

The Sanctuary and the Glacis

France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and
Nuclear Weapons in the 1980s (Part I)

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In December 1985, Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) came to Paris to meet with French President François Mitterrand to discuss defense and security cooperation. Kohl had requested the meeting in the hope of overcoming the stalemate that had emerged during the previous months, not least regarding nuclear matters—a sensitive subject in light of the two countries’ different nuclear weapons status. The conversation was thorough. Mitterrand, in particular, mentioned the possibility of establishing some form of nuclear consultation mechanism between Paris and Bonn in times of crisis or war, a long-time West German demand. Kohl was euphoric: “This is the very first time that this kind of discussion can take place,” he told Mitterrand. “Such a conversation had never before been possible between a [French] president and a [West German] chancellor,” he continued, adding that his father, a captain in the German army, “would never have imagined such a situation.”¹ Kohl was right. Only a few years before, such topics were hardly discussed between French and West German leaders. In the wake of Mitterrand’s election in the spring of 1981, Helmut Schmidt, Kohl’s predecessor, had come to Mitterrand’s vacation home in the southwest of France for extensive discussions of the international context as well as bilateral relations. Toward the end of their first meeting, Mitterrand, who had been briefed on the importance of nuclear consultation to the FRG, asked Schmidt whether he had discussed the topic with his predecessor, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. “No,” Schmidt answered flatly, adding that Giscard “had eluded this matter.”²

1. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Paris, 17 December 1985, in Archives Nationales (AN), 5AG4/CD72/2. See also Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Paris, 17 December 1985, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD)*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 347, pp. 1821–1836.

2. Mitterrand-Schmidt meeting, Latché, 7 October 1981, in AN, 5AG4/CD72/2.

Journal of Cold War Studies

Vol. 22, No. 3, Summer 2020, pp. 119–179, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00929

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Ever since France became a nuclear power in the early 1960s, the nuclear factor had created a gap between the two countries. France under President Charles de Gaulle had become the West's third (and the world's fourth) nuclear power and was determined to make that status the linchpin of the country's restored international standing, whereas the FRG's non-nuclear status was an increasingly central element of the Cold War nuclear order.³ Following de Gaulle's deep-seated conviction that nuclear weapons and decisions cannot be shared, France's security was premised on the country's autonomous nuclear deterrent and its retreat from the integrated military command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO). By contrast, the FRG's security relied on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence and NATO's defenses. Whereas France aimed primarily to protect its national "sanctuary" thanks to French nuclear strategy, the FRG feared that its own territory might serve as a mere "glacis" for the defense of the French "hexagon," including, starting in the early 1970s, through the possible use on West German soil of France's newly acquired tactical nuclear weapons. The nuclear factor was thus a major hurdle on the way to the ambitious political, strategic, and military rapprochement the two countries had vowed to pursue since the early 1960s.⁴

In the 1960s and 1970s, little progress had been achieved to overcome the French-West German nuclear conundrum. In spite of attempts to bridge the gap, the two countries (especially France) had essentially eluded the issue, as Schmidt had told Mitterrand. This was true, most notably, in the vital military-strategic dimension, in which what could be called the sanctuary paradigm (or, as seen from the FRG, the glacis paradigm) remained firmly in place at the time of Mitterrand's election. Whether France's strategy might

3. On the importance of West Germany's non-nuclear status for the international order during the Cold War and beyond, see, for example, Andreas Lutsch, "The Persistent Legacy: Germany's Place in the Nuclear Order," Nuclear Proliferation International History Project Working Paper No. 5 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015); and Andreas Lutsch, "Westbindung oder Gleichgewicht? Die nukleare Sicherheitspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zwischen Atomwaffensperververtrag und NATO Doppelbeschluss (1961–1979)," Ph.D. Diss., Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, 2015.

4. On politico-strategic relations between France and the FRG, see Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Alliance incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954–1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); and Urs Leimbacher, *Die unverzichtbare Allianz: Deutsch-französische sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit, 1982–1989* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1992). For a general account of French-FRG relations since the postwar period, see Corinne Defrance and Ulrich Pfeil, *Entre guerre froide et intégration européenne: Reconstruction et rapprochement, 1945–1963* (Paris: Institut Historique Allemand, 2012); and Hélène Miard-Delacroix, *Le Défi européen: De 1963 à nos jours* (Paris: Institut Historique Allemand, 2011). On France and the FRG in the 1980s, see Ulrich Lappenküper, *Mitterrand und Deutschland: Die enträtselte Sphinx* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2011); Tilo Schabert, *Wie Weltgeschichte gemacht wird: Frankreich und die deutsche Vereinigung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002); and Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War and German Unification* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

somehow cover FRG territory and whether the latter could escape partial destruction as a result of France's deterrent "maneuver" was far from certain; yet it was hardly a matter for discussion between Bonn and Paris, in spite of the vital importance of the issue, not least for Germany. By the early 1980s, nuclear matters—despite a shared willingness to revive bilateral defense cooperation—were a blind spot in the otherwise increasingly close relationship between the two countries.

Things changed significantly after Mitterrand's spring 1981 election and, even more so, after the political transition in Bonn in the fall of 1982, when Kohl succeeded Schmidt. In a context marked by the deteriorating East-West and security environment and, in particular, the looming Euromissile crisis, the two countries wanted to move forward in their bilateral relationship. Starting in 1983, Paris and Bonn embarked on a new phase of strategic dialogue and cooperation with, at its core, the once muted nuclear issue. True, the matter was complicated, not least because of the extraordinary sensitivity of the issue of nuclear consultation. The French were as reluctant to budge in the name of their "autonomy of decision" as the West Germans were determined to extract concessions on what they viewed as a vital issue. Although Mitterrand's relationship with de Gaulle had been notoriously fraught, Mitterrand's ascendancy to presidential power found him all but espousing the general's views on strategy—not least his staunch defense of nuclear independence.⁵ As a result, more than three years of often frustrating bilateral sessions took place before the subject was finally discussed. By the time of the December 1985 meeting, enough progress had been made for the two leaders to envisage a breakthrough, prompting Mitterrand in February 1986 to issue a formal commitment to consult with Kohl on the possible use of tactical (or "pre-strategic") weapons on FRG soil. Mitterrand's consultation pledge was a turning point.

The limits of rapprochement soon became clear, however, especially when it came to operationalizing the nuclear consultation agreement, once again highlighting the dilemmas of nuclear sharing. The French were hell-bent on preserving their sovereignty in nuclear matters—and the West Germans were equally determined to obtain what they believed was a legitimate *droit de regard*. This issue was still looming by the time of the historic events of 1989–1990, yet the end of the Cold War and German reunification soon made it all

5. On Mitterrand's views regarding defense and strategy, see Hubert Védrine, *Les Mondes de François Mitterrand: A l'Élysée 1981–1995* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), pp. 713; Georges Saunier and Philippe Vial, eds., *La France et sa défense: Paroles publiques d'un président, 1981–1995* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2015); and Jean-Yves Le Drian and Hubert Védrine, eds., *Mitterrand et la Défense* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2017).

but irrelevant, making the Franco-German nuclear rapprochement unfinished business. Still, since 1983 Paris and Bonn had made real progress in reducing the gap between the two countries' different stances in nuclear matters and moving beyond the sanctuary/glacis paradigm. This was the result of West German tenacity but also of French—particularly Mitterrand's—willingness to take into account FRG interests in the name of the Franco-West German “community of destiny” while keeping what the French president saw as red lines.

My two-part article on this subject, the first part of which appears here, explores the lengthy, often vexing efforts at bridging the nuclear gap during the last decade of the Cold War. It does so by analyzing the three levels at which this gap existed; that is, at the levels of international standing, alliance choices, and, last but not least, operational and doctrinal options. The relationship between France and West Germany in the 1980s remained complicated by their differing nuclear weapons status—a complication that was compounded by their dissimilar international situations: one, a fully sovereign country with great-power status; the other, a divided, only partly sovereign country. Meanwhile, France and the FRG's diverging attitudes toward the United States and U.S. extended nuclear deterrence and their different positions on NATO military integration and strategy continued to frustrate their efforts at strategic rapprochement and to hamper their shared goal of a more autonomous Western Europe. Finally, the two countries' clashing vital interests remained exceedingly difficult to reconcile when it came to military options in the conventional and tactical nuclear fields, with no less than their respective survival potentially at stake. These three levels of analysis and policy continually intersect throughout this article, although the third level—with the sanctuary/glacis problematic especially salient—occupies most of the narrative.

The study covers the decade from 1981 to 1990 chronologically. Two subperiods, corresponding to different East-West contexts, are distinguishable, separated by the turning point of late 1985/early 1986 on nuclear consultation. The first period covers the “new” Cold War and the relaunch of French-West German cooperation from 1981 to 1986 (part 1), and the second period covers the “new” détente and the enduring nuclear conundrum from 1986 to the end of the Cold War in 1990 (part 2). Both contexts proved to be powerful incentives for France and the FRG to try to move beyond their nuclear differences. Ultimately, overcoming the dilemmas of nuclear decision-sharing proved out of reach, but significant headway was nevertheless made during that crucial period in narrowing divergences between the two countries on all three levels, including nuclear consultation. The article concludes

counterfactually, arguing that, had the Cold War lasted a few more years, France and the FRG would have made great strides toward further reducing their differences.

Studying French-FRG relations and the nuclear factor in the 1980s can help us understand the defense and security policies of these two important European countries as well as their equally important interactions—policies and interactions that, during this period, were largely shaped by the nuclear factor. Studying French-West German relations and the nuclear factor in the 1980s is also essential because this theme was at the crossroads of some of the most consequential issues shaping the Cold War in Europe, especially in its final years. Looking at how France and the FRG approached the nuclear factor within the framework of their bilateral relationship provides unique insights into systemic issues such as the German question in its broader sense; competing visions of security (and of Western security in particular) and the role and functioning of alliances (and of the Atlantic alliance in particular); and, last but not least, relations between nuclear haves and have-nots, including the question of nuclear sharing and extended deterrence. Finally, the theme resonates with contemporary issues: with doubts rising about the durability of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, the search for alternative security schemes in Europe—including revisiting the bilateral nuclear relationship—is once again at the forefront of the strategic debate.⁶

The French-West German Conundrum and Mitterrand's Ascent to Power (1981)

By the time Mitterrand became president in May 1981, the nuclear issue had been a durable though mostly latent impediment in French-FRG relations for two decades. Whether in the political dimension or on the (closely intertwined) politico-strategic and military-strategic levels, the nuclear factor stood in the way of the two countries' rapprochement. In the political dimension, West Germany's status as a non-nuclear power (enshrined in the FRG's unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons as part of the 1954 Paris agreements)

6. U.S. President Donald J. Trump's apparent willingness to revisit the conditions of the U.S. protection of Europe has triggered a new debate in Germany, including on the possible revival of a German nuclear option. See Ulrich Kühn and Tristan Volpe, "Keine Atombombe Bitte: Why Germany Should Not Go Nuclear," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 96, No. 4 (July/August 2017), pp. 103–112. On the French-FRG equation, see Emmanuelle Maître, *Le couple franco-allemand et les questions nucléaires: Vers un rapprochement?* Note de la FRS No. 18/2017 (Paris: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2017), online at <https://www.frstrategie.org/web/documents/publications/notes/2017/201718.pdf>.

and France's emerging status as the world's fourth nuclear power in the 1950s and 1960s created a gap between the two countries' international standing. Although France's quest for nuclear power had other motivations as well (starting with the country's search for independence and its leaders' growing doubts about the long-term reliability of the U.S. security guarantee, especially in the wake of the 1956 Suez crisis), considerations of prestige or "rank" and the willingness to ensure France's political superiority over West Germany were no doubt part of the calculus.⁷ No doubt, too, this created a measure of resentment among the FRG's leaders. By the time France effectively joined the nuclear club in the wake of the first French nuclear test in the Sahara Desert in February 1960, the West Germans had to come to terms with their country's inexorable inferiority in that realm—a situation that highlighted the delicate relationship between victor and vanquished: "This [French nuclear] bomb, I'd like to know against whom it has been conceived," Chancellor Konrad Adenauer reprovingly asked the French ambassador in Bonn.⁸

By the 1960s the gap between France's status as a nuclear "have" and West Germany's as a nuclear "have not" was a fact of life—one that was further confirmed by the FRG's signature and ratification of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969–1975 and by France's steady buildup of its nuclear deterrent throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Despite yearning for political non-discrimination and *Gleichberechtigung*, the FRG—as a result of both the postwar settlement and the strictures of the Cold War system—was neither willing nor in a position to change its non-nuclear status in any fundamental way. By the 1970s, regardless of what remained in West Germany of Adenauer's early misgivings, France's nuclear "rank insignia" (together with its other symbols of political preponderance, including its holding of rights and responsibilities over Berlin and the FRG as a whole and its permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council) were seen as indisputable facts—and were largely accepted across the Rhine.⁹ By the time of Mitterrand's rise to power, the stability and efficiency of the Bonn-Paris tandem increasingly relied on the maintenance of an overall balance between the FRG's growing economic might and France's continued politico-strategic preeminence. (This theme would culminate in the 1980s.) Still, the two countries' divergence in nuclear weapons capability was never far from the surface and

7. See Mathieu L. L. Segers, "The *Relance européenne* and the Nuclear Dimension of Franco-German Rapprochement," in Carine Germond and Henning Türk, eds., *A History of Franco-German Relations in Europe: From "Hereditary Enemies" to Partners* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

8. François Seydoux, *Mémoires d'outre-Rhin* (Paris: Grasset, 1975), p. 225.

9. Helmut Schmidt, *Die Deutschen und ihre Nachbarn* (Berlin: Siedler, 1990), p. 173.

could easily become, once again, an irritant with the potential for complicating the bilateral relationship.

Things were more problematic on the politico-strategic level. The opposite stances of France and the FRG on nuclear weapons and NATO integration limited the two countries' ability to establish close cooperation in that realm. France's effective accession to nuclear military power in the early 1960s (its nascent *force de frappe* became operational in the fall of 1964) went hand in hand with the country's increasing aloofness from NATO integration and its growing challenge to U.S. leadership and strategy—both in the narrow sense and in the broader sense of U.S. “grand” strategy toward Europe and the Cold War more broadly.¹⁰ By contrast, the FRG as of the 1960s had in effect become the bulwark of the U.S.-led security system in Europe. With growing conventional capabilities and participation in nuclear-sharing arrangements, West Germany had emerged as the largest European contributor to NATO's integrated defense as well as the centerpiece of U.S. extended deterrence in Europe—both passively, as the foremost beneficiary, and actively, as a vital contributor to its implementation. Although the two countries under Adenauer and de Gaulle had embarked on a far-reaching politico-strategic rapprochement—including an exploration of ways to reconcile and combine their respective postures to make bilateral cooperation the backbone of a more autonomous Western Europe—their effort had remained mostly fruitless. The January 1963 treaty on French-West German cooperation (the Elysée Treaty) quickly became a dead letter in the politico-strategic dimension after the West German Bundestag ratified it with a preamble that essentially reaffirmed the FRG's Atlanticist preference at the expense of de Gaulle's Europeanist vision. By 1966–1967, France had withdrawn from NATO's integrated command structure and nuclear sharing arrangements in the name of nuclear independence and autonomy of decision. France rejected the emerging NATO strategy of flexible response and declined to participate in NATO's nuclear consultation system, not least NATO's newly established nuclear planning group (NPG). To be sure, the impact of France's insistence on nuclear independence was partly attenuated by NATO's 1974 Ottawa declaration, which recognized France's contribution—together with the UK's—to the defense of Europe and to the overall deterrent posture of the alliance. Yet France's uncompromising independent posture within the Western alliance, combined with the FRG's unconditional Atlanticism, created a seemingly

10. On this, see Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

insuperable chasm with West Germany when it came to politico-strategic options.¹¹

By the early 1970s the gap between France and West Germany on this level, too, was seen on both sides as a fact of life—each party in essence acknowledging that the other would not change its stance in the foreseeable future—as well as a challenge to be addressed through further rapprochement. Starting in 1974, President Giscard d’Estaing and Chancellor Schmidt attempted to relaunch bilateral cooperation with a view to overcoming the politico-strategic disconnect between France’s posture as a non-integrated, independent nuclear country and the FRG’s posture as a non-nuclear, integrated member of NATO. By the end of the decade, Paris and Bonn once again had set out to create the groundwork for a more autonomous Western Europe, a move fueled by both countries’ increasing defiance of U.S. leadership against the backdrop of a looming “new” Cold War. Yet, given the domestic sensitivities on the French side (with Giscard being regularly accused by the Gaullists of jeopardizing the country’s independence and of preparing to return to the NATO fold), procrastination set in. The plan for Schmidt and Giscard was to move forward after Giscard’s hoped-for reelection in 1981. Almost twenty years after the Elysée Treaty, the Paris-Bonn politico-strategic rapprochement remained unfinished business.¹²

Yet the most troublesome dimension of the bilateral nuclear conundrum was of a military-strategic nature. What would effectively happen in case of crisis or war in Europe, given that France’s defense posture and deterrent concept, in both declaratory and operational terms, seemed to be based exclusively on the protection of the country’s “vital interests” and the defense of the national “sanctuary”? To what extent would this posture and this concept involve taking into account the interests of France’s foremost European partner and ally? Crucially, would France’s nuclear guarantee also cover the Federal Republic, or would the FRG serve as a mere *glacis* for the protection of France’s territory?

These questions—especially this last—became all the more pressing starting in 1974, when the French army began to field the *Pluton*, a mobile, tactical nuclear missile with a range up to 120 kilometers.¹³ The most plausible

11. See Soutou, *L’Alliance incertaine*; and Bozo, *Two Strategies*.

12. Helmut Schmidt, *Menschen und Mächte* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 1987), pp. 171, 272, 284–285.

13. The French tactical air force was equipped with tactical nuclear bombs in 1972, but the longer range of the aircraft compared with tactical ground missiles made it less of an issue in relations between France and the FRG. On this, see Soutou, *L’Alliance incertaine*, pp. 330. In addition, from the start

situation involving its use was one in which Soviet aggression in Central Europe had not been stopped by the NATO forces in charge of the forward defense of the FRG. (Since the 1960s, NATO's forward defense had been organized as a "layer cake" involving eight allied army corps deployed along West Germany's eastern border. As a non-integrated nuclear power, France declined to be part of NATO's forward defense, insofar as its participation would have involved a de facto "automatic" French involvement in a possible conflict, which France rejected in the name of both its nuclear "autonomy of decision" and the "uncertainty" necessary for deterrence. Nevertheless, NATO agreements with France signed after 1966, starting with the 1967 Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreement, foresaw the French army's possible intervention alongside NATO as a reserve force.)¹⁴ In such a situation, Plutons, in conjunction with whatever remained of French conventional forces, would be enlisted to deliver a tactical nuclear strike against enemy forces to defeat the Soviet thrust on the ground or, in a last-ditch attempt at restoring deterrence, to convey to Moscow the imminent risk of a French *strategic* strike on Soviet territory in what French doctrine described as a "last warning" (*ultime avertissement*), all of which was part of a "national deterrent maneuver" (*manœuvre nationale de dissuasion*) involving conventional and tactical nuclear forces.¹⁵ Yet because of the short range of the Plutons (which were stationed in eastern France in peace time) as well as the limited volume and capabilities of French conventional forces (stationed on both sides of the French-FRG border), either or both of the following two scenarios seemed likely: first, to save enough conventional and tactical nuclear forces for the protection of French territory in case of a collapse of NATO's forward defense, France's effective participation in the defense of the FRG's territory against an attack from the east would

and during the whole period under consideration in this article, ground-based tactical nuclear weapons were arguably more significant as part of the sanctuary/glacis debate because of their value as a means of nuclear "gesticulation" in times of crisis, including through their possible deployment on West German soil.

14. On French-NATO military relations after de Gaulle's 1966 decision, see Bozo, *Two Strategies*; and Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN: De la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen* (Paris: Masson, 1991). See also note 45 *supra*.

15. See *Livre blanc sur la défense nationale*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Ministère de la Défense Nationale, 1972), pp. 20–23. Tactical nuclear use was not formally mentioned in the various French-NATO military agreements signed after 1967, but it was discussed starting in 1975 between the chief of staff of the French armed forces, General Guy Méry, and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Alexander Haig, leading to an agreement on possible consultation between French and NATO military authorities prior to tactical nuclear use. West German authorities were not involved in that process, however, and the primary aim of such consultation was apparently to ensure the military efficiency of French and NATO tactical nuclear strikes—in particular by limiting possible "fratricide effects" from simultaneous strikes—rather than limit the damage done to FRG territory and population. See Bozo, *La France*, pp. 121–122.

involve, at best, piecemeal conventional forces in a second echelon role; second, a last-ditch effort to resist an invasion of France—that is, the effective implementation of the national deterrent maneuver—would involve the firing of a sizable number of Pluton missiles into West German territory, probably in the vicinity of the border, resulting in the likely destruction of large swaths of West German territory and a major death toll in the FRG.

As seen from Bonn, then, France's strategy, because of these operational and doctrinal constraints, did not enhance the security of the FRG, in contrast to NATO's strategy, which at least nominally was based on the defense of FRG territory along its eastern border. (This was further compounded by French declaratory policy, which since the 1960s had seemed to envisage French non-participation in the "battle of Germany" in case of a Soviet attack while reserving French forces for the "battle of France." This presentation aimed at stressing France's independence for domestic reasons, yet it did not correspond to the reality of the country's likely involvement alongside its allies in such a contingency, albeit in a limited reserve role and under national command.)¹⁶ Worse still for the leaders in Bonn, France's defense of its sanctuary could turn West German territory into a nuclear battlefield. This was also true of U.S. and UK nuclear forces, but the West Germans wanted to believe they had a measure of influence on their possible use through the NATO consultation procedures that had been developed—in particular in the NPG—after France's withdrawal.¹⁷ Meanwhile, France's deterrent posture, based on early nuclear use and an ostensibly low nuclear threshold in what essentially remained a "trip-wire" strategy, was seen by NATO allies, including the FRG, as potentially jeopardizing escalation control, which was central to the strategy of flexible response. How to reconcile France's autonomous strategy with NATO's therefore remained a major issue in French discussions with NATO and with the FRG.

Here again, the French and the West Germans came to live with their differences and, especially under Giscard and Schmidt, even began to explore ways to bridge them. Aware that France's military-strategic concept was an

16. On this, see Bozo, *Two Strategies*, pp. 50–51, 83–84, 133.

17. The nominal starting point of nuclear consultation in NATO had been the "Athens guidelines" of 1962, which committed the allies—the United States first and foremost—to consulting before any possible use of nuclear weapons, "time and circumstances permitting." See Jane E. Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response: NATO's Debate over Strategy in the 1960s* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 73. On the beginnings of the NPG in the wake of France's withdrawal, see also Bozo, *Two Strategies*, p. 200; and Paul Buteux, *The Politics of Nuclear Consultation in NATO 1965–1980* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

obstacle to bilateral cooperation, Giscard was willing to move beyond the pure “sanctuary” model and to revise the notion of German territory as a mere glacis for France’s deterrence. Meanwhile, FRG leaders, without asking for France’s return to the NATO fold, were hoping to reduce the antagonism between France and NATO and to obtain an increased military “interlocking” between the two countries. Yet until the end of the decade progress was limited—not least as a result of the difficulty for France to move beyond the strict observance of Gaullist doctrine. In the spring of 1976, the chief of staff of the French armed forces, General Guy Méry, declared that, faced with a Soviet attack, France would likely participate in the early defense of West German territory, even forging the notion of “enlarged sanctuarization” to imply that France’s deterrent posture might somehow cover the neighboring country rather than just the national “sanctuary.” This created a domestic stir—fueled by the Gaullists—forcing Giscard henceforth to remain cautious in his search for making France’s concept more acceptable to the West Germans for fear of being accused of betraying de Gaulle’s legacy.¹⁸ Leaders of the FRG were not seeking an explicit French nuclear guarantee, not least because they viewed only U.S./NATO extended deterrence as having the necessary credibility in the face of the Soviet threat. In addition, any move toward increased European military autonomy was seen in Bonn as potentially undermining the U.S. security commitment to Europe and, as a result, German security. Any French contribution to West Germany’s nuclear security, then, was seen by the FRG as a supplement, not a substitute to the existing U.S./NATO guarantee. (This basic feature of the French-West German nuclear equation by and large remained unchanged in subsequent years, reflecting the fact that both countries, although dissatisfied with aspects of the Western, U.S.-dominated nuclear status quo, were not willing to challenge it and were hoping for its continuation at least for the foreseeable future.) Yet the lack of significant progress, from Bonn’s point of view, was especially frustrating regarding the issue of the possible use of French tactical nuclear weapons on FRG territory—Bonn’s foremost concern when it came to the impact of France’s nuclear concept on West Germany’s security.

To reduce the risk that FRG territory would become a tactical nuclear battlefield, the West Germans, in the wake of the 1974 deployment of the Plutons, had hoped to convince the French to accept consultation procedures prior to a possible tactical nuclear use along the lines of those in existence

18. Schmidt, *Menschen*, p. 285; and Soutou, *L’Alliance incertaine*, p. 360.

with the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as NATO authorities. The West Germans had kept bringing up this issue in the 1970s. Yet the French were evasive, rejecting any “*droit de regard*” on France’s deterrent in the name of preserving the sacrosanct “autonomy of decision” as well as the “uncertainty” that, in their view, had to prevail regarding a possible French decision to resort to nuclear use. So Bonn’s request fell on deaf ears.¹⁹ Thus, by the time of Mitterrand’s election, France’s tactical concept and its foremost instrument, the Pluton, had become a central if latent bone of contention between France and the FRG—and the most significant hurdle on the way to increased bilateral military-strategic cooperation. Obtaining France’s acceptance of some sort of cooperation on this issue remained West German leaders’ most pressing concern in 1981.

That, in the wake of Mitterrand’s coming to power, the issue of nuclear consultation was quickly brought up by the West Germans with the new powers that be in Paris is thus not surprising. Four months after the French presidential election, as Schmidt was preparing for an important visit to Mitterrand at his vacation home in Latché in southwestern France, the Bonn Chancellery passed a message to the Elysée: the FRG wanted to establish nuclear consultation procedures with France similar to those already existing with the Anglo-Americans. Schmidt, his chief of staff Manfred Lahnstein told his Elysée counterpart, Pierre Bérégovoy, had brought this up with Giscard, who had said he was not opposed to the idea—but nothing had come of it. Schmidt thus wanted to discuss this at Latché, Bérégovoy told Mitterrand.²⁰

Although they had met several times since the French presidential election, the meeting in Latché on 7–8 October 1981 was Mitterrand’s and Schmidt’s first opportunity to discuss in depth the international situation and their countries’ bilateral relations, and the nuclear issue figured prominently in the exchange. The international context, dominated by the looming crisis over the issue of Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF)—that is, the Euromissile crisis—brought the issue to the fore.²¹ Since NATO’s dual-track decision of December 1979, pressure had steadily mounted on the FRG, where U.S. Pershing II missiles were to be deployed by the end of 1983 if the Soviet Union had not in the meantime agreed to dismantle its own SS-20s through

19. Schmidt, *Menschen*, p. 276; and Soutou, *L’Alliance incertaine*, p. 330.

20. Bérégovoy note for Mitterrand, 7 October 1981, in AN, 5AG4/190, Dossier 4.

21. On the INF crisis, see Leopoldo Nuti et al., eds., *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2015).

negotiation—an increasingly uncertain prospect amid the growing pacifist movement in the FRG.²²

As Mitterrand and Schmidt recognized, the Euromissile crisis dramatically highlighted the fundamental differences between France and West Germany regarding nuclear weapons. The Federal Republic—NATO's foremost non-nuclear state and the European country with the most U.S. nuclear weapons on its soil—was weakened and vulnerable. By contrast, France—an independent nuclear state devoid of foreign weapons on its territory and not involved in a possible U.S. INF deployment—appeared as an island of stability. “You are a nuclear power, a guarantor power in Berlin, and you have an independent protection,” Schmidt told Mitterrand, “while we are not a nuclear power [and] we depend on others for our protection.” The FRG, Schmidt went on, was clearly more dependent on the United States than France was. This was a problematic situation given that country's increasing unpredictability and its constant oscillations in strategic matters: “I feel very close to them,” he continued, “[but] without our alliance with France I would feel far too closely bound to the U.S. alliance.” Schmidt added, “A demonstrative gesture of support on the part of France vis-à-vis Germany, as General de Gaulle and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had done, is vital for us.”²³

Mitterrand was sympathetic. Since taking office, he had vocally demonstrated his support for Schmidt's willingness to implement the dual-track decision—displeasing the growing number of those in the FRG who opposed the deployment of new U.S. missiles. Mitterrand mentioned to Schmidt his desire for a “privileged friendship” and “a particularly close relationship” between the two countries. He was willing, he said, to contemplate “any gesture, such as a joint declaration that would manifest French-West German cohesion, now or at some later stage.” As if to give substance to his words, he brought up the specific issue that he knew Schmidt wanted to discuss with him: “Has a mutual information procedure been set up between France and the FRG in case of conflict?” he asked, adding, “I believe not.” Schmidt confirmed this: “We have [such] an agreement with Britain and the United States,

22. On West Germany, the Euromissile crisis, and the anti-nuclear movement, see, for example, Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: Free Press, 1991). For a recent discussion, see Holger Nehring, “The Last Battle of the Cold War: Peace Movements and German Politics,” in Nuti et al., eds., *Euromissile Crisis*, pp. 137–138. On the impact of the crisis on West German foreign policy, see the classic work of Helga Haftendorn, *Deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Selbstbeschränkung und Selbstbehauptung 1945–2000* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001).

23. Mitterrand-Schmidt meeting, Latché, 7 October 1981, in AN 5AG4/72/2. See also the German minutes of the conversation in AAPD, 1981 (II), Docs. No. 287–288, 290, pp. 1536–1549, 1553–1565.

but not with France.” “Had France refused this?” Mitterrand asked. “No, said Schmidt. But Giscard had said he would never deploy nuclear weapons in Germany. He had eluded this matter.”²⁴

The meeting in Latché confirmed that the escalating INF crisis threatened to complicate relations between France and the FRG. In broad terms, the rise of the West German pacifist movement, which at some point could well erode the FRG’s commitment to NATO or even morph into outright neutralist sentiment, was a direct challenge to France’s security. In spite of the latter’s distant ties with NATO, the alliance was inseparable from Western security, whose central piece happened to be the FRG. The anti-nuclear component of the pacifist movement (which, the French believed, stemmed from the West Germans’ growing fear of a possible nuclear war on their soil) was especially worrisome to Paris because it threatened to call into question a central tenet of the FRG’s *Westbindung*; that is, its confidence in the U.S. security guarantee.²⁵ Worse still, the West German nuclear aversion could strain relations with the FRG if, as was predictable, it became directed at France’s independent nuclear deterrent—which, the French believed, the West Germans had never truly accepted. French concerns in that regard revolved in particular around possible FRG pressure to include France’s (and the UK’s) nuclear forces in U.S.-Soviet negotiations over INF, which had started in Geneva in the fall of 1981. The fear of France being dragged into the superpowers’ arms control negotiations—a constant Soviet demand that Paris energetically declined in the name of its strategic independence and rejection of the “bloc system”—had existed since the inception of the U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) talks a decade earlier, but it had gained renewed currency in the context of the looming INF crisis. The French feared their NATO allies might pressure them to go along with the Soviet request—especially the

24. Mitterrand-Schmidt meeting, Latché, 7 October 1981; and *AAPD*, 1981 (II), Docs. No. 287–288, 290. The brief exchange between Mitterrand and Schmidt on nuclear consultation does not appear in the German protocol. This may reflect the high sensitivity of the matter and the fact that such protocols were shared within the West German government, whereas on the French side Mitterrand had given strict orders that protocols of his conversations with foreign leaders not circulate outside the Elysée. See Bérégovoy, handwritten note for Hubert Védrine, 30 September 1981, in AN, 5AG4/CD/160/1.

25. Jean-Michel Gaillard, note, La RFA, le pacifisme, la construction européenne, 21 September 1981, in AN, 5AG4/CD160, Dossier 1; Ministère des relations extérieures (MRE), Direction d’Europe, notes, La situation politique intérieure de la RFA, 2 October 1981, in AN, 5AG4/CD160, Dossier 1; and Note, La politique étrangère de la RFA, 6 January 1982, in AN, 5AG4/CD160, Dossier 1. On French perceptions of the FRG and French-West German relations during that period, see Hélène Miard-Delacroix, “Les relations franco-allemandes,” in Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, and Jean-Louis Bianco, eds., *François Mitterrand: Les Années du changement, 1981–1984* (Paris: Perrin, 2001), pp. 295–310.

West Germans, whose paramount interest in the success of the INF negotiation stemmed from their desire to avoid the deployment of U.S. missiles on their soil, even if this meant compromising France's nuclear independence. Although this was clearly not Bonn's official line, Paris by early 1982 was increasingly concerned about pronouncements from leaders of Schmidt's Social Democratic Party (SPD) in favor of somehow taking into account the French *force de frappe* in the Geneva negotiations. The Elysée considered such comments "very damaging."²⁶ As seen from Paris, the Euromissile crisis threatened to destabilize the cornerstone of the nuclear-based Western security order and to widen the gap between France and the FRG in that realm.²⁷

Launching a New French-West German Security Dialogue (1982–1983)

The obvious response to this challenge was for France to strengthen its ties with the FRG while reinforcing the West European project in order to contribute to the FRG's continued *Westbindung* in an era of decreasing confidence in the U.S. guarantee.²⁸ The French realized that meeting this challenge and, crucially, preventing a widening of the French-West German gap in the nuclear realm meant they would have to accept an evolution of their own nuclear posture. That posture was perceived across the Rhine as "egoistic": France's refusal to be involved in any nuclear negotiation ran contrary to the FRG's arms control aspirations; its defense of the national "sanctuary" was at odds with the FRG's reliance on NATO's forward defense and U.S. extended deterrence; and, last but not least, France's military-strategic concept—both its position on the rear of NATO's defense line and its likely use of tactical nuclear weapons—involved the risk of nuclearizing the FRG to protect French "vital interests." The French believed that Bonn's perception of France's

26. MRE, Direction politique, service des Affaires stratégiques et du désarmement (ASD), note, Position du SPD visant à la prise en compte des forces françaises dans la négociation de Genève, January 1982 (precise date not identifiable), in AN, 5AG4/CD160, Dossier 2. Government officials in Bonn also saw the evolving SPD position on third nuclear forces as dubious. See Botschafter Herbst, Paris, an das Auswärtige Amt, 1 April 1982, Betr.: Informationsreise MdB Egon Bahr nach Paris am 1. und 2. 4. 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (I), Doc. No. 103, pp. 517–519, esp. p. 519 n. 12.

27. On France and the INF crisis, see Ilaria Parisi, "La France et la crise des Euromissiles, 1977–1987," Ph.D. Diss., Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, 2017; and Frédéric Bozo, "France, the Euromissiles, and the End of the Cold War," in Nuti et al., eds., *Euromissile Crisis*, pp. 208–229. On France's foreign policy under Mitterrand, see Védrine, *Les Mondes*; and Frédéric Bozo, *French Foreign Policy since 1945: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn, 2016), pp. 115–147.

28. Note, La politique étrangère de la RFA, 6 January 1982.

posture was partly mistaken, insofar as France did contribute to the defense of Europe and—together with the United Kingdom—to the alliance’s overall deterrence, à la the 1974 Ottawa declaration. Still, the conclusion was clear: France had no hope of positively influencing the FRG without minimally meeting its concerns, which would have to involve a more “extensive” definition of France’s vital interests, a more flexible tactical nuclear concept, and a more forthcoming stance in arms control. For this, opening a fresh dialogue was of the essence, including a “frank and direct” conversation “at the highest level” in order to convey to the FRG that France was now ready to move away from a narrowly “national” concept of nuclear deterrence and to discuss the role the *force de frappe* might play in European security in the future. Meanwhile, a joint declaration (as Mitterrand had mentioned to Schmidt) should affirm the two countries’ willingness to reach a shared security vision.²⁹

The 39th bilateral French-West German summit was scheduled to take place in Paris on 24–25 February 1982. Such half-yearly events were the most visible incarnation of French-FRG cooperation under the 1963 Elysée Treaty, so the summit offered an opportunity for a concrete move, culminating as it did with the adoption of the planned joint declaration. In it, Mitterrand and Schmidt described the relationship between the two countries as “fundamental” and the basis for a more united and powerful Europe, and they pledged to reinforce the relationship further so they could work together in an even closer way. Paris and Bonn, “in the spirit” of the 1963 treaty, wanted to strengthen their cooperation in foreign policy and to conduct in-depth exchanges of views on security matters—in essence, reviving the dormant defense and security dimension of the treaty, as Giscard and Schmidt had planned to do.³⁰ In the wake of the summit and the adoption of the declaration, the French wanted to keep up the momentum, signaling to the West Germans that they were now willing to take into account Bonn’s concerns in their own strategic decision-making. Hence, meeting Egon Bahr, the architect of the FRG’s *Ostpolitik* and the brain behind the SPD’s stance on security and disarmament, French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson went to great lengths to discard any notion of French nuclear autarky while stressing that France’s independent strategy could not be seen in isolation from its environment—namely, France’s NATO allies, not least the FRG. “We are not a nuclear Switzerland,” Cheysson said.

29. MRE, Centre d’analyse et de prévision (CAP), note a/s Approfondissement des rapports de sécurité franco-allemands, 12 February 1982, in AN, 5AG4/CD 160, Dossier 2.

30. Joint declaration of 25 February 1982, in Adolf Kimmel and Pierre Jardin, eds., *Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen seit 1963: Eine Dokumentation* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), pp. 243–245.

(Bahr was on record in favor of having French and UK nuclear forces taken into account in the Geneva negotiation, so it was especially important to convince him of the new frame of mind that prevailed in Paris).³¹ The French also wanted to implement the Mitterrand-Schmidt decision, which the two leaders had taken in principle in February, to gather the foreign and defense ministers of both countries to create a framework for renewed strategic cooperation and begin discussing substantive issues. A first meeting was scheduled to take place—in all discretion—in July 1982 near Paris; it was meant to include a presentation by the French defense minister of France's strategy and its contribution to European security. Yet the increasing fragility of the government coalition complicated matters in Bonn, and so the meeting did not take place as planned. By the time Kohl replaced Schmidt as chancellor after a vote of no confidence in the Bundestag on 1 October, the renewed French-West German dialogue had yet to begin.³²

Would the new coalition in Bonn follow up on Schmidt's willingness to revive cooperation with France? Although the Free Democrats remained in the coalition, with Hans-Dietrich Genscher staying on as foreign minister, the more Atlanticist Christian Democratic Union (CDU) was now in command, and the extent to which the CDU would favor a more European course remained to be seen. Whatever uncertainty existed was quickly dispelled by Kohl's visit to Mitterrand on 4 October, the day his government was formed. The two bonded instantly, affirming their shared understanding of the historic significance of the French-West German partnership and pledging to step up cooperation in all domains, inaugurating a personal relationship that influenced their countries and Europe for more than a decade. The meeting was brief and did not allow Kohl and Mitterrand to enter into a substantive discussion of specific areas of cooperation—except for security matters. The INF issue, once again, was central. Both men reaffirmed their support for the implementation of the dual-track decision if the Geneva talks did not bear fruit, while at the same time recognizing the different situations of their respective

31. MRE, Europe, note, Entretien entre M. Egon Bahr et le Ministre, 1er avril 1982, 2 April 1982, and MRE, ASD, note pour le Ministre, Entretien avec E. Bahr, 31 March 1982, both in AN, 5AG4/CD 160, Dossier 2. See also Botschafter Herbst, Paris, an das Auswärtige Amt, 1 April 1982.

32. See Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit dem französischen Außenminister Cheysson, 18 February 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (I), Doc. No. 60, pp. 305–313; Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Schmidt mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand, Hamburg, 14 May 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (I), Doc. No. 150, p. 783; Ministère de la défense (MD), Cabinet du ministre, note de François Heisbourg à l'attention de M. le Ministre, "Rencontre franco-allemande du 1er juillet," 22 June 1982; Cheysson to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, unsigned, n.d., in AN, 5AG4/CD 160, Dossier 2; and Hubert Védrine, note pour le président de la République, "Dîner avec M. Kohl," 4 October 1982, in AN, 5AG4/CD 187, Dossier 2.

countries in that regard. Mitterrand, as he had done with Schmidt, recognized the magnitude of the challenge the FRG was facing as a result of its political and strategic situation. “In France, things are different,” he said, adding, “we have nuclear weapons and it is clearly very important to know how Germany and France conceive of their common security.” When Kohl said he would like the four ministers to meet as planned, Mitterrand readily agreed to consider this. He ended the meeting by recounting for Kohl that when he became president his aides had taken him down to the Elysée’s underground shelter and showed him the “nuclear button” and the direct telephone lines to Washington, London, and Bonn. But he also had a telephone on his office desk, he said, signaling that he wanted to remain in close and regular contact. The nuclear issue, which so divided France and Germany, was very much present at the formation of the Kohl-Mitterrand “couple.”³³

In the wake of the conversation on 4 October, the two countries swiftly agreed that the four ministers would meet during the upcoming French-West German summit in Bonn on 21–22 October. Each side had its own concerns and expectations. The French mainly wanted to debate in general terms the future of nuclear deterrence given the growing anti-nuclear sentiment. The West Germans, by contrast, wanted above all to discuss France’s specific role in the defense of the FRG and the conditions in which its tactical nuclear forces would be used—and they were skeptical that the French would be willing to go far along that road.³⁴

The results of the four-way talks between Cheysson, Genscher, and their respective defense colleagues Charles Hernu and Manfred Wörner on the first

33. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Paris, 4 October [mistakenly dated 14 October] 1982, in AN, 5AG4/6562. See also Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand (sic) in Paris, 4 October 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (II), Doc. No. 254, pp. 1330–1335. On that day, Kohl and his small delegation stayed over at the Elysée for dinner. When Waldemar Schreckenberger, the newly appointed state secretary in Kohl’s chancellery, asked about the possible use of French tactical nuclear weapons on West German soil, Mitterrand replied that it could happen only “in agreement with Germany” and in case of the “previous destruction” of FRG territory and if France’s self-defense made it “indispensable.” This was a theme, Mitterrand added, on which he would gladly—but very confidentially—inform Kohl. See Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Paris, 4 October 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (II), Doc. No. 255, p. 1337. The “direct telephone lines” Mitterrand mentioned to Kohl were actually secure teletypes. For more, see Guigou and Védrine note for Mitterrand, *Objet*: 46èmes consultations franco-allemandes au sommet, Bonn, 7–8 novembre 1985, n.d., in AN, 5AG4 EG/44.

34. The first four-way ministerial meeting was preceded by a visit of the West German defense minister to his French counterpart in Paris in mid-October. See Bonn Telegram 1688, 12 October 1982; and MRE, CAP, note pour le cabinet du ministre (à l’attention de M. Delbourg) a/s M. Woerner, 13 October 1982, both in AN, 5AG4/CD 161, Dossier 1. See also Botschafter Herbst, Paris, and das Auswärtige Amt, 16 October 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (II), Doc. No. 275, pp. 1427–1430; and Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer, 19 October 1982, in *AAPD*, 1982 (II), Doc. No. 278, pp. 1454–1457.

day of the summit were nevertheless important. A procedure was finally agreed to operationalize the decision by Mitterrand and Schmidt in 1982 to intensify the strategic dialogue between the two capitals: the four ministers would meet twice yearly on the occasion of the French-West German summits, and a bilateral commission would meet in between, gathering high-ranking civilian and military officials. This formula was validated by Kohl and Mitterrand during their one-to-one meeting the following day. The two men then entered into a more detailed discussion.

Mitterrand did most of the talking, showing his understanding of FRG concerns—while also highlighting red lines that were unmistakably in continuity with de Gaulle's, including a staunch defense of France's military autonomy and the conviction that the nuclear decision could not be shared. On the conventional level, France, Mitterrand said, would maintain the current level of its forces in the FRG while maintaining those forces separate from NATO's integration. On the nuclear level, the FRG could have no part in France's nuclear decision-making, but West Germany should not become a "battlefield." Mitterrand went to the heart of the matter: "uncertainty is necessary as to what our reaction will be in case of an aggression against Germany," he said, adding that "he himself had no clue" and that the only answer was the existence of "trust" between the two leaders. One had to find a path "between two notions," he continued. On the one hand, France's "vital interest" was defined by the "sanctuary"; on the other hand, any aggression against the FRG threatened France's vital interests. Could West German territory be included in the French sanctuary? Only circumstances would tell, he said, adding, "but be aware that, for us, Germany's security is an essential concern" and that "Germany's security issues will not be dealt with by France without Germany." In the past, he acknowledged, the short range of the Pluton, combined with France's role on the rear of NATO's forward defense, had been a problem that had hindered French-West German cooperation. But after 1992, the Hadès missile—the Pluton's planned replacement—would have a range of more than 350 kilometers, Mitterrand said, which will "facilitate" things.³⁵ Kohl thanked

35. The development of a follow-on to the Pluton had first been contemplated in the late 1970s. At the time, the project involved a mobile missile with a range of 250 kilometers, possibly equipped with a low-yield, enhanced radiation weapon (ERW) warhead (i.e., a neutron bomb) in the hope of limiting collateral damage on German soil. Although the possible ERW option resurfaced from time to time well into the 1980s in spite of West German sensitivities to this type of weapon, that option had in effect been left dormant when the decision to launch the program was made in the fall of 1982, and at the end of the decade the Hadès was effectively produced with a regular nuclear warhead. By the time the development program was launched in late 1982, the range of 250 kilometers, which was seen as also problematic because of West German sensitivities, had been extended to over 350 kilometers, and by the late 1980s that range had officially been extended to 480 kilometers. François Heisbourg,

him effusively for his presentation, which was “vital” for the FRG. The Rhine in Strasbourg was not wider than 300 meters, he said, mentioning that Adenauer, whose picture was on the wall of the office where they were meeting, was “watching us.” Mitterrand concluded by hinting—as Cheysson had done earlier with Bahr—that the French sanctuary was no longer an absolute notion: “France’s vital interest,” he said, “is not to remain the only surviving country, except for the USSR, in a Europe in ruins.”³⁶

In retrospect, Mitterrand’s precisely worded presentation—which he no doubt had carefully thought through—provided the conceptual framework within which the French–West German strategic rapprochement of the subsequent years would take place, combining overtures and red lines from which he would not deviate. Meanwhile the bilateral commission on defense and security gathered for the first time in Paris on 7 December 1982. By convening between French–West German summits, the commission could prepare the meetings of the four ministers. At the end of 1982, satisfaction prevailed in Paris. The French believed the relaunch of the bilateral strategic cooperation they had called for as part of the revival of the Elysée Treaty was on track, at least in procedural terms, to the satisfaction of both parties. The French hoped the fledgling strategic dialogue would help to correct the image of a strategically self-centered France, but they realized that the FRG was expecting “concrete gestures” from Paris sooner rather than later.³⁷

An opportunity for such a gesture was soon in sight. As agreed with Kohl in October 1982, Mitterrand was scheduled to speak to the West German Bundestag on 20 January 1983, in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. Because a possible decision on INF deployment was to take place before the end of the year, the Euromissile crisis was likely to reach its peak during the following months. In this context, the Elysée viewed Mitterrand’s speech as a historic occasion to express France’s solidarity with the FRG while strengthening its *Westbindung* and continued adherence to nuclear deterrence. The INF issue and, in particular, the willingness of some in the FRG to include France’s deterrent in the Geneva negotiations more than

interview, Paris, 27 December 2017; and François Heisbourg, email correspondence with author, 8 January 2018. See also Commandant Baille, *Histoire et doctrine d’emploi de l’armement nucléaire tactique français (1959–1996)* (Paris: Centre de Doctrine et d’Enseignement du Commandement, 2018), https://www.penseemiliterre.fr/plugin/cdec/pdf/to_pdf.php?entry=244.

36. Kohl–Mitterrand meeting, Bonn, 22 October 1982, in AN, 5AG4/CD/72/2. See also the West German account of the four ministers’ meeting: Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer, in *AAPD*, 1982 (II), Doc. No. 284, pp. 1480–1487.

37. MRE, CAP, note pour le ministre a/s Quel discours tenir aux Allemands, 1 December 1982, in AN, 5AG4/CD 174; and Diplomatic Telegram 39, 3 January 1983, in AN, 5AG4/6562.

ever threatened to drive a wedge between the two countries. Worse yet, if Bonn failed to act on its commitment to deploy U.S. missiles by the end of 1983 in the event that the negotiations yielded no results by then, the FRG would find itself on a slippery slope toward denuclearization. This, in turn, would gravely threaten France's interests as a nuclear power. To strengthen the FRG's resolve, Paris needed to move clearly beyond the traditional discourse on "non-inclusion" and to explain why France's independent nuclear posture was important for West Germany and Europe as a whole. The goal of Mitterrand's speech was thus to "comfort the FRG" in the "coming battle" over INF deployment, and, as a result, the Elysée saw it as no less than the president's most important public declaration since the beginning of his term.³⁸

The Bundestag speech was a success, and it marked a major step in the rapprochement between the two countries and their leaders. In it, the French president described the East-West nuclear balance as a condition for peace and warned against the risk of denuclearization and U.S.-Europe decoupling. While he hoped the INF negotiations would restore the nuclear balance, he stressed that success in Geneva depended on the allies' resolve to implement the dual-track decision, implying that their possible failure should lead the FRG to agree to Pershing missile deployment on its soil. And while he again rejected any inclusion of France's nuclear forces in the negotiation, Mitterrand also stressed that the United Kingdom and France contributed to the overall deterrence, pledging France's solidarity and close consultation with the FRG: "nothing that touches upon the life and security of Germany can be dealt with without her," he proclaimed.³⁹ With uncertain general elections scheduled in March 1983 in the FRG as a result of the early dissolution of the Bundestag in late 1982, this was a flagrant French intrusion in the country's internal debate and a clear-cut expression of support for Kohl and his government, which faced the SPD's growing opposition to a possible U.S. missile deployment. Whether Mitterrand's support played a role in the coalition's victory on 6 March 1983, Kohl saw it as crucial, and it was instrumental in consolidating the nascent political rapport between the two men.⁴⁰ Mitterrand now wanted to "renew" and "deepen" the "fundamental pact" that bonded the two countries.⁴¹

38. MRE, CAP, note pour le ministre, *a/s* Contacts en Allemagne à la veille de l'anniversaire du traité de l'Elysée, 17 January 1983; and Note, Pierre Morel to Jean-Louis Bianco, *Objet*: Discours au Bundestag: Nécessité et modalités d'une grande initiative, 17 January 1983, in AN, 5AG4. CD/174.

39. See the speech in *La Politique étrangère de la France (PEF)*, January–February 1983, pp. 41–47.

40. See Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Helmut Kohl: Eine politische Biographie* (Munich: DVA, 2012), pp. 352.

41. Mitterrand to Kohl, n.d. (probably 16 March 1983), in AN, 5AG4/6562.

With Kohl now firmly confirmed in office, the new French-West German strategic dialogue could begin for good. The French realized that a lot still had to be done to overcome German misgivings with regard to France's deterrent posture, which, it was thought at the Quai d'Orsay, was still seen across the Rhine with "distrust" and even "hostility" in spite of recent French "gestures."⁴² Wörner had stated during the initial four-way ministerial meeting back in October 1982 that the Germans above all wanted close consultation on the role of France's conventional forces and, most of all, its tactical nuclear forces. While they had subsequently been willing to discuss less sensitive topics, such as the Soviet threat and arms control, no one in Paris doubted they would soon grow more "impatient" to discuss their main concerns. This created a difficult conundrum. True, the French, back in October, had pledged that any decision with a possible effect on the FRG's population or territory would be the object of consultation between French and West German leaders. But the FRG's demands, seen from Paris, raised important difficulties: French conventional forces were in the midst of a major overhaul, which made it premature to discuss their possible future role. More crucially, no matter how legitimate Bonn's concerns regarding consultation on tactical nuclear use, any cooperation in this field should not hamper France's strategic freedom of action—or the perception thereof—which, in French doctrine, was the *conditio sine qua non* of its deterrent capability.⁴³

The Elysée, where the emerging French-West German strategic conversation was closely monitored, mostly shared the Quai's concerns. The West German demands simply could not be ignored, wrote Hubert Védrine, Mitterrand's diplomatic adviser, since responding to these demands was precisely the reason for the renewed strategic dialogue between Bonn and Paris. Yet the West German requests ran contrary to what Mitterrand had plainly told Kohl in October; that is, that it was "impossible" for the French president "to give in advance information to anyone regarding a possible decision to use nuclear weapons." This was a decision the French leader "would make alone when the time came." The issue was not just one of preserving France's cherished autonomy of decision. Uncertainty, Védrine continued, was "an essential part of our deterrent capability," which the West Germans no less than the French had an interest in keeping unimpaired. The French-West-German conversation, Védrine added, could therefore either endanger France's deterrent

42. MRE, CAP, Note A/S Allemagne: L'Avis de trois experts (J. Rovin, B. Spinelli, J. Dumoulin), 16 March 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD161, Dossier 2.

43. MRE, le directeur politique, note pour le ministre, a/s Échanges de vues franco-allemands sur les questions de sécurité, 18 April 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD161, Dossier 2.

posture, if the French engaged in the discussion of possible scenarios regarding tactical nuclear use, or anger the West Germans, if the French refused to hold such a discussion in the name of France's autonomy of decision. The way out of this conundrum, he advised, was to focus the conversation on the conventional level as a priority. "Absolute confidentiality" was needed because of the sensitivity of the matter with regard to public opinion. Mitterrand, Védérine concluded, should therefore give strict instructions to Cheysson and Hernu before the upcoming fresh meeting of the bilateral commission and that of the four ministers.⁴⁴

The meeting of the bilateral commission in Bonn on 29 April 1983 provided a first opportunity for Paris to frame the emerging French-West German conversation along these lines. The French, as Védérine had suggested, wanted first to update the West Germans on the ongoing reorganization of France's defense posture—starting with its conventional forces—and its importance for Western defense. François Heisbourg, Hernu's close adviser, and General Jeannou Lacaze, the chief of staff of French armed forces (CEMA), made a presentation on the future defense "program law" for 1984–1988. France's new defense program, Heisbourg and Lacaze told their West German counterparts, reflected the Socialist government's determination to maintain the country's sustained military effort. One of its highlights, they said, was the impending creation of the new Force d'Action Rapide (FAR), a rapid, lightly armored intervention force relying on air mobility. When operational, they told the West Germans, the FAR could be used both in out-of-area contingencies (e.g., in Africa) and in Europe, where it might intervene "quickly" and "robustly" alongside France's allies. Crucially, it could be engaged in the vicinity of the FRG's eastern border; that is, beyond the "RDM line" (a virtual circular arc going through the cities of Rotterdam, Dortmund, and Munich that, in the plans agreed between France and NATO, marked the easternmost reach of a possible French conventional intervention alongside NATO allies, reflecting the limited capabilities of the existing French battle corps).⁴⁵ Meanwhile the Pluton would be replaced in 1991 by the longer-range Hadès, as Mitterrand had confided to Kohl back in October, and by 1987 the French tactical air force would be equipped with a new, medium range stand-off nuclear missile, the Air-Sol Moyenne Portée (ASMP), with a range of

44. Védérine note for Mitterrand, 25 April 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD161 dossier 2.

45. The RDM line—whose existence was not known to the public until the late 1980s—was mentioned in the 1974 Valentin-Ferber agreement, which had been signed to update the 1967 Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreement to take account of the increased French conventional potential, which now included the two army corps forming the First French Army. See Bozo, *La France*, p. 118.

400 kilometers, to replace the force's aerial bombs. The combination of the creation of the FAR and the introduction of the Hadès and the ASMP, Lazare hinted, substantially changed the French-West German military-strategic equation, for it meant that a "possible aggressor" might at an earlier stage than so far anticipated be "confronted by French [conventional] forces" that could well be "backed" by French tactical (or "prestrategic," in the new official parlance) nuclear capabilities.⁴⁶

The message was clear: whereas in the past France's participation in the early defense of the territory of the FRG would likely have been limited to a handful of conventional forces followed by an all-out battle near the French-West German border—including the use of tactical nuclear weapons with devastating consequences for the FRG's territory and population—in the future France's conventional forces would be able to intervene early and mightily near the intra-German or the Czechoslovak border. In addition, such an intervention would de facto have a deterrent effect since France's "vital interests" were not predetermined and, therefore, could not be construed as necessarily limited to the national territory. Only the French president would decide where the limit was when the time came, as Mitterrand had told Kohl.⁴⁷

Although the French were eager to stress that their strategic concept remained basically unchanged and separate from NATO's (since it continued to rely on national autonomy as well as on "pure" deterrence, rejecting any prolonged conventional or nuclear combat, as opposed to flexible response, at

46. In 1983, France's tactical nuclear weapons were officially renamed "pre-strategic," a semantic change motivated by a desire to underline the fact that these weapons could not be used as part of a prolonged nuclear combat but only as a last warning before an all-out strategic strike—that is, as part of a deterrent rather than a war-fighting strategy. The move was seen as a return to the original "purity" of France's deterrent concept, which some believed had been tarnished by the introduction of the Pluton, whose de facto war-fighting role was hardly distinguishable from that of NATO's equivalent weapons. The shift allowed the Socialist government to claim its adherence to the "Gaullist" concept while emphasizing the difference between France's strategy and NATO's. (In what follows, the terms are used interchangeably.)

47. The French were keen to convey to the FRG that in their view the "vital interests" were not necessarily confined to the limits of the hexagon, as defenders of Gaullist doctrine continued to argue. In April 1983, retired General Lucien Poirier, a renowned strategist and one of the authors of French nuclear doctrine in the 1960s and 1970s, had published an article in a military journal in which he made the case for the creation of the FAR—which he saw as in line with the Gaullist concept—while also reiterating that the vital interest stopped at the country's borders. This "rigorous" approach, Heisbourg told the West Germans, was "useful" for the domestic debate but was not an "official" vision. In the eyes of the government, the appreciation of the vital interest was "contingent"; that is, subject to circumstances—a disclaimer the West Germans found "useful." See MRE, le conseiller technique (D. Delbourg), Réunion de la commission franco-allemande de défense et de sécurité, 29 avril 1983 (compte-rendu), 29 April 1983; and Heisbourg to Jacques Andréani, 25 April 1983, both in AN, 5AG4/ CD 161, Dossier 2; and Heisbourg, interview. See also Lucien Poirier, "La greffe," *Revue de défense nationale*, April 1983, pp. 15–27.

least as the French saw it), the foregoing meant, in essence, that the perennial strategic antinomies between France and its allies, the FRG first and foremost, could from now on significantly diminish: the FRG was, potentially, no longer doomed to serve as a “glacis” for France’s “sanctuary.” The significance of all this for the FRG’s security did not escape the West German participants, who included Lacaze’s opposite number, Inspector General of the Bundeswehr General Wolfgang Altenburg, as well as the secretary of state in the Ministry of Defense, Lothar Rühl: “This means a lot to the Germans,” Rühl said.⁴⁸

The French were pleased with the meeting. The military-strategic conversation, they believed, had spontaneously reached a “satisfactory balance” between the FRG’s “legitimate curiosity” about French military options and the necessity for France to preserve the “independent” character of these options. That is, the conceptual framework sketched out by Mitterrand in his October 1982 conversation with Kohl seemed validated. Overall, the West German reaction, the French observed, had been positive. Bonn was thankful for the information given by Paris, and the West Germans seemed to understand how the logic of “uncertainty,” which was characteristic of France’s deterrent concept, worked in their favor when combined with increased conventional capabilities. The West Germans, in particular, appeared to have been impressed

48. MRE, le conseiller technique (D. Delbourg), Réunion de la commission franco-allemande de défense et de sécurité, 29 avril 1983 (compte-rendu), 29 April 1983; and Heisbourg to Andréani, 25 April 1983. At the core of the new approach presented to the West Germans on that day was the changing interplay between conventional and tactical nuclear forces in French doctrine. Whereas the use of Pluton missiles was hardly conceivable without the engagement of the French forces in Germany, whose role was to prepare the ground for a massive tactical nuclear strike against enemy forces by forcing them to regroup, in the future the use of the FAR and of the Hadès could be operationally decoupled. Thanks to the enhanced range of the Hades, a “last warning” could be delivered, for example, against second-echelon forces without being prepared by conventional forces; so the FAR could be engaged early on alongside allied forces in the vicinity of the FRG’s eastern border. Such *operational* decoupling did not, however, imply a *doctrinal* decoupling. Because “vital interests” were not defined in advance, for the enemy any FAR intervention entailed the risk of a pre-strategic strike. On all this, see Bozo, *La France*, p. 139, *passim*. The evolution of French conventional and tactical nuclear concepts starting in 1983 was broadly in line with similar trends within NATO (which had been prompted by changes in the Soviet military posture); namely, the introduction of the “Follow-on-Forces Attack” doctrine for the conventional defense of Europe and, even more crucial, NATO’s increasing reliance on longer-range tactical or theater nuclear weapons to deliver strikes deep into enemy territory. On the conventional aspects, see, for example, Bozo, *La France*, p. 124; and Dima P. Adamsky, “The Conceptual Battles of the Central Front: The Air-Land Battle and the Soviet Military-Technical Revolution,” in Leopoldo Nuti, ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975–1985* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 151–162. On the nuclear aspects, see, for example, Ivo H. Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response: NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). These adaptations—particularly those in the nuclear dimension—were welcomed by the West Germans, who within NATO were advocating scenarios involving more selective tactical nuclear strikes carried out with longer-range weapons with a view to emphasizing deterrence rather than war-fighting, as Wörner told his French counterpart a few months later. See below, note 62. I am grateful to Andreas Lutsch for drawing my attention to the broader NATO context of the French-West German military rapprochement.

by the presentation of France's new operational capabilities (first and foremost the creation of the FAR), although the French had made clear there was no doctrinal change in France's deterrent concept. The bottom line was encouraging: the Quai d'Orsay believed the meeting had installed a climate of "growing confidence."⁴⁹

This climate of confidence was confirmed when the four ministers met again in Paris in mid-May during the spring French-West German summit. Hernu again stressed the novelty of the future Hadès missile. Unlike the Pluton, the Hadès, thanks to its extended range of 350 kilometers, would not hit the territory of the FRG, Hernu said. In addition, whereas the Pluton could be seen as a battlefield weapon, the Hadès was clearly designed for a last warning, in essence recoupling the tactical and the strategic levels of nuclear deterrence. Wörner seemed convinced. The FRG, too, was opposed to any notion of a prolonged nuclear war, he said, deploring that U.S. military commanders "have not abandoned the idea of waging a limited nuclear war on European soil." Concern with the U.S. and NATO strategy of flexible response—which West German leaders increasingly saw as potentially opening the way to a conventional or a tactical nuclear conflict on their territory while shielding U.S. territory from devastation—was another reason for the FRG to want to engage in a renewed strategic conversation with the French.⁵⁰

The intensifying strategic dialogue between Bonn and Paris took place against the backdrop of a phase of French-West German rapprochement not seen since the early 1960s. On the economic and monetary front, Paris's decision in March 1983 to keep the French franc in the European monetary system (in spite of calls to let the currency float and unpeg it from the Deutsche mark), combined with Mitterrand's decision to pursue a policy of financial and economic adjustment while pushing for a relaunch of the European community project, was a watershed for French-FRG relations. A French-West German quid pro quo of sorts between economic and strategic issues was detectable at this crucial juncture. Kohl's decision to come to the rescue of the besieged French currency in March 1983 and thereby avoid a major French franc devaluation could be seen as Kohl's returning the favor of Mitterrand's

49. MRE, Delbourg note to Védrine, 2 May 1983, in AN, 5AG4/ CD 161, Dossier 2.

50. When Cheysson asked about the quality of U.S.-West German cooperation in these matters, Wörner expressed his frustration. Mentioning the NPG, he criticized "an overly formal framework" in which "it is not possible to have serious discussions" on important strategic issues. *Compte-rendu de la réunion ministérielle franco-allemande sur les questions de stratégie et de sécurité* (Paris—16 mai 1983), 17 June 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD 72, Dossier 2.

Bundestag speech two months earlier.⁵¹ Be that as it may, the personal and working relationship at the highest level between the two capitals was reaching a new level. In July 1983, Kohl's close associates in the federal Chancellery offered to their French counterparts in the Elysée to organize a retreat in Cadenabbia, Adenauer's former vacation home on Lake Como, in order for the two teams to become better acquainted. Mitterrand readily approved the West German initiative.⁵²

The last weeks of 1983 marked another major development. On 22 November, after a lengthy and tense debate, the Bundestag voted in favor of the deployment of U.S. Pershing and cruise missiles in the FRG, marking a victory for Kohl as well as a turning point in the INF saga. The decision was also a milestone for the ongoing French-West German strategic rapprochement. Mitterrand and Kohl met in Bonn two days after the vote for a fresh summit. Kohl was elated; it was a "very important outcome," he said, thanking Mitterrand for his support. The two now wanted to look toward the future and for ways to end Europe's excessive strategic dependence on the United States. "We must think about how to bring our defense systems closer together," Kohl said. The FRG was "not interested" in possessing nuclear weapons "on its own," he continued, adding that European security in the future had to rely more on French and UK nuclear weapons, "otherwise it will depend only on the U.S." (Kohl, to Mitterrand's satisfaction, also repeated that Bonn would continue to oppose any inclusion of French and UK forces in the Geneva negotiations once they resumed after the suspension the Soviet Union had announced as a riposte to the Bundestag decision.) Mitterrand agreed, though he was again careful to highlight his red lines: in spite of France's growing nuclear arsenal, he warned Kohl, France and the United Kingdom "could not, in the present situation, guarantee Europe's security" independently from the United States.⁵³

Later that day, the four ministers met. The conversation was similar to that of the principals. All agreed on the decisive character of the Bundestag vote and on the "essential importance" of the Franco-German strategic dialogue in that context. The West Germans again thanked the French for their support, which Genscher said would have "lasting effects." He added

51. On this, see David Marsh, *The Euro: The Battle for the New Global Currency* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 105.

52. Jean-Louis Bianco note to Mitterrand, 28 July 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162, Dossier 1.

53. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Bonn, 24 November 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD 72, Dossier 2. See also Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand, 24 November 1983, *AAPD*, 1983 (II), Doc. No. 357, pp. 1776–1790.

emphatically: “We are in favor of a European security policy based on Franco-German cooperation.” Like Kohl, Wörner said once again that the FRG had no qualms about its own nuclear renunciation and that France’s status as a nuclear power was “an advantage” that reinforced Europe’s security without challenging the U.S. security guarantee. He also praised Mitterrand’s recent speech at the United Nations in which the French president had forcefully justified his rejection of any UK or French participation in U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations.⁵⁴

As 1983 drew to a close, the French were pleased with the progress made since 1982 in reducing the French-West German nuclear antinomy. On the political level, the gap that threatened to widen between the two countries against the backdrop of the INF crisis had been kept under control, with Bonn showing understanding for France’s stance on the independence of its nuclear forces and its “non-inclusion” in U.S.-Soviet negotiations—and, crucially, the Bundestag vote confirmed the FRG’s continued attachment to nuclear deterrence. On the politico-strategic level, the INF crisis, by emphasizing Western Europe’s dependence on the U.S. security guarantee, prompted French and West German leaders to start thinking about a bilateral and Europe-wide complement—though not an alternative—to that guarantee. Last but not least, on the military-strategic level, all the foregoing had triggered a bilateral conversation at the highest level on France’s possible conventional and nuclear role in the defense of the FRG—which, officials in Paris believed, was beginning to assuage Bonn’s most pressing concern: that the FRG not serve as a mere “glacis” for the French nuclear “sanctuary.” The conclusion was clear: The “defense” dimension of the Elysée Treaty had to be pursued through increased cooperation with Bonn on the conventional level and—with all necessary precautions to avoid eroding France’s autonomy of decision—by including nuclear issues in the bilateral strategic dialogue.⁵⁵

West Germany Steps Up Pressure—In Vain (1984)

Despite the relatively upbeat assessment in Paris a year after the relaunch of the French-West German strategic dialogue, the West Germans were still not

54. MRE, le directeur des affaires politiques, 3ème réunion ministérielle franco-allemande sur les questions de stratégie et de sécurité, Bonn, 24 novembre 1983, 28 November 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162, Dossier 1. See also Gespräch der Bundesminister Genscher und Wörner mit dem französischen Außenminister Cheysson und Verteidigungsminister Hernu, 24 November 1983, *AAPD*, 1983 (II), Doc. No. 356, pp. 1765–1775.

55. MRE, CAP, Note A/S L’Allemagne, la France après le déploiement, 20 December 1983, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162, Dossier 1.

satisfied that the French were effectively meeting their concerns, in particular in the tactical nuclear realm. West German diplomats wondered whether the French were really willing to move.⁵⁶ Until then, the FRG had shown restraint—no doubt because throughout 1983 Bonn's priority had been to secure the decision to deploy U.S. missiles, on which the Kohl government's international credibility was premised. But with the deployment decision now in its implementation phase, West German leaders—who were still faced with widespread public opposition to nuclear weapons—were tempted to step up their demands. As Mitterrand was preparing to meet again informally with Kohl, Védérine told him that, although the West Germans were pleased with the ongoing conversation at the ministerial level and within the commission on defense and security, they were now “beginning to ask sensitive questions” about France's strategy.⁵⁷ Meeting Kohl at Villa Ludwigshöhe in the chancellor's homeland of Rhineland-Palatinate on 2 February 1984, Mitterrand volunteered that he and Kohl should perhaps discuss military problems more in the near future, including nuclear issues. Although the nuclear decision could not be shared, “intermediate steps” could surely be devised. Kohl was content to reply that the FRG was not asking for a “dual key,” while observing that the French president could hardly think of Strasbourg without also thinking of Kehl (the small town across the Rhine from Strasbourg). Mitterrand agreed. A nuclear war would not recognize borders, he said.⁵⁸

The FRG's willingness to push the strategic conversation further was quickly confirmed.⁵⁹ In late April, officials from the Chancellery and the Elysée met again in an informal retreat, as they had in Cadenabbia the previous year, this time convening in Courchevel in the French Alps to discuss defense and security issues more specifically. The West Germans, the French noted, did not disguise their wish to obtain more concrete guarantees regarding the role of French conventional forces in the defense of the FRG as well as

56. See, for example, Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirigenten Seitz, 13 January 1984, *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 9, pp. 42–45.

57. Védérine note for Mitterrand, a/s Concertation et coopération franco-allemande en matière de sécurité et de défense, 1 February 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162, Dossier 2; and Védérine note for Mitterrand, 31 January 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 285/2.

58. Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand auf Schloß Ludwigshöhe, 2 February 1984, *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 30, pp. 168–172.

59. Shortly after the meeting at Villa Ludwigshöhe, the Auswärtige Amt's political director, emphasizing the need to intensify bilateral security cooperation, listed France's participation in forward defense, operational planning for the FAR, and guidelines for French (tactical) nuclear use as “themes” to be further explored bilaterally. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer, 6. Februar 1984, Betr.: Intensivierung der deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit, in *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 35, pp. 185–192.

consultations on tactical nuclear planning.⁶⁰ Confirmation of the West German push came when the bilateral commission on defense and security met again in mid-May. Altenburg suggested that the future operational role of the FAR should now be broached at the commission level, and Rühl, stressing the need for the FRG to be “better informed,” suggested that “the issue of nuclear weapons” (by which he meant bilateral consultation on tactical nuclear use) should be discussed by the four ministers. Védrine highlighted Rühl’s request on his copy of the minutes of the meeting.⁶¹

Two weeks later, during the spring meeting of the four ministers, the West Germans became somewhat more insistent. After Cheysson praised the ongoing “strategic conversation,” Wörner brought up Bonn’s concerns. The key question in the conventional dimension, he said, was “the extent to which France was ready to participate in the defense of the FRG.” As for nuclear consultation, it was an important issue to discuss, albeit discreetly and without mentioning it in public. The French, predictably, showed a willingness to be more forthcoming in the former than in the latter area. Hernu again highlighted the novelty of the FAR: there could be no “automaticity,” he said (by which he meant the FAR could not be integrated into NATO or be part of its forward defense), but the force could take on an enemy division several hundred kilometers distant within four hours. The French military, Hernu said, was ready to discuss possible scenarios of engagement, including beyond the RDM line, with their West German counterparts (though not with NATO commands, Hernu made clear); the two countries might even consider staging a joint exercise involving the deployment of the FAR in the FRG. Wörner was pleased with Hernu’s overture, noting that the FRG was concerned about possible scenarios involving a limited Soviet attack and wanted to be able to count on the French in such circumstances. The creation of the FAR, he said, was “an impressive development.” Yet the French were more reserved on the nuclear issue, again stressing the increased range of the future Hadès and ASMP missiles, which Hernu said could bring “very satisfactory answers” to the FRG’s concerns without changing France’s doctrine, which involved delivering a “last warning” to restore deterrence, not a prolonged nuclear war. Wörner agreed with this last point but was not satisfied with Hernu’s response when it came

60. Diplomatic Telegram 22330-34, 4 May 1984, and *Compte-rendu du séminaire de Courchevel*, n.d., both in AN, 5AG4/CD 179/3.

61. MRE, Cabinet du ministre, *Commission franco-allemande sur la sécurité et la défense*, *Compte-rendu de la réunion du 14. mai 1984*, 17 May 1984, in AN, A4/CD 162, Dossier 2. See also *Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer*, 16. Mai 1984, Betr.: 6. Sitzung des deutsch-französischen Ausschusses für Sicherheit und Verteidigung am 14. Mai 1984 in Bonn, in *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 140, pp. 672–678.

to possible consultations on tactical nuclear weapons. The West Germans understood the need for “uncertainty” and “non-automaticity” when it came to tactical nuclear use of French (or NATO) weapons, he said. But, he added, Dresden, Erfurt, and Leipzig were also German cities, thus the future range of the Hadès, though allowing for the FRG to be spared, would still involve the destruction of (East) German territory. The West Germans wanted consultations to take place if these weapons were ever to be used on, or launched from, German territory (and Wörner’s reaction clearly meant that this included both the FRG *and* the German Democratic Republic). But Hernu, who had no mandate from Mitterrand to discuss this extremely sensitive subject, was evasive. French vital interests, he repeated, were not confined to the hexagon, but “it was not possible to determine in advance the place and modalities of a nuclear warning.” For deterrence to operate, the Soviet Union (or, for that matter, the United States) should have no certainties about possible French tactical nuclear use.⁶²

The next day, during meetings that took place in Rambouillet, near Paris, Kohl and Mitterrand again briefly touched on defense issues. Mitterrand was aware of the risk of an impasse and wanted to reaffirm his commitment to military cooperation while deflecting the growing West German insistence on nuclear consultation. Both countries would need to clarify their positions by the end of 1984, he said, recalling that in nuclear matters his presidential prerogatives were “exclusive” and mentioning that in other military domains (such as the production of “new weapons”) the FRG was under no restrictions and that increased bilateral cooperation was thus possible in these areas. “We must see what we can do and cannot do,” he said, adding, “there must be a security dimension in the Franco-German alliance [but] we yet have to devise

62. MRE, le directeur des affaires politiques, Compte-rendu de la discussion des MRE et de la défense français et allemands, La Celle Saint-Cloud, 28 mai 1984, 30 May 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162/2. See also Gespräch der Bundesminister Genscher und Wörner mit dem französischen Außenminister Cheysson und Verteidigungsminister Hernu in La Celle Saint-Cloud, 28 May 1984, *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 142, pp. 722–729. That the FRG authorities considered the need to shield German territory from the possible effects of nuclear strikes to include East German territory was not a surprise for the French, who saw this as yet another sign that the German question was still open. See Védrine, *Les Mondes*, p. 405. Another interesting aspect of this exchange was Wörner’s comment to the effect that, within NATO, the FRG advocated a doctrinal evolution that was similar to France’s when it came to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. Conceding that U.S.–West German differences had existed in these matters for two decades because U.S. officials tended to see tactical nuclear weapons as “a means to wage war” whereas the FRG saw them as a means to restore deterrence where needed, Wörner said that the scenarios involving tactical nuclear forces should include “selective strikes” aimed at influencing the enemy’s decisions. The October 1983 Montebello (Canada) NPG decision, he said, was a novelty not so much because of the reduction of NATO’s tactical nuclear stockpile decided on there, but because the adopted guidelines for tactical nuclear use were close to the West German concept, which was a “breakthrough.”

a strategy.” Kohl agreed. This was important for the FRG, he said, though such a move should not be seen as directed against the United States. Mitterrand concurred; it was a difficult endeavor, he said, but it was the “heart” of European construction.⁶³

By mid-1984, the French-West German nuclear issue was beginning to take central stage in the public debate. This was, to a large extent, the result of the wider bilateral rapprochement, which had gathered steam over the first few months of the year. Mitterrand had wanted to use France’s presidency of the European Council during the first half of 1984 to relaunch the European project based on close cooperation with Kohl. The push had culminated in the European Council meeting in Fontainebleau on 25–26 June, which settled the vexing UK rebate issue and allowed the two countries to display ambitious goals for a new phase of European unification, not least in the political and security dimensions, including through the creation of a European Union. In that context, the emerging French-West German defense and security partnership was drawing public attention. Could it become the backbone of a strategically more autonomous Europe?

On 28 June, Schmidt gave an important speech to the Bundestag in which he called for a major Franco-West German initiative in security and defense, for which he said the “time was ripe.” Though no longer in office, Schmidt wanted at least intellectually to pick up the thread where he and Giscard had left it in 1981. The nuclear issue was central in his speech. In addition to advocating a more autonomous Europe—one faced with what he saw as increasingly questionable U.S. strategic reliability—Schmidt’s implicit aim was to narrow the gap that resulted from the West German public’s growing anti-nuclear sentiment and France’s staunch defense of nuclear autonomy. Schmidt’s proposal involved combining France’s nuclear status and West Germany’s conventional might. The two countries would form a force of 30 divisions (eighteen West German and twelve French) that, he said, would be enough to ensure the conventional defense of Europe. In addition, France would unilaterally extend its nuclear guarantee to cover West German territory—without granting the FRG a right of co-decision, except when its own territory was concerned as a possible target or point of departure of nuclear strikes. The initiative would be implemented in the framework of the existing treaties (NATO and the Western European Union), Schmidt

63. Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand und Premierminister Mauroy in Rambouillet, 29 May 1984, *AAPD*, 1984 (I), Doc. No. 155, p. 756. See also Védrine handwritten notes, “43èmes consultations franco-allemandes, Rambouillet, 28–29 mai 1984,” in AN, 5AG4/CD72, Dossier 2.

said, recognizing that it would probably raise eyebrows in Washington (and London) and in Moscow, at least on the spur of the moment. In Schmidt's view, the project would rely on the FRG's considerable economic and financial power base and on France's politico-strategic preeminence as a nuclear power and permanent UN Security Council member, as well as a guarantor power in Berlin. Schmidt, in sum, was ready to grant France the role of a strategic leader both in Europe and in the Paris-Bonn "tandem."⁶⁴

Schmidt's initiative did not come as a surprise to Mitterrand. The French president—who had kept in close contact with his former opposite number—had invited the ex-chancellor a year before in Latché to discuss bilateral relations, and Schmidt had sketched out his vision, which Mitterrand had called "bold." Shortly before speaking to the Bundestag, Schmidt had come to the Elysée and given Mitterrand a memorandum summarizing his proposal. Mitterrand had then passed the memorandum on to his military chief of staff, General Jean Saulnier, asking him "to conduct a close analysis" of this "important document."⁶⁵ Saulnier's verdict was unmistakably negative. Saulnier, a former commander of the French strategic nuclear forces, described Schmidt's proposals as "contradictory" with French doctrine. An extension of France's nuclear guarantee would simply not be credible faced with most scenarios involving a Soviet attack against the FRG, he said, citing "a conventional, chemical or even a nuclear attack" against "German military objectives" in the FRG, "an air-land attack against West-Berlin," or a "limited conventional attack" along the Iron Curtain. Whatever limited advantages a proclaimed French guarantee (which would in any case coexist with the still indispensable U.S. guarantee) might bring to the FRG, Saulnier continued, would be offset by considerable drawbacks for France itself. The Soviets would likely use it as a pretext to ask for an inclusion of the French nuclear forces in arms control negotiations; U.S. officials would use it as a reason to diminish their military commitment to Europe's defense; the other West European countries would feel neglected; and French public opinion might react negatively to an initiative that "clearly entailed increased risks" for France—meaning, no doubt, the possibility of being dragged into a nuclear exchange with the

64. The speech (which also touched upon other issues pertaining to Franco-German relations and European unification) was given in response to Kohl's report on the Fontainebleau European Council meeting. See the transcript in *Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht, 77. Sitzung, Bonn, 28 June 1984*, esp. p. 5601, <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/10/10077.pdf>. See also Schmidt's recollection in *Menschen*, p. 288.

65. Helmut Schmidt, *Disposition [sic] d'un discours sur le sujet "Progrès vers l'autonomie européenne" à prononcer devant le Bundestag, jeudi 28 juin 1984*, in AN, 5AG4/CD 162, Dossier 2; and Schmidt, *Menschen*, p. 286.

Soviet Union in case of escalation. The conventional aspects of Schmidt's proposal were equally disputable in Saulnier's view. Most military experts, he said, would consider "extraordinarily optimistic" the notion that 30 French and German divisions would suffice faced with more than 80 Soviet-bloc divisions. Saulnier's bottom line was negative: Schmidt's proposal was "not realistic from a military point of view," he said, and it "might jeopardize U.S.-Europe strategic coupling without offering a credible alternative."⁶⁶

Saulnier did not elaborate on the military thinking behind his blunt and clear-cut rejection of Schmidt's proposal. His assessment seemed, to some extent at least, at odds with what the French had conveyed to the West Germans over the past several months; namely, that in the future the combination of the FAR and the Hadès would de facto enhance France's contribution to the FRG's security in terms of conventional defense and—at least implicitly—nuclear deterrence. In fact, the main reasons for Saulnier's rejection of Schmidt's proposal were of a political rather than military nature. Most of these were stated in his memorandum for Mitterrand: an explicit French nuclear guarantee to the FRG would put France's independent nuclear status at risk (if only through possible inclusion in arms control, which would become irresistible) while creating problems with both allies (challenging the United States, frustrating other Europeans) and foes (antagonizing the Soviet Union). Yet another, arguably even more crucial reason, although not mentioned by Saulnier, concerned the West Germans themselves. Beyond Schmidt—who no longer held office and was somewhat of a lone voice—it was far from clear that the FRG's leaders were prepared to recognize the credibility of an explicit French nuclear guarantee, let alone ask for it. By anointing France as the FRG's protector, such an initiative would further expose the gaps in status and rank between the two countries while also colliding with Bonn's Atlanticism and emphasis on U.S. and NATO guarantees. This went to the heart of the French-West German nuclear conundrum—and of the two countries' ulterior motives. In the end, the main risk for the French in taking an initiative such as Schmidt's was a likely rebuff from the West Germans themselves, who were all too ready to minimize the strength or value of the French *force de frappe* and could therefore hardly be expected to want to be seen as *demandeurs*.⁶⁷

66. Saulnier note for Mitterrand, Relations franco-allemandes en matière de défense, 5 July 1984, in private papers. ("Private papers" henceforth refers to photocopies of documents made available to the author by former French officials.)

67. Heisbourg, interview.

Saulnier's analysis matched Mitterrand's own thinking, which he had shared with Kohl the previous year. In the current circumstances, France could simply not on its own—or even jointly with the United Kingdom—provide a credible, full-fledged nuclear guarantee to the FRG as a substitute for U.S. extended deterrence. True, Mitterrand did not reject the notion that France's vital interests somehow included FRG territory and that France therefore did in effect contribute alongside the United States and Britain to the nuclear security of the FRG (as the Ottawa declaration implied). Nor did he rule out an *implicit* extension of France's deterrence to the FRG through increased French conventional and tactical nuclear capabilities in the future. Yet Saulnier's analysis signaled Mitterrand's persistent red line: an *explicit* French nuclear guarantee was not in the cards and—in the foreseeable circumstances at least—the FRG's security would continue to rely primarily on the U.S. (and NATO) nuclear umbrella.⁶⁸

Schmidt's speech was not an official FRG proposal (which meant the French were under no obligation to respond officially), but it was an important moment in the intensifying nuclear dialogue. What had so far been a discreet, high-level dialogue between the two governments was now out in the open. In the wake of the speech, the French noted the “extreme interest” with which the issue was being discussed in the media and political circles in Bonn. More importantly, the French embassy in Bonn reported that Kohl's entourage wanted to use the momentum to obtain a “breakthrough” in the bilateral strategic dialogue—meaning consultation on tactical nuclear weapons. To be sure, Kohl and Genscher were cautious. Genscher believed that France and Britain could not replace the United States in this arena. As for Kohl, he wanted to avoid an embarrassing public debate on the role of the French nuclear deterrent. He knew full well that the FRG's demands had to be formulated with prudence. This would be the end of a process of increased cooperation with France, not its precondition. But his close personal relationship with Mitterrand, Kohl believed, would help.⁶⁹

Still, by mid-1984 the French could not ignore the fact that the FRG's key aim was to extract concessions from them on the issue of tactical nuclear use on German soil. The Elysée learned that Kohl in early June had asked Altenburg to write a report on this issue to clarify the discrepancy he perceived between Mitterrand's presentation of the role of French tactical nuclear forces

68. On this, see Pierre Favier and Michel Martin-Roland, *La Décennie Mitterrand*, Vol. 2, *Les Épreuves* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 256–258.

69. Dispatch from the French ambassador to Bonn (Jacques Morizet), *Objet: Réactions au discours de M. Schmidt devant le Bundestag*, 4 July 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 1.

and what their actual role would be. The report, which he had then discussed with Genscher and former Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauss, said that, although the West Germans should not ask to share the nuclear decision with the French, they should at least request a thorough exchange of information and aim for Bonn's participation in nuclear planning and in selecting possible targets as well as in devising the overall strategic concept, all of which would also ensure complementarity (and avoid duplication) with NATO.⁷⁰

The growing West German insistence on obtaining what in the French view amounted to a *droit de regard* on France's nuclear posture (justified by the possible role of the FRG as a nuclear battlefield) did not come as a surprise in Paris; it was seen as the logical consequence of the relaunch—largely at French initiative—of bilateral defense cooperation. But the French—with a bit of irritation—also perceived it as reflecting the perennial West German longing for *Gleichberechtigung*, combining dissatisfaction with the inferior status of the FRG and, conversely, a touch of envy at France's own great-power status—including its nuclear status.

The growing West German pressure, combined with the increased public visibility of the issue in the wake of Schmidt's speech, spurred the Quai d'Orsay—at Védrine's request—to review West German demands in detail and consider possible options. The Quai believed Bonn basically wanted from Paris what it had obtained from NATO in consultation on tactical nuclear weapons. Not being privy to these NATO procedures, Quai officials could surmise only that such procedures included, in particular, consultations on the choice of possible targets on FRG territory; on the modalities of possible tactical nuclear strikes; and, last but not least, on a possible decision in times of crisis or war to use tactical nuclear weapons. French diplomats were quick to exclude any substantive cooperation on the first two aspects—that is, targeting and operational planning—for several reasons: because the uncertainties of possible conflict scenarios meant these aspects could not be determined in advance; because establishing such formal procedures could lead to leaks that might cause public opinion in the FRG to become even more wary of France's deterrent posture, as was the case with NATO's posture; and because it could create pressure for France to align itself further with NATO's integrated bodies. Targeting and operational planning, therefore, had to remain a strictly national prerogative, French diplomats believed. The bottom line was clear: to the extent the French were ready to engage in consultations with the FRG on tactical nuclear use, this should exclude any discussion of these matters in

70. Note, Coopération franco-allemande en matière de défense, 3 July 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 1.

advance of an actual crisis or war, as was assumed to be the case in NATO or bilaterally.

The third aspect, however—consultation in times of crisis—could be explored, in the view of Quai officials. If this option was pursued, it should be clear that tactical nuclear consultation would *not* involve any notion of nuclear co-decision, which remained clearly off-limits. Rather, it would involve setting up special communications equipment between Paris and Bonn in order to make such consultation possible if and when the time came. In the spirit of the discussions of the previous few months with the West Germans, other overtures could also be considered: reviewing the characteristics of future tactical nuclear systems (i.e., the Hadès and ASMP missiles) with a view to increasing their range and thus ability to reach targets farther east; discussing plans for increased French contribution to the FRG's conventional defense; and adapting declaratory policy so it better conveyed France's unconditional military solidarity with allies against the Soviet threat (e.g., emphasizing that de Gaulle himself had never left in doubt France's determination to fight alongside its allies against Soviet aggression—in spite of the sacrosanct notion of “non-automaticity,” which had been coined in the 1960s to state that France would not follow the United States in any crisis in Europe resulting from a U.S. “adventure.”)⁷¹

Thus, by mid-1984, the French were looking for ways to operationalize the conceptual framework Mitterrand had sketched out for Kohl in the fall of 1982 and that his ministers had discussed in some detail with their West German counterparts in subsequent months. Yet, in spite of the French Foreign Ministry's effort to devise a more concrete framework, the French still did not know how to respond to what they saw as the FRG's “embarrassing” demands on nuclear issues.⁷² French officials hoped to deflect these demands by making concessions in the conventional arena. Hence, during a meeting of the bilateral commission on defense and security on 22 October, Lacaze and Altenburg agreed to conduct “technical” studies on possible scenarios of a FAR engagement in Central Europe in a strictly bilateral French-West German framework

71. MRE, CAP, note *a/s* Relations de sécurité franco-allemandes: Réflexions sur les options, 24 July 1984; MRE, sous-direction des affaires stratégiques, note *a/s* Coopération franco-allemande en matière de sécurité: Demandes allemandes, 30 July 1984; MRE, le directeur d'Europe, Note *a/s* Relations franco-allemandes en matière de sécurité, 9 August 1984; and Védrine handwritten notes, “Les demandes allemandes,” 27 August 1984; and MRE, sous-direction des affaires stratégiques, note *a/s* RFA et procédures de consultation sur l'emploi des armes nucléaires tactiques, 18 October 1984, all in AN/5AG4 CD 163, Dossier 1.

72. MRE, sous-direction des affaires stratégiques, note *a/s* Concertation franco-allemande en matière de défense et de sécurité: Bilans et problèmes, 9 October 1984, in AN/5AG4 CD 163, Dossier 1.

(i.e., leaving aside any discussion with NATO commands, which would have raised overly “sensitive” issues).⁷³ No further progress was made at the meeting. In the run-up to the bilateral summit that was scheduled to take place on 29–30 October 1984 in the thermal resort of Bad-Kreuznach in Rhineland-Palatinate (where Adenauer and de Gaulle had met a quarter century before), Mitterrand’s closest advisers warned him of “real problems” that had emerged in the security dialogue as a result of West German demands regarding tactical nuclear consultation.⁷⁴ However, when the four ministers met on the first day of the summit, neither the conventional nor the nuclear issue was discussed.⁷⁵

The meeting in Bad-Kreuznach took place shortly after a spectacular gesture of bilateral reconciliation. In September, Kohl and Mitterrand had held hands at Verdun. From then on the scene symbolized the two countries’ “community of destiny,” as had happened two decades earlier when Adenauer and de Gaulle prayed together in the cathedral of Reims. Yet the community of destiny clearly stopped where vital interests began. At Bad-Kreuznach, Mitterrand brought up the issue head on. Saying, as he had hinted at Rambouillet in May, that “it was now time to start asking ourselves what we want in the strategic arena,” he observed that bilateral cooperation was “off limits”—or at least that it would be “very difficult to make progress”—in the nuclear domain. The FRG, he added, did not aspire to nuclear weapons status, but “it suffers” from this situation. As a result, it was important for France and the FRG to make progress in all other domains, starting with space, in which France would be hard pressed to advance on its own because of financial constraints—including the cost of its nuclear effort. Kohl agreed. Such projects need not be seen as a challenge to U.S. strategic leadership, he said, but they were key to ensuring that France, West Germany, and the rest of Europe were not left behind in this domain. Kohl did not want to envisage the FRG’s possession of nuclear weapons. He had enough problems, he said, with nuclear weapons already present on West German territory—namely, U.S. (and UK) weapons. This was precisely why cooperation in other military domains was so

73. MRE, le directeur des affaires politiques, note pour le Ministre, Objet: Conversations franco-allemandes à quatre sur la stratégie et la sécurité, 25 October 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 1; and Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer, 23 October 1984, Betr.: Deutsch-französische sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit, 7. Sitzung des Ausschusses für Sicherheit und Verteidigung am 22.10.84 in Paris, AAPD, 1984 (II), Doc. No. 288, pp. 1320–1326.

74. Védrine and Elisabeth Guigou note for Mitterrand, a/s 44èmes consultations franco-allemandes au sommet, Bad-Kreuznach, 29–30 octobre 1984, 29 October 1984, in AN, 5AG4, CD/179/2.

75. Résumé de l’entretien entre MM. Cheysson, Hernu, Woerner, et Genscher, 29 October 1984, in AN, 5AG4/6562. See also Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Pfeffer, 1 November 1984, AAPD, 1984 (II), Doc. No. 297, pp. 1345–1357.

important, Mitterrand responded; it was the best way for the French and the West Germans to move beyond their respective national interests rather than to pursue separate courses. But when Genscher and Cheysson were ushered in, they told the two principals that French-FRG satellite cooperation, which they had discussed during their meeting, was running into difficulties. (The French wanted to convince the Germans to participate in SAMRO, a military reconnaissance satellite that was key for the credibility of the *force de frappe* and its independence from U.S. observation capabilities, but the West Germans were reluctant for financial and technical reasons). Mitterrand was not deterred. “My objective is to build a military satellite with you,” he said; “otherwise the U.S. will decide on the destiny of the French deterrent, and German reunification will not happen before a thousand years.” Mitterrand’s reasoning was that only a strong Europe based on French-West German cooperation would be able to challenge the superpowers’ shared hegemony over Europe and make the continent’s reunification possible. “I have a simple theory: we must do together what Germany is not prohibited from doing,” Mitterrand said, adding that the reason he had accepted the *force de frappe* after having opposed it under de Gaulle was that “he wanted France to have a say.” Mitterrand was trying to convince Kohl that space capabilities, in which France and the FRG could take the lead in Europe, would be as strategically important in the future as nuclear weapons had been in the past. He clearly hoped to discourage Kohl from pushing too far with demands for any sort of *droit de regard* on France’s deterrent. In taking this stance, Mitterrand—like most of his officials, not least at the Quai d’Orsay—seemed to be interpreting FRG requests on this matter mostly in political terms; that is, as expressions of the perennial German quest for status and *Gleichberechtigung*. Was Mitterrand, as a result, underestimating the genuine and by no means novel military-strategic concern relating to the FRG’s role as a possible nuclear glacis? Be that as it may, at Bad-Kreuznach, the French offered Kohl nothing in terms of nuclear consultation. Was Mitterrand renegeing on his—to be sure, unspecific—pledge to take into account West German views in devising France’s strategy? Were the French concerned with what they sensed were excessive expectations about nuclear consultation? As 1984 drew to a close, Paris and Bonn—in spite of Kohl’s and Mitterrand’s earlier intention to make progress by the end of the year—were clearly at a stalemate on this issue.⁷⁶

76. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Bad-Kreuznach, 30 October 1984, in AN, 5AG4/CD 72, Dossier 2. See also Runderlaß des Vortragenden Legationsrats Karkow, 2 November 1984, AAPD, 1984 (II), Doc. No. 294, pp. 1357–1360.

From Stalemate to Breakthrough? (1985)

The year 1985 was challenging for French-West German relations. Yet after a lengthy, convoluted conversation, the year ended with an important potential breakthrough on the nuclear issue. The European project was moving rapidly ahead, as French-West German leadership proved decisive, opening the way at the European Council meeting in Milan in June to the convocation of an intergovernmental conference, culminating in the adoption of the Single European Act in Luxembourg in December. Yet the bilateral relationship went through difficult times during these months, with serious disagreements emerging between Bonn and Paris on subjects ranging from launching a new round of negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to the European response to U.S. President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a proposed space-based missile defense system—dubbed “Star Wars”—meant to shield the United States and the West at large from Soviet strategic nuclear missile strikes. Although Reagan had first announced the initiative in March 1983, the United States by 1985 wanted to open it up to U.S. allies and had begun soliciting their political and strategic endorsement of the concept and offering them a degree of technological and industrial participation. Because SDI went to the heart of the issue of nuclear deterrence, it was bound to have an impact on French-West German relations.

SDI again highlighted the gap between the FRG as a non-nuclear, integrated NATO country and France as a nuclear, non-integrated country. Reagan's move threatened to drive a wedge between Paris and Bonn. Kohl seemed willing to cooperate with Washington in the name of U.S.-European coupling and to secure technological and economic benefits for West German firms (though Genscher and others, like Rühl, were more skeptical), whereas the French rejected SDI on both strategic and political grounds.⁷⁷ The French were wary of a program that would likely result in Europe's increased subservience to U.S. interests and that threatened the very concept of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability and, more vital, the credibility of French (and British) nuclear forces.⁷⁸ The French again saw in Bonn's inclination to participate in SDI an expression of resentment at the FRG's “nuclear interdiction”

77. Guigou and Védrine note for Mitterrand, *a/s* 45ème sommet franco-allemand, 7 February 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 2.

78. MRE, Service des affaires stratégiques et des pactes, Note *a/s* Groupe d'experts franco-allemands sur l'initiative de défense stratégique, 7 February 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 2. On France and SDI, see Paul Chaput, *La France et l'Initiative de défense stratégique de Ronald Reagan* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).

and longing for a full-fledged politico-strategic status. This was a poor calculation, the French believed, insofar as West German participation in SDI, which could happen only on unequal terms, would aggravate the FRG's dependence on the United States for its security.⁷⁹

In spite—or perhaps because—of this difficult backdrop, the strategic conversation between Paris and Bonn intensified throughout 1985, giving rise to an alternating pattern of progress and setbacks. Undiscouraged by the lack of substantial progress on nuclear consultation in 1984, the FRG kept up the pressure. The West Germans, the Quai d'Orsay noted in the run-up to the bilateral summit in Paris on 27–28 February 1985, wanted this issue to be officially on the agenda of the French-West German commission on defense and security and of the forthcoming foreign and defense ministers' meeting. The French were still reluctant to discuss the matter officially in the commission, saying that only the ministers could do so—and in their personal capacities only. But when the ministers met during the summit, the conversation mostly revolved around the SDI issue. Nuclear consultation, once again, was not discussed.⁸⁰

The French were still unwilling to engage in a process of nuclear consultation that they believed ran contrary to their deterrence concept, but they did want to continue to give tokens of solidarity to the FRG. In a public statement issued on the close of a joint maneuver in southwest Germany in June 1985, Hernu declared that the two countries had “common security interests.” This apparent departure from the usual affirmation of France's “vital interests” prompted Wörner to thank his colleague for saying that West Germany was “not a mere glacis” for France. Hernu's entourage wanted to build on this exchange. Hernu's statement, they believed, confirmed that the French nuclear concept did take into account West German interests and therefore had a deterrent value for the FRG. Wörner's reaction highlighted the extent to which the strategic dialogue had made progress over the previous two years. The French were not far from believing that the once divisive sanctuary/glacis issue was now all but resolved. As for the conventional dimension, they believed that France's role as a reserve force on the rear of NATO's forward defense could no longer be seen as a liability by the FRG given technological advances; that is, “airplanes flying across [German] territory in a matter

79. Védrine note for Mitterrand, a/s La RFA et sa sécurité, 10 June 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 2.

80. MRE, le directeur des affaires politiques [P. Morel], note pour le Ministre A/S Positions du chancelier Kohl, 27 February 1985; and MRE, compte-rendu du dîner franco-allemand des quatre ministres (MM. Dumas, Hernu, Genscher, et Wörner), 27 February 1985, both in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 2. See also *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 53, pp. 288–292.

of minutes” as well as “the considerably enhanced range of missiles and helicopters.” Hernu’s statement thus confirmed the validity of an approach that brought the *implicit, de facto* inclusion of the FRG in France’s vital interests rather than offering an *explicit* nuclear guarantee, complete with NATO-style nuclear sharing and consultation arrangements.⁸¹

Predictably, this was not enough for Bonn, as confirmed during a fresh meeting of the four ministers a few days later. The French wanted to clarify things, both stressing their openness and reaffirming caveats. Hernu emphasized the novelty of his recent statement, which he said he had intentionally made in the presence of journalists to reach out to, and influence, the French public. Yet it was also a response to recent declarations from both the Socialist Party (in particular from Jacques Huntzinger, the party’s international spokesperson) and the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR, the neo-Gaullist party) to the effect that France’s deterrent could cover the FRG. This, Hernu said, did “not match France’s deterrent concept.” Roland Dumas (who had recently replaced Cheysson as foreign minister) was somewhat more forthcoming, arguing that Huntzinger’s declarations did “in part” reflect France’s thinking. Such statements could not “bind” the government, but they would be taken into consideration by French authorities, he said, adding that Hernu and he “were in practice constantly working to materialize and extend the concept of the vital interests.” Wörner again welcomed Hernu’s statement of the previous week, saying it had been received in Bonn as “a remarkable step forward.” West German leaders, he said, were also on the defensive, faced with statements such as Schmidt’s of a year before, which created “illusions” in the public, such as a possible explicit French nuclear guarantee. The West Germans, Wörner said, were nevertheless hoping for “step by step” progress in two respects. First, French participation in forward defense should increase. This had “nothing to do” with NATO, he said, and it could be advanced by a new joint maneuver such as the one of the previous month—perhaps including the FAR and taking place farther east to underscore France’s renunciation of its “glacis thinking.” Second, Wörner asked if “one day” the two countries could find an arrangement for consultations on tactical nuclear use on or from German territory, including East Germany. Procedures such as the ones that were agreed with Britain and the United States would be “desirable,” he

81. Ministère de la défense, Cabinet, le conseiller technique [J.-F. Bureau] note, Objet: Déclarations de MM. Hernu et Werner [*sic*] à Muningen [*sic*: Münsingen] (20 juin 1985), 24 June 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 163, Dossier 2. General Georges Fricaud-Chagnaud (who had been instrumental in the creation of the FAR) described the notion of an implicit, de facto French extended deterrence as “dissuasion par constat” (literally, deterrence by taking stock). See Bozo, *La France*, p. 154.

added. Hernu responded positively on the conventional dimension, confirming that such a maneuver would take place in 1987. As for tactical nuclear weapons, only the president and the chancellor could discuss this issue—he himself was not authorized to do so. The FRG had to understand that, in the French doctrine, tactical nuclear use was inseparable from the decision to use strategic weapons. Arrangements on tactical nuclear weapons would therefore limit the president's "freedom of decision" on the strategic level and fundamentally hamper deterrence. Dumas confirmed that these issues could be discussed only "at the highest level." The nuclear decision, he said, was of a "unique character." The French understood the FRG's point of view, but such arrangements would in effect change the "nature" of a French nuclear decision.⁸²

By mid-1985 the FRG's unwillingness to take no for an answer was becoming increasingly clear. An explicit extension of France's sanctuary—that is, a French nuclear guarantee of the territory of the FRG à la Schmidt—was still seen as off-limits at the government level in Bonn, both politically and strategically. So, too, was France's taking on a specific layer of NATO's integrated forward defense. Both scenarios were seen as maximalist and counterproductive. Yet Bonn wanted to use the growing debate in political and intellectual circles in France, as well as the increasingly positive disposition of French public opinion toward military solidarity with the FRG, to advance its requests both in the conventional sphere (an increased French contribution) and, most of all, in the nuclear field (consultations on tactical nuclear use). "France's guarded attitude is not sufficient reason for us to remain guarded," West German diplomats believed, adding, "after all, we are the most concerned party in this matter and the French government can no longer hide behind a reluctant public opinion."⁸³

The French could indeed no longer ignore the FRG's mounting pressure. SDI remained a divisive issue (which had prompted Kohl and Mitterrand to try to patch up their differences in a meeting on Lake Constance in May), and

82. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Edler von Braunmühl, Betr.: Deutsch-französische Gespräche der Außen- und Verteidigungsminister am 26. Juni in Bonn, 26 June 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (I), Doc. No. 171, p. 896.

83. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Seitz, Betr.: Weiterentwicklung der sicherheitspolitischen Zusammenarbeit mit Frankreich, 19 August 1985, in *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 224, p. 1151. The West Germans took notice of a July 1985 poll revealing that 57 percent of those asked believed (against 19 percent) that France should come to the rescue of an FRG faced with a "serious threat" and that 40 percent believed (against 24 percent) that in such a situation France's "vital interests" would be threatened. See Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirigenten Schauer, Betr.: Deutsch-französische Sicherheitspartnerschaft hier: Strategiediskussion in Frankreich, 22 July 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 202, p. 1065.

the nuclear issue was threatening to complicate the relationship further. Yet the Elysée was still reluctant to budge. As Kohl and Mitterrand were preparing to meet again in late August at the French president's official Riviera residence in Brégançon, Védérine's bottom line remained unchanged. The ongoing public debate on France's strategy carried the risk of fostering "dangerous illusions" in Bonn, he wrote to Mitterrand, advising him to warn Kohl against "unsolvable controversies on the extension of [France's] nuclear guarantee." What really mattered, he wrote, was "to underline the growing community of interests" between the two countries. (Ironically, Védérine mentioned the increasingly positive attitude of French public opinion in that regard as a reason to emphasize shared interests rather than engage in nuclear consultation à la NATO, which the West Germans wanted.) Affirming the growing role of the FAR while avoiding "useless debates" on forward defense was the right thing to do, Védérine said. He saw little that could be done on nuclear issues beyond informal exchanges of views at the political level. To transpose existing NATO procedures on the bilateral level, he said, would involve discussing "scenarios" and therefore give credence to the notion that French tactical nuclear forces were for "combat" while providing the Soviet Union with arguments to denounce France's return to the NATO fold and ask for its nuclear forces to be taken into account in the INF negotiations, which had resumed in the spring. The bottom line was that "trust" between the chancellor and the president was what really mattered, as Mitterrand had told Kohl during their first discussion of nuclear strategy in 1982, and one way to illustrate this trust in West German eyes, Védérine suggested, would be to set up a "direct and secure line of communication" between the Elysée and the Chancellery "to allow for immediate consultation in times of crisis."⁸⁴

The Brégançon conversation marked progress in that direction. In its wake, Mitterrand ordered his military chief of staff, General Gilbert Forray (who at the Elysée had succeeded Saulnier, who himself had replaced Lacaze as chief of staff of the French armed forces), to study the technical feasibility of a direct, secure video link between the Elysée and the Chancellery, with early conclusions expected by the end of the year.⁸⁵ Yet by the time of the November 1985 bilateral summit, it was becoming clear that the West Germans were not eager to explore technical options beyond installing a secure telephone link, which those in Paris saw as an insufficient upgrade from the existing

84. Guigou and Védérine note for Mitterrand, *Objet: Votre rencontre avec le chancelier Kohl à Brégançon le 24 août, 23 August 1985*, in AN, 5AG4/6538.

85. Forray note for Mitterrand, *Objet: Liaison télévisée entre Paris et Bonn, 7 October 1985*, in AN, 5AG4/CD 185/3.

teletype. The Elysée wanted to install “a television studio” from which the president could “directly speak with the chancellor with translation, see him on a TV screen, share with him such and such document directly,” knowing that the chancellor would use a “similar studio” and that “all these communications would be secure.” Such a video link “would have a major impact on public opinion,” Védérine told Mitterrand, demonstrating that “nothing important would happen without France and Germany immediately liaising at the highest level—without your having to make a precise commitment on substance.”⁸⁶

Védérine’s last point was precisely what fueled West German skepticism. The FRG could only see France’s insistence on upgrading the existing means of communication between the Elysée and the Chancellery as confirming Mitterrand’s refusal to engage in an extensive nuclear consultation process à la NATO and his intent to limit such consultation to an exchange in a crisis or war only. Yet French officials were unwilling to go further in demonstrating France’s good will. After *Der Spiegel* published an article critical of French defense policy, Védérine noted that the West Germans criticized France’s lack of solidarity with the FRG while at the same time berating France’s *force de frappe* as “backward looking,” even obsolete. This was “irrational,” Védérine believed, and it showed that what was at stake was, in fact, status or “identity.” Would the West Germans, who were increasingly impatient with the much more credible U.S. nuclear umbrella, welcome France’s less potent nuclear protection? Either way, he said, the Soviet Union would not believe in an extension of the French nuclear guarantee to the FRG. Védérine also maintained that any sharing of information with the FRG on the conditions of tactical nuclear use would somehow make its way to the public (as was the case with NATO tactical nuclear scenarios) and further fuel the anti-nuclear sentiment in the FRG while allowing the Soviet Union to calculate the risk of a French nuclear strike, thus resulting in a weakening of France’s deterrent posture. Védérine’s bottom line was clear: progress in the French-West German strategic relationship could take place only in the conventional arena, and the notion of “vital interests” had to remain blurred for both France and West Germany. Jean-Louis Bianco, the Elysée’s chief of staff, was somewhat less reluctant: “a symbolic initiative, combined with concrete measures, might have a positive effect,” he wrote.⁸⁷

86. Guigou and Védérine note for Mitterrand, n.d., *Objet: 46èmes consultations*.

87. Védérine note for Mitterrand (with Bianco handwritten annotation), *a/s* article du *Spiegel* critiquant la politique française de sécurité, 19 September 1985, private papers.

The nuclear conundrum was very much on Mitterrand's mind in the fall of 1985, as he looked for ways to move forward while keeping French red lines. One major hurdle on the way to closer cooperation was the likely negative Soviet reaction. Since the 1950s, the nuclearization of the FRG's defense posture in the NATO context had been one of the most sensitive East-West issues—and its hypothetical acquisition of a national nuclear capability was a possible *casus belli* for Moscow. As Mitterrand had told Kohl at Bad-Kreuznach, the German nuclear issue was inseparable from the wider German question, including the issue of reunification.⁸⁸ On 2–4 October 1985, the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to Paris for his first official visit to the West. The discussion, which was dominated by strategic issues, was remarkably frank, in stark contrast to past exchanges with Gorbachev's predecessors, confirming to Mitterrand that a return to East-West détente was now possible after the peak of the Euromissile crisis. The French president's effort to defuse possible Soviet misperceptions regarding the ongoing French-West German rapprochement was now all the more important. Gorbachev was the one who brought up the issue, expressing "concern" about the intensifying military cooperation and mentioning the long-lasting Franco-Soviet "understanding" on this issue. Gorbachev was using a standard Soviet theme; that is, the shared interest of Paris and Moscow in containing a resurgent Germany. "We want to be sure," the Soviet leader said, "that the FRG will never have access to nuclear weapons." Mitterrand's answer was categorical: France and West Germany were strengthening their military ties, and they would continue to do so, but this did not include nuclear weapons. "France cannot share its nuclear weapons with Germany," he said, "because it would threaten the whole European balance . . . but most of all because it is not in our interest to do so." Gorbachev was satisfied, noting, "for us, this point is as important as the inviolability of borders."⁸⁹ A week later, Mitterrand, in a conversation with Kohl on their way to West Berlin, where Mitterrand was paying an official visit, summarized his exchange with Gorbachev. He had told the Soviet leader, he said, that French-West German military cooperation was a must. Gorbachev had accepted this, Mitterrand told Kohl, but West

88. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Bad-Kreuznach, 30 October 1984.

89. Gorbachev-Mitterrand meeting, 2 October 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 76, Dossier 3. From the 1960s through German reunification in the 1990s, France and the Soviet Union—though they did not see eye to eye on this issue—shared at least a common understanding that Germany's recognition of the Oder-Neisse line (the border between East Germany and Poland) and its renunciation of nuclear weapons were two prerequisites for solving the German question. See Frédéric Bozo, "I Feel More Comfortable with You': France, the Soviet Union, and German Reunification," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Summer 2015), pp. 116–158.

German “control” over nuclear weapons was, in Gorbachev’s view, “absolutely excluded.”⁹⁰

As 1985 was drawing to an end, some kind of denouement was approaching in the nuclear saga. Mitterrand’s conversation with Gorbachev was an important step in his search for an appropriate answer to the FRG’s concerns, as it allowed him to soothe possible Soviet reactions while also conveying to Kohl that sharing control of the nuclear decision one way or another was a non-starter. The overall context of French-West German relations remained difficult, as it had been for most of the year. The intergovernmental conference of the EC was entering its final phase, culminating on 3 December in an EC meeting in Luxembourg, where agreement was finally reached on the Single European Act (SEA). The SEA included a major revision of the 1957 Treaty of Rome to create a unified European market; it also opened the way to a more assertive European community in the foreign and security sphere, a shared French-West German objective. Things were tenser in the strategic arena, though. Divergences over SDI between Paris and Bonn had not been fully overcome in spite of the launching in spring and summer 1985 of Eureka, a French-designed European project aiming to respond to the technological challenge of SDI. (Paris offered Bonn the chance to co-sponsor the project.) The French were growing frustrated with West German procrastination in the field of bilateral armament cooperation, which the French deemed an essential leg of bilateral military cooperation. Lack of progress in space projects, including the reconnaissance satellite, was especially vexing (the French attributed the delay to Bonn’s willingness to focus on SDI). All this, the French believed, confirmed the FRG’s basic pro-Americanism, hampering their objective of increased European autonomy. French officials deplored the “divergences” and “misunderstandings” between Bonn and Paris in spite of the ongoing security dialogue.⁹¹

Mitterrand himself did not disguise his frustration. Receiving the Bundestag president, Philipp Jenninger, a close Kohl ally, in late October at the Elysée, the French president mused about the ups and downs in France’s relationship with the FRG. When Jenninger assured him of the Bundestag consensus on the “necessity” for close cooperation with France, Mitterrand was dismissive. He was “optimistic” on bilateral relations, he said, but he was not

90. Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand auf dem Flug nach Berlin, 10 October 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 277, p. 1427.

91. MRE, Europe, sous-direction Europe centrale, Fiche opérationnelle, Objet: 46è consultations franco-allemandes au sommet, Bonn, 7–8 novembre 1985, 29 October 1985, in AN, 5AG4/EG 154, Dossier 2.

“blind,” mentioning in particular Bonn’s decision to stick to the United States at the expense of Europe when it came to SDI and space cooperation projects. As for the nuclear sphere, France, Mitterrand again said, could not include FRG territory in its strategy. This would mean including the other neighboring countries as well, and the Soviet Union simply “would not believe it.”⁹² Coming right before a fresh bilateral summit, these statements did not go unnoticed in Bonn, where Mitterrand’s frustration provoked some soul-searching in the generally Francophile Auswärtiges Amt. The Jenninger conversation, West German diplomats believed, showed that FRG prevarication in matters of interest to France could well jeopardize further bilateral security cooperation.⁹³

In this somewhat fraught context, Kohl and Mitterrand met in Bonn on 7–8 November for the biannual Franco-German summit. Bilateral security cooperation, predictably, was central.⁹⁴ Again, Mitterrand tried to deflect the nuclear issue, offering the FRG an alternative way to the “major power” status he believed the West Germans wanted, implicitly confirming Védérine’s analysis of Bonn’s motives. “If I were German,” Mitterrand said, “I would want to become independent in matters of security.” The way to do so, he suggested, was for the FRG to explore all domains below and beyond the nuclear, which was the only prohibited domain. A conventional force buildup was open to them, he said, but it would not reduce the FRG’s dependence on the United States, because the Soviet Union could always escalate. Space, on the other hand, was a promising domain, he hinted, implying that it would eventually transcend the nuclear as a result of technological advances. Mitterrand once more deplored Bonn’s reserved attitude with regard to French-led European projects such as the observation satellite or the future *Hermès* space shuttle. The two countries had converging interests in this sphere, he said. Mitterrand did not reject these comments, but he justified the lack of an ambitious West German space policy by citing budgetary constraints while minimizing the FRG’s commitment to SDI—again ruling out any nuclear ambitions for the FRG. Yet the conversation did not go beyond generalities, for Mitterrand and Kohl had agreed to meet again before Christmas—this time informally—to

92. Schoeller an das Auswärtige Amt, Betr.: Besuch von Bundestagspräsident Jenninger und Frau Jenninger in Paris vom 29.–31.10.1985, 31 October 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 302, p. 1563.

93. Schoeller an das Auswärtige Amt, Betr.: Stand der deutsch-französischen Beziehungen aus Sicht des französischen Präsidenten, hier: Gespräch Mitterrands mit Bundestagspräsident Jenninger am 31.10.1985, 5 November 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 303, p. 1568.

94. Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990* (Munich: Droemer, 2005), p. 386.

discuss bilateral security cooperation specifically and to explore possible ways out of the current stalemate.⁹⁵

Success was by no means guaranteed. In the wake of the November Bonn summit, the French were still disappointed by what they perceived as West German caginess, especially in matters of armament cooperation and space projects. On the other hand, they were undoubtedly wary of Bonn's continued insistence on nuclear consultation. In late November, Védrine told two Kohl allies and members of the Bundestag that the Paris-Bonn "Idyll" of the years 1981–1983 in matters of security had not led to converging concepts, mentioning the "considerable clash of interests" that prevailed in these domains between France and the Federal Republic.⁹⁶

The planned meeting took place in Paris on 17 December. Kohl and Mitterrand clearly wanted to conclude what over the previous months had been a frustrating dialogue. They saw the informal format of their meeting—complete with gift exchange—as reflecting the mutual confidence they had achieved after three years. The conversation was long and thorough. Mitterrand wanted to discuss things concretely. European defense was a "hollow" concept, he said, implying that what really mattered was French-West German cooperation. The latter had to be based on two facts: France had no desire to return to NATO's integrated military command, and West Germany's security relied primarily on the United States. Still, the two countries had common interests, being in the same "camp" and geographically near. Mitterrand again tried to circumvent the nuclear issue. A nuclear capability was technologically achievable for the FRG, he said, but it was "politically impossible." Nuclear defense one day would be "outmoded," he added. Conventional and space projects were thus the way forward, he said, emphasizing the latter and deploring again that "no advances" had taken place in this sphere. Kohl remained evasive. Agreement on space cooperation was possible, he said, clearly eager to bring the conversation around to the conventional and nuclear issues. He, too, recognized the differences between the two countries, and he wanted to build on them: France was not an integrated NATO member, whereas the Bundeswehr was the largest conventional force in Europe; France was a nuclear power, whereas the FRG ruled out any nuclear ambition. The FRG, Kohl said, wanted to rely on the "U.S. pillar" because West German security was

95. Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand, 8 November 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 397, p. 1589.

96. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Edler von Braunmühl, Betr.: Deutsch-französische sicherheits- und verteidigungspolitische Zusammenarbeit, 18 December 1985, *AAPD*, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 349, p. 1845.

“unthinkable” without the United States. At the same time, the FRG sought to “increase” bilateral cooperation with France because no one knew “what the U.S. will become in the future.”⁹⁷

The two then got to the heart of the matter. “What does Germany want?” Mitterrand asked point-blank. Kohl, clearly, was *demandeur*. Conventional cooperation was discussed first. Kohl wanted to go back to what the Elysée Treaty envisaged, including exchanges of military officers, joint training (including a joint military academy), and the creation of joint units. Mitterrand had no objection to this. The French president said the future role of the FAR was the key question when it came to operational matters. Would it remain in a reserve role, like the First French Army, in the vicinity of the Franco-German border, or could it be engaged farther to the east, even along the FRG’s eastern border and as part of NATO’s forward line of defense, as the Germans wanted? Mitterrand did not give an answer, but he implied there were limits, as French participation “in the initial shock” might induce France to resort early to nuclear use.

The two then discussed nuclear matters, including consultation on possible tactical nuclear use—Kohl’s overriding concern. They briefly danced around the issue, with Kohl wondering in general terms to what extent the two countries’ vital interests might converge. Mitterrand again expressed his red lines: there could be no “joint action” in the nuclear field, he said, excluding any form of sharing of the decision and recalling the differences of strategies between France and NATO. Yet he soon made an overture. To “take precautions” when FRG territory was concerned would be “normal,” he said. Some form of consultation might therefore be considered. Kohl was pleased, observing that this was the first time such a conversation had been possible between a president and a chancellor. Kohl mentioned exchanges of letters between the West German chancellor and the U.S. president as well as the British prime minister, dating back to Lyndon Johnson and Kurt-Georg Kiesinger and Willy Brandt and Edward Heath respectively. Might these serve as templates for a similar French-West German agreement? Mitterrand did not respond specifically on this point, but he again warned against “unrealistic” propositions—such as Schmidt’s 1984 suggestion that France’s *force de frappe* might cover German territory. This was a counterproductive idea, he said. Only the United States, at least for the time being, could do so—and if the United States failed, France’s *force de frappe* would “not suffice.” Kohl

97. Kohl-Mitterrand conversation, Paris, 17 December 1985, in AN, 5AG4/CD 72, Dossier 2; and Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Paris, 17 December 1985, AAPD, 1985 (II), Doc. No. 347, pp. 1821–1836.

happily criticized his predecessor. Schmidt's proposal was "absurd," he said, "a pure intellectual play." What the West Germans wanted, he continued, was a consultation mechanism—"no more, and no less." Mitterrand was satisfied with the clarification. Saulnier, Altenburg, and Forray were then ushered in and asked to work on concrete options in the various domains of cooperation discussed by Kohl and Mitterrand, including the role of the FAR and consultation procedures in case of nuclear use involving FRG territory. Kohl was elated by what he saw as a breakthrough. His father, a captain in the German army, "would never have imagined such a situation," he told Mitterrand, again reassuring the French president that the FRG did not want to be a nuclear power or to "inflict its nuclear defense on France."⁹⁸

The moment was indeed a breakthrough—at least a potential one. The Kohl-Mitterrand agreement in principle still had to be formalized. After two years of a long and convoluted conversation, the French and the West Germans were now willing to devise concrete steps to intensify bilateral military cooperation, including possible consultation procedures in case of tactical nuclear use—the FRG's main demand since the relaunch of the two countries' strategic "dialogue." Faced with Kohl's growing insistence in late 1985, Mitterrand, Védérine later recalled, resolved to move forward "in the name of the Franco-German cause."⁹⁹ And yet two more months of, at times, tense negotiation were necessary to refine the consultation mechanism that had been agreed in principle, once more reflecting the extreme sensitivity of the nuclear issue and the continuing salience of national interests on both sides.¹⁰⁰

98. Kohl-Mitterrand conversation, Paris, 17 December 1985; and Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Paris, 17 December 1985. Kohl on that day did not disclose the content of the Johnson-Kiesinger and Brandt-Heath exchanges. The Johnson letter was issued on 9 September 1968 and confirmed by Kiesinger on 17 September 1968, and the exchange of letters between Brandt and Heath took place on 17 and 18 March 1971 in the wake of the deployment of British tactical nuclear weapons on German territory. See *AAPD*, 1985 (II), p. 1828. Writing to Kiesinger, Johnson "confirm[ed] our understanding concerning consultation between our two governments on the use of nuclear weapons" and specified that, "to enable the Government of the FRG to make its views known to the US Government before selective release of nuclear weapons for use from or on the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany, the President of the United States and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany will consult directly with each other prior to such release" and that "The President of the United States will not make selective release of nuclear weapons for use by German armed forces if the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany objects to such release." Johnson to Kiesinger, 9 September 1968, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, Vol. XV, Doc. No. 286. The wording of the Johnson letter seems to suggest that the United States did not give the FRG an effective veto right over the use of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on FRG territory, but only over the possible use of dual-key systems, thus leaving out U.S. single-key systems. See Lutsch, "The Persistent Legacy"; and Lutsch, "Westbindung oder Gleichgewicht?"

99. Védérine, *Les Mondes*, p. 404.

100. Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, p. 389.

When Kohl and Mitterrand met, the chancellor handed over a set of documents detailing his various proposals to increase bilateral military cooperation. Analyzing them, Forray gave his verdict to the French president. “The Germans want us to make a step forward,” he wrote, but—apart from suggestions on joint training, which, he said, were acceptable—their proposals “are not innocent.” Forray used a bodily metaphor: the FRG’s defense policy, he said, “relies on two legs: the NATO (or U.S.) leg, and the French (or European) leg.” Kohl’s proposals “tend to strengthen the French leg,” but they also tend to “move it closer to the Atlantic leg.” Regarding the conventional dimension, Forray noted that the FRG—in contrast to France’s non-integrated status and its rejection of any “automatic” engagement—wanted a segment of France’s forces in West Germany to be included in NATO’s layered forward defense, an idea Forray deemed “unacceptable.” However, he said it was possible to explore a potential “counter attack” role for French forces beyond the current RDM line, provided this involved the FAR, which had been created for that purpose.¹⁰¹ As for consultations on nuclear weapons, these were acceptable in principle, but the West Germans wanted to copycat existing NATO procedures, which carried the risk that France’s pre-strategic doctrine (relying on a last warning and rejecting nuclear combat) would be assimilated into NATO’s flexible response—something that would “call into question” the French deterrent concept. Forray concluded that it was not possible to refuse discussions (to be led by Generals Altenburg and Saulnier), but that “great caution” was needed if the French were “to go where they wanted to go, but not beyond.” Ideally, the West Germans should accept moving the “U.S. leg closer” to the “French leg,” Forray said. Perhaps the French could agree to budge if the FRG were willing to make concessions on armament cooperation or space projects?¹⁰²

The West Germans were fully aware of French second thoughts. They, too, recognized the existence of fundamental differences between the two countries in defense and security matters while wanting to focus on shared goals and approaches. Bonn’s foreign office, in particular, was determined

101. This insistence on France’s participation in NATO’s forward defense revealed differences of views in Bonn. The documents—likely drafted by Altenburg and his staff—reflected the overwhelmingly Atlanticist views of the top West German military, for whom NATO military integration was sacrosanct and whose objective was no less than France’s return to the NATO fold. By contrast, politicians were more pragmatic and ready to accept France’s non-integrated posture, as illustrated by various of Kohl’s and Wörner’s pronouncements.

102. Forray note for Mitterrand, *Objet: Documents remis par le chancelier Kohl*, 20 December 1985, private papers. See also Favier and Martin-Roland, *La Décennie*, Vol. 2, p. 260.

to build on Kohl's December conversation with Mitterrand and to take into account French demands (in particular on space projects) in the hope of advancing West German approaches by the time of the next bilateral summit in late February 1986.¹⁰³ Bonn, Védérine later surmised, wanted to codify the breakthrough in nuclear consultation before the French legislative election in March, which was widely expected to lead to Mitterrand's loss of his parliamentary majority and hence to a likely "cohabitation" between the Socialist president and an RPR-led conservative government that likely would be less prone to depart from what the West Germans saw as the Gaullist "dogma."¹⁰⁴ Domestic factors also played a role, French diplomats believed, with the Europeanist Auswärtiges Amt willing to step in as part of its perennial rivalry with the more Atlanticist Ministry of Defense. The French believed that FRG political authorities wanted to mitigate the impression of an overly U.S.-leaning defense and security policy that the FRG had created in 1985, in particular through its positive response to SDI and lack of responsiveness to French offers to cooperate in weapons and space projects. This was, no doubt, the main purpose of Genscher's visit to Dumas in early January 1986, which had been scheduled in order to discuss the relaunch of French-FRG cooperation in defense and security in the wake of the Kohl-Mitterrand conversation the previous month.¹⁰⁵

Breakthrough and Its Limits (1986)

Genscher's Paris visit was welcomed but ended inconclusively. Dumas again deplored the apparent lack of West German interest in space projects. Cooperation was possible in the conventional domain but difficult in the nuclear arena as a result of "historical factors," he said. Genscher wanted to dispel the press's broad skepticism that Paris and Bonn could overcome their nuclear differences. France's nuclear arsenal was "an advantage" for the FRG and Europe as a whole, he volunteered. ("He's right," Védérine wrote on the transcript of the conversation.) Genscher then added somewhat pompously that France and West Germany were "doomed to sharing a security community"

103. Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Edler von Braunmühl, 18 December 1985, p. 1850.

104. Védérine, *Les Mondes*, p. 405.

105. MRE, le directeur politique, note pour le Ministre, Objet: Votre entretien avec M. Genscher le 8 janvier: Coopération franco-allemande en matière de sécurité et d'espace, 6 January 1986, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

and that their differences in fact created a “force of attraction.”¹⁰⁶ But French diplomats were unconvinced. France and the FRG were equally attached to their “fundamental orientations,” they noted, and the “symbolism” of the bilateral rapprochement of the past two or three years had created “overly large expectations” in the FRG while “blurring [perceptions of] substantial differences [with Bonn]” in France, leading to the current stalemate. Hence, they believed, the need for the two countries to focus on specific areas of cooperation rather than on a comprehensive project, as Kohl and Mitterrand had done. The Quai d’Orsay shared Forray’s guarded assessment of Kohl’s proposals. Although it was fine to discuss joint training of officers with Bonn, French diplomats believed, France should be careful not to move toward some form of participation in NATO’s forward defense, which would lead to a “quasi automatic” engagement of French forces. As for nuclear consultation, there should be no transposition of NATO procedures—including the creation of a bilateral equivalent of the NPG—and instead should be agreement to inform and consult with the FRG in times of crisis through a secure link, as explored in the wake of Brégançon. This approach, which was compatible with French deterrence doctrine, represented “an alternative” to NATO procedures, the Foreign Ministry officials believed, in essence allowing consultation “at the only possible level, i.e. the highest level.”¹⁰⁷

The French red lines on nuclear consultation were now clear. Mitterrand had an opportunity to express them, if somewhat obliquely, during a fresh meeting with Kohl in mid-January. In the fall, the two had agreed to meet in Baden-Baden, where the French forces in Germany had their headquarters, to display their willingness to step up military cooperation.¹⁰⁸ After a review of troops and various ceremonies (complete with a top Bundeswehr general,

106. MRE, Cabinet, Note a/s Entretien du Ministre avec M. Genscher, Sécurité, 8 January 1986, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

107. MRE, le directeur politique, note pour le Ministre, 6 January 1986; and Note pour le Ministre, Objet: Rencontre de Baden-Baden entre le président de la République et le chancelier: Coopération franco-allemande dans le domaine de la sécurité et de l’espace, 14 January 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2. Quai officials were concerned that Saulnier seemed ready to discuss with his West German counterpart issues that went beyond the strictly technical aspects of communications in times of crisis. Saulnier justified this stance by saying it would “lead nowhere” anyway given differences between the French and the FRG on these issues, but French diplomats worried that it sent the wrong “signal.” Saulnier’s relatively more open attitude (which, given his absolute loyalty to Mitterrand, was perhaps the result of the natural sense of collegiality that prevailed among military chiefs) might explain in part the misunderstanding that emerged later between Paris and Bonn on the issue of nuclear consultation. (This matter will be discussed further in Part 2 of my article.)

108. Forray note for Mitterrand, Objet: Visite à Baden-Baden le 16 janvier 1986, 13 November 1985, and handwritten note from Jean Musitelli to Védrine, 14 November 1985, both in AN, 5AG4/CD186, Dossier 2.

Hans-Henning von Sandrart, receiving the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest distinction, from the French president), Kohl and Mitterrand briefly reviewed Kohl's proposals based on the documents he had given Mitterrand when they met in December. Mitterrand confirmed he had no problem with enhanced conventional cooperation, including possible French engagement beyond the RDM line (provided that French forces were not under NATO command), increased joint maneuvers, and joint training of officers. As for nuclear consultation, he said, "finding a system" should not be a problem. Yet he was again evasive when Kohl said he desired "something analogous" to the existing arrangements with the United States. Mitterrand, noting that he was not privy to their content, implied he was not willing to go far in this direction. "It is in space projects that progress can be made," he said, again calling for FRG participation in projects such as Hermès.¹⁰⁹ During a joint press appearance with Kohl, Mitterrand confirmed his reservations in the nuclear realm. "Consultations" were "perfectly normal" when German territory was concerned, he said, but sharing the nuclear decision was impossible. (The French noted in the following days that West German press reports exaggerated the significance of Mitterrand's statements, mentioning his supposed readiness to consider "harmonization" of pre-strategic nuclear targeting as well as French participation in forward defense. The French embassy in Bonn saw this as "revealing" of the FRG's "ulterior motives.")¹¹⁰

Although the endgame was in sight, it took the six weeks that separated the Baden-Baden meeting from the bilateral summit of late February until the two sides finally reached an agreement (at least a presentational one) on the various aspects that had been discussed in December. In Bonn on 4 February, Altenburg and Saulnier had a seven-hour discussion that the French general found constructive and characterized by his counterpart's "surprising" openness and willingness to recognize the French viewpoint. Agreement was reached on the need to explore options for a possible engagement of the FAR east of the RDM line in the southern FRG as a reinforcement of the Bundeswehr's Second Army Corps and to prepare a joint maneuver along these lines in 1987. The nuclear issue proved trickier. Altenburg again mentioned the consultation procedures that were already part of the NATO framework, as well as those agreed bilaterally with the U.S. president and the British prime

109. Kohl-Mitterrand meeting, Baden-Baden, 16 January 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD 164, Dossier 2. See also Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohls mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Baden-Baden, 16 January 1986, *AAPD*, 1986 (I), Doc. No. 10, pp. 48–55.

110. Bonn Telegram No. 120, 20 January 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD186, Dossier 2; and *Le Monde*, 18 January 1986.

minister, saying that the FRG wanted to use the latter—which, he underlined, were known to very few people in the FRG—as a template for a possible French-West German consultation mechanism. Altenburg also emphasized that the ultimate decision on nuclear use would remain in French hands and that there could be no German veto. Yet the French noted that Altenburg also mentioned procedures that went beyond consultation in the narrow sense, including targeting restrictions based on the intensity and altitude of possible nuclear explosions as well as avoidance of sensitive sites. Altenburg pledged to describe these procedures in writing, so it remained to be seen whether such restrictions were compatible with the French concept. (Paul Quilès, who had recently succeeded Hernu as minister of defense, was skeptical, but he asked Saulnier to “study” the issue.)¹¹¹

The French were becoming nervous faced with what they saw as mounting pressure in the run-up to the summit in late February. A week before the summit, Altenburg sent Saulnier a draft joint declaration that had not been discussed during their meeting and according to which the French president would declare he was “ready to consult with the [West] German government prior to any nuclear use . . . affecting the vital interests of the FRG.”¹¹² The proposed wording—which in Paris could only be seen as too extensive and binding—caused the French Ministry of Defense to speculate that the FRG now “wanted to precipitate things in order to obtain concessions on sensitive points.”¹¹³ The Elysée nevertheless wanted to bring the negotiations to a conclusion. In late January, Mitterrand had published a book containing a selection of his foreign policy speeches and writings—a clear attempt to stake out presidential territory before the March legislative elections and the “cohabitation” that would likely ensue. In the book, Mitterrand gave his bottom line for French-West German military cooperation, both underlining its limits—which, he said, were the result of history—and recognizing the FRG’s “legitimate” demand for “additional assurances” on the part of France. Mitterrand affirmed the incremental character of the two countries’ military cooperation, again mentioning “future [space] technologies” as the most promising field if a European defense was ever to emerge. He called a “joint response to the nuclear challenge” (i.e., a shared nuclear deterrent) an “impossible quest” as a

111. Quilès note for Mitterrand, 20 February 1986, and Saulnier note for Quilès, 4 February 1986, both in private papers.

112. Projet [“allemand” added in pencil], Déclaration concernant un accord entre le président de la République française et le chancelier fédéral d’Allemagne à l’occasion du sommet franco-allemand à Paris, les 27–28 février 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

113. Ministère de la défense, le directeur du cabinet civil et militaire, Patrick Careil, note for Védrine and Forray, 20 February 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

result of the gap between the two countries' statuses, and again dismissed any notion of an explicit French nuclear guarantee to Germany as lacking credibility and as something the West Germans were not asking for anyway. But Mitterrand stressed the need for Paris and Bonn to "refine consultation procedures" regarding tactical nuclear use. He also hinted that in the future the FAR could be engaged to the east of the RDM line, refuting any "theological" approach to France's role vis-à-vis NATO's forward defense while at the same time again rejecting any form of French reintegration.¹¹⁴

In the run-up to the summit, Védérine suggested using Mitterrand's introduction to the book to refine the French response to the FRG's demands. This response might include giving a green light to studies of FAR engagement options east of the RDM line as well as a declaration by the French president—rather than a joint declaration, signaling that this was indeed a West German request that was granted by the French, not a bilateral agreement—indicating that he was willing to consult with the FRG chancellor prior to possible pre-strategic strikes affecting German territory. This would be perceived "as a major political turning point," Védérine told Mitterrand. (Védérine believed it was premature to discuss the terms of a possible secret letter to Kohl, including details of a consultation procedure along the lines of similar letters written by the U.S. president and the UK prime minister, because the Germans, so far, had not shared the content of those letters.)¹¹⁵

The final talks took place during the summit in Paris on 27 February. In a sign that the negotiation concerned the principals and their military chiefs exclusively, the four ministers, who met as usual during the summit, were not involved in this final phase.¹¹⁶ The negotiation was tense, and its positive outcome was not a foregone conclusion. The French bargaining stance was premised on the notion that any French commitment to consult prior to nuclear use would be "a substantial advance" that should "come with a quid

114. See *Réflexions sur la politique extérieure de la France*, in François Mitterrand, *Ceuvres*, Vol. 4 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2018), p. 791. See also the introduction by Frédéric Bozo, pp. 723–736. (The book was first published by Fayard in January 1986).

115. Védérine note for Mitterrand, a/s Déclaration éventuelle du président de la République à l'issue du sommet franco-allemand, 25 February 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2. Why the Germans had not shared the Johnson and Heath letters with the French is unclear. One possible explanation is that the Johnson letter said that "knowledge of these undertakings will be limited to our two governments"; another is that the letter in effect contained a limited U.S. commitment to consult. See Johnson to Kiesinger, 9 September 1968.

116. MRE, Direction des affaires politiques, Compte-rendu de la réunion des ministres de la défense et des ministres des relations extérieures à l'occasion du sommet franco-allemand, 27 February 1986, in AN, 5AG5/CD164, Dossier 2. See also Gespräch der Bundesminister Genscher und Wörner mit dem französischen Außenminister Dumas und Verteidigungsminister Quilès in Paris, 27 February 1986, AAPD, 1986 (I), Doc. No. 57, pp. 314–327.

pro quo.”¹¹⁷ Yet at the end of the summit a joint declaration was published. It mentioned Paris’s and Bonn’s willingness to explore FAR engagement options, including through joint maneuvers and, crucially, stated that “within the limits imposed by the extreme rapidity of such decisions,” the French president was “ready to consult with the German chancellor on the possible use of pre-strategic weapons on German territory” while recalling that “in such matters there can be no sharing of the decision.” (The declaration also mentioned the decision to equip the Elysée and the Chancellery with means of “immediate and secure communication” and to explore joint training of officers. Perhaps as part of the quid pro quo desired by Paris, Bonn’s decision to consider participation in the Hermès project was evoked—in noncommittal terms—in a separate statement.)¹¹⁸

The joint declaration signed on 28 February 1986 was seen—at least in Paris—as a turning point in the French-West German strategic rapprochement. Yet what the French saw as the culmination of the conversation begun three years earlier was viewed by the West Germans as only the beginning of a more far-reaching process—one that should eventually lead to a more substantial West German say over France’s nuclear strategy. True, in Bonn, official reactions were, initially, no less than ecstatic. Kohl’s advisers lauded his “tenacity” and his “confident and friendly relations” with the French president, which had resulted in a “historic breakthrough.” Yet the French embassy reported that this apparent enthusiasm disguised a degree of disappointment. Kohl associates had confided to West German newspapers prior to the summit that he was hoping for a “binding” formula. The Elysée saw this as a confirmation that Bonn had hoped that Paris would accept the language proposed by Altenburg before the summit as well as an exchange of letters based on procedures in existence with Britain and the United States.¹¹⁹ An article in *Der Spiegel* soon confirmed this. West German leaders and especially the military, the weekly wrote based on leaks, believed the declaration fell short of

117. Védrine handwritten note for Bianco, n.d., in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2; and Bianco handwritten note for Mitterrand, n.d., in AN, 5AG4/ 6579. Bianco told Mitterrand that, “since the Germans are *demandeurs*, we might ask for a quid pro quo involving perhaps Hermès or the CAP [common agricultural policy].”

118. Védrine, *Les Mondes*, p. 405. See the text of the declaration in Kimmel and Jardin, eds., *Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen*, pp. 262–265. Védrine would later recount that Genscher had insisted on the inclusion of the phrase “on German territory.” See MRE, Cabinet du ministre, Commission franco-allemande sur la sécurité et la défense, Compte-rendu de la réunion du 14. mai 1984, 17 May 1984. The wording of the 28 February 1986 declaration echoed that of the 1962 Athens guidelines, which called for nuclear consultation, “time and circumstances permitting.” See Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*, p. 73.

119. Bonn Telegram No. 400, 4 March 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

what was desirable and that Kohl would from then on try to move beyond a sheer consultation pledge and get Paris to share information on French tactical nuclear planning with Bonn. The Elysée was not surprised. “Such an article was predictable,” Védérine told Mitterrand, “even though it is coming a bit too soon.”¹²⁰

Altenburg himself confirmed that Bonn wanted to keep up the pressure. In an interview with *Die Welt*, he said that, after the 28 February declaration, pre-strategic nuclear use “could not take place on German territory without prior consultation” with the FRG and that Bonn was intent on “duplicating” existing NATO mechanisms in order to refine consultation procedures. The French judged Altenburg’s statement to be off-limits, amounting to a bid for a West German *droit de regard* over France’s deterrent. Védérine wrote to Mitterrand that Altenburg’s former assertion was “mistaken” and that the latter “confirmed an intent that we do not share,” and the Ministry of Defense issued a statement to the effect that Paris wanted to “stick to the terms” of the 28 February declaration.¹²¹

The West Germans’ barely disguised frustration with the terms of the declaration was seen in Paris as confirmation that Bonn’s main motivation in striving for a say over the *force de frappe* was, as ever, a search for an equality of rights. “The FRG no longer tolerates the second-tier status that it accepted at the time of the [October 1954] Paris agreement,” the Quai d’Orsay noted, adding that “the longing for *Gleichberechtigung*, though muted, as ever dominates German policy.”¹²² The French felt they had gone as far as possible in the direction of West German wishes. Meeting Genscher in July 1986, Mitterrand—who had recently returned from a visit to Moscow—again used the Soviet factor to convey this to the West Germans: Gorbachev was concerned that the FRG might try to share the nuclear decision through cooperation with France, he told Genscher, adding that he had assured the Soviet leader that “Germany, at least today, is not asking . . . to participate in the nuclear decision.”¹²³ The Quai thought France could go no further in meeting West German requests. “Going beyond [the 28 February declaration] would

120. Bonn Telegram No. 426, 10 March 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

121. Bonn Telegram No. 547, 1 April 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2; and Védérine note for Mitterrand, 2 April 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

122. MRE, le Directeur d’Europe, note pour le Ministre, a/s relations franco-allemandes, 16 May 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD164, Dossier 2.

123. Genscher-Mitterrand meeting, 18 July 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD 73, Dossier 1. See also Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit Staatspräsident Mitterrand in Paris, 18 July 1986, *AAPD*, 1986 (II), Doc. No. 200, pp. 1049–1053. Mitterrand also conveyed to Genscher his irritation with Altenburg’s statements to the effect that France would reintegrate NATO’s military command in case of a crisis,

mean calling into question France's autonomy of decision," French diplomats believed. (Similarly, the Quai thought that going beyond existing agreements about extending the FAR's role would "change France's NATO status."¹²⁴) By mid-1986, French-West German military cooperation was in abeyance, with both parties (particularly the new French government, formed in the wake of the March 1986 legislative election) wanting to take stock of what had been accomplished over the previous three years. The meeting of the bilateral commission on defense and security in late July illustrated the standstill, in particular on the nuclear issue. Rühl was content to state that, "for us, it was important that France had departed from its *glacis*-thinking and given military substance to its political solidarity."¹²⁵

Yet by the fall of 1986 it was clear that the issue of nuclear consultation was far from settled, as the French had hoped. The technical aspects of the secure video link that had been discussed the previous year—and that remained the Elysée's privileged approach to the issue of nuclear consultation—had yet to be clarified (the West German side, however, had agreed to look into this anew). Meanwhile the conversation between the two military chiefs, which had been initiated in the wake of the December 1985 meeting, was still ongoing in the wake of the 28 February declaration, and the West Germans were still frustrated by the overly "narrow" character of the talks (i.e., their exclusive focus on technical issues relating to communications).¹²⁶

As Kohl and Mitterrand were preparing to meet again for a fresh summit in Frankfurt in late October 1986, the West Germans intended to keep up the pressure to obtain more than the February statement—including information on potential targets and joint directives on conditions of use. The French believed the West German military staff was especially keen to obtain new concessions, whereas Kohl was satisfied with the state of play and wanted to avoid what could become a divisive new round of negotiation with

which was a serious distortion of France's position—but not something Mitterrand could reproach Kohl with.

124. MRE, ASP, note *a/s* le point sur la coopération franco-allemande en matière de sécurité, 3 September 1986; and Rapport de la commission franco-allemande de sécurité et de défense aux ministres des affaires étrangères et de la défense, n.d. (October 1986), both in AN, 5AG4/CD 165, Dossier 1.

125. Sitzung des deutsch-französischen Ausschusses für Sicherheit und Verteidigung, 23 July 1986, AAPD, 1986 (II), Doc. No. 213, pp. 1122–1139. See also Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrat Bertram, 18 July 1986, Betr.: Deutsch-französische Konsultationen über Nuklearfragen, AAPD, 1986 (II), Doc. No. 201, pp. 1054–1055.

126. Védrine note for Mitterrand, *a/s* Votre visite à Baden-Baden, 15 January 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD 186, Dossier 2; Forray note for Mitterrand, *Objet*: Coopération franco-allemande, 25 August 1986, in AN, 5AG4/CD 165, Dossier 1; and Aufzeichnung des Vortragenden Legationsrat Bertram, 18 July 1986.

Paris. The Elysée was confident that Saulnier was being “cautious” in his ongoing discussion with his West German opposite number, but the political situation in France following the March 1986 legislative elections and the arrival of a new center-right government led by Jacques Chirac, a neo-Gaullist, was making the issue even more sensitive as a result of the “cohabitation” between the president and the government. The Elysée was concerned that the Hôtel Matignon (the office of the prime minister) could use the continuing FRG pressure to criticize the February declaration as ill-advised. The Elysée, therefore, wanted the Frankfurt summit to highlight first and foremost the projected video link as well as the ongoing preparations for the following year’s joint maneuver involving the FAR. The hope was to focus on technical aspects in order to deflect West German requests to negotiate on tactical nuclear consultation arrangements that went beyond the spirit of the February declaration. (In addition, the West German military had still not shared with its French counterparts the precise content of the NATO guidelines that they wanted to be included in an agreement on tactical nuclear use, so the French were in a wait-and-see mode.)¹²⁷

Months after the February 1986 declaration, the nuclear consultation issue was still looming between Paris and Bonn. By then, the East-West context was rapidly changing, and a “new” détente was under way. Although no one could have predicted this, the last chapter of the Cold War had opened and, with it, renewed nuclear challenges for the French-West German relationship. The second part of this article, to be published in a subsequent issue of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, will address the enduring French-FRG nuclear conundrum from 1986 to 1990.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Andreas Lutsch and the JCWS’s anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

127. Forray note for Mitterrand, *Objet: Sommet franco-allemand des 27–28 octobre 1986; questions relatives à la défense*; and Védrine note for Mitterrand, *a/s Sommet de Francfort: Coopération franco-allemande en matière de sécurité et suites du sommet de Reykjavik, 24 October 1986*, both in AN 5AG4/EG/155, Dossier 1.