

The de Gaulle Problem

❖ Marc Trachtenberg

General Charles de Gaulle, president of the French Republic from 1958 to 1969, was certainly an extraordinary figure, but what are we to make of his policies? In the concluding essay in *Globalizing de Gaulle*, Garret Martin puts his finger on the key problem. Did de Gaulle, he asks, actually have a “grand design, that is to say an overarching and ambitious vision to reshape international affairs”? Or was he engaged in “mere posturing,” the only real purpose of which was to enhance French prestige?¹

That question lies at the heart of what might be called the “de Gaulle problem”—the whole problem of how the de Gaulle phenomenon, especially de Gaulle’s foreign policy, is to be interpreted—and Martin answers it in a very direct way. De Gaulle, he thinks, did have an “ambitious grand design to overcome the Cold War bipolar order.” From the outset de Gaulle knew what he wanted to do: “The General,” Martin says, “returned to power in 1958 with a long-term blueprint for relations with the Soviet Union and for European security.” And Martin gives that strategy fairly high grades. Even on the German question, the central issue in great-power politics during this period, Martin contends that de Gaulle offered “a compelling long-term vision for a European solution” to that problem.² Other observers see things differently, but Martin’s view is shared by many scholars. Indeed, the prevailing view today is that de Gaulle’s policy did make sense on its own terms—that de Gaulle had a coherent program, and that his vision provides us with the key to understanding what he was doing at the operational level.³

But does that view hold up in the light of the evidence? To get at that is-

1. Garret Martin, “Conclusion: A Gaullist Grand Strategy?,” in Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Garret Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958 to 1969* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), p. 291.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 298–299.

3. See esp. the passage in an article cited by Martin on p. 307 n. 65: Georges-Henri Soutou, “La décision française de quitter le commandement intégré de l’OTAN (1966),” in Hans-Joachim Harder, ed., *Von Truman bis Harmel: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von NATO und europäischer Integration* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), esp. p. 195. Note also the basic thrust of the ar-

sue, the first step is to look at the fundamental concept that lay at the heart of de Gaulle's approach to foreign policy, his basic notion of a "European Europe." What exactly did de Gaulle have in mind when he used that term?

He in fact used the term in two distinct and somewhat contradictory ways. Sometimes, especially in the mid-1960s, the concept of a "European Europe" was tied to the notion of a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals." The basic idea here was that the two hegemonic powers, the United States and Russia (as de Gaulle liked to call the USSR), would gradually loosen their grip over their respective spheres of influence in Europe, and the European peoples would recover their independence and work out a settlement they all could live with. That settlement would provide for a reunified German state—a state that would have no nuclear weapons and would have to accept the 1945 borders. The Soviet Union, as a European power, would be included in this process, but the United States would be treated essentially as an outsider. The Americans would be asked only to guarantee the settlement the Europeans had worked out among themselves.

Was this pan-European vision consistent with de Gaulle's philosophy of international politics? One of his most fundamental assumptions was that great nations strive for real control over their own destinies, which meant that they needed to be able to defend themselves. In his view, of course, France in particular could be truly independent only if it possessed its own nuclear force. But why would the same logic not apply to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)? De Gaulle sometimes seemed to think that the FRG, like France, would sooner or later insist on becoming a fully sovereign power.⁴ But didn't this mean that the Germans would have to acquire a nuclear capability? It was in fact on the basis of this kind of thinking that de Gaulle in the early 1960s seemed to believe that no matter how distasteful the prospect was, a West German nuclear capability was more or less inevitable. "Whatever we do or say," he told U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk in April 1963, "the day will come when [the Germans] will do as they please [in the nuclear area], and neither you nor we will be able to prevent them from doing so."⁵

By 1964, however, he had turned with great force against the idea that the FRG could ever be allowed to become a nuclear power. He assumed that

gument in what is probably the most important scholarly study of de Gaulle's foreign policy, Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

4. See, for example, de Gaulle's remarks in a meeting with former West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer, 10 March 1966, in *Documents diplomatiques français*, 1966, Vol. 1, p. 423 (henceforth cited as DDF with year and vol. no.)

5. Rusk–de Gaulle meeting, 8 April 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 1, p. 378. See also de Gaulle–Bohlen meeting, 4 January 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 1, p. 21; and de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 21 January 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 1, pp. 95–96.

other powers—above all, the Soviet Union and France—would be able to prevent West Germany from going nuclear. But how, in such a system, could the problem of Soviet power be dealt with? Even if Soviet policy were to lose its ideological edge (as he foresaw), an imbalance of power between the USSR and the FRG would almost certainly create problems. Just as America's enormous power led the United States, in de Gaulle's view, to pursue a domineering policy no matter what its intentions, so the absence of an effective counterweight to Soviet power in Europe could easily lead to an overly assertive Soviet policy. He understood that France alone could not provide that counterweight. A French-dominated Western Europe, however, might be able to provide it, and de Gaulle seemed to be aiming at that kind of system.⁶ But why would West Germany go along with such an arrangement? The idea that the FRG would accept such a subordinate position was scarcely in keeping with de Gaulle's own political philosophy: sooner or later the Germans would want to pursue a policy of their own. It was perhaps because he sensed that a purely European system might not be perfectly stable that he thought the United States would still have to play a certain role in underwriting the system the Europeans had worked out for themselves.⁷ But if the Americans were pushed to the margins of European political life, why would they provide a security guarantee?

De Gaulle, however, was not particularly interested in questions of that sort. When he spoke of a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals," he was laying out not so much a political program as a vision of how things might develop in the fairly distant future—a vision of a Europe freed from the "two hegemonies," free to settle its own affairs. By word and deed, he could set an example that others in both parts of Europe might follow. But he certainly understood that in the final analysis his ability to move things in that direction was quite limited. He was describing a historical process, a process rooted essentially in certain fundamental long-term changes that were taking place in the Communist world and did not depend in any fundamental way on the particular policy the French government sought to pursue.

In practical terms, the real focus of his policy lay elsewhere. The immediate problem had to do with whether the defense of Europe would rest essentially on U.S. power, or whether Western Europe would become (to use

6. For de Gaulle's thinking in this regard, see entry for 22 August 1962 in Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, 3 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 1994), Vol. 1, pp. 158–159. It was widely suspected in West Germany at the time that this was de Gaulle's goal. See Benedikt Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée: De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963–1969* (Paris: PUF, 2007), esp. p. 65.

7. See, for example, de Gaulle–Lübke meeting, 21 July 1966, in *DDF* 1966, Vol. 2, p. 378; and de Gaulle–Lucet meeting, 25 July 1966, in *DDF* 1966, Vol. 2, p. 415.

Dwight Eisenhower's phrase) a "third great power complex in the world," capable of balancing Soviet power without direct U.S. support.⁸ In this area France *could* play a key role, and de Gaulle evidently very much preferred that second solution. His goal, he said, was to create a continental West European bloc that could stand on its own both militarily and politically, a Europe that could be truly independent of the United States and of the Soviet Union as well, a Europe that could chart its own course in world affairs. He often spoke, that is, as though he very much wanted to create a "European Europe" in a second sense of the term: a freestanding continental West European bloc. This bloc would be based not on a Franco-Soviet but on a Franco-German entente: France and the FRG together would be the heart of a Europe "capable of being truly European, that is, independent."⁹

In itself this was by no means an absurd idea. France and West Germany, with the smaller countries in the western part of the continent organized behind them, were certainly capable of generating enough power to hold their own in Europe. West German leaders, not just when Konrad Adenauer was in charge but also during the coalition government under Kurt Kiesinger and Willy Brandt (1966–1969), were quite open to the concept. They naturally had no wish to remain totally dependent on the United States forever, and they knew that a freestanding Europe was much more acceptable, both at home and abroad, than a freestanding Germany. As for the Americans, they, too, were quite willing to go in this direction, at least until January 1961. Carolyne Davidson says in her contribution to *Globalizing de Gaulle* that even during the Eisenhower administration the U.S. government was determined to "exercise control in Western Europe" and, in particular, "to retain ultimate control over nuclear weapons."¹⁰ But it is quite clear that Eisenhower would have been delighted if the Europeans had come together as a bloc and taken charge of their own political fate—and he understood that to do so they would have to build a nuclear force of their own.¹¹ He was by no means opposed to that idea. He was not even against the idea of a West German nu-

8. See Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 147n.

9. Entry for 21 September 1963 in Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, Vol. 2, p. 239.

10. Carolyne Davidson, "Dealing with de Gaulle: The United States and France," in Nuenlist, Locher, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle*, pp. 112–113.

11. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, esp. pp. 147–156, 205–210. The Eisenhower policy was dropped when John F. Kennedy took office, and the new administration in its first two years opposed the idea of nuclear weapons under European control. But the policy shifted again in December 1962, when Kennedy tried to see whether some sort of nuclear arrangement could be worked out with the French. See pp. 363–370. That attempt failed, but Kennedy did not lose interest in the subject. His national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, for example, went so far as to tell a French diplomat in August 1963 that "the United States was ready, unconditionally, to help France manufacture bombs." See de Leusse to Couve de Murville, 7 August 1963, in *DDF*, 1963, Vol. 2, p. 161.

clear force.¹² He knew that the defense of Europe was a burden, and he ultimately wanted the Europeans themselves, not the United States, to carry it. It was for that reason that he wanted to reduce the U.S. military presence in Europe, perhaps eventually down to zero, and to have the Europeans provide for their own defense. As the United States pulled out its troops, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Eisenhower believed, would devolve into an essentially European defense organization, and the NATO commander would become a European (and, in fact, a French) general.¹³

But de Gaulle was unreceptive to that idea when Eisenhower proposed it, and despite all the rhetoric about a “European Europe,” the French president was not in any great rush to see the Americans go and to replace NATO with a purely European defense system. The basic reason had to do with Germany. De Gaulle came closest to accepting the idea of a freestanding Europe, not just in words but in fact, in the early 1960s. At that time he thought that, like it or not, a West German nuclear force might well be unavoidable, and for a while he seemed inclined to build his policy on that assumption—to accept the fact that the FRG, like France, would at a certain point become a nuclear power, and that a nuclear-armed France and a nuclear-armed West Germany could be the two great pillars on which a truly independent Europe could be built.¹⁴ But even during that period, he had real misgivings about the idea of a German nuclear capability. Given the way the Germans had behaved in the first half of the century, could they really be trusted with nuclear weapons? On the other hand, if you took the idea of an independent Western Europe at all seriously, it was hard to rule out the possibility of a nuclear West Germany. For how could Europe defend itself—how could you have a Europe that was not just an American protectorate—if one of its most

12. Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 209–210.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 213–215, 224–226.

14. Some comments he made at a meeting with Adenauer in 1960 are of particular interest in this context. France was building nuclear weapons, he said, because France could no longer remain in a “state of dependence” and it was “more than probable” that the day would come when Germany would also want to build a nuclear force of its own. The defense of Europe could not depend on the vagaries of American political life, and this meant that France and West Germany had to be able to defend themselves by coming together and developing a nuclear capability: “Cette situation implique incontestablement une union entre la France et l’Allemagne et impliquera sans doute qu’à partir d’un certain moment, celle-ci ne reste pas, non plus, dépourvu d’armes nucléaires. . . . Il est intolérable pour nos deux peuples, qui assument de grandes responsabilités et ont de grandes capacités, d’admettre que ce n’est pas à eux de se défendre par eux-mêmes, le cas échéant, et que les Américains en sont responsables à leur place.” See de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 29 July 1960, in *DDF* 1960, Vol. 2, pp. 165–166. These passages were first quoted (in German translation) in Georges-Henri Soutou, “De Gaulle, Adenauer und die gemeinsame Front gegen die amerikanische Nuklearstrategie,” in E. W. Hansen, G. Schreiber, and B. Wegner, eds., *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), pp. 498–499. The account of this meeting, based on German sources, in Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Staatsmann, 1952–1967* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1991), p. 566, is also quite revealing.

important, and most exposed, member states was to be kept non-nuclear? And if you did try to prevent the West Germans from going nuclear, what kind of message would you be giving them? Wouldn't you be saying that no matter how democratic and "European" the West Germans had become, they were still mistrusted—that although it was acceptable for other countries, like Communist China, to build a nuclear force because that made for a more multipolar world, the same principle simply did not apply to the Federal Republic?¹⁵ If the French really felt that way, what kind of partnership could they have with the West Germans? What sort of Europe could be built on that foundation?

These problems were clear enough, and in the 1960–1963 period de Gaulle was not sure which way he wanted to go. As Louis Joxe, one of his closest collaborators, told a U.S. diplomat in early 1963, "de Gaulle was more uncertain as to the German problem than any other in [the] European picture."¹⁶ But by 1964 the French president had made up his mind. The idea of treating the FRG as an equal, the idea of a nuclear Germany and a nuclear France coming together as the heart of a truly independent Europe, was essentially abandoned. The vague (and somewhat disingenuous) overture that year to Karl Carstens about some sort of West German participation in the French nuclear force, which Carine Germond alludes to in her article in *Globalizing de Gaulle*, was perhaps the last vestige of that approach.¹⁷ And in fact it was around that time that de Gaulle turned very sharply against the idea of a West German nuclear capability and anything that even seemed to point in that direction. France was now dead set against the U.S. plan for a multilateral force (MLF), even though that plan (as the French realized) was something of a fraud—that is, it would not have given the Europeans any real control over nuclear weapons.¹⁸ The French even opposed the plan the United States came up with as a kind of substitute for the MLF: U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's 1965 proposal for a greater degree of allied, and especially West German, participation in NATO nuclear planning. That proposal, which led to the establishment a year later of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, was

15. For de Gaulle's reaction to the explosion of a Chinese bomb in October 1964, see Institut Charles de Gaulle, *L'aventure de la bombe: De Gaulle et la dissuasion nucléaire* (Paris: Plon, 1985), p. 352.

16. Bohlen to Kennedy, 23 February 1963, in State Department Central Files for 1963, POL 15-1 FR, Record Group 59, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD.

17. Carine Germond, "A 'Cordial Potentiality?' De Gaulle and the Franco-German Partnership, 1963–1969," in Nuenlist, Locher, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle*, p. 46. On the overture to Carstens, see Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée*, pp. 163–165; and *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 766–768, 775, 890–891 n. 19 (henceforth cited as AAPD with year and vol. no.).

18. The MLF was commonly referred to at the time as the "*farce multilatérale*," the "multilateral farce," a term General Pierre Gallois claimed to have coined.

opposed by the French mainly because it involved the FRG too closely in decisions about nuclear use. De Gaulle clearly thought that the Germans should have no say whatsoever about how and when nuclear weapons would be used, even though their country would be more deeply involved than any other in a European war.¹⁹

De Gaulle by that point was not willing even to consider any sort of European nuclear force—that is, any form of nuclear sharing with the FRG: “I am not going to give our bombs to Germany! You can be quite sure that I will not give up the enormous advantage we have over the five other members of the Common Market by virtue of the fact that we are the only ones who are armed with nuclear weapons and are thus in a position to defend ourselves!”²⁰ Perhaps, at some point in the distant future, after the Europeans had come together politically and a real European government had come into being, Europe would have its own nuclear force.²¹ But until then the Germans were to have no say over how the French force would be used.

The problem was that with no way of providing for the FRG’s own defense—no real control over what the United States would do, and no chance of creating a European force that Bonn would have some control over—the West Germans were totally dependent on the United States strategically and therefore politically. This was not a situation they had chosen for themselves, and both Chancellor Kiesinger and Foreign Minister Brandt would have liked to follow a more “Gaullist” path.²² But de Gaulle assumed that the West Germans *had* made a choice—that they had decided not to be good Europeans, that they had decided in fact to be America’s vassals.²³ This

19. See esp. de Gaulle’s extraordinary comments in a meeting with U.S. Undersecretary of State George Ball, 31 August 1965, in *DDF* 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 280–281. After reading what de Gaulle says here, you have to wonder whether he thought that a real partnership between France and Germany—in the long run, the only possible basis for a truly independent Europe—was a realistic goal. Regarding French policy on the question of German participation in NATO nuclear planning, see also, Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l’Europe: De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l’alliance atlantique, 1958–1969* (Paris: Plon, 1996), pp. 146–147.

20. Entry for 25 November 1964 in Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, Vol. 2, p. 63.

21. De Gaulle–Erhard meeting, 4 July 1964, in *AAPD*, 1964, Vol. 2, p. 775; and de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 9 November 1964, in *AAPD*, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 1260–1261.

22. See, for example, de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 13 January 1967, in *DDF* 1967, Vol. 1, p. 71; de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 14 January 1967, in *DDF* 1967, Vol. 1, p. 86; de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 12 July 1967, in *DDF* 1967, Vol. 2, p. 67; de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 15 February 1968, in *DDF* 1968, Vol. 1, pp. 317–318; and de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 13 March 1969, *AAPD*, 1969, Vol. 1, pp. 368, 372–373. Willy Brandt, then foreign minister, also rejected the idea that West Germany could be an “American satellite.” See Maurice Vaïsse, “De Gaulle et Willy Brandt: Deux nonconformistes au pouvoir,” in Horst Möller and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *Willy Brandt und Frankreich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), p. 104.

23. See, for example, de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 27 September 1968, in *AAPD*, 1968, Vol. 2, pp. 1200–1209, esp. 1208. The previous year he had told Kiesinger directly that although the Federal Republic wanted good relations with France, the West Germans hindered this by slavishly following

struck the West Germans as deeply unfair, especially because de Gaulle's own policy had not been designed to enable the FRG to free itself from dependence on the United States—above all by allowing it to take part in an effective European defense system. And indeed when you look at this whole story, you really have to wonder how serious de Gaulle was about building a solid relationship with Germany, and thus about creating a truly “European Europe.”

So you come away from all this with the sense that there was an enormous gap between rhetoric and reality. The official line was clear. De Gaulle's basic idea was that you had to move away from the “Yalta” system—the system in which the two superpowers had divided Europe between them, the system that kept the Europeans down and kept them from creating a more united and more peaceful continent. He took it for granted that Soviet leaders were not the only ones responsible for this situation. The Americans were also to blame. U.S. hegemony was “suffocating” the Europeans, preventing them from “being themselves and reaching an understanding with the East.”²⁴ That was why in theory the French and the West Germans had to come together and stand up to the United States. That was why a truly independent Europe—a Europe that ultimately could stand on its own militarily—had to be brought into being.²⁵

And yet the reality was very different. De Gaulle certainly believed that *France* had to be independent, and this meant, to his mind, that French forces could not be “integrated” into the NATO system and that France needed a nuclear force of its own. But this Gaullist doctrine was not intended as an article for export—not to Germany, at any rate. To be sure, de Gaulle sometimes suggested to the West Germans that they too, sooner or later, would follow in France's footsteps—that eventually their country would again be fully sovereign, that countries like France and Germany would insist on taking control of their own fate.²⁶ But those words cannot be taken at face value, certainly not after 1963. Sovereignty to de Gaulle meant a nuclear capability, and by the mid-1960s he was dead-set against the idea of the West Germans getting any control over nuclear weapons, and was even quite reluctant to move

the American lead—“in der Hörigkeit Amerikas zu stehen,” in the German account; “être dans l'obédience de l'Amérique,” in the French record. De Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 13 January 1967, in *AAPD*, 1967, Vol. 1, p. 68; and de Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 13 January 1967, in *DDF*, 1967, Vol. 1, p. 66.

24. De Gaulle–Brandt meeting, 15 or 16 December 1966, in *DDF*, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 1020; and de Gaulle–Brandt meeting, 15 or 16 December 1966, in *AAPD*, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 1640.

25. De Gaulle–Kiesinger meeting, 25 April 1967, in *AAPD*, 1967, Vol. 2, p. 645.

26. See, for example, de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 21 September 1963, in *DDF*, 1963, Vol. 2, p. 284; de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 10 March 1966, in *DDF*, 1966, Vol. 1, p. 423; and de Gaulle–von Kiermannsegg meeting, 16 March 1967, in *DDF*, 1967, Vol. 1, p. 318.

ahead with the establishment of a European defense system, even though that idea was closely tied to the notion of an independent Europe. French officials in fact opposed the idea by arguing that if anything of the sort were created, it would allow the United States to avoid involvement in a European war—which was not at all the sort of argument you would have expected the French to make if they had taken their own rhetoric at face value.²⁷

The reality is that de Gaulle was not interested in seeing U.S. troops leave Europe, as some of the articles in *Globalizing de Gaulle* make clear.²⁸ But the key point to emphasize here is that the reason had to do as much with West Germany as with the Soviet Union.²⁹ France itself could not be part of the “integrated” NATO command system, but it was a good thing that the FRG was—that is, that Bundeswehr divisions were integrated into a military system under U.S. command.³⁰ France itself would not sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) because the treaty was part of a system that allowed the two superpowers to dominate the world.³¹ But the French made it abundantly clear that they expected West Germany to sign the NPT.³²

The basic idea of a non-nuclear West Germany went hand-in-hand with the idea of a continuing U.S. military presence in that country, and a continuing U.S. presence in the FRG was not something that de Gaulle found hard to accept. In principle, he wanted to move beyond the “Yalta” system, and he blamed the United States and the “bloc system” for perpetuating the division of Europe. In principle, he stood for a more “dynamic” policy, one that aimed at “overcoming” the Cold War status quo. But in reality, when you look at specifics, it is hard to see how, even in the mid- and late 1960s, his policy differed in any fundamental way from U.S. policy. Neither country wanted to see a nuclear-armed Germany; both agreed that Western Europe needed to be defended and that the United States would play a fundamental role in that defense; both were in favor of moving beyond the Cold War and reducing East-

27. Couve-Schröder meeting, 12 November 1965, in *AAPD*, 1965, Vol. 3, p. 1701.

28. See, for example, James Ellison, “Britain, de Gaulle’s NATO Policies, and Anglo-French Rivalry, 1963–1967,” in Nuenlist, Locher, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle*, p. 148; and Yuko Torikata, “The U.S. Escalation in Vietnam and de Gaulle’s Secret Search for Peace, 1964–1966,” in Nuenlist, Locher, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle*, p. 158.

29. See esp. the de Gaulle–Church meeting, 4 May 1966, in *DDF* 1966, Vol. 1, p. 764. Note a U.S. diplomat’s summary of de Gaulle’s views in early 1969, as relayed to him by French Foreign Minister Michel Debré’s *directeur du cabinet*: de Gaulle regarded the “continued presence of US forces in Germany” as a “principal stabilizing element” in the “foreseeable future in face of a self-assertive Germany.” See Blake to Secretary of State, 3 April 1969, in NSC Files, Box 674, Folder “France, vol I,” Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, CA.

30. See, for example, Hervé Alphand, *L’étonnement d’être: Journal, 1939–1973* (Paris: Fayard, 1977), p. 379.

31. See Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, pp. 377–379.

32. See Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée*, p. 316; and Klaiber to Auswärtige Amt, 1 February 1968, in *AAPD*, 1968, Vol. 1, p. 147.

West tension; both wanted to see greater freedom for Eastern Europe; and both approved, in principle, of the idea of a reunified German state. Did the two countries disagree on any major European issue?³³

But what about the French claim that the two countries understood the concept of *détente* differently? When U.S. officials talked about *détente*, the argument ran, what they were really aiming at was a new Yalta. The sort of *détente* the superpowers would bring into being would simply freeze the status quo, whereas France supposedly wanted to bring about a very different sort of system.³⁴ And yet, as Marie-Pierre Rey notes in her essay in *Globalizing de Gaulle*, “de Gaulle in fact favored the freezing of existing European borders”—including the border between the two Germans.³⁵ He just did not want an institutionalized arrangement that would provide for the formal recognition of the two German states—a view the United States shared. In practical terms de Gaulle was more than willing to live with the status quo, including the status quo of a divided Germany. As he told the Soviet ambassador in July 1963, “France’s foreign policy was based,” like Moscow’s, “on the maintenance of the existing territorial order.”³⁶ That point applied in particular to Germany. De Gaulle in fact was not very interested in German reunification, except perhaps as a very distant goal: “we wish that it will come about some day, but that’s a bit like the Jews who said for 1800 years ‘next year in Jerusalem.’” It might be a very long time before Germany was reunified, and de Gaulle was by no means upset by the prospect that reunification would get delayed indefinitely.³⁷

33. Thus, for example, President Kennedy in 1963 “could not see where the disagreement” between the United States and France lay. Yes, in the past the United States had opposed the French nuclear force, but by that point it had come to accept France’s nuclear arsenal as a reality, and on the core political issues both countries took much the same position. The French foreign minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, agreed that the interests of the two countries “were essentially the same,” and that on the great question of Germany the differences had to do with tactics rather than with anything fundamental. See Kennedy-Couve meeting, 25 May 1963, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 771–772 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers); Kennedy-Couve meeting, 25 May 1963, in *DDF, 1963*, Vol. 2, p. 355; Kennedy-Couve meeting, 7 October 1963, in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 785–786; and Kennedy-Couve meeting, 7 October 1963, in *DDF, 1963*, Vol. 2, p. 357. De Gaulle himself seemed to recognize this basic point. Note his comment in a meeting with Ambassador Charles Bohlen in 1965: “he did not think our differences were really very much a matter of principle.” Bohlen to State Department, 4 May 1965, in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, Vol. 12, p. 95.

34. See, for example, Couve to French ambassadors, 21 January 1965, in *DDF, 1965*, Vol. 1, p. 84; and de Gaulle–Erhard meeting, 12 June 1965, in *DDF, 1965*, Vol. 1, pp. 727–728. See also, Martin, “A Gaullist Grand Strategy?,” p. 299.

35. Marie-Pierre Rey, “De Gaulle, French Diplomacy, and Franco-Soviet Relations as Seen from Moscow,” in Nuenlist, Locher, and Martin, eds., *Globalizing de Gaulle*, p. 31.

36. De Gaulle–Vinogradov meeting, 12 July 1963, in *DDF, 1963*, Vol. 2, p. 93. See also de Gaulle–Zorin meeting, 5 July 1965, in *DDF, 1965*, Vol. 2, p. 47.

37. De Gaulle–Mansfield meeting, 19 November 1968, in *DDF, 1968*, Vol. 2, p. 846. Note also de Gaulle–de Margerie meeting, 5 June 1963, in *DDF, 1963*, Vol. 1, p. 597; and de Gaulle–Scranton

As for the notion that de Gaulle wanted a more dynamic policy aimed at “overcoming” the Cold War division of Europe, that claim, too, has to be assessed in the light of the fact that he did not like the idea of a Germany cut loose from the blocs. The French were not happy when the Germans themselves began to think in those terms. And yet ending the division of Europe meant ending the division of Germany, and the Soviet Union obviously was not just going to hand over East Germany to a West German state that remained part of NATO. The unification of Europe, the “overcoming of Yalta,” implied the ending of the bloc system—the dissolution of the alliances. But it was one thing to talk about this kind of outcome in a very vague and abstract way, as something that might happen in the distant future. It was quite another to give it real operational content, which was what people like Brandt and Egon Bahr wanted to do—and the French were not at all pleased when West German thinking and, after December 1966, West German policy started to move in that direction.³⁸

So what does this all mean? The main point, perhaps, is that de Gaulle’s political program, as he laid it out both in public and in private, is not to be taken at face value, if only because the pieces do not quite add up to a clear and consistent policy. That basic point has major implications. For one thing, given the way I now understand de Gaulle’s policy, I am much more sympathetic to Andrew Moravcsik’s general argument about the role that economic considerations played in shaping France’s European policy in that period than I was when I took part in a JCWS forum responding to his article on de Gaulle a decade ago.³⁹ For if the rhetoric was not the expression of a powerful

meeting, 20 September 1968, in *DDF* 1968, Vol. 2, p. 467. On this issue, see esp. Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée*, pp. 289, 315, 319.

38. See Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée*, pp. 183, 359, 371–372. French concerns about where Germany might be going were not new. In 1963, for example, the French had opposed the Kennedy administration’s détente policy with the argument that it would spur the West Germans to engage in their own dialogue with the USSR, which might well lead to the neutralization of Germany and thus to the neutralization of all of Western Europe—a prediction that was to some degree borne out by subsequent events. See De Gaulle–Dixon meeting, 17 September 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 2, p. 268; de Gaulle–Adenauer meeting, 21 September 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 2, pp. 291–292; Rusk–Couve meeting, 7 October 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 2, pp. 367–368; and Rusk–Couve meeting, 8 October 1963, in *DDF* 1963, Vol. 2, p. 381. Couve pointed out in his 8 October 1963 meeting with Rusk (p. 381) that the West German Social Democrats (and the Free Democrats) were increasingly inclined to deal directly with the USSR—something Couve obviously viewed as quite dangerous. On the Bahr concept—Brandt’s views were somewhat milder, or perhaps just less clear—see, for example, Alexander Gallus, *Die Neutralisten: Verfechter eines vereinten Deutschlands zwischen Ost und West, 1945–1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2001), pp. 296–308, esp. 303; and Andreas Vogtmeier, *Egon Bahr und die deutsche Frage: Zur Entwicklung der sozialdemokratischen Ost- und Deutschlandpolitik vom Kriegsende bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996), esp. pp. 84–85, 170n. For French views of Brandt even in the period before he entered the government and, in particular, French concerns about the “neutralist” tendencies he was to a certain extent associated with, see Cyril Buffet, “Rapport sur l’homme au passé complexe: Willy Brandt et la France (1948–1966),” in Möller and Vaïsse, eds., *Willy Brandt und Frankreich*, esp. p. 66.

39. See Marc Trachtenberg, “De Gaulle, Moravcsik, and Europe,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 2,

and coherent geopolitical concept, especially after 1963, then one could certainly argue that it is to be understood mainly in instrumental terms, and that in particular a desire to benefit economically from West Germany's commitment to the "European idea," most notably via the Common Agricultural Policy, was one of the main considerations that came into play.

But that is essentially a rationalist view, and it is only fair to point out that I also came away from the analysis with a sense that de Gaulle's policy is not to be understood in entirely rational terms—indeed, with the sense that de Gaulle was increasingly out of touch with political reality. The rhetoric seemed to take on a life of its own, and in the last years of de Gaulle's presidency his language became a little wild. He made what were widely viewed as anti-Semitic comments after the Six-Day Mideast War in 1967. He went to Montreal that same year and called for independence for Quebec. ("If I go," he had said, "I expect it will only be to light the powder barrel.")⁴⁰ In early 1968 he said that "only three peoples [were] under foreign oppression today—the French in Canada, the Arabs in Israel, and the Tibetans in China." The Quebecois were more oppressed than, say, the Poles or the Estonians? Bohlen, the U.S. ambassador in Paris, was appalled when he heard about de Gaulle's comment: "Really, the old boy is going off his rocker."⁴¹ And indeed some of the things he was saying during that period—his remark, for example, that the FRG would probably attack the Soviet Union if that country went to war with China—do come across as a little bizarre.⁴²

And yet it is hard just to leave it at that. Despite everything, despite all his flaws and eccentricities—his "dadas," as his closest collaborators called them—when you study de Gaulle you cannot help but feel that there was something quite extraordinary here, an intellectual élan not found in many statesmen. De Gaulle was a giant. No one should dispute that. But sometimes even giants have feet of clay.

No. 3 (Fall 2000), pp. 101–116. This was a comment on Andrew Moravcsik, "De Gaulle between Grain and Grandeur: The Political Economy of French EC Policy, 1958–1970 (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 3–43; and Andrew Moravcsik, "De Gaulle between Grain and Grandeur: The Political Economy of French EC Policy, 1958–1970 (Part 2)," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall 2000), pp. 4–68.

40. Quoted in Bernard Ledwidge, *De Gaulle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 335.

41. Diary entry for 23 January 1968, in C. L. Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries, 1963–1972* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 404. See also Bohlen to State Department, 12 July 1967, in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, Vol. 12, p. 143; and Bohlen to State Department, 27 July 1967, in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, Vol. 12, p. 145.

42. See also his remark that the FRG would probably attack the Soviet Union if that country went to war with China. De Gaulle–Scranton meeting, 20 September 1968, in *DDF, 1968*, Vol. 2, p. 463.