Economic Cooperation (1975-77) were just a few of the major venues – alongside Commonwealth Conferences and European Community meetings with associated African, Caribbean, and Pacific states. It is fair to ask how deeply any historian would be tempted to plunge into these disintegrating heaps of paper, especially since the results of the 'North-South dialogue' were so intangible.

For the most part, the volume at hand avoids engagement with these alternative conference networks. The CSCE in 1975 is barely mentioned, despite the temporal overlap with the rise of the G-7. One author does, however, take a valiant look at the last gasp of the 'North-South dialogue,' the 1981 Cancun Summit. Guia Migani notes that the original goal – inspired by the 1980 report of the Brandt Commission – was to work around entrenched positions at the United Nations (UN) and find a fresh start for productive North-South conversations. Such a conference only made sense if the U.S. joined; yet the Reagan administration would only do so if the agenda was kept vague and the circle of participants small, rather like the G-7. Thus, rather than institutionalizing a new forum for 'dialogue,' the Cancun Summit was a one-off event, noteworthy mainly for President Reagan's surprisingly heartfelt side conversations with each of the conference participants. As the *Guardian* pithily observed, all the occasion amounted to was "a rather expensive form of encounter group therapy" (189).[13] Multilateral summit diplomacy failed to resolve 'North-South' issues; its most useful role was to smooth over bilateral relations between the U.S. and leaders from the Global South. The 'New International Economic Order,' proclaimed so boldly at the UN in 1974, ended in a whimper.

All told, the essays in this volume suggest that there is much work yet to be done on the fiendishly complex diplomatic world of the 1970s. The best historical insights can be expected from a problem-oriented approach – emphasizing specific international issues or individual national strategies – rather than a narrow institutional analysis of the G-7.[14] Ministerial councils of NATO and the OECD probably deserve equal billing with the European Council, which as things stand receives rather less attention in the volume than the title would suggest. The new summitry was, in the end, but one expression of a broader Western (or 'trilateral') commitment to ongoing partnership. Emmanuel Mourlon-Droul and Federico Romero have put forth a compelling series of investigations into this surprisingly intensive and long-lasting phase of international cooperation.

William Glenn Gray is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. He has authored numerous articles and book chapters on U.S. and German foreign relations, from monetary turmoil and European integration to weapons exports and nuclear non-proliferation. Recent works include "Reagan and Western Europe," in Andrew Johns, ed., *A Companion to Ronald Reagan*, (2015); "Learning to 'Recycle': Petrodollars and the West, 1973-1975," in Elisabetta Bini, et al.,

[13] Guia Migani, "The Road to Cancun: The Life and Death of an East-West Summit," 174-197.

[14] This is not to deny the useful results of institutional analyses, as seen in the contribution by co-editor Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, "Less than a Permanent Secretariat, More than an Ad Hoc Preparatory Group: A Prosopography of the Personal Representatives of the G7 Summits (1975-1991)," 64-91.

ed., *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and its Economic Legacy*, ed. (2016); and "Waffen aus Deutschland? Bundestag, Rüstungshilfe und Waffenexport 1961 bis 1975," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (April 2016). In 2015 he received the DAAD Prize for Distinguished German and European Studies, awarded by the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies.