

Dealing with the Americans: a new world order

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American policymakers have always perceived the foreign policy of France under Charles de Gaulle—and the policy legacy which he left behind him, not only in France but in Europe and the wider world as well—through lenses which were shaped by the parameters and assumptions of American foreign policy since World War II. Those lenses distorted in a quite crucial way several of the most significant aspects of de Gaulle's policy and legacy.

What is more important, however, is that this distortion has been characteristic of a more generally blinkered approach on the part of US policymakers (and some academic specialists), an approach which has made American foreign policy less and less relevant to the realities of today's new "post-Cold War" Era.

The most fundamental feature of postwar American foreign policy involved a set of assumptions about the nature of world politics which revolved around the Cold War system. The first of these was that the political, economic and ideological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union would continue indefinitely to be the structural core of international relations. The second was that the geopolitical epicentre of that confrontation was the Iron Curtain across Central Europe. This second assumption had certain corollaries: on the one hand, that the stabilisation or peaceful coexistence; and, on the other hand, that the stabilisation of that theatre had to come not from the European nation-states themselves, but from the cohesion of alliance systems centred in each of the two superpowers respectively.

The third assumption, which was essentially derived from the first two, was that any structural change in Cold War system could only result from "superpower condominium"—"detente from above"—and not from the undisciplined initiatives of the European nation-states and peoples—what might be called "detente from below". Detente from below would be likely to endanger to nuclear blackmail, "Finlandisation" and other forms of direct or indirect society domination, and thus undermine the West as a whole. The only major partial exception to this rule, so far as Europe went, was the possibility of a West European defensive system linked to European political union, such as the European Defence Community of the early 1950s or the various regionally-based "European pillar of NATO" proposals put forward, for example, in the 1960s and 70s.

Any such defence union would only be acceptable to the United States, of course, insofar as a unified Europe did not itself go off on a course which was at odds with US policy—as the embryonic European political co-operation mechanism did in the Yom Kippur War and the Venice Declaration. European independence, in the American view, was only viable and desirable if it acted as a regional complement or supplement to American policy, because only the United States could have a sufficiently global approach to understand and pursue Europe's own best interests in the wider context.

The American approach

It is of little importance, in the long view, that this American approach had two rather different strands—the idealist and the realist. In the idealist strands, represented by such establishment figures as George Ball, "detente from below" was thought to be fundamentally misconceived because the values of the free world (economic liberalism and political democracy) were seen as indivisible¹. The United States itself (and American values) therefore represented a higher stage of politics, whose leaders were acting on behalf of the universalisation of those values—and was not merely another corrupt European-type nation-state of the kind that George Washington warned us against and whose squabbles had caused two world wars. The European and Gaullist desire for independent approaches were therefore fundamentally immoral, based on narrow selfishness rather than enlightened self-interest. Alliance cohesion and even integration were part of a necessary and desirable secular trend toward a better world led by a reluctant but essentially altruistic United States which could claim the moral high ground.

In the realist strand, epitomised by Henry Kissinger, the objection to "detente from below" was more pragmatic. Nation-states other than the United States and the Soviet Union did not possess the power resources to pursue global stabilisation. Thus although the desires of less powerful nation-states and regions for more independent foreign policies and world roles were fundamentally understandable and had to be catered for, at least in part, their ambitions could also be counterproductive and disruptive. American realists believed that global stability depended upon the establishment and careful maintenance of an overall balance of power between the strongest potential antagonist; therefore destruction by the smaller fry had to be kept in constant—paternalistic—check: This was the message of the "Year of Europe" in 1973. Europe as a whole, and France in particular, could never aspire to the rank of equal to the superpowers, and therefore could never play a constructive "balancing" role in the wider Cold War structure².

The debate between the idealists and the realists has been very prominent within the American foreign policy establishment. However, this has not really made a great difference to the Europeans themselves. This is because the terms of the debate do not even recognise "detente from below" as a viable option³. Given this basic dialogue of the deaf, the American debate does not include or even perceive any alternative path to the dismantling of the Cold War system in Europe itself. The paradox of American foreign policy toward Europe since World War II has been that it has included to intellectual mechanism for conceiving of an infrastructural evolution which could do away with the Cold War system. Either there would be continuing confrontation, which most American policymakers have in the past always assumed to be the primary underlying reality of the world system; or there would be a carefully controlled "detente from above" process. And a crucial necessary condition of the second would of course have to be *increased*, rather than decreasing, alliance discipline and integration, to prevent chaos and renewed confrontation.

Misconceptions and misunderstandings

It is in the context of this fundamental underlying paradigm of American foreign policy toward Europe that de Gaulle's foreign policy was critically misperceived. It is the sterility of this American paradigm which has made American policymakers flounder in the today's new post-Cold War Era. For the Europe which is emerging in the wake of the collapse of the Cold War system, a *Europe des Etats* "from the Atlantic to the Urals," is one to which American

foreign policy is increasingly irrelevant. Western Europe is no longer the unruly fringe of the Atlantic Alliance. It is at the centre of things. And virtually all of the structural models which are now seen to be relevant to its future—from the “Common European Home”, to a nation-state-based collective security system, to “variable geometry” economic co-operation and integration—are profoundly *Gaullien* in character.

For the key to understanding de Gaulle’s foreign policy was that it was a policy designed ultimately to prepare, *from below*, a structural evolution to a post-Cold War world. American foreign policy has been so deeply enmeshed in the Cold War paradigm that such an evolution has been perceived as a negative and even dangerous possibility. So today, as the Bush Administration scurries about trying to get a handle on events in Europe, it might be useful for us (and them) to refocus, with a new sense of hindsight, on the basic options underlying *Gaullien* foreign policy. For it can be seen as far more complex and sophisticated than its main American interpreters understood at the time—at worst a process of intellectual and policy *bricolage* which for all that was somewhat ahead of its time, and at best a long-range vision, as Alfred Grosser has said, of an extended past and more or less distant (if achievable) future⁴.

In this context, the present was to de Gaulle simply a more or less constraining intermediate stage, a state of transition between the development of national societies as the fundamental building-blocks of the world order, on the one hand, and the development of webs of bilateral and plurilateral co-operation—an “international of nationalism”—on the other. American policymakers, in contrast, saw his actions as those of a dangerous “alliance maverick,” a bull in the nuclear balance-of-terror China shop. Indeed, in selling ways out of the Cold War strait jacket, de Gaulle ran up against a series of dead ends—some of which, of course, were of his own making.

The *Gaullien* project was characterised by the articulation of a number of common themes⁵: (a) multipolar “big power” co-operation in maintaining and stabilising the system as a whole; (b) intergovernmentalism as the core of any structural mechanism for co-operation and integration; (c) interlocking webs of bilateral relations (both economic and political) as the means to extend international co-operation (rather than global multilateralism); (d) mutual non-interference and the re-evaluation of the nation-state as possessing a capacity for “enlightened [national] self-interest”; and (e) the attempt to increase the margin of manoeuvre and the influence of France itself as a means of gaining



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leverage to pursue the other, wider goals. The articulation of these different structural webs is what I elsewhere refer to as "plurilateralism." This complex layered structure can be identified and analysed at a range of more concrete foreign policy levels: the global level, the alliance level, the European level, the level of defence policy, and the level of policy toward the Third World.

It must be said first, however, that the key to understanding American misperception of de Gaulle was a twofold belief on the part of US

policymakers, built into the paradigm outlined earlier in this paper. That belief was, firstly, that de Gaulle's project was fundamentally obsolete and retrogressive—that it ran counter to the direct-war world. Each of the goals above could be, and was severely criticised, from the ground up, on this basis. For example, multipolar “big power” co-operation at the highest level was attacked as meaning a return to the 19th century system of big power conferences which was unable to counteract the breakdown of the Concert of Europe system, and the very failure of which opened the way to World War I.

Tilting at windmills

Intergovernmentalism was seen being a feeble alternative to integration, especially at a European level; its requirement for unanimity would paralyse, rather than empower, co-operative mechanisms. Interlocking webs of bilateral relations were at best politically futile (e.g., attempting to entice Eastern Europe into closer bilateral relations would only lead to mere invasions of Czechoslovakia), and at worst both economically and politically retrogressive—encouraging neo-mercantilism and undermining the multilateral postwar world order of Bretton Woods, GATT, the Marshall Plan, and the long wave of economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s. Non-interference and the re-evaluation of the nation-state were seen as feeble substitutes for alliance solidarity in the face of a totalitarian and aggressive USSR, opening the way to the expansion of Soviet influence (in a zero-sum sense) and inevitable Finlandisation for Europe. The attempt to increase France's and leverage were seen as tilting at windmills—the delusions of grandeur of an old man with a personal bitterness against the US for wartime slights at worst, the futile belief that France could once again play a major balance of power role as it had done in the 19th century European system at best. The attempt to prop up a declining France was seen not as a strategic necessity, but as folly.

On the other hand, to de Gaulle, the American paradigm was itself based on a delusion of grandeur (what Senator Fulbright called the “arrogance of power”). The notion that the Cold War would last forever, or perhaps that a post-Cold War system could be built on the basis of superpower condominium, was to ignore the realities of a diverse world. De Gaulle's world was one in which social solidarity above the nation-state level was fragile, and therefore a world in which, in the long run, international solidarities had to be built on the basis of the autonomous, self determined co-operation of states. This does not mean that he believed that the world break up along nation-state lines, nor that

economic interdependence would do anything other than increase; on the contrary, he repeatedly supported the liberal values of an open world, politically and economically.

What he did believe was that such an open world could not rest upon American hegemony and Cold War divisions. Indeed, he believed that the drive to power of the American nation-state, its own *Realpolitik* of the superpower-based Cold War system, would end up by undermining America's own creation, a liberal and diverse world order. Only by starting with the nation-state, democratising it (on the basis of a "social democracy" with a closer intertwining of state and economy⁶), and deepening the principles of intergovernmentalism and mutual non-interference, could an open world order be guaranteed in a post-Cold War context. Only by resisting American hegemony, and by encouraging the Soviet Union to see itself not as a revolutionary power but as "eternal Russia", could the superpowers be tamed, be brought within the orbit of what I have here called "*enlightened* national self-interest"—the pursuit of which would constitute the main guarantee of a plurilateral post-Cold War world.

In this context, the fact that it was France which was pursuing this set of goals was seen by de Gaulle not as the result of bitterness, spite or narrow nationalistic tunnel vision, but as a guarantee that the principle of democratic nationalism—the main legacy of French history (reconciling the *ancien régime* and the Revolution)—rather than outside domination, would be the guiding principle of such a world order. This was the core of his idea of *grandeur*, that symbolic construct which would not only bring together the conflicting forces within France, but also expand the benign influence of France in the world. France, then, could have a particularly significant role to play in setting out the conditions for a post-Cold War world.

At the same time, France represented, for de Gaulle, a sort of potential "macrocosm within the microcosm". At the world level, a *Gaullien* France had global ambitions, but limited ambitions. France had the experience and tradition to be a Great Power, but was not a superpower. It could thus develop a special relationship with smaller powers, such as the Eastern European countries and the Third World, and could therefore effectively blend the interests of big and small alike in the councils of the international system. As a big power, it would be in a position to negotiate with the superpowers on such issues as the Middle East in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, or to bring the antagonists in Vietnam together over the conference table. But at the same

time, not being a superpower and lacking the will or the means to dominate, France could look after the interests of the smaller countries too within these settings. Thus what seen as pretentiousness and delusion by American policymakers at the superpower level, was seen by de Gaulle as a chance to expand the virtual representation of the "rest of the world" in the councils of the strong. These claims were continuously resisted by American policymakers, although "realists" were sometimes prepared to make mainly symbolic concessions, especially after the Nixon Administration came into office in 1969. And, of course, neither were the smaller countries particularly willing to accept France's mediation most of the time (except in some former French colonies).

Principle application

At the alliance level, de Gaulle at first sought to apply the same principles, to expand the political consultative process at the highest level, in the September 1958 NATO memorandum. The blocking of this initiative, for the reasons enumerated earlier in this paper, is a well-know story. When it became clear, in the early 1960s, that Kennedy's "dumbbell theory" of "Atlantic partnership", along with McNamara's pursuit of the flexible response nuclear strategy, depended not upon diversifying authority within the alliance but further centralising it in Washington (escalation, after all, had to be tightly controlled from the centre), then de Gaulle's ultimate response was withdrawal in 1966 from the integrated military organisation. These developments outraged American idealists, but were seen as partly understandable (if pragmatically deplorable) by realists.

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At the European level, de Gaulle's approach, for all of the programmatic adjustment and conjectural tacking which inevitably took place, can be seen in two complementary proposals: the Fouchet Plan of 1961-62, and "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals." The importance of the Fouchet Plan to de Gaulle was that it combined the structure of intergovernmentalism, crucial to the principle of non-interference and national self-determination (the basis for durable co-operation being the legitimacy of the state itself), with the expansion of the *scope* of co-operation to security and foreign policies.

Therefore in a post-Cold War world (with the Soviet Union playing at least a status quo and at best a constructive stabilising role), a Western Europe organised along the lines of the Fouchet Plan and linked with Eastern Europe through webs of bilateral economic and political ties could in theory provide an *institutionalised mechanism* for creating a quasi-confederal and diversified European economic area (centred in the more integrated European Economic Community). When complemented by a pan-European security conference, long a Gaullist project as well as a Soviet one (American criticism of the CSCE have focused mainly on the latter), the embryo of a post-Cold War European settlement might have been established. But fierce opposition from Atlanticists and neo-functionalists in Europe, as well as hostility from the United States (especially from idealists), constituted a crucial blocking coalition here.

De Gaulle's defence policy was in some ways merely a common pragmatic means to a variety of ends. In the first place, it was meant to establish French credibility (at least in a symbolic way) to play the role of semi-big power in the councils of the strong. However, its independent role was magnified and expanded by the context of its development: i. e., hostility from the United States and the deepening split with NATO. In the second place, it asserted French equality with Britain within Europe, so that it would no longer be the case that the only small nuclear power within Europe would be bound into a "special relationship" with the US. In the third place, it was meant to emphasise the "national" source of the legitimacy of defence, in contrast to the "integrated" structure of the alliance.

I do not believe that, for de Gaulle, nuclear weapons were an end in themselves. However, that they symbolised, across a variety of issue-areas, was so viscerally crucial that they assumed a greater role than they might have done. American intransigence and misperception of de Gaulle's wider project

helped to see to that—although closer Franco-American nuclear co-operation after 1973, based on a more “realist” interpretation of the values of the *Force de frappe*, modifies this picture somewhat⁷.

With regard to the Third World, de Gaulle’s policy was to provide the possibility of a “Third Way” for North-South co-operation—at a time when both America and Soviet foreign policy sought to integrate as much of the Third World as possible economic and political influence as a global power⁸. In the United States, the French role in the Third World was interpreted in various ways. Here US policymakers. Idealists disliked the French role in general, seeing it as a 19th century relic. But realists made some basic distinctions. When French influence was classes fundamentally as constituting a sub-dimension of “Western” influence in a region where the United States was underrepresented, such as Africa, then it could be seen as not only benign, but potentially constructive from as America point of view. In contrast, where it came into conflict with America’s view of her own (and their allies’) interests, such as in the Middle East, then it was much less welcome.

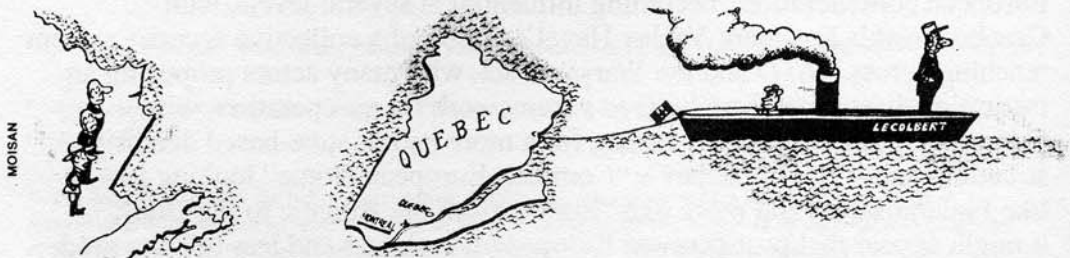
Learning the wrong lesson

After de Gaulle left power in 1969 and then died in 1970, some American policymakers, such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who claimed to be “realists” and who had expressed some sympathy for certain aspects of de Gaulle’s project, tried to present themselves as American Gaullists. However, in attempting to apply what they saw as the lesson of de Gaulle’s foreign policy, they mainly adopted stance which reflected their distorted perceptions. In particular, they saw de Gaulle primarily as a 19th century-style master of *Realpolitik*, attempting to intervene in a balance-of-power situation to pursue specifically French interests and to increase the *rang* and prestige of France in the world.

Therefore the alternative approach favoured by these so-called “American Gaullists” was to assert explicitly that, unlike the idealists, they did not believe an ideal Americanised world, but were instead pursuing *American* “national interests” and approaching the Soviet Union not as an ideological enemy but as one “Great Power” to another. Therefore their aim was not a post-Cold War world based on “detente from below” and an interdependent world of nation-state, but on just another form “detente from above” and a

more "realist" version of superpower condominium. They regarded Europe in the 1970s, which was often said to have taken on certain "Gaullist" features (for example, with the European Economic Community adopting an increased role for the Council of Ministers, the summit meetings and the beginnings of the political co-operation mechanism), as having become more divided and parochial (not less)—and was therefore less dependable in alliance and world order terms (and consequently more in danger of being "Finlandised"). European-American differences over the Yom Kippur War and the oil crisis entrenched these perceptions⁹.

By the mid-1970s, the perceived failure of realism led to a temporary revival of a certain idealism in Carter's Human Rights policy, followed by the collapse of detente and ultimately the "Second Cold War" under the Reagan Administration. Within France, the Gaullist legacy of an independent foreign policy and nuclear deterrent was eroded at several levels under the Giscard d'Estaing and Mitterrand presidencies, but the public consensus and symbolic image of independence remained, tattered but influential, especially at the domestic level. American foreign policy once again was characterised by an attempt to impose tighter alliance discipline, in the form of new theatre nuclear forces, the Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles. Interestingly enough, the "new social movements" and their anti-nuclear components, which were so prominent in the European debates of the time, often took on a *Gaullien* appearance (for example, in the writings of Mary Kaldor), but their approach to "detente from below" was, of course, at the level of civil society rather than at that of the nation-state.



Redrawing world order

During most of this time, American foreign policymakers continued to see European independence as dangerous to the alliance and to global stability. While they continued to refer in vague terms to the desirability of European political unification and its corollary, the construction of a "European pillar" to the alliance, they generally indicated that they thought that European policymakers were incapable of effectively pursuing such a project¹⁰. Some US commentators were attracted to Franco-British nuclear co-operation or to Franco-German conventional co-operation as partial measures, but for the most part these were seen as too problematic to be viable in the continuing Cold War setting. Indeed, when the worm of the "Second Cold War" turned, and the Reagan-Gorbachev negotiations led to a new superpower "detente from above", it was widely perceived in the United States that these developments were the culmination of American pressure and therefore a vindication of the American paradigm. Many in Europe, on the other hand, have attributed the progress in arms control to drastic changes within the Soviet Union which had much deeper causes—and thus little relationship to American foreign policy *per se*. Obviously this debate will continue¹¹.

Learning the right lesson

But what is interesting is that whatever the explanation for the huge structural changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in recent years, months and weeks, it remains true that once the "Soviet threat" had been downgraded and once domestic forces in the East had begun to force the pace of communist collapse, the basic rationale for American hegemony and "alliance discipline" seemed to begin to evaporate across Europe. With West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's view of German foreign policy once again looking toward intergovernmentalism and webs of linkages between East and West, with French President François Mitterrand's proposals of a "trans-European confederation" becoming influential at several levels, with Czechoslovakia President Vaclav Havel's notion of a collective security system reaching across NATO and the Warsaw Pact, with many actors proposing an institutionalisation of the CSCE as a framework for co-operation, with European social movements calling for a more nation-state-based defensive structure, and with Gorbachev's "Common European Home" looking less like Finlandisation and more like "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals," it might appear that post-postwar Europe will look less and less like the tired American vision of Europe and more and more like the plurilateralist *Gaullien* design¹².

Thus the failure of American foreign policy in Europe—and, it could be argued, in the world in general—has been to a great extent the result of the United States' rigid adherence to the Cold War paradigm of international relations. General de Gaulle, whatever his faults (and it would be difficult not to admit that they were many, as domestic events in 1968 would most clearly show), at least contained an authentic vision of a world without the Cold War. And it would seem that he correctly identified several of the most significant features of that world—intergovernmentalism, co-operation, webs of bilateral relations, and "detente from below" At the same time, despite Secretary Baker's call for a "new architecture" for Europe—a phrase, at least, many Europe can identify with¹³—American foreign policymakers are still floundering in psychologically unfamiliar territory.

They are floundering because the lessons which they *thought* they had learned from de Gaulle were the wrong lessons, and because they did not perceive—and were intellectually unprepared to conceive—the right lessons. For this reason, it is not merely the process of American foreign policymaking¹⁴ which makes the United States inept as an international actor in the rapidly changing world of the 1990s. It is also the fact that the content of the most significant dimensions of the new, emerging world order still elicit visceral puzzlement and cognitive dissonance. The longer that American foreign policymakers think of Europe, and of the world, in Cold War terms, the more difficult they will find it to devise a foreign policy which can give the United States a relevant and constructive role to play in the world—and the more likely it becomes that American economic decline will be paralleled by a new and even more rapid decline in political influence in a post-war world.

References

¹ - See George W. Ball, "Slogans and Realities", *Foreign Affairs*, vol 47, no 4 (July 1969), pp 623-641

² - See James O. Goldsborough, "France, the European Crisis and the Alliance", *Foreign Affairs*, vol 52, no 3 (April 1974), pp 538-555.

³ - For Example, consider the following quotation: "In the long run, the restoration of Europe requires the reassociation of its western and eastern halves. In the shorter run, it can best be served by the continued integration of Western Europe and its close co-operation with the United States. There is no incompatibility between the two objectives. The reassociation of Europe will not be achieved by a disunited Western Europe, divorced from America", Zbigniew Brzezinski, "America and Europe", *Foreign Affairs*, vol 49, no 1 (October 1970), pp 11-30, 25-6.

- 4 - Alfred Grosser, *The Foreign Policy of the French Fifth Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1965).
- 5 - For a more extended consideration of this and related arguments, see P.G. Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of de Gaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- 6 - Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, Vol I (Paris: Plon, 1970).
- 7 - Richard H. Ullman, "The Covert French Connection", *Foreign Policy*, no 75 (Summer 1989), pp 3-33.
- 8 - See Robert Aldrich and John Connell, eds., *France in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989), especially later chapters.
- 9 - Z, "The Year of Europe?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol 52, no 2 (January 1974), pp 237-248.
- 10 - It is also interesting to notice that the supply of articles in *Foreign Affairs* on European subjects by *American Establishment authors* seems almost to dry in the late 1970s and through much of the 1980s.
- 11 - Cf. Kennet Dyson, ed, *European Detente: Case Studies in the Politics of East-West Relations* (London: Pinter, 1986), and Mary Kaldor, Gerard Holden and Richard Falk, eds, *The New Detente: Rethinking East-West Relations* (London and Tokyo: Verso and the United Nations University, 1989).
- 12 - For a prescient article, see Jolyon Howorth, "The Third Way", *Foreign Policy*, no 65 (Winter 1986-87), pp 114-134.
- 13 - See P G Cerny, *The Changing Architecture of Politics: Structure, Agency, and the Future of the State* (Newbury Park, Cal., London and New Dehli: Sage Publications, 1990).
- 14 - P G Cerny, "Political Entropy and American Decline", *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, vol 18, no 1 (Spring 1989), pp 47-65.