

Franco-American Relations and the NATO

Crisis of 1966

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"France cannot be France without greatness." -President de Gaulle

France and the United States are widely considered to be models of modern democracy. At the time of the American Revolution, France was considered America's number one ally. Indeed it is widely accepted that the United States would have easily been defeated by Britain without the aid of French forces. Likewise, the World Wars of the 20th Century illustrate the mutual respect and admiration that had existed between the two nations until recently. Yet, in the year 2003, we found our own Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, declaring on national television that, "Going to war without France is like going duck hunting without an accordion. You just leave a lot of useless, noisy baggage behind." Somehow, while maintaining the appearance of amiable relations, our two countries continue to criticize one another, both on a personal and national level. These disagreements are no longer simply words, but continuously result in discord on an international level, making it impossible to create a united front.

While discussing the history of Franco-American Relations following World War II, this paper culminates with an analysis of one incident in the history of Franco-American relations in which President Charles de Gaulle of France denounced American intervention in Vietnam and withdrew from the integrated command structure of NATO in 1966. Through this analysis, I have examined whether or not de Gaulle's actions during this time, and the subsequent actions of American policy makers, marked a departure in the way that the societies of the two cultures perceived each other. In order to do this, I have researched the policies of President de Gaulle's administration, as well as those of several American presidents' administrations, in regards to one other. In

researching the policies of these leaders, I have incorporated their individual ideologies, as I feel that it is important to take into account the effect personal beliefs have on policy. I have also attempted to uncover how these ideologies spread throughout their respective societies.

Beginning with President Charles de Gaulle, I have investigated his widely known policy of *Grandeur*. In his war memoirs, de Gaulle expresses that he has "always had a certain idea of France." This idea was unchangeable for the General, as it was based in history and a romanticized view of what France once was, and what he believed it would again become. De Gaulle's theory of *Grandeur*, many historians argue, is the main impetus behind the policies he employed during his presidency. This term encapsulates de Gaulle's desire for a strong France, restored to her role as one of the most powerful and influential countries on the planet. General de Gaulle believed that greatness was inevitable for France; that everything about its history, culture, and politics made it destined for greatness. De Gaulle hoped to use this idea to inspire the French people into forming a united front based on a new national consciousness in which citizens, moved more by patriotism than partisanism, would create a more stable social and political system.

One large issue challenging this idea was the increasing hegemony of the United States following World War II. De Gaulle spent much of his Presidency criticizing what he called "the American protectorate" and, although he maintained, for the most part, that the core values of the two nations were the same, de Gaulle did not attempt to hide his resentment of the United States' power over Western Europe. He detested the excess of power the US retained in all matter of affairs including diplomatic, economic, etc., and

felt that America took far too many liberties in international affairs. He also criticized American society for its materialism. He often remarked on the lack of history and culture in the United States, "at least as far as great Nations go."¹ My research comments on the amount of influence beliefs such as these had on the public in France.

After their defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, the French pulled out of their former colony of Vietnam in order to concentrate more intently on the crisis in Algeria. During the next 8 years the Americans became the principle supporters of the South Vietnamese government, watching closely to ensure that another domino did not fall. Embroiled in Algeria, de Gaulle maintained his loyalty to the United States and insisted that, while he had no intention of becoming part of the war, he would not stand in America's way. In 1960, he expressed his goodwill to Congress by declaring, "If, in a material sense, the balance between two camps that divide the world might seem equal, it is not the case morally. France, for its part, has chosen. It has chosen to be on the side of free peoples. It has chosen to be with you." However, de Gaulle already had reservations concerning the overwhelming dominance of the United States in regards to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the end of the Eisenhower administration, de Gaulle attempted to reconstruct the alliance system of NATO. He challenged the legitimacy of an organization that subordinated other militaries, namely the French, in order to broaden the power and influence of the American Army. De Gaulle supported a tripartite that would include France, Britain, and the United States as equal partners in controlling the combined nuclear strength of the West and making decisions concerning global policy.² He also wanted a guarantee that the US would defend French interests.

¹ De Gaulle, Charles. Lettres, notes, et carnets.

² De Gaulle, Charles. The Complete War Memoirs.

However, neither the US or Britain approved of this plan. Insulted by this refusal and by the lack of support he received from the Western powers in Algeria, de Gaulle continued to develop his "force de frappe," or nuclear arsenal, and to slowly back away from heavy participation in NATO affairs.

However, it is important to remember that this decision was by no means sudden. Although de Gaulle was distrusting of the tremendous power of the United States, he always remained hopeful that the North Atlantic Alliance could become an equal partnership of nations concerned about their security following the bloody events of the 1940s.³ Throughout his presidency, he did all he could to persuade the Americans to give France a bigger role or to listen to some of his suggestions. Although much of the American public may not have seen his decision to withdraw from the military command coming, US policy makers had had plenty of warning.

Although de Gaulle had had some difficulties with President's Roosevelt and Truman, he maintained that he respected President Eisenhower and admired President Kennedy. He objected to the fact that America had free reign to abuse its power, but did not feel that these two administrations had yet overly exploited that power. However, he immediately disliked Johnson. After their first meeting at the funeral of President Kennedy, de Gaulle described Johnson as a "cowboy-radical" and later remarked to a Paris journalist, "I rather like Johnson. He doesn't even take the trouble to pretend he's thinking."⁴ De Gaulle's interest in international relations increased with the end of the Algerian War in 1962. This reintegration into world affairs coincided with the increased commitment of the United States in Vietnam. During this time, de Gaulle really began

³ De Gaulle, Charles. The Complete War Memoirs.

⁴ Schwartz, Thomas. Lyndon Johnson and Europe : in the shadow of Vietnam.

his efforts to distance himself from the United States. Criticisms of American abuse of power steadily increased. Accusations arose, including that the United States was attempting to use Europe as a nuclear battleground, and that the US had acted unilaterally by revising the alliance strategy without receiving approval from the other Western powers.

Throughout deliberations, Charles de Gaulle maintained that a unified Europe, equal with the United States, could not exist without a European defense system, independent of NATO and, subsequently, the United States. As far as de Gaulle was concerned, by the year 1962 the threat posed by the Soviet Union had been almost wholly overshadowed by the threat the United States represented to European independence and autonomy. This was made vividly clear by his encouragement of trade and cultural relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, his recognition of Communist China in January 1964, his continued condemnation of US intervention in Vietnam in favor of neutrality, and his slow disengagement from various NATO ventures.⁵ It was also highlighted by what most historians characterize as random acts of spite, including his refusal to attend a ceremony in Normandy commemorating the D-Day invasion.

These actions culminated with de Gaulle's memorandum of March 11, 1966, which was sent to all of the allied powers and enumerated the causes of France's grounds for withdrawal of its troops from NATO and for the expulsion of all foreign troops from French territory. The grounds listed included:

“the diminution of the Soviet threat, the depreciation of the United States nuclear guarantee, the unwillingness of the de Gaulle government to integrate France's nuclear

⁵ Tanner, Henry. The New York Times. Tuesday, March 8, 1966.

forces into NATO, the resurgence of a politically and economically strong Europe, the reconstitution of France's sovereignty that had been impaired not only by the presence of foreign bases on French territory but also by dependence upon the United States for its defense, the need to thaw East-West relations frozen by monolithic blocs under the control of the superpowers, and the increasing influence of the Third World, especially of China in world politics which occasioned the re-evaluation of alliance ties."⁶

Although France did not leave the Atlantic Alliance entirely, this withdrawal from the military command was no small, symbolic gesture but proof that the French would not continue without sovereignty over their own, personal security. De Gaulle's criticisms of the US and his desire to move out from under its control were no longer secrets to anyone. What effect, then, did this grand gesture have on the opinions of French citizens towards Americans and vice versa? If President de Gaulle, the epitome of patriotism with his grand designs for the *grandeur* of France and the humbling of the United States, made known his criticisms of American cultural ineptitude and materialistic depravity, it is quite possible that these opinions would have a large influence on the stereo-types of Americans throughout French society. Likewise, this blatant refusal to follow the United States lead was a shot to the ego for many Americans. Did American distaste for French culture and society get exacerbated by a feeling of betrayal and ingratitude? Many would argue that it was still too soon after the end of World War II for the French to forget the debt Europe owed to the United States. This essay will evaluate the significance of these events by considering the amount of

⁶ Kolodziej, Edward. French International Policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou. p. 129.

symbolic gesture? Did they agree that they still had the same fundamental goals and that

In his book Philip Cerny maintains that *grandeur* "has been used by de Gaulle's supporters and critics alike as shorthand for summarizing the ideological content of Gaullist foreign policy."⁷ Through my research, I intend to explore this notion by evaluating the amount of influence this idea had on de Gaulle's policy. Cerny maintains that as much as events may influence actions, we cannot underestimate the important role of personal ideologies. He argues that de Gaulle's idea of *grandeur* did not have designs for "aggressive nationalism," but rather a peaceful attempt to increase France's role in the world. The entire time that de Gaulle was criticizing American actions and intervention, he was constantly reiterating his belief that Americans and French had the same values at heart. This, Cerny argues, illustrates that de Gaulle did not really want to sever ties with America, which is evident through the fact that it remained in the Atlantic Alliance, but merely wanted to assert France's independence. However, by doing so, de Gaulle unintentionally aroused the resentment of the United States by "undermining her self-image of altruistically taking on the burdens incumbent upon her as the 'vanguard of the free world.'" Cerny finds that de Gaulle's goals were merely symbolic and that once the symbolic goal had been reached, relations were rapidly repaired between France and the US. Because de Gaulle never really had the intention of broadening French power around the globe, it was more of a domestic policy whose purpose was to create a sense of "national identity" within France and to stabilize domestic and political problems. Therefore, international relations were not really altered. In my research, I strongly question this argument. Did the citizens of each country see the NATO crisis as a

⁷ Cerny, Philip, The Politics of Grandeur. p. 3.

symbolic gesture? Did they agree that they still had the same fundamental goals and that this was just a temporary glitch? Or was the ideological rift deeper than that?

In French International Policy Under de Gaulle and Pompidou, Edward Kolodziej seems to contradict this argument. He argues that France had three goals after the Algerian War and the American victory in Cuba during the missile crisis. These goals included:

“to prevent either a possible war or a more probable superpower accord that would jeopardize European interests and French aspirations for greater world power and prestige, to offset American military superiority by righting, largely through diplomacy favoring the Soviet Union, what appeared to be the temporarily tilted superpower balance, and to work toward reconstruction of the international system that would retain most, if not all, of the advantages of uneasy stability currently existing and promise greater political autonomy and maneuverability for all states.”⁸

He believed that no state could long survive as a separate power if it “left its destiny up to the decisions and actions of another state, however friendly it might be.”⁹ Kolodziej would argue that de Gaulle’s motives were not symbolic. He wanted real power for a France that he truly believed was far greater than the US, due to its impressive and regal history and culture.

In Seducing the French, Richard Kuisel agrees with Kolodziej’s theory about French goals during the 1960s. He maintains that, although President de Gaulle continued to insist that the United States and France essentially had the same values and goals at heart, he was significantly anti-American in that he had a real disdain for

⁸ Kolodziej, Edward. French International Policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou p. 123.

⁹ Kolodziej, Edward. French International Policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou p.126.

American exploitation of military power and for American materialist culture. He argues that de Gaulle viewed intervention in Vietnam as a product of American underestimation of "the force of Vietnamese nationalism" and the need to hide American expansionism "under the guise of anticommunism."¹⁰ In regards to culture, while visiting California in 1960, de Gaulle commented on a new traffic cloverleaf by saying, "I have the impression that all this will end very badly."¹¹ It was clear that he did not want this kind of progress for his country. Kuisel emphasizes de Gaulle's infatuation with the rich history of France and with his subsequent dismissal of the US as an infant who could in no way yet compare to France, or any "real" nations for that matter. Therefore, this book would certainly suggest that the events of 1966 and Gaullist criticisms of America had a huge effect on how the French viewed the society of the United States. This is made evident by comparing opinion polls employed by Kuisel in which one showed that 52% of the French population had a positive opinion of the United States in 1964 and another showed that by 1966, almost half of the population said they were "rather" or "very" different from Americans.¹² Kuisel wholeheartedly believes that public opinion followed de Gaulle's descent into anti-Americanism. He also touches upon the resentment Americans felt towards these attitudes, stressing increasing criticisms of France regarding their "ingratitude" and "arrogance." By examining previous literature such as this, as well as the newspaper articles and opinion polls from the time period of the NATO crisis, I have formed an argument concerning the relevance of this era to the formation of Franco-American relations. In the following pages, I will clarify this argument by giving a brief history of relations

¹⁰ Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, p. 145.

¹¹ Kuisel, *Seducing the French* p. 147.

¹² Kuisel, *Seducing the French* p. 143.

following World War II, the actions of policy makers during this time, and finally the reactions of the public. In doing so, I will also analyze the ways in which both countries defined themselves following the Second World War, and the way that they would ultimately define one another.

De Gaulle, FDR and Truman

Charles de Gaulle's apprehensions about the United States date back to his first dealings with President Roosevelt during World War II. As leader of the Free French following the Nazi occupation, de Gaulle hoped to mobilize the world in support of a resistant France. He feared that without an official alliance with the other Western powers, France was in jeopardy of permanently falling through the cracks of German domination. "Who," he asked, "can guarantee us the eternal alliance and, more to the point, the immediate and effective alliance of England and America?"¹³

However, to President Roosevelt, de Gaulle represented an enormous obstacle to the establishment of a lasting peace. He saw de Gaulle as far too nationalistic and hoped to influence the more discreet Vichy government into resisting manipulation by Berlin. He was confident that this cooperation would keep French forces neutral until the Allies could thwart the Nazi machine. Perhaps most importantly, Roosevelt viewed de Gaulle as a potential military dictator who would try to re-establish France as a colonial power, which he thought would increase post-war upheaval, not to mention threaten America's growing dominance in the Far East.¹⁴

¹³ De Gaulle, *Lettres Notes et Carnets*, vol. III, p. 67

¹⁴ FRUS, 1943, II, pp. 23ff

As a result, Roosevelt was often wary of de Gaulle knowing too much about Allied plans. In fact, he did not even inform him of the North African invasion because he was afraid of de Gaulle getting in the way of his cooperation with French African forces, led by Admiral Francois Darlan. When de Gaulle's aides protested, FDR responded with, "Of course I'm dealing with Darlan since Darlan's giving me Algiers! Tomorrow I'd deal with Laval [leader of the German-collaborating Vichy government], if Laval were to offer me Paris!"¹⁵ This attitude, however, was put into question when it became clear that it was beginning to encourage French pro-Nazi officials in the Vichy government. As a result, FDR held a conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1943 to discuss the position they would take concerning de Gaulle. Because he feared that the British government would try to organize a French government under de Gaulle, Roosevelt decided to compromise by agreeing to give de Gaulle control of French North Africa. He hoped that this concession would take the focus off of criticism of his policy when it came to an open alliance with Free France and his dealings with the Vichy government.¹⁶

De Gaulle, however, would not be so easily wooed. He was not only deeply offended by FDR's conduct and apparent lack of respect, but also infuriated by the fact that he had not been consulted on policy concerning territories he believed were rightfully part of the French Republic.¹⁷ At a meeting in Casablanca in 1943 between the three powers, de Gaulle regarded the President as power-hungry and egotistical. He would later remark in his memoirs that Roosevelt "meant the peace to be an American peace, convinced that he must be the one to dictate its structure, that the states which had

¹⁵ FRUS, 1942, p. 546-47.

¹⁶ FRUS, 1942, p. 550-560.

¹⁷ De Gaulle, The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle.

been overrun should be subject to his judgment, and that France in particular should recognize him as its savior and its arbiter." Likewise, FDR viewed the General as austere and more interested in heightening his own power and influence than he was interested in the salvation of Europe.¹⁸ But despite these negative perceptions, the two leaders acknowledged that victory was the main objective and that an Allied victory would depend heavily on a united front in order to build confidence in the war effort. Both sides decided that it was important to create a semblance of mutual respect.

However, unlike the British who largely saw de Gaulle as the true leader of a resistant France, FDR continued to foil de Gaulle's efforts for control of the Free French forces.¹⁹ It was clear that, although Roosevelt may not have been as manipulative as de Gaulle claimed, he did indeed have a vision of post-war France that was completely different from that of de Gaulle. He feared a French state built completely around the army and the myth of de Gaulle as a military hero.²⁰ Such a state would be a deep thorn in the side of the United States as it struggled for more influence in the world, especially if de Gaulle were to be able to hold on to the entire French empire. Antagonism grew as de Gaulle continued to resist American influence over the French, as well as Allied, military operations, even when it came to the Allied invasion. He was very suspicious of what he saw as an attempt by Roosevelt to place France under the authority of General Eisenhower.²¹ Indeed, one day before the Allied invasion of Normandy, de Gaulle was presented with a draft of the proclamation to the peoples of Western Europe, particularly

¹⁸ Lowenheim, Francis L., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, p. 252.

¹⁹ Lowenheim, Francis L., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, p. 200.

²⁰ FRUS, 1943, II, pp. 919

²¹ De Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, p. 559.

the French, which stated that they should strive to carry out the orders of Eisenhower in any circumstance.

In July 1944, President Roosevelt invited General de Gaulle to the White House as a gesture of good will. Because he had effectively refused to grant any of the legitimacy desired by de Gaulle as leader of the Free French, Roosevelt decided that something needed to be done to strengthen the appearance of good relations and to heighten morale.²² He also feared the loss of support from the French Resistance. The visit spoke volumes about the relationship between the two men. Roosevelt, predicting the hostile stalemate that would quite possibly occur if discussions became too detailed, chose to avoid references to the disputed issues at hand. He knew that in the tumultuous setting caused by the shifting events of the war, nothing that he and de Gaulle disagreed upon would be effectively resolved.

However, the President did not mince words when it came to his plans for the future. He knew that the post-war era would be the time to secure US dominance and saw de Gaulle as a hindrance to that goal. Even in the presence of the General, FDR made no secret of what he intended as France's role. He wholly agreed that France would need to be eventually fully self-governing. The French people had the right to determine what leader would be best for their own country. However, he hoped that events following the war would exhibit de Gaulle's inability to rule France efficiently. In fact, the only official role he ever granted de Gaulle was "temporary de facto authority for civil administration in France."²³

²² FRUS, 1944, p. 708.

²³ FRUS, 1945, p. 655.

President Roosevelt made it clear that it would not be possible for France to share equal authority with the Big Four powers of Britain, China, Russia, and the United States. The General was turned down when he asked to be present at the Yalta Conference. FDR also insisted that France accept the fact that some areas of French territory would inevitably be under the control of the United Nations and the United States military. Although France was allowed to keep its holdings in Indochina and North Africa, and was made a member of the Berman Control Council, the difficulties that occurred between Roosevelt and de Gaulle during World War II would have lasting effects. Both leaders made sacrifices when it came to doing what would be the most advantageous for the war effort, but that was as far as their amiable relations ever got. Both sides did what was necessary to preserve the appearance of friendship because it served their own objectives, but they would always have opposing visions of the other's role in Europe, as well as the world as a whole.²⁴

Following the peace accords, de Gaulle's transactions with Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, continued where the former had left off. The General became more and more convinced that every move made by the Americans was simply to secure world domination. "President Truman," de Gaulle asserted in his memoirs, "was convinced that the mission of serving as guide fell to the American people, exempt as they were from exterior shackles and internal contradictions that encumbered all other states."²⁵ He felt that Truman saw America as a shining example of democracy and as a kind of manual for how to build a successful nation. America had found the secret for ever-lasting political success, as was evident by the fact that it was the only Western nation truly still intact.

²⁴ FRUS, 1944, III, pp. 683.

²⁵ De Gaulle. The Complete War Memoirs, p. 907.

Whether or not this accusation was legitimate, this ideology was an inexcusable oversimplification in the eyes of de Gaulle. He was amazed by the overwhelming optimism and self-assuredness of Americans following the war. They were the richest, most powerful nation in the world and, with programs like the Marshall Plan, were on the way to healing the world's financial wounds. This perception of American attitudes intensified de Gaulle's growing criticisms of America's materialistic culture. He was convinced that Truman saw the creation of peace as a feat that could only be solved through economic means. The Americans were obsessed with money while what the world really needed was "frontiers, grievances and guarantees." In de Gaulle's opinion, what France needed, as well as the other liberated nations of Europe, was a promise of security and policies to back it up. Pumping money into Europe would not help unless a system was created that would maintain a balance of power and reassure the war battered people of their safety. Truman, de Gaulle would argue, preferred simply to create the illusion of helpfulness by continuously giving money, which the US had too much of anyway, and to maintain order and dominance over other states by imposing US military rule.²⁶

Truman's policy concerning France was, for the most part, an extension of Roosevelt's. Even more than FDR, Truman was not afraid to let de Gaulle and his fellow Frenchmen know where they stood. France was, without question, a cherished friend of the US and an important ally, but was obliged to play a subordinate role in the reconstruction of Europe. When de Gaulle ordered a French occupation administration to be created in an area of Germany taken by French forces, Truman gave Eisenhower the go-ahead to ask them to withdraw. When de Gaulle resisted, Truman responded by

²⁶ Truman, Harry. Letters Home by Harry Truman, p. 37.

sending a letter stating that he was "shocked by the attitude of your government in this matter and its evident implications." He also warned de Gaulle about growing resentment within American society, especially if the news of these actions were to become public knowledge. De Gaulle was thus grudgingly forced to acquiesce to the wishes of the American president, and did so while insisting that things would not have to elevate to such a dramatic level if France were informed of the plans of the US and the United Nations more often and further in advance.²⁷

Occasional conferences between the two leaders, set up with good intentions in mind and hopes for a full reconciliation, were often punctuated with disputes about different injuries one party believed it had suffered at the hand of the other. At one point, President Truman felt compelled to confront de Gaulle about some negative press that had been written in France about the American President. De Gaulle rightfully responded by saying that he could not control the press, but also added that he too had been greatly insulted by some negative articles written on US soil.

Despite frequent squabbles like this, business continued as usual. US loans helped France out of her state of destruction. One major development which temporarily improved relations between de Gaulle and Truman was the fact that the Left in France was rapidly gaining supporters. De Gaulle knew that at a time of such great economic need, stable relations with the US were necessary for a stable majority of the votes in the elections. By November 1945, de Gaulle realized that the American presence in Europe was not going to go away and that France would have to ally with them if it were to be restored to even a semblance of its former power. But, however necessary it was, de Gaulle found it difficult to stand aside and watch as more and more concession were

²⁷ De Gaulle, The Complete War Memoirs.

made to Washington in order to secure much needed funds. On January 18, 1946, de Gaulle announced his plans to resign as head of the French government. However, many

The Return of de Gaulle

In 1958, France was in the midst of war with Algeria, its last and perhaps most treasured colony. To the French, Algeria was not considered a colony or merely an extension of France, but an important part of France itself. However, the Fourth Republic, which succeeded de Gaulle, was too weak to be able to handle a conflict that proved to be far more challenging than anyone had foresaw. In fact, the government was so unstable that no cabinet ministers were capable of staying in office long enough to make any progress. The US had a huge interest in the outcome as, not only were they of its own destiny. However demoralized and wounded they were following the simultaneous events of the past half a century, the Fifth French Republic should never need to take orders from another country, especially one he believed was still in its infancy. De Gaulle was obsessed with the long and ever-evolving history of France and its culture. This fact helps to explain why he found it particularly offensive that the United States, even with all its wealth and military power, seemed to be able to delegate authority without any opposition following the war. It did not matter to him how wealthy a nation was. How could America, which had only just become a world power within that very century, know what was best for Europe?

Indeed, de Gaulle was greatly offended by what he viewed as the overwhelming arrogance of many American leaders. He was appalled by the manner in which they

after the French used aircrafts built in America to attack a Tunisian border town as retribution for their support of the Algerian rebels. America, under Eisenhower, had wholeheartedly taken up the policy of Containment. As with any politically unstable nation, the US saw in Tunisia the threat of one more country yielding to Communism.

The weak government in France realized that they could not straighten out the mess alone and, therefore, decided to go the United States for help. This, however, backfired when the people of France, deeply offended by this invitation for America to interfere with something that was clearly a French issue, ousted Premier Gaillard, leader of the Fourth Republic. De Gaulle was restored to power on May 13, 1958. Although the tension with de Gaulle was far from forgotten, many Americans, including

Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, were looking forward to seeing some stability in France, a feat they knew de Gaulle alone could handle. However, many Americans feared that he would make it a goal to create a French identity that would be in direct confrontation with US ambitions.

De Gaulle and the Policy of Grandeur

President Charles De Gaulle believed one could change history by changing the way that people think. De Gaulle hoped that, by taking advantage of his oratorical skills and dramatic style of politicization, he would be able to revolutionize the way the French public viewed themselves. He believed that deep down, all French citizens saw France as he did, a country rich in history and culture that was more than capable of taking control of its own destiny. However demoralized and wounded they were following the tumultuous events of the past half a century, the Fifth French Republic should never need to take orders from another country, especially one he believed was still in its infancy. De Gaulle was obsessed with the long and ever-evolving history of France and its culture. This fact helps to explain why he found it particularly offensive that the United States, even with all its wealth and military power, seemed to be able to delegate authority without any opposition following the war. It did not matter to him how wealthy a nation was. How could America, which had only just become a world power within that very century, know what was best for Europe?²⁸

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²⁸ Cerny, Philip, The Politics of Grandeur. p. 17

seemed to shrug off the suggestions and requests of France, as if it had never been a great power. However, de Gaulle's real objective in promoting his policy of *grandeur* was not to injure the prestige of the United States. His ultimate goal was to raise France up from the subordinate position it found itself in following an era of wars that had weakened morale and caused its citizens to lose sight of their own identity.

For many, de Gaulle was a symbolic, almost mythical hero, as much as he was a contemporary leader. He knew how to use dramatic elements to his advantage. As early as 1944 he wrote, "As for me, I shall retire...It is necessary to disappear. France may again have need of a pure image. I must leave her that image. If Joan of Arc had married, she would no longer be Joan of Arc. It is necessary to disappear."²⁹ Clearly, de Gaulle had a flair for these kinds of theatrics. It is really no surprise that he would come to power when he did, just as the French were in need of inspiration. He not only gave a disillusioned France a strong leader whose most central goal was to turn France and her population back into one of the most powerful and wealthy in the world, but he also gave the French a brand new, powerful ideology. In short, he condensed the French culture, history and traditions into a package that was easily comprehensible to a public that had lost sight of what made them unique as Frenchmen. Whether or not everything de Gaulle presented to the public was in fact inherently part of what it had been to be "French" before the war was not important. All that mattered was its effect on the French state of mind at that moment.³⁰

By studying the ideological motives for de Gaulle's foreign policy, it becomes far easier for one to understand his actions, as well as his often hostile attitude towards

²⁹ Cerny, The Politics of Grandeur.

³⁰ Kuisel, Seducing the French.

the United States. However, it is important to remember that, as mentioned earlier, while the application of de Gaulle's policy of *grandeur* may very well have had the added effect of alienating the French farther away from the United States, its true purpose was the restoration of France to its rightful position of prestige and power.

De Gaulle, Kennedy and NATO

The ability of a nation to defend itself and to do so on its own terms was something de Gaulle believed should be the right and duty of every country. As he stated in an address in Strasbourg in 1961, "A great state which does not possess them [nuclear weapons], while others have them, does not command its own destiny." It is logical that de Gaulle, in light of his desire for national *grandeur*, would want to prevent any one country from so dominating the globe that France's right to make its own decisions concerning national security would become threatened. It also comes as no surprise that a lot of the difficulties de Gaulle would have with the American government following his rise to the Presidency in 1958 would have to do with this need for France to have absolute and sole control over its own defense.

Although it had already been decided among leaders of the Fourth Republic that a French nuclear force, or *force de frappe*, would be created, Charles de Gaulle decided to make it one of his top priorities when he came to power in 1958. He wanted it known, especially by the United States that, unlike the Fourth Republic and Britain, he was not creating a nuclear force to backup those already held by the US and other NATO allies. The *force de frappe* under de Gaulle's rule would be a political tool—something

that represented France's position outside of NATO as a strong world power.³¹ In 1957, amidst news of the ever-growing Soviet nuclear power, Washington proposed that intermediate range ballistic missiles be placed in strategic areas throughout Europe. While Britain, Turkey and Italy all accepted the proposal, de Gaulle insisted that any nuclear weapons on French soil must be under the complete control of French forces and only French forces. The US then suggested a multilateral nuclear force to be deployed from barges on rivers. The French President also turned down this proposition. After all the time he had spent trying to build up a nuclear independence, he was not about to give it all up.

Not surprisingly, the first real clash between France and the United States came about as a result of a proposal de Gaulle made concerning NATO on September 17, 1958. Almost immediately following his return to power, de Gaulle boldly insisted that the United States, Britain and France set up a "three power directorate"³² which would exist outside of the organized NATO command force. His argument to Eisenhower was that something needed to be done in light of recent incidents in the Middle East and Taiwan. De Gaulle saw American acceptance of this proposal as crucial for maintaining positive relations with the super power. Without the tripartite, France would have virtually no say in the decisions made within NATO; decisions which affected France personally. Eisenhower, rarely one to lose his temper when it came to de Gaulle, did not want to completely disappoint de Gaulle but knew that this suggestion was completely out of the question because it would put de Gaulle in a position of decision-making when it came to

³¹ Charles de Gaulle, *Complete War Memoirs*, p. 202.

³² Pierre, *Conflicting Vision: Defense, Nuclear Weapons, and Arms Control in the Franco-American Relationship During the De Gaulle Era*, p. 3.

NATO's nuclear weapons.³³ Instead of altogether rejecting the proposal, Eisenhower responded to de Gaulle that the tripartite would be impossible as it would simply give France an unfair advantage over the other NATO countries. However, he tried to reassure de Gaulle by stating that he would be willing to discuss how to make NATO more effective as a whole, including all its members. The French government made no subsequent response and, in fact, maintained that they were never given the response from Eisenhower.

Over the next few years, de Gaulle continued his efforts to build up the French *force de frappe*. On several occasions, he sought American nuclear assistance but was thwarted by the 1958 Mc Mahon Act, which stated that America could only help those countries that had "already made substantial progress." Clearly, this act was specifically designed to deny aid to any country other than Great Britain. Eisenhower argued that the French should have been made privy to what the Russians were capable of in order to level the playing field between the US's Allies and its potential enemies, but the Congress's Joint Committee on Atomic Energy would not hear of it.

Hope for a peaceful compromise came with the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy returned de Gaulle's admiration and hoped to improve their countries' rapidly souring relations. In fact, several of his advisors favored nuclear assistance to France and hoped that the creation of a tripartism would restore amiable relationships within NATO. In December 1962, Kennedy decided to offer to sell Polaris missiles to France. However, this action was halted when information slipped out and de Gaulle was informed of the offer in a newspaper. He was convinced that it was just another attempt by the United States to take control of French nuclear forces and that

³³ John Foster Dulles Papers, White House Memoranda series, p. 4.

Britain, who had accepted the US's offer, had thus given up its nuclear independence. Consequently, de Gaulle held a press conference on January 14, 1963 at which he reconfirmed France's need for a powerful *force de frappe*, independent of NATO. He rejected any military proposals that suggested integration, refused to sign the Test Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1963 and, as an act of defiance, vetoed British entry into the Common Market. In a characteristically dramatic gesture, de Gaulle insisted that his seat at the Geneva Disarmament Conference in Geneva be left empty.

De Gaulle, Johnson and the NATO Crisis of 1966

The death of JFK in November 1963 not only devastated millions of people around the world, for many it destroyed the hope for a peaceful end to the increasing tension within NATO. Though not as ostensibly negative toward de Gaulle as Roosevelt or Truman, the new President Johnson was less passionate about enhancing international relations than his predecessor and tended to focus more on domestic issues.³⁴ De Gaulle, whose only visit to the US would be for the funeral of President Kennedy, had complimented the young President before his death by stating that he thought "like a European."³⁵ However, after meeting Johnson at the services, he immediately disliked the gruff Texan. His air of "Cowboy know-how" and his scorn of intellectualism offended Charles de Gaulle.³⁶ Likewise, Johnson confided to one of his secretaries that "President de Gaulle was always the hardest to get to. I always had trouble with people

³⁴ Kearns, Doris. Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, p. 150.

³⁵ De Gaulle. Memoirs of Hope, p. 254.

³⁶ Schwartz. Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam, p. 102.

like him, who let high rhetoric and big issues take the place of accomplishments.”³⁷

Relations were gravely complicated by the continuous increase of American intervention in Vietnam, a former French colony. De Gaulle was absolutely against any intervention in the conflict and was convinced that it was simply an excuse for Americans to gain even more power by expanding their empire. In 1964, de Gaulle asked for all NATO troops to be taken out of South East Asia, a request that was duly rejected.

In examining this topic, it is very important to remember that, although the timing was a bit of a surprise, the withdrawal of France from the military command of NATO was by no means unforeseeable. In many ways, it was simply one step in a long series of measures taken by de Gaulle since 1959.³⁸ In fact as earlier as 1959, de Gaulle announced that France could not possibly “accept the integration of these forces, or an organization of allied command that takes away its liberty of action.” Steps taken to weaken the power of NATO within France prior to 1966 included the withdrawal of the French fleet from the Mediterranean, the rejection of American nuclear arms in France (1959), the non-appropriation of the NATO command of retired Algerian divisions (1962), the non-appropriation of French forces at the “front line” of the iron curtain, and the withdrawal of the French fleet from the Atlantic (1964). In 1965, the French government could no longer hide its desire to step away from NATO from its allies. In January 1965, American Ambassador Charles Bohlen warned Johnson that France would soon seek radical changes to the NATO agreements set up between the allies.³⁹ He fervently advised leaders in Washington to immediately begin considering the eventual

³⁷ Kearns, Doris. *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, p. 195.

³⁸ Bozo, Frederic. *Chronique d'Une Decision Annoncee: Le Retrait de l'Organisation Militaire (1965-1967 in La France et l'Otan, 1949-1996*, p. 332.

³⁹ Bozo, Frederic. *Chronique d'Une Decision Annoncee: Le Retrait de l'Organisation Militaire (1965-1967)*, p. 332.

relocalization of American forces stationed in France. Expecting the worst but hoping for the best, the American government was told in Autumn 1965 by French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville that France would reach a decision by Spring 1966, but that nothing was yet decided.

All was made clear when France's participation in the military force of NATO ended abruptly on March 7, 1966 when de Gaulle announced that he would soon withdraw all French forces from the NATO military command and that all non-French forces and installations were to vacate French soil as soon as possible, including the NATO headquarters. The NATO allies were informed that they would have only one year to transfer all bases, etc. outside of French territory. De Gaulle justified his decision by stating his belief that the main reasons for creating an alliance such as NATO, the threat of Soviet invasion, was no longer a threat following the peaceful conclusion to the Bay of Pigs fiasco.⁴⁰ He also argued that the European nations, particularly France, had economically revived and no longer needed the protection of an outside force, especially one that refused to operate multi-laterally. He proclaimed that France felt out of tune with what was happening in the world because of the secondary position it was put in. The focus of NATO, he feared, was now solely on South East Asia, an area in which de Gaulle completely disagreed with US policy.

It was therefore "the style more than the substance" of de Gaulle's decision that surprised American political leaders.⁴¹ By not consulting the other members of NATO, Ambassador Bohlen remarked to M. de Couve that de Gaulle was "violating the treaty of 1949." He also warned that the effect of this decision on the people of the United States

⁴⁰ De Gaulle, Charles. Memorandum of March 7, 1966.

⁴¹ Bozo, Frederic, *Chronique d'Une Decision Annoncee: Le Retrait de l'Organisation Militaire*, p. 336.

would be considerable and that Franco-American relations would be gravely wounded. After all, the American public was not as informed of the warning signs that had existed prior to the announcements. They had been too absorbed with events surrounding the Cold War in areas around the world, including Cuba and South East Asia, to pay very close attention to what was happening in Western Europe. Furthermore, there were many political dealings within NATO that the public simply was not privy to. In any case, de Gaulle's withdrawal came as quite a surprise to most Americans and, as Mr. Bohlen predicted, the decision of the French President would have a huge effect on American public opinion in the years to come.

Johnson, for his part, realized that there was not a lot he could do to change the de Gaulle's mind and saw it as very important that he did not lose face when it came to the world community. His immediate reaction to President de Gaulle's handwritten letter, which enumerating the reasons for the withdrawal, was one of disappointment.⁴² He responded immediately to de Gaulle, but merely remarked that the letter raised "grave questions regarding the whole relationship between the responsibilities and benefits of the Alliance."⁴³ In Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam, Schwartz highlights the animosity between Johnson and de Gaulle. He stays true to the impressions of many other authors concerning de Gaulle's goals for France and agrees that de Gaulle was critical of the American *mode de vie* and of its excess of power. However, he goes on to discuss the reaction of President Johnson to de Gaulle's withdrawal. He maintains that Johnson did not try to exploit this action in order to gain public support. He gives Johnson credit for resisting this temptation. Amidst a declining

⁴² Handwritten letter from Charles de Gaulle to Lyndon Johnson, March 7, 1966, Box 16, Special Heads of State Correspondence

⁴³ FRUS, 15, p. 488.

approval rate of his own, he could have easily welcomed French criticism as a "diversion, a chance to rally Americans against the ungrateful, patronizing, and insulting French."⁴⁴ Instead he chose not to create any more drama, or as he put it, not to get into a "pissing match with de Gaulle," as he felt that this would simply "build de Gaulle up and build up France."³⁶ As he told Mc Namara, "When a man asks you to leave his house, you don't argue; you get your hat and go." He hoped that this would give him the appearance of having taken the moral high ground.

Opinion polls show that an overwhelming majority of Americans denounced de Gaulle's actions. Johnson could have easily gained some short-term support, especially in the face of growing American criticism of his policies in Vietnam. Even government officials who were traditionally huge supporters of France and de Gaulle backed Johnson during this confrontation. But instead of exploiting the incident, Johnson decided not to get worked up over the withdrawal. It was important to him to appear like the bigger man and for de Gaulle to be seen as the guilty party. He also sincerely did not want to encourage American hatred for Europe, which he thought could easily get out of hand. In the end, he remained gracious and respectful to de Gaulle in all their correspondence.

In his official response to de Gaulle concerning the letter of March 7, Johnson made sure that de Gaulle was aware that the doors to NATO would always be left open and that he would be willing to make amends at anytime.⁴⁵ Francis Bator summed up the futility of making any threats to the French about their security by declaring, "It is a fact of geography that a US threat to deprive France of our protection is at best barely credible and at worst just plain silly. It is like threatening to abandon Kentucky in the face of a

⁴⁴ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* p. 105.

³⁶ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Letter from Lyndon Johnson to President Charles de Gaulle, March 22, 1966. Box 19.

land attack by Canada. It is hard to do unless one is prepared to throw in Ohio. If we are going to defend the Germans against the Russians, we cannot help but defend France too." Johnson now saw, as his immediate goal, the reconstruction of NATO without France as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Public Opinion to the Withdrawal in France

The image of France nourished by de Gaulle's passionate rhetoric about the idea of *grandeur* and the subsequent policies espoused by his government inspired the creation of a new identity within French society. De Gaulle's denial of American hegemony with the withdrawal of 1966 would serve as the ultimate solidification of that identity. If it was possible to back away from NATO, then it really was possible for France to stand on its own two feet again. The days of being constantly belittled and insulted were over. Newspaper articles and opinion polls confirmed the declarations of de Gaulle. Contradictions to this mindset did occur as business-minded Frenchmen continued to support the arrival of dollars on French soil. But despite the lack of a change of practice in some sectors, the change of morale and ideology was undeniable.⁴⁶

Perhaps the way in which the French public felt most violated by the presence of Americans was in the economic sector. They feared that American businesses would buy out all businesses in Europe and exploit its resources, leaving only minor roles for Europeans themselves. Like many reservations of the French concerning Americans, this fear was not independent of Gaullist supporters.⁴⁷ The hypothesis that American businesses would attempt to create a monopoly throughout the world in as many

⁴⁶ David Strauss, Menace in the West : the rise of French anti-Americanism in modern times.

⁴⁷ Kuisel, Seducing the French, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Kuisel, Seducing the French, p. 154.

industries as possible was an anxiety shared by nearly everyone in France. De Gaulle directly addressed this anxiety by making it no secret that he wished to ensure that French businesses remained in control of their own destinies.

At the point of de Gaulle's return to power in 1958, concern about the loss of economic control was not nearly as acute as it would become by the beginning of the 1960s. Quite understandably, the main objective for the French president was to rebuild his country. At this point, he felt that he was in no position to deny that he needed American support to accomplish this. Likewise, he did not believe that it was at all necessary to fear American investments, as they could be seen as an important addition to French capital.⁴⁸ If a powerful friend reaches out its hand, why slap it away? He hoped that by working with Americans and by learning from them, France would eventually reach the point of being in competition with them. In his studies of capitalistic systems, de Gaulle had realized that competition was a truly important part of reconstruction. He explained this sentiment by stating that, "Expansion, productivity, competition—such, clearly, were the rules that the French economy, traditionally cautious, conservative, protected, and scattered, must henceforth adopt."⁴⁹

In order for his plan to work, both the creation of the European Common Market and the continuation of American investments were crucial elements. He hoped that this new system would strengthen the fledgling European economies by creating the appearance of a larger, connected entity in the face of a super-powerful United States. A friendly dialogue with the US would also ensure that Americans, following the termination of the Marshall Plan, would still feel invested in the economic triumph of

⁴⁸ Kuisel, Richard, *Seducing the French*, p. 158.

⁴⁹ Television address by Charles de Gaulle, 1959.

their French brethren. In 1959, the French Prime Minister Michel Debré, as well as de Gaulle himself, made it clear that they desired for many more American firms to come to French soil. In the same year, the Franco-American Convention of Establishment encouraged "mutual investment" and "accorded nationals and companies of both countries equal treatment."⁵⁰ American businessmen in France, de Gaulle anticipated, would become the partners of French businessmen, not their patrons.

Within a couple years, these optimistic hopes would be wholly shattered as it became painfully clear that the two would not be partners. Between 1962 and 1963, both General Motors of Paris and Remington Rand-France laid off nearly 700 and 800 employees respectively, without any prior notice whatsoever. The French public began to complain that this kind of unethical capitalism flew in the face of all the things traditional French business practices stood for, including the principle that employers were expected to compensate for layoffs. Fear of the manipulation of French businesses by foreign hands was heightened when, beyond the knowledge of de Gaulle, the American company Chrysler purchased the automobile company Simca, the third largest automobile company in France.⁵¹ Chrysler emerged from the deal with 18,000 new French employees.⁵²

De Gaulle was outraged and immediately adopted an extremely harsh stance when it came out American investments. Instead of arguing that France needed American investments in order to become a competitor in international markets, he changed his position to an insistence that what France really needed was economic autonomy, something that it would never achieve while in the grasp of American capitalists. The

⁵⁰ Kuisel, *Seducing the French* p. 159.

⁵¹ L'Express, 5/30/1966.

⁵² Le Monde, March 9, 1962.

President's conclusion in this matter becomes quite logical when one considers the statistics. Out of the total amount of dollars in France coming from foreign investments in 1965, which equaled about five billion dollars, over half came from the United States.⁵³ To de Gaulle and the French public, this was in no way healthy competition, but rather blatant monopolization. All levels of society steadily began to feel pangs of resentment. One headline read, "The American, if not the guilty, is the accused."⁵⁴

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about the French public's reaction to the constant invasion of the US dollar was the way in which it differed from that of other Western European countries. Of course, there was a certain negativity present when it came to American investment in countries like Britain and West Germany, but France was the only country where the government actually tried to control the amount of investments made. Despite the seemingly exorbitant amount of American investments within France, these numbers were continuously dwarfed by American investments within other European countries. In comparison with France, these countries openly welcomed US business.⁵⁵ By 1967, stocks from United States businesses added up to \$1.9 billion in France, as opposed to \$6.1 billion in Great Britain and \$3.5 billion in West Germany. Given these figures, what was it that made the French so much more determined to resist American investments?

One extremely powerful component was the influence of President de Gaulle. Charles de Gaulle had an uncanny ability to affect public opinion. Just as de Gaulle was unwilling to accept the political domination of France by America, he also refused to

⁵³ Erick Schmill, *Les Investissements Etrangers en France*, 1966.

⁵⁴ Olivier Brault, *Indépendance nationale et investissements américains: la politique française à l'égard des investissements américains sous les présidences du général de Gaulle et de Georges Pompidou*

⁵⁵ Kuisel, Richard, *The American Economic Challenge: De Gaulle and the French*

accept American economic domination through investments. Although American investments continued to pour in to a certain extent, as many French businessmen continued to make money off of these investments, the viewpoint of the French elite continued to be that French investors must control the amount of business done by Americans on French soil, not the other way around. Therefore, the idea of the importance of economic autonomy easily translated into the ideology of *grandeur*. If France was again to become a major world player, it needed to have complete control over *all* aspects of its destiny. In an opinion poll taken in 1965, half of the French public said that de Gaulle's policy towards America was just right.⁵⁶ While some believed that the rationale behind de Gaulle's efforts to curb American investments was based in economics, it is undeniable that much of his reasoning was political. He felt that continuous trade with the US would lead to more and more US domination. If the US could control French business as well as how much nuclear progress France could make for its own, personal protection, what else could it control?

This fear and criticism of America, ever-present in the mind of de Gaulle, quickly spread into the consciousness of French citizens in all levels of society as the threat of American hegemony and its consequences for the autonomy of France became more and more acute. America became something to be admired for the power it had achieved, but something to be disdained for the manner in which it had attained it. Somehow France needed to reach a point of political and economic power that could be considered competitive with that of the United States. However, they would be no better than the greedy American capitalists and would lose sight of what it meant to be French if they

⁵⁶ Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs*

⁵⁶ De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*

⁵⁶ IFOP polls. 1965. *France and the United States: the cold alliance since World War II*

failed to achieve this in a far more civilized manner than America had.⁵⁷ The French public defined certain criticisms of post-war America as vices that they must avoid at all costs. Among others, these vices included uncivilized and unethical business practices, a desire to dominate the world using imperialistic and overtly militaristic means, and the spread of social conformity devoid of any genuine cultural relevance and steeped in materialism. De Gaulle expressed these views openly and often made comments concerning America's social baseness. In the American social system, he argued, "material gain is the motive for all activity and the basis of all hierarchy."⁵⁸ In cultural matters, de Gaulle referred to America as France's "daughter" and argued that however powerful the US might become, it was all doomed to end badly because the only thing holding it together was materialism and greed.⁵⁹ As a result of beliefs such as this, expressions for the American military machine arose in order to criticize its questionable motives. These expressions included the assertions that Americans were fighting "an ideological war for Coca-Cola."⁶⁰

Likewise, de Gaulle criticized the American policy of containment, which revolved around American military might, and labeled it as a ploy to spread the "American Protectorate." Nowhere was this more clear than in de Gaulle's criticism of the American campaign in Vietnam. De Gaulle hoped to create a kind of third alternative between Soviet communism and American hegemony, especially in light of his belief that there was no longer any danger of the Soviets becoming aggressive.⁶¹ He criticized

⁵⁷ David Strauss. Menace in the West : the rise of French anti-Americanism in modern times.

⁵⁸ Charles de Gaulle, The Complete War Memoirs

⁵⁹ De Gaulle, Discours et Messages.

⁶⁰ Winock, Michel. *Les Attitudes des Français Face à la Présence Américaine (1951-1967)*, p. 323.

⁶¹ Castigliola, Frank. France and the United States : the cold alliance since World War II .

American's belief that they could easily fix things that displeased them by waging war. "The United States," he asserted, "apply elementary sentiments to the resolution for weighty problems."⁶² Using his prior experience in Vietnam and North Africa as a model, de Gaulle astutely warned President Kennedy about approaching danger in 1961 stating, "you will bog down ever deeper into a military and political quagmire, no matter how many men you lose and how much money you spend."⁶³ Clearly, this prediction was largely ignored. Nevertheless de Gaulle assured Kennedy at this time that "the French will not oppose such an intervention but will not participate in it."⁶⁴ The French press and public showed appreciation for this kind of policy. They wanted to make it clear that they did not have any ill-will for the United States but that they did not agree with their recent actions, and therefore, did not want to be a party to them. Raymond Aron summed up this sentiment in a television appearance in 1951 stating that:

"Many French, even the anti-communists, think of the world as if the Americans have a personal quarrel with the Russians or the capitalists of Wall Street with the communists of the Kremlin. Because of this, the roles have been reversed: the Europeans are no longer the protégés, but the victims."⁶⁵

The French no longer felt like they needed the US's protection and felt resentful of the power Americans seemed to feel they had over the rest of the world. By keeping

⁶² De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, p. 324.

⁶³ De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*.

⁶⁴ Minutes of meeting between President Johnson and French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville, Oct. 3-4, 1966.

⁶⁵ Winock, Michel. *Les Attitudes des Français face à la Présence Américaine (1951-1967)*, p. 325.

French leaders out of important international negotiations, the United States seemed to show that they did not have the rest of the West's best interest in mind, but simply wanted to use the other nations and their resources to further their own cause.

As a result of the contempt French citizens felt as they watched the American Empire's power grow while embodying all of these vices, the French resolved to define themselves as the antithesis of these qualities; in short, the antithesis of what they felt it meant to be America. Therefore, by identifying and creating a succinct definition of the American Goliath before them, they were able to etch out a clear identity as a modern day David. Throughout the early 1960s, frequent polls presented the extent to which French public opinion was in-keeping with the outspoken statements of de Gaulle concerning the United States. Again and again the majority of the French public maintained that de Gaulle's conduct with the United States was "as it should be."⁶⁶

This support, along with criticism of the United States, increased with the ascent to power of President Johnson, as many saw the JFK administration as a small but reassuring beacon of hope for the revitalization of Franco-American cooperation. As one French citizen living in London declared, "Kennedy's death was a catastrophe almost as much for Europe as for America. Europe was ready to accept President Kennedy as its leader. If Kennedy had lived, Europe would not be so divided because de Gaulle would have found it harder to rally Frenchmen behind his NATO policies."⁶⁷ It is likely that de Gaulle would have found it difficult to be as openly critical of the United States had Kennedy survived, as he respected Kennedy and believed that they understood each other,

⁶⁶ Kuisel, *The Gaullist Exorcism*, p. 132.

⁶⁷ Roger Ricklefs, No Leader Fills European Void, *The Times*, April 12, 1963.

at least more than he and Johnson had.⁶⁸ Other members of the European community echoed these sentiments as well, while also denying that de Gaulle himself would make a proper leader for Europe as a whole. "Europe," asserted one Brussels businessman, "rejects General de Gaulle's leadership in NATO policy but can't accept President Johnson's either. All those Texas barbeques—no European point of view at all."

French approval of and feeling of connectivity with the United States reached its apex in 1961 and continued along a steady decline throughout the next few years. In a continuous study conducted on the French public to determine the perceived community of basic interest with the US, the percent judging difference in interest was subtracted by the percent judging agreement of interests. The results were as follows: 26% in June 1961, 17% in February 1964, 10% in June 1965, -11% in February 1967, and -18% in May 1967.⁶⁹ As is made clear from this study, agreement with the policies and interests of the United States made its biggest decline following the French withdrawal from the military command of NATO in 1966.

Once France could no longer be charged with turning a blind eye on American intervention in Vietnam, criticism of the war within France soared. When asked who, the US or North Vietnam, was trying most sincerely to bring peace about in May 1967, 11% of the French public sided with the United States, while 14% claimed North Vietnam was trying hardest and 54% claimed that neither side had any genuine dedication to peace. Likewise, 42% of French citizens claimed that American intervention was merely an American attempt at imperialism.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Contigliola, Frank, Kennedy, de Gaulle, and the Challenge of Consultation

⁶⁹ United States Office of Policy and Research, Trends in West European Public Opinion on US Policy Objectives.

⁷⁰ Le Monde, May 17 1967.

Of course, President de Gaulle knew he was taking a risk by so blatantly placing himself in opposition to with the policies of the United States. At first, most French citizens still felt a strong connection with America and feared being at odds with the most powerful country in the world. He knew that what he did next would make all the difference. His subsequent voyages to Moscow and Cambodia helped to ease the minds of his countrymen by showing that France could still remain technically on the side of the Western powers, but could also become the voice of reason in a world that was embroiled in violence and fear.⁷¹ Like its other criticisms of American policies, French perception of most Americans as power-hungry war-mongers helped establish their own identity. In contrast with the United States, they saw in themselves an alternative to imperialistic materialism in the West and prided themselves on being a peace-loving people. It was this idea that led de Gaulle to pronounce "his triumph over international relations" in Phnom Penh in 1966. As Michel Winock argues in his reflections on the French response to American presence in world affairs, "Many French citizens took this opportunity to "choose their camp – that of peace against the camp of war."⁷²

The Effect of the Withdrawal on Public Opinion in the US

The withdrawal of French forces from the military command of NATO marked the poorest Franco-American relations to date. Questions and insults poured from both sides of the Atlantic. Americans from all walks of life made known their contempt for the ungrateful French, who still remained technically within the Atlantic Alliance and

⁷¹ Brunet, Jean-Paul. *Le Retrait de la France de l'OTAN: La Scene Interieure*, p. 392.

⁷² Winock, *Les Attitudes des Francais Face a la Presence Americaine (1951-1967)*.

apparently hoped "to have their cake and eat it too."⁷³ The French were perfectly aware, argued many in the US, that America would never abandon France in a time of crisis. They saw the pullout from NATO as an underhanded move by de Gaulle who saw an opportunity to assert France's independence and individuality without having to step completely out from under the protection of America. When de Gaulle told Johnson's aide Dean Rusk that he wanted every American soldier out of France, Rusk responded by asking, "Does that include the dead Americans in military cemeteries as well?" Many Americans also became suspicious over de Gaulle's increased communications with the USSR and "Red" China.

The United States media presented the reasoning behind de Gaulle's decision as "a narrow and potentially destructive nineteenth-century nationalism, an ideology Americans unhesitatingly associated with Europe's wars."⁷⁴ Many Americans responded by reflecting upon the state of NATO, and by agreeing that it did need to be reassessed but that the way in which this fact was brought to the attention of the world completely humiliated the United States. "In a football game, doing something wrong can make you a hero," argued Carl Rowan in the Evening Star, "but in international politics it can earn you the title 'architect of calamity.'"⁷⁵ It was very important for many in the US to come out of the situation with their honor intact and they appreciated Johnson's refusal to stoop to de Gaulle's level. NATO would survive just fine without the French. In an address to Georgetown students in 1967, John M. Leddy, the Assistant secretary of State for European Affairs remarked:

⁷³ San Diego Union, April 1, 1967.

⁷⁴ Chase, James and Malkin, Elizabeth, The American Media and de Gaulle

⁷⁵ The Evening Star, April 26, 1966.

"This episode of the French crisis in NATO is illuminating. I believe it sheds light on the future course which the fourteen NATO governments are likely to take in the years ahead. For, in the moment of truth brought by the French crisis, they clearly decided that NATO was not an expensive luxury, that it continued to serve the vital security interests of their peoples. There is no détente yet, but NATO is crucial to its creation and to positive East/West Relations."⁷⁶

Johnson's cool reaction in the face of what some perceived as an insult and a blatant example of ingratitude helped shape for Americans an image of themselves that was already becoming the norm. Looking back on the events of the two previous decades, Americans often couldn't help but form an identity that partly justified de Gaulle's stereotypes. Americans, many would argue, not only came to the rescue of Europe *during* World War II, but they came to their rescue afterwards as well. After the peace, the Marshall Plan, of which France was the chief recipient, was initiated to build Europe back up after destruction by the Nazis. For no reason other than a sense of duty to ones friends, the United States poured money and advisors into a broken France so that its government would be strong enough to resist another invasion, this time from the Soviets. In the public's eyes, as soon as de Gaulle's France, was strong enough to stand on its own again it began criticizing America's every move.⁷⁷ As early as 1965, 52% of the French public wanted to move toward an integrated Europe without any intervention

⁷⁶ Address, John M. Leddy (Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs) to Georgetown Students at conference on the Atlantic Community, 11/13/67, "Panzer: NATO," Office Files of Fred Panzer, Box386, LBJ Library.

⁷⁷ Pag, Caroline. U.S. official propaganda during the Vietnam War, 1965-1973 : the limits of persuasion.

from the United States, while only 22% and 20% said the same in Britain and West Germany respectively.

De Gaulle's seemingly constant criticism of the war in Vietnam during the 1960s was one of the most explosive issues to affect the Franco-American Alliance. Much of the resentment felt by Americans was due to the French President's somewhat self-righteous approach to this criticism. Some Americans felt resentment because they sincerely felt the US was doing the right thing. Other Americans' growing bitterness may have been attached to the hidden fears they held about the war's legitimacy. Whatever the cause, Americans did not like the fact that France was not following their lead. In 1964, de Gaulle called for the neutralization of the governments involved in the conflict.⁷⁸ Several years of criticism following this request climaxed with de Gaulle's speech of September 1966 in Phnom Penh in which he asked that the US completely abandon its crusade and withdraw its troops.

Many saw de Gaulle's condemnation as hypocritical, especially in light of its colonial history in Vietnam. On July 31 1964, an article in Time read, "De Gaulle made it sound as if Americans had wanted to move into the Indo-Chinese mess—and not as was really the case, that the United States entered the scene with great reluctance to salvage something from the mess left behind by the disastrously defeated French."⁷⁹ De Gaulle's growing neutralization also fed American fears concerning France turning its back on America and cozying up to the USSR and China. One editorial entry in the The Philadelphia Inquirer openly accused de Gaulle of this stating,

⁷⁸ Philadelphia Inquirer, Johnson Starts Fifth Year Dismayed by Inability to Sway De Gaulle, November 23, 1967.

⁷⁹ Statement on US Policy toward NATO, McGeorge Bundy to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 7/31/64.

⁷⁸ Paxton, Robert et al. De Gaulle and the United States : a centennial reappraisal

⁷⁹ Time Magazine, July 31, 1966.

"Charles de Gaulle has shown himself, in every way possible and on every possible occasion, the implacable enemy of this country. He has been viciously hostile on the Vietnam situation; has sided openly with the North Vietnamese and the Chinese Communist regime at Peking; and has called for U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam. Heeding his advice on what to do about the enemy in Vietnam would be the height of folly."⁸⁰

Johnson aide McGeorge Bundy also demonstrated his bitterness towards French reactions when he commented to a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1966, "The present foreign policy of France is disappointing in its manners, costly in its pride, wasteful in its lost opportunities, irrelevant in much of its dramatics, and unendurable in its fundamentals. The recognition of China was a gesture with no practical result. And the present specter of a deal with Moscow is sheer fantasy---as far beyond French power as it is contrary to French intentions."⁸¹

But the biggest insult came with the withdrawal of forces on March 7, 1966. In fact, less than three months later a Gallop Poll published in the Washington Post showed that only 16% thought of France as a dependable ally at the time while 56% thought of France as undependable and 28% had no opinion.⁸² This is especially pertinent when one notes that an identical poll taken in 1963 showed that 32% of the public found France dependable at that time and only 25% said it was undependable. This gallop Poll also

⁸⁰ Philadelphia Inquirer, *Johnson Starts Fifth Year Dismayed by Inability to Sway De Gaulle*, November 23, 1967.

⁸¹ Statement on US Policy toward NATO, McGeorge Bundy to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 6/20/66", LBJ Library.

⁸² Washington Post, The Gallop Poll, "People Here Lose Faith In France as Dependable, 7/9/66, LBJ Library.

showed many describing de Gaulle as "power-hungry, egocentric, or overly nationalistic."

Most of the public was appalled, but looking towards their president they saw nothing but austere respectfulness. There were no threats and it was clear that Johnson did not intend to take any guarantees away from France. This added to the belief of many in the US that American actions were 100% benevolent and that they did not expect anything in return. This helped to solidify American's perceptions of themselves as "the world's policeman." In The Harris Survey published in the Washington Post in June 1966, 75% of Americans asked said that they agreed with LBJ in that NATO should continue as before, with or without France.⁸³ The Russian threat, they believed, was still very pertinent and they had a duty to protect the world. They did not need to get any immediate thanks back in return because they knew that eventually the world would appreciate it.

Consequently, this vision of themselves as the savior of the world juxtapositioned with the latest actions by French, helped to set certain Americans' views of the French as arrogant, ungrateful, spoilt children. On May, 17, 1967, the editor of the Times-Union used a page of his newspaper to enumerate the assaults many in America felt Charles de Gaulle had made on the security of the United States in recent years including the facts that he had:⁸⁴

1. scoffed at America's pledge to defend Europe and undermined the NATO defense structure by forcing out our troops, at a cost of nearly \$1 billion to the US
2. tried to split Britain and the US

⁸³ The Washington Post, June 1966.

⁸⁴ The Times Union, 5/17/67, LBJ Library

3. spurred the kind of Nationalism in Europe which in this century has twice plunged that continent and the US into war
4. impeded peace in Vietnam by backing Ho Chi Minh and refusing to use French influence to obtain negotiations to end the fighting
5. wrecked hopes of halting the spread of both the manufacture and testing of nuclear weapons
6. drained gold from Fort Knox and interfered with US efforts for greater international monetary stability
7. snubbed all attempts by Mr. Johnson to talk over Franco-American differences

In reality, the vast majority of French subjects were in favor of neutrality and simply wanted to escape being bogged down in an eventual war between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁸⁵ Of course, French citizens were extremely grateful for the help given to them during and after the World War, but they did not expect to have to accept such a huge American influence in their country as a result of it. When it came down to it, they knew they were ideologically on the side of the US, but they didn't understand why they were expected to support every move America made. In the end, they were ashamed by what they saw as an American "occupation" and simply wanted to be given back their own sovereignty.⁸⁶

None the less, many Americans were sick of being criticized for things they felt were only in the best interest of their allies. They considered the ideas and policies of de Gaulle as the whims of "an egocentric leader who was not powerful enough to manifest

⁸⁵ Castiglione, Frank. Not "A Normal French Government": La Reaction Americaine au Retrait de la France de l'OTAN, p. 403

⁸⁶ Castiglione, Frank. Not "A Normal French Government": La Reaction Americaine au Retrait de la

⁸⁵ Winock, Michel and Bozo, Frederic et al. La France et l'OTAN, p.325.

⁸⁶ La France et l'OTAN, p. 324.

his own wishes.”⁸⁷ They saw de Gaulle as being far too obsessed with the idea of a powerful France and felt that it had distracted him from what was really best for the world and for his own people. They were wholly unwilling to accept that this disagreement was simply “a conflict between two legitimate interests” and argued that it was “proof of a lack of good sense and vision among the French.”⁸⁸ However, they hoped this loss of good sense would be only a fleeting malady brought on by an overly-nationalistic, overly-zealous leader. They saw the current situation as “personal, independent of de Gaulle’s administration, and therefore temporary.”⁸⁹ Many criticized Johnson for not standing up to de Gaulle, but in the end they felt that his respectful demeanor was only testament to the righteousness of the United States and the pettiness of France. In many ways, the disloyalty of France, countered by the seemingly increased loyalty of the rest of NATO, only strengthened Americans’ conviction that NATO was still very much needed and that France was going to have a rude awakening in the very near future. Of course, they would leave the door open for France’s eventual return, but for the time being the focus would be to prove the legitimacy of NATO by showing how well it could function without the participation of France.

⁸⁷ Costigliola, Frank. *Not “A Normal French Government”: La Reaction Americaine au Retrait de la France de L’OTAN*, p. 403

⁸⁸ Costigliola, Frank. *Not “A Normal French Government”: La Reaction Americaine au Retrait de la France de L’OTAN*, p. 417.

⁸⁹ Costigliola, Frank. *Not “A Normal French Government”: La Reaction Americaine au Retrait de la France de L’OTAN*, p. 405.

Conclusion

As a result of the slights he received from President Roosevelt during World War II, Charles de Gaulle wanted to ensure that France would not stay in a subordinate position for long. During his long and complicated relationships with different leaders of the United States, de Gaulle reiterated his best-wishes for his American brethren while never backing down on his assertion that a country as great as France would never acquiesce to the every whim of an ally, no matter how powerful or how much they had aided them in the past. General De Gaulle never denied that both France and the United States had quite similar interests at heart. Until the end of his Presidency, he would continue to avow, even after his withdrawal from NATO, that if it were to come down to a hot war between the United States and the Soviet Union, France would always be on the side of its Western ally.

However, de Gaulle's number one priority was the resurgence of France, under the Fifth Republic, as one of the most powerful and revered nations in the world. Ever the student of French history and culture, de Gaulle emphasized the good, pure qualities and traditions of a powerful France that he hoped would again bestow its knowledge on the developing world. In order to remind the French of these qualities and to once again inspire within them pride for their country, de Gaulle knew that he would have to create a new identity within France, which would embody all of the values he treasured and envisioned for a *grande* France.

While de Gaulle admired the success and strength of the post-war American powerhouse, he did not admire American means, culture, and to some extent, Americans themselves. He saw in America many corrupt elements that France would have to do

without in its ascent to the top. Some of these elements included materialism, militarism, and imperialism. As a result of his disdain for these factors, de Gaulle decided to create an identity for France that would reject these elements and set a new standard for democracy in the latter half of the 20th Century.

Because the overwhelming prosperity and power of the United States during this time caused the new Super Power to constantly be subject to the scrutiny of the rest of the world, it was easy for the French to build resentment to certain elements of American life, which de Gaulle had so long distrusted. The odd mixture of fascination and contempt that the French held for all things American caused many to analyze every aspect of American culture, society, and government in order to emulate the positive attributes, and expose the negative ones. The fact that Americans were taking over many French businesses and putting people out of jobs was the element that tipped the scale for many French citizens. De Gaulle's outspoken criticisms of the US's intervention in Southeast Asia and its materialistic culture as a whole helped this process along, as he had an uncanny ability to inspire people using his knack for drama and politicization. The construction of the new French identity reached its finale with de Gaulle's decision to pull out of NATO in March 1966.

However, Much of the creation of this new identity happened outside of the consciousness of the American public, as most were busy enjoying their newfound security and adjusting to the US's new place in the world. While Vietnam and the Cold War loomed abroad, the American focus was far from on France and its stubborn leader Charles de Gaulle. However, the French withdrawal from NATO brought about a rude awakening for many American citizens. The French were no longer their friends, but were seen as

ingrates and hypocrites by many in the American public who were caught completely off guard by the French President's actions.

As de Gaulle's decision had helped secure an identity within France that he had had a huge hand in creating, it also helped to solidify a certain identity within the United States that had been growing since the end of the Second World War. America was the leader of the Free World. It had proved its legitimacy with its actions during the war and its success afterwards, not to mention the aid it gave to an ailing Europe. It deserved and demanded respect from a Europe that still needed its protection from the possibility of Soviet hostility. If Charles de Gaulle had made up his mind to turn his back on America and leave NATO, the US had no other choice than to let it be. America would continue to defend France should it be in jeopardy, but it would be a long time before it would be able to trust France or hold it to the height of respect it did other, more loyal nations. It would however accept France back into NATO and the good graces of the United States should de Gaulle see the light. As Ambassador Bohlen stated following the withdrawal, "All doors should be left open for a French return after suitable repentance." The doors for communication were left open on both sides and, despite their grievances, both sides hoped the other would give a little so that they would be able to reach a compromise. However, this compromise would not occur in de Gaulle's lifetime. Charles de Gaulle would resign from office in April 1969 and die soon after on November 9, 1970, leaving behind the legacy of a relationship with the United States that was ever cordial, but never clear due to a lack of trust and equality of power. To this day the friendship between our two countries remains ambiguous.

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