

PRESERVING THE MYTH:
BRITISH AND FRENCH RELATIONS WITH
THE UNITED STATES FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II

By

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At the conclusion of World War II, France and Great Britain were both declining imperial world powers attempting to minimize their loss of influence and prestige. Given similar situations, the two nations nevertheless adopt drastically differing foreign policies. This paper examines both nations' situations following the war in order to ascertain why. The conclusion is that Great Britain was able to maintain its influence by adopting policies in line with those of the United States, which was not a large sacrifice for the British. France, in contrast, was in a reduced state and had to reassert its independence in order to preserve the image of power. Further, the French had a substantially different position regarding postwar Germany, and its foreign policy, therefore, overlapped much less with the United States than Great Britain's did. Close American ties would therefore have come at too great a sacrifice.

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As regards the United States, one sometimes feels that Britain will not take no for an answer, whereas France will not take yes.¹

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest effects of World War II was the profound shift in world power politics that it caused. Having decisively defeated Germany, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) demonstrated the tremendous power that they were to wield following the war. Conversely, France and Great Britain, ancient empires with longstanding global power, had shown their weakness in the face of Germany and their dependence upon the United States and USSR for defense and security. Similar in that they were declining colonial powers, Great Britain and France however developed very different strategies for dealing with this loss of power and retaining as much status and influence as possible. Great Britain, in general, adopted a foreign policy that was relatively in line with most American policies. Indeed, many scholars reason that this period saw the true genesis of the “special relationship” between Great Britain and the United States. France, on the other hand, seemed to contradict the United States at every turn. Rather than trying to get as close to the United States as possible, France seemed to consistently frustrate American policies and interests, at times appearing to contradict its own policies in order to do so. This paper will explore Great Britain and France’s situations following World War II in an attempt to explain why their policies differed so greatly.

Many explanations exist to explain why the Anglo-American relationship was more “special” than any other relationship was following the war. Some argue that cultural and linguistic ties, something obviously not shared to the same degree with France, formed the foundation for what Churchill called the “unity of the English-speaking peoples.”² However, these cultural ties have remained constant for hundreds of years while the relationship has evolved dramatically. Others would argue that a common experience during the war of conquering a mutual enemy proved particularly unifying for the two nations. Though this is likely true, the same circumstance occurred during World War I without establishing the “special relationship.” The end of the war would further have eliminated the basis for such a relationship. Therefore, it is clear that there must have been a more substantial reason why Great Britain’s relationship with the United States following the war was so much closer than France’s.

This paper will examine the period from 1945 to 1950, when the British and French established foreign policies that would remain largely intact for the rest of the twentieth century. I argue that although Great Britain and France were both aging empires struggling to retain power amidst declining global influence, their situations on the world stage and domestically were so different that to preserve their own best interests they had to act in strikingly different ways. I argue that each nation’s power in the global context set the framework for its actions, and that the extent to which its foreign policies overlapped with those of the United States directly affected the potentiality for close American relations. I first explore Great Britain’s position following the war, principally its need for close relations with the United States regarding

economic reconstruction and defense. Then I look at the complementary need of the United States for a strong Great Britain, particularly to prevent Soviet expansion and to open its market for American products. This examination will demonstrate that the mutual need of each nation for the other is exactly what brought about the “special relationship.” I then study France’s situation immediately following the war, specifically looking at similarities and differences with Great Britain. This involves exploring the notion of *grandeur*, the French Communist Party, and France’s view of postwar Germany. This examination will demonstrate that for France to have encouraged stronger relations with the United States it would, of necessity, have had to sacrifice much of its independence, its *grandeur*, and its policy on how to deal with Germany after the war. How to solve the so-called German problem was perhaps the main focus of French foreign policy in years following the war. Thus, France’s foreign policy objectives overlapped with American objectives to a far lesser extent than Great Britain’s did. A close relationship with the United States would have created far too many sacrifices on the part of the French and, therefore, no close ties were sought, resulting in a much less “special” relationship.

BRITISH NEEDS FOR CLOSE ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

Understanding Great Britain's state of affairs following the war means appreciating its financial situation. Put simply, "Fifteen months of war reduced Britain, the world's greatest trading nation and creator of the largest ever empire, to *de facto* international bankruptcy."³ Had the British population known exactly what Great Britain's situation was on May 8, 1945, the jubilation caused by Germany's surrender would have had a much more sober tone. Six years of war, blackouts, bombing, and worry about soldiers' welfare were over; however, Great Britain's situation was grave. Shipping was at half of its pre-war tonnage,⁴ and £1.1 billion in foreign investments had been sold off to finance the war effort.⁵ Foreign currency reserves were dramatically lower and overseas debts were remarkably high: total external debt rose from £476 million before the war to £3.355 billion afterwards.⁶ Exports were at one-third of their pre-war level thanks to bombing, reorganization for specific wartime needs, and delay of all but the most necessary repairs. Further, German bombing damaged four million homes: 210,000 were totally destroyed and 250,000 were rendered uninhabitable. These repairs alone were estimated at £1.45 billion.⁷ To add insult to injury, there were more food rationing programs in effect after the war than during it.⁸ Even more dramatic,

military conscription (drafting) was reinstated after the war to fulfill Great Britain's vast military commitments, a measure unprecedented in peacetime.⁹

For all these reasons, the abrupt end of Lend-Lease at the conclusion of the war was crippling for Great Britain. Long before directly joining in itself, the United States had been contributing to the war effort. Beginning in 1941, the Lend-Lease program enabled the United States to aid materially any country that it deemed vital to its own defense interests. Within this framework, the United States contributed fifty billion dollars to 38 nations. Over twenty-seven billion of these dollars, much in the form of food and supplies, went to Great Britain. (Six billion dollars were returned in "reverse Lend-Lease," by which American soldiers were supplied while in Europe). It is clear that Great Britain grew dependent upon the United States for continuing the war effort as well as for maintaining its current level of subsistence.¹⁰ Thus, when Lend-Lease was abruptly terminated in October of 1945, Great Britain knew that it had to act fast to secure a means for replacing it.

By December of that year, Great Britain had accepted a loan from the United States for \$3.75 billion at two percent interest. At the same time, the United States essentially wrote off nearly all of the Lend-Lease debts. In return, Great Britain had to establish convertibility between currencies and eliminate discriminatory tariff barriers, specifically Britain's Imperial Preference. This would clearly benefit American trade, but it was also thought that it would promote world peace as well. As Will Clayton of the State Department warned, "Nations which act as enemies in the marketplace cannot long be friends at the council table."¹¹ Despite the American intentions, however, British

response was mixed. Many thought that the terms of the agreement were particularly harsh, and they resented what they saw to be the United States taking advantage of an opportune situation.

Many dubbed the loan “‘Britain’s economic Munich,’ [demonstrating] U.S. hegemonic power and Britain’s fall from grace.”¹² There were those in the British elite who expected American aid following the war to be in the form of a gift, a sort of recompense for the larger and longer standing suffering on the part of the British during the war.¹³ The actual terms were indeed far from a gift. The *Economist* expressed British frustration when it wrote, “It is aggravating to find that our reward for losing a quarter of our national wealth in the common cause is to pay tribute for half a century to those who have been enriched by the war.”¹⁴ Along those same lines, a letter in *The Times* acquiesced, “It seems that we can only accept the loan, but with a heavy heart.”¹⁵ The Americans, quite the opposite, were hesitant to give what they did. The general fear was that hard-earned American dollars would be spent promoting the British Empire, establishing socialist programs of nationalization, or subsidizing fighting in Palestine, all of which was unacceptable.¹⁶ A Congressman summed it up best, railing that the loan would “promote too damned much Socialism at home and too much damned Imperialism abroad.”¹⁷ Thus, considering American fears and sentiments, as well as the fact that no other European nation was treated so well, the United States saw the deal as extremely generous.¹⁸

In any event, the loan was only a temporary solution. Following the war, Europe’s situation in general was grave. Agriculture and coal production were

particularly devastated, leaving many hungry and cold. An especially harsh winter in 1946-7 exacerbated the situation and demonstrated Europe's imminent need for foreign aid. In direct response, U.S. Secretary of State Marshall made known in a speech at Harvard that the United States would provide financial support if European nations could come up with a recovery plan upon which they all agreed. British Foreign Secretary Bevin took advantage of this speech to lay out a framework for the distribution of American aid. The Marshall Plan, as it came to be known, distributed twelve billion dollars from 1947 to 1952, increasing production in Western Europe by 35%. Great Britain was the largest recipient of the Marshall Plan with \$3.19 billion total in aid, \$2.85 billion of which was in grants.¹⁹

Great Britain's economic situation was also key to one of its central problems of the twentieth century in general and immediately following the war in particular: that of resolving the disparity between its reduced resource base and its enormous colonial obligations.²⁰ After the war, Great Britain remained the largest empire the earth had ever seen, comprising one quarter of the planet's peoples and lands. This necessitated military commitments in forty different countries across the globe, which became increasingly taxing and unrealistic as Great Britain's hegemonic role and wealth diminished.²¹ At the peak of the British Empire in the 1860's, maintenance of the *Pax Britannica* cost no more than 2% of the GNP; this was less than one quarter of its cost a century later at 9% of GNP.²² These overwhelming responsibilities explain Great Britain's withdrawal of military forces from Greece and Turkey in 1947. The British understood well the dangers of removing their presence from such a location. Though it was not believed that

the USSR had immediate plans for world domination, it certainly would not pass up easy opportunities to expand its influence. British Foreign Minister Bevin argued that, “Even if we do not believe that the Russians have plans for world domination, I am certain they will not be able to resist advancing into any vacuum we may leave.”²³ However, Great Britain’s close working relationship with the United States assured it that the withdrawal was safe, for the United States would assume the responsibility. Therefore, Great Britain announced its withdrawal in February of 1947, making way for the announcement of the Truman Doctrine and the United States’ policy of containment. It would have been impossible for Great Britain to remove its military obligations in Greece and Turkey without the aid of the United States.

Great Britain’s needs for American help went much further than mere economic relief: defense and security were also critical issues following the war. In order to fully understand its foreign policy following the war, one must first examine Great Britain’s vision of the world at this time. This is most aptly summarized in Churchill’s “three circles” conception:

The first circle for us is naturally the British Commonwealth and Empire, with all that that comprises. Then there is also the English-speaking world in which we, Canada and the other British Dominions, and the United States play so important a part. And finally, there is United Europe.... Now if you think of the three inter-linked circles you will see that we are the only country which has a great part in every one of them. We stand in fact at the very point of junction and here is this

island at the very centre of the seaways and perhaps the airways also; we have the opportunity of joining them all together.²⁴

This conception in fact was at the very heart of Great Britain's dilemma following the war: where to place its priorities. Churchill created a rather romantic view of British destiny as a world power, exerting influence and leadership within all of these spheres of influence. The following decades would demonstrate that this conception was not at all pragmatic. The British Empire had been reduced to the British Commonwealth of Nations, which was substantially less beneficial economically. Further, the "English-speaking circle" had at its core the very fundamental problem of its unbalanced nature: "London policymakers could not forget that they remained more dependent upon the power of another nation than at any other time of peace in England's proud history. Nor could they forget that this dependency was not reciprocal; Great Britain needed the United States far more than the Americans relied upon Britain."²⁵ Many argue, in fact, that the emphasis placed by Great Britain on its Atlantic interests was often to the detriment of its European interests. Continually stressing the "special relationship" with the United States resulted in Great Britain joining most European organizations substantially later than others did, thus sacrificing its influence in determining their structures. To this day, Great Britain has yet to commit itself wholeheartedly to the concept of "Europe."²⁶

Directly following the war, however, the "three circles" conception seemed reasonable. Great Britain thought itself a supreme moral victor, having steadfastly stood its ground throughout the entire war against Nazi Germany. It was a traditionally

powerful empire of phenomenal size and enormous diplomatic experience around the world. It had earned its seat next to the United States and the USSR as one of the Big Three at the Yalta Conference following the war to decide the shape of postwar Europe. Indeed, when the term “superpower” was first introduced into political science, it specifically included Great Britain.²⁷ Further, most officials at the war’s end saw Great Britain’s weakened state as temporary. Its unique position within all three circles, the theory went, ensured its economic and diplomatic success.

Furthermore, Great Britain’s position following the war seemed naturally to be that of a third alternative between American capitalism and Soviet communism. Before the fundamentally antagonistic nature of the U.S./USSR relationship was evident to all, Great Britain thought that it could serve as the intermediary between the two foremost, yet very different powers. Such an important position of negotiator would facilitate Great Britain in retaining an enormous amount of power and influence. This is another reason why Great Britain did not stress its European ties as much as it stressed its others: Great Britain saw Europe as weak and defeated. Germany and France were both virtually destroyed and of much lesser importance to Great Britain than the United States or the USSR. It is also important to remember Great Britain’s physical geographical setting: an island physically distinct from Europe. The mentality that this introduces is one in which Great Britain remains, as Churchill described, *with* Europe, not *of* it.

Yet, as the years progressed, it became increasingly evident that Great Britain’s reign as superpower was over. Sir Henry Tizard aptly and justly said:

We [Great Britain] persist in regarding ourselves as a great power capable of everything and only temporarily handicapped by economic difficulties. We are not a great power and never will be again. We are a great nation but if we continue to behave like a great power we shall soon cease to be a great nation. Let us take warning from the fate of the great powers of the past and not burst ourselves with pride.²⁸

This issue would plague British politics for decades. In 1962, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson succinctly stated: “Britain has lost an empire but has not yet found a role.”²⁹ Many British officials were still clinging to the British *grandeur* in which they were raised. They came to realize the reality of their situation at drastically different times (and to differing degrees). This is evidenced by the fact that as late as 1964, newly elected Prime Minister Harold Wilson was able to claim that “We are a world power and a world influence or we are nothing.”³⁰

However, directly following the war Great Britain recognized its dependence upon the United States for its (and Europe’s) immediate security. There was a tangible fear amongst many British statesmen and Europeans in general that the United States would withdraw back into its isolationist ideology and abandon Europe and the world to their own devices. Certainly some have argued that the United States only entered the war because it was attacked at Pearl Harbor, and that its only goal in the war was thus realized upon the defeat of Germany and Japan. Any efforts, therefore, that could tie the Americans to European affairs and security were pivotal in changing the shape of postwar politics.

Great Britain recognized its inability to police the world and maintain the *Pax Britannica*. It believed strongly that the immense wealth and power of the United States dictated that they must step into that role in assuring a new *Pax Americana*. Defeated Germany was obviously no longer the principal threat to British security; increasingly, however, the USSR was recognized to be the next potential menace. As it became progressively evident that the United States and the USSR would be the dominant postwar powers, many British began to fear expansionist intentions of the Soviets. A Europe crushed by six years of war would put up little defense against an advancing Soviet army. Churchill was one of the earlier politicians to anticipate the impending and growing danger of the USSR: “On his way to the Tehran Conference at the end of 1943 Churchill told Harold Macmillan: ‘Germany is finished, though it may take some time to clean up the mess. The real problem now is Russia. I can’t get the Americans to see it.’”³¹ Hassner and Roper insist that:

The first goal of British foreign policy had to be to defend Western Europe against the threat of Soviet expansionism and that, in order to reach this goal, it was essential to tie America, seen as naive and hesitant, firmly to Europe. It is only a slight exaggeration, therefore, to claim that “for nearly three years [Prime Minister] Attlee and [Foreign Minister] Bevin fought their battle with [Soviet leader] Stalin virtually alone,” and then that “the policy of Great Britain amounted almost to a conspiracy to involve the United States more actively in world affairs.”³²

Less than a year after the end of the war in March 1946, Winston Churchill, no longer in power, made his famous Iron Curtain Speech. In it, he denounced the isolation that had fallen between the USSR and the western powers, and insisted that strong Anglo-American relations were the solution:

[Churchill] did “not believe that Soviet Russia desires another war” but was “convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength.” In other words, the extent of Soviet expansion would depend on the West’s response. Churchill called for “a special relationship between the United States and the British Commonwealth,” which would mean combined military staffs, shared bases, resources and weapons, and eventually, perhaps, common citizenship. This “fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples” was, he insisted, the only help for a “haggard” world, in which all countries, except America and the British Commonwealth, were now confronted by the peril of communism.³³

Increasingly following Churchill’s lead, Great Britain’s Atlantic ties became more important than any others it possessed. As the rift between the United States and the USSR became deeper and more evident, Great Britain recognized early that its allegiance lay with the Americans. Thus, by placing that relationship above all others in importance, Great Britain could attempt to retain as much influence, status, and prestige as possible. During the war, Harold Macmillan drew an appropriate analogy, describing British relation to the Americans as “‘Greeks to their Romans’: loyal subordinates to the new imperium, valued for their advice and so allowed to retain a greater influence than their

reduced circumstances would otherwise allow.³⁴ By becoming the United States' top deputy facing the Soviets, Great Britain maximized its declining situation.

* * *

Therefore, Great Britain had numerous reasons for fostering close ties with the United States at the conclusion of the war. Economically, American aid was absolutely essential to British survival. British security was likewise directly attached to the United States. Further, a close bond with the United States was seen as the easiest and most natural means to retaining international prestige and influence. As Churchill once tried to explain to de Gaulle, "It is better to persuade the strong than to oppose them."³⁵ By dovetailing their already similar foreign policy objectives with those of the United States, Great Britain was best able to preserve its image of world power.

AMERICAN NEEDS FOR CLOSE ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

It is more than evident that the “special relationship” between Great Britain and the United States was never a perfectly balanced one. Immediately following the war, in fact, it was immensely lopsided. However, that does not mean that the United States had little need for close Anglo-American relations. The truth is quite the contrary, in fact. However disproportionate the relationship, Great Britain was the United States’ most important ally at the end of the war. More than with any other country, the United States understood the needs for close cooperation with Great Britain. The State Department argued that this was especially true in the absence of any other significant ally.³⁶ Europe lay in ruins and its future remained uncertain. Germany was crushed; France was seen as surprisingly weak, having capitulated after only six weeks of German attacks in May-June 1940. Great Britain was the only ally upon which the United States could rely with any confidence. One might be tempted to argue that the United States simply had no better European options for a strong ally. Nevertheless, there are still a number of reasons why close Anglo-American ties were particularly important to American interests.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was one of the major proponents of close Anglo-American ties. It rightly argued that Great Britain was firmly anti-Soviet and pro-American. Further, the British enjoyed internal political stability and were

willing to bear a wide range of international responsibilities. All of these factors made Great Britain an “indispensable ally.”³⁷

There were a number of significant reasons why the Anglo-American relationship was vital to the United States. One such reason was simply that the United States could not impose its decisions in Europe alone. It was important not to appear to be dictating policies from across the Atlantic, and Great Britain, with its socialist policies, was more readily trusted in many countries than the United States was alone. The CIA wrote on 7 December 1949, that “The United Kingdom is, by a vast margin, the most valuable and dependable’ of American allies.”³⁸ As it was the moral victor of the war for the European continent, many other countries looked to Great Britain for leadership. For example, when Marshall gave his famous speech suggesting that the United States would help with European economic recovery provided that Europe come up with a universal plan, it was Great Britain that immediately took the initiative and set up meetings with other European nations to discuss terms for the aid. Close relations with Europe’s most powerful nation were certainly beneficial for American foreign policy.

Further reasons for American desires to establish close relations with the British lie in economics. Very simply, “the opening up of the empire was one of the prime objectives of the new hegemonic power.”³⁹ The American vision of the world following the war was one in which all nations freely engaged together in trade. It saw competition between economic blocs as one of the main causes of war, and thus believed that the removal of imperial trade preferences was a step in the direction of ensuring peace. The issue of empire was always a difficult one for Great Britain and the United States in the

decades following the war. The United States' policy-makers believed that imperial preferences were detrimental to economic freedom, while Great Britain saw its empire as the foundation for its success and its claim to superpower status.

The United States' concrete need to export to Great Britain directly supported its conceptual goal of worldwide free trade. There was a general fear among American officials that the massive industrial expansion during the war would surely result in surplus production after the war unless overseas markets could be found.⁴⁰ Thus, Great Britain was regarded as a large area to which the United States could export products, a high priority for the United States' own financial security. This also played a hand in the writing off of most Lend-Lease debts to European nations. Though it was an act of generosity, the United States simply could not afford Europe to remain indefinitely in debt, unable to purchase American products.

The most critical impetus for the United States to encourage strong relations with Great Britain grew from a fear of Soviet expansion. Immediately following the war, no such fear was prevalent among the Americans; indeed, they anticipated cooperation with the USSR in re-establishing postwar Europe. It is hard to pinpoint when the United States came to the realization that the USSR posed a real threat; different agencies and individuals became convinced at different times. Nevertheless, the early warnings were there. In March 1946, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned privately that "the defeat or disintegration of the British Empire would eliminate from Eurasia the last bulwark of resistance between the United States and Soviet expansion... Militarily, our present position as a world power is of necessity closely interwoven with that of Great Britain."⁴¹

Great Britain was thus seen as the European anchor of capitalist strength, fending off Soviet communism.

The CIA went further, insisting that,

The United States should be prepared to pay a high price given that Britain was America's "only powerful ally." In addition much of her extra-European influence was based upon the confidence and expertise of local British personnel rather than on physical power. Comparable American influence could probably be introduced only at greater expense and effort. It was thus in America's interest to subsidize Britain with her worldwide network of bases, territories and contacts.⁴²

Thus, close relations with Great Britain meant making use of British military infrastructure and intelligence already established throughout the world. This was indeed a significant benefit of close Anglo-American relations.

As time passed, the importance of the relationship, as it pertained to the prevention of Soviet expansion, became self-evident. Two pivotal events in this realization were the communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 and the Soviet blockade of the Western zones in Berlin from the summer of 1948.⁴³ These events solidified the fear of Soviet expansion and aggression in American minds. The coup in Czechoslovakia, feared to have been orchestrated by the USSR, was the first sign that the spread of communism was a genuine threat. Then in June 1948, the USSR severed rail, road, and water routes into West Berlin, isolating the Western occupation zone. American and British Air Forces responded by supplying the two million West Berliners

by air. 277,000 flights were made over fifteen months, many at three-minute intervals.

This was an enormous and dangerous undertaking that demonstrated the Western Powers' willingness to stand together against the USSR. It was especially important in that it earned Great Britain the reputation among Americans of a staunch and like-minded ally. This was the most obvious demonstration to the American public of solid cooperation since the war, and it demonstrated the dependable nature of British relations. This contrasted sharply with the less helpful and less resolute behavior of the French.⁴⁴

Another direct response to the Berlin airlift was the deployment of American bombers to a base in Great Britain. Construction on the base was begun in 1946, but sixty B-29 "atomic bombers" were dispatched there on 15 July 1948. Though none of them were outfitted with nuclear armaments, the threat directed at the Soviets, as well as Anglo-American cooperation, were clear for all to see. In fact, cooperation was so smooth that no formal agreement was made regarding the bombers. One Air Force commander marveled, "Never before in history has one first-class power gone into another first-class power's country without any agreement. We were just told to come over and 'we should be pleased to have you.'"⁴⁵

Great Britain was not worried about securing a formal written agreement on the terms of American occupation on the base. More important for them was the assurance that the United States would indeed be committed to Europe and its security: "On a military level, in mounting the Berlin airlift the Anglo-American alliance had been revived almost on its Second World War footing. With the arrival of the B-29 bombers

Bevin had the practical assurance of the American commitment to Europe. The Anglo-American special relationship was working.”⁴⁶

Therefore, the five years following the war solidified in the minds of British and American officials the mutual benefits of a close relationship. The State Department completed a major study, *Essential Elements of US-UK Relations*, just two months before North Korea attacked South Korea in June 1950. The study concluded that the dissolution of the Anglo-American relationship “would be a major disaster. No other country has the same qualifications for being our principal ally and partner as the UK... The British... are our most reliable and useful allies, with whom a special relationship should exist.” Further, the paper argued that, “serious impairment” of Anglo-American relations “would require a whole reorientation of US foreign policy, since the achievement of many of our objectives... depends on the British agreeing with those objectives and taking the necessary action to accomplish them.” The CIA concluded that “we cannot afford to permit a deterioration in our relationship,” based as it was on a “fundamental identity of our interests.”⁴⁷ The CIA thus recognized the fact that the bases for American and British foreign policies were essentially the same, and that a strong relationship was thus of interest to both nations.

* * *

Thus, the immediate postwar years saw a profound increase in Great Britain’s strategic value for the United States. It was already a useful ally for economic, diplomatic, military, infrastructural, and European leadership reasons. The Soviet threat, however, truly amplified the Americans’ desire for intimate relations with Great Britain.

It was really the fear of communism that motivated the Americans to break out of their isolation and create strong relations with Great Britain.

THE FRENCH SITUATION

For more than four years, France was under German control. This fact and its implications are paramount to the understanding of France's postwar foreign policy. Before the war, the French military was well respected and thought to be one of the strongest and most efficient in the world. Its dramatic and swift loss in a mere six weeks to the German affront was devastating. The shock was felt across the world, leaving both Great Britain and the United States in utter disbelief. The French themselves were horrified by the failure of their government and military to defend them and, consequently, had little source of national identity during the occupation. The northern part of the country was directly occupied by Germany troops, while the southern part was controlled by Pétain's pro-German Vichy government. Bell states, "French institutions, in contrast to those in Britain, [were] severely damaged by the war. The collapse of 1940... dealt a death-blow to the Third Republic. Pétain... set out to replace it by a new *État français*, which never achieved coherent form and was utterly discredited by 1944."⁴⁸

A distinguished officer of the French military seeking refuge in Great Britain, General Charles de Gaulle saw himself as the only man capable of reestablishing France's identity. Appalled by the creation of the "traitorous" Vichy government, he

immediately set out to oppose it and continue the resistance. On June 18, 1940, de Gaulle gave a speech from London on BBC radio in which he called upon all Frenchmen to resist the Germans and the Vichy government, and continue to fight alongside the British. Though his now-famous appeal went virtually unrecognized throughout the world at the time, de Gaulle slowly accumulated a reputation and built a small but fierce resistance force, the Free French, from London. After commanding Free French forces in battles in Africa, de Gaulle was present at the liberation of Paris in 1944. De Gaulle admitted later in his memoirs that he implored Allied Commander-in-Chief Eisenhower to allow Free French forces to liberate Paris when the time came, insisting upon the importance that the liberation come from the French.⁴⁹ Eisenhower acquiesced. De Gaulle recognized the formidable task that lay ahead for the French, and acknowledged his duty to recreate a strong sense of national identity. His goal throughout his leadership of France was to restore the French sense of status and *grandeur*. The very first sentence of his *Mémoires de Guerre* [War Memoirs] is: "Toute ma vie, je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France [All my life, I have had a certain idea of France]."⁵⁰ He was not going to let four years of German occupation destroy that.

On August 25, 1944, then, the Parisians were overjoyed to be finally free from the Germans, but still had no idea what the future held. De Gaulle's speech that day marked a climactic moment in France's history: "Paris! Paris outraged! Paris broken! Paris martyred! But Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the armies of France, with the support and the help of the whole of France, of France that is fighting, of France alone, of true France, of eternal France."⁵¹ De Gaulle

conveniently forgot to mention the Allied Forces without whom France could not have been liberated, and thanks to whom he was allowed to even make his speech. However, such a speech was absolutely necessary for recreating France's sense of *grandeur*.

Stephen E. Ambrose said of that quotation, "Not one word in the last sentence was true, but through these words de Gaulle gave back to France not only her honor but her soul."⁵² De Gaulle and the Free French were the only direct connection between the France that existed before German occupation, and what existed at the end of 1944. Thus, French identity was of necessity built around the strength of de Gaulle's leadership and the labeling of the Vichy government as traitorous. Only with these two elements could France be seen to have existed through the entire occupation, struggling against its adversaries. It was crucial for de Gaulle to build the illusion that liberation had come from within, and not almost entirely from the Allied Forces. As President of the French State, de Gaulle held this mentality of French *grandeur* and independence as the foundation for everything he did, to the continual frustration of the United States. If France were seen as dependent upon anyone else, de Gaulle believed, it would question his carefully constructed and delicate illusion: that of a France powerful in and of itself.

There are hence a number of instances following the war in which de Gaulle contradicted the United States on seemingly meaningless issues. De Gaulle was consistently willing to sacrifice Allied relations whenever a shred of French pride was at stake.⁵³ The most famous such incident occurred in response to France's exclusion from the Yalta Conference in 1945, where the Big Three formulated the structure of postwar Europe. De Gaulle saw this as an insult to France and as evidence that the wanted to

block the return of France to great-power status. He therefore declined Roosevelt's invitation to meet him in Algiers following the conference.⁵⁴ De Gaulle was irritated at missing the Yalta conference and then at being invited to meet the American President in French territory. On the other hand, Roosevelt's health was failing and he could hardly be expected to make a special trip just to see de Gaulle. In any case, the fact that even the French public thought de Gaulle had gone too far demonstrates well the extent to which he was willing to go to protect French independence and *grandeur*.⁵⁵ He would do nothing that could appear to sacrifice French pride this. Even as head of the French State twenty years later, de Gaulle was keenly aware that the therapeutic dose of self-confidence that he wanted to administer to France depended less on actual independence than on the appearance of independence.⁵⁶

The real paradox was indeed that France was helplessly dependent upon American aid for its recovery after the war. De Gaulle was attempting to demonstrate French independence when his country's very existence was predicated upon this aid. The economic situation following the war was indeed grim:

No country could have undergone defeat, four years of occupation and pillage, the absence of two million of its work force (deported war prisoners, doing forced labor, and so on), and then the liberation campaign, without being economically drained. In 1944, production was less than a third of what it was in 1938, itself a very poor year. Nine hundred thousand dwellings, 3,125 bridges and works of art had been destroyed, as well as thousands of factories, two-thirds of the country's

harbor installations, three-quarters of its locomotives, and nine-tenths of its road vehicles. In addition, the French were facing imminent famine.⁵⁷

Further, “Although the country’s economic potential remained great, all plants stood in need of modernisation, especially in the coal industry, ...a number of cities had been destroyed, transport was at a standstill, ...agricultural production was not faring much better, and finally, inflation and unemployment were rising.”⁵⁸ The economic situation was grave, and French officials were keenly aware that that implied dependence on the United States. Monnet, head of the central French planning agency, understood that France faced the choice of “modernization or decadence.”⁵⁹ Modernization, an absolutely necessary component in reestablishing the economic independence essential to France’s *grandeur*, necessarily implied increased dependence on the United States, to the chagrin of Monnet and de Gaulle.

In any event, France was the second-largest recipient of Marshall Aid, obtaining \$2.7 billion, nearly entirely in the form of grants.⁶⁰ Most Lend-Lease debts were simultaneously written off. The package did not, however, come without stipulations. Firstly, France had to balance its budget and control inflation, so that American credit should hold its value. Secondly, France had to open its colonial markets to American business. This created markets for American goods and sources of raw materials.⁶¹

While it is certainly true that “the Americans were generous in writing off Lend-Lease aid which was due to be repaid, in providing loans, and in paying for Canadian agricultural produce to be sent to France,”⁶² the French response at the time was not one of gratitude. Part of the free trade requirement was a very specific demand for the film

industry that limited the number of French films shown in cinemas. Such a seemingly trivial detail sparked public outcry, and the agreement was denounced as American cultural imperialism.⁶³ While not a pivotal economic issue, the opening of French cinemas to more American films was indeed an effective method for promoting capitalism. An issue far more complex than commerce, the American embassy stated that films were “one of the most effective media for the dissemination of information regarding the United States.”⁶⁴ However upset the French were at the conditions of the American aid, there was no one else to provide it. “Some of the French opposed Marshall Aid vehemently. Some welcomed it. Some agonised over the choice. But meanwhile successive governments took the dollars, and on the whole used them to good advantage.”⁶⁵ After all, no one else was going to provide the 1,340 locomotives or the 25,750 tractors that France imported from the United States in from late 1945 to late 1947.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, it is critical to see the aid through French eyes. With the removal of barriers to American exports and investment, “France was inundated not only by American products but also by propaganda selling the American way of life.”⁶⁷ Similar to the debate over Hollywood films was the controversy that erupted over the attempt to establish Coca-Cola bottling plants in France. A seemingly absurd topic for serious debate, Coca-Cola nonetheless became the center of a heated dispute. Dubbed “the most American thing in America,” Coca-Cola was a product marketed by mass advertising, symbolic of high consumption, and living proof of the success of free enterprise.⁶⁸ James Farley, its president and a politically powerful anticommunist, said that it contained the

“essence of capitalism” in every bottle.⁶⁹ Surprisingly, there was enough support for the attempt to ban Coca-Cola from establishing itself in France that legal suits were filed under the premise that it was dangerous to public health. The case was appealed repeatedly and dragged on for years before it was decided that Coca-Cola was not a health hazard.

Though both part of a rather farcical episode, Coca-Cola and films were symbolic of something far deeper. They represented a penetration of American values into French culture, and clearly demonstrated American power and French weakness.⁷⁰ In years to come, as France’s power grew back, American products and culture became easier to accept. At the time, however, with France’s dependence on the United States so overwhelming, these issues were much more difficult for the French public to accept. This left the French government caught between the anger of French public opinion and the dire need for American aid.⁷¹

Immediately following the war, however, the United States was primarily acting to remove preferential trade barriers and to open French markets to American products. Increasingly though, there were those whose motivation was the desire to prevent the spread of communism. An economically weak France was a prime target for a communist take-over, obviously unfavorable as far as the United States was concerned. At no other point in French history was a communist seizure of power so likely.⁷² This rapidly became the most compelling reason for sending economic aid to France. After all, France was the geographic and historical heart of Europe, and its collapse would have been a decisive blow to the West.⁷³

It is instructive to examine the French electoral results in the years directly following the war, particularly as they compare with Great Britain. The following table demonstrates the substantial electoral power enjoyed by the French Communists, and the near nonexistence of the British Communist Party.

British and French election results 1945-1951⁷⁴

FRANCE	1945 (Oct)	1946 (Jun)	1946 (Nov)		1951 (Jun)
Communists	26.0	26.2	28.6		25.6
Socialists	23.8	21.1	17.9		14.3
Christian democrats	24.9	28.1	26.3		12.4
Gaullists ^a	n/a	n/a	n/a		21.6
UNITED KINGDOM	1945 (Jul)			1950 (Feb)	1951 (Oct)
Labour	47.8			46.1	48.8 ^b
Conservatives	39.8			43.5	48.0
Liberal Democrats	9.0			9.1	2.5
Communists	0.4			0.3	0.1

- a. The Gaullist Party was not in existence during the 1945-6 elections.
- b. Though the Labour party received more votes overall in 1951, the Conservatives elected 26 more MPs and therefore won control of Parliament.

Though the British Labour Party supported and implemented socialist policies, it was fundamentally not a communist party. Support for the British Communist Party during this period never reached one half of one percent of the electorate. In contrast, the French Communist Party performed extremely well, consistently receiving one quarter of the votes cast. This earned it a place as part of the French coalition government. It was at this point, when its strength was the greatest, that the threat of a coup was strongest. As it was, the fear of a hostile takeover was largely unrealistic; such an action would have been out of the question. The inevitable American intervention aside, there was simply

not enough support for it amongst the French themselves. A communist attempt to gain control forcefully of the government would have become, in fact, a government *against* the people.⁷⁵ This is a fact, however, that is made clear only with hindsight. At the time, the fear of such a coup rapidly grew in intensity. France was the only country in northern Europe with a strong Communist Party, something of which the United States was keenly aware.

The French were, on occasion, able to profit from the threat of communist expansion. When Lend-Lease was terminated, for example, and before Marshall Plan funds were secured, France was in dire straits and required immediate help. It requested interim aid from the United States, and used communist apprehension to secure it. Insisting that strikes, misery, and inflation were increasing, [Foreign Minister] Bidault warned that the Communists might agitate the working masses enough to incite an overthrow of the government. The interim aid was immediately granted.⁷⁶

American fears of communist influence in France were strong enough eventually to force their removal from power in the coalition government altogether. As the French Prime Minister in 1947, Ramadier asked Parliament for a vote of confidence. He got it by 360 votes to 186, with all of the Communists having voted against him.⁷⁷ He seized the opportunity and summarily dismissed all Communist Party members from the coalition government. This was no coincidence: the Americans had made it quite plain that they were ready to grant massive aid through the Marshall Plan, provided that the Communists were excluded from power.⁷⁸ Throughout this period, the CIA was also

secretly funding anti-communist and non-communist trade unions in order to limit the power of those that were communist, the CGT in particular.⁷⁹

Therefore, although communism did not produce widespread American panic immediately following the war, it did not take long for the alarm to grow. The peril of France falling to the communists was a grave one: as the heart of Europe, its toppling would certainly precipitate a disaster for the rest of the continent. This is why U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson's ad hoc committee (SWNCC) in April 1947 concluded that France was the only country for whom it was imperative to provide economic aid solely on the basis of political factors.⁸⁰

* * *

France's situation following the war was bleak, and de Gaulle recognized what was necessary to reestablish French *grandeur*. Though hopelessly dependent on the United States for their economic recovery and security, the French nevertheless asserted a power and independence far greater their actual situation merited. The Americans were forced to put up with this precisely because the threat of communism was so palpable. French security was essential to France, but also to the United States.

FRANCE AND THE GERMAN PROBLEM

Understanding France after the war also necessarily involves grasping France's stance on Germany, as it was the primary focus of French foreign policy following the war. Germany had obviously been the center of French attention during the war, and was also the source of France's humiliation and defeat. Its postwar structure, dictated by the Allies, was therefore of paramount importance to de Gaulle and the French government.⁸¹ De Gaulle's goal was to press French interests as far as possible in order to prejudice the eventual settlement in French favor.⁸² After all, there was a feeling in France that having won the war in 1918, they had bungled the peace. This must absolutely be avoided after 1945. The threat of German aggression must be decisively eliminated.⁸³

To France, this implied several specific tenets. First, the left bank of the Rhine should be separated from the rest of Germany as a buffer state. Second, the Ruhr coalfields, the basis of Germany's military strength, should be placed under the supervision of an international authority. Third, the coal-rich Saar should once again be economically tied to France in a customs union.⁸⁴

The French saw the separation of the Rhineland from Germany as strictly necessary for French survival. This region was the industrial powerhouse of Germany, and its separation would preclude any future German aggression toward the French. The

second and third demands were directly tied to France's severe need for coal. By placing the Saar region under international control, France hoped first to isolate this resource from being used in any potential German aggression, and second to use that international body to exact reparations for French suffering during the war at German hands. The French saw this as their fundamental right after the war. Paying the Germans with scarce American dollars for coal that was its due for reparations seemed absolutely absurd to French officials.⁸⁵ They wanted to harness German industrial strength for the whole of Europe while leaving it under international control, which would limit its potential ability to act aggressively and independently. "Under French political tutelage, German industrial power could be employed to the benefit of all of Europe, but Germany itself would remain so shackled by administrative controls as to be rendered incapable of threatening the political equilibrium of the continent."⁸⁶

Immediately following the war, France, aware of the very different American and British plans for the postwar Germany, attempted to further its policies through a relationship with the USSR. De Gaulle succeeded in negotiating a minor treaty with a rather disinterested Stalin, but it was a concrete sign to the United States of how far France was willing to go to press its policies on Germany. In any case, the treaty had little long-term effect and, once France accepted the Marshall Plan aid, there was no longer any room to play the two superpowers off one another.

France's deep-rooted feelings about the postwar settlement of Germany therefore generated much resentment when the Yalta Conference agreements were nothing close to that for which France was hoping. France was certain that only a weakened and

politically separated Germany could ensure against future aggression. The United States, however, was growing increasingly suspicious of the USSR and communist expansion. It therefore wanted a strong, re-energized, and revitalized Germany to serve as a buffer, defending Europe against any aggressive Soviet intentions.

Thus, the United States in general did not support appropriating reparations from Germany in order to supply France with coal. Rather, Germany should sell that coal in order to reinvigorate its own economy. Further, American officials saw French desires to separate parts of Germany as absurd. Removing Germany's industrial heart would prove crippling; its economy could not withstand such a blow. Moreover, the idea of submitting the Ruhr region to an international administrative body would open the door to further Soviet influence. In short, "France should stop being obsessed with Germany, curb its appetite for German coal, and focus on rebuilding its own economy, the Americans lectured. They promised that the atom bomb and the United Nations guaranteed against German aggression."⁸⁷

French officials, however, were not convinced. Were war to break out with Germany and the USSR, the French knew that the United States did not intend to shield them from it. In fact, Pentagon plans of 1947–48 were based upon a quick withdrawal to Great Britain and northern Africa, from where the United States would attack the Soviets with atom bombs.⁸⁸ This meant horror worse than the defeat of 1940. Foreign Minister Bidault and Armed Forces Minister Teitgen worried that "The Russian hordes will occupy the area, raping women and deporting the male population for slave labor in the

Soviet Union... France and Western Europe will be ...devastated by the Soviet hordes and [then] atomized by the United States.’’⁸⁹

These fears ran strong and deep through the French government, and permeated its foreign policy. Controlling German resources to eliminate the threat of a future attack was central to French foreign policy. After pushing their goals as far as they possibly could from their weakened position, French officials finally realized they would have to come up with an alternate plan or risk being dictated to by the Americans. The alternate plan became the European Coal and Steel Community, invented by Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, and the head of the economic planning agency, the Commissariat au Plan, Jean Monnet.⁹⁰ The provisions of the ECSC call for the coal and steel industries of France and Germany (and any other nation that wished to take part) to be unified under a single authority. This ingenious plan had numerous benefits for the French. First, war with Germany would be rendered not only unthinkable, but also materially impossible.⁹¹ German industrial capacity would be under the same authority as the French. Further, the plan would also give the French ready access to the coal it so desperately needed. Finally, the plan was the first step toward a European Federation, in which France could take a leadership role. Best of all, the French finally had a plan that would be supported by the Americans, who were “well pleased,” by its announcement in May 1950.⁹² For all these reasons, the ECSC was a major constructive step toward solving the German problem that plagued French officials throughout the years immediately following the war. Through it, France was finally able to accomplish its primary foreign policy goals without directly opposing those of the United States.

* * *

The French invention of the ECSC sheds much light onto France's foreign policy goals leading up to 1950. In fact, it clearly demonstrates that restraining Germany was of paramount concern to French policy-makers, and that their disagreement with the United States on this issue presented fundamental obstacles to Franco-American relations. De Gaulle clearly recognized this barrier, as evidenced by his early attempts to cultivate closer ties with the Soviet Union. The French, so recently under German occupation, would not subscribe to the American claim that a revitalized and rearmed Germany was essential to their own interests. French goals for foreign policy following the war, therefore, were fundamentally different from those of the United States, precluding intimate Franco-American relations.

CONCLUSION

Immediately following World War II, France and Great Britain were in seemingly parallel situations. Both were large colonial powers accustomed to considerable international status and influence. Both had fairly liberal democratic governments. Both were economically weakened by the war, and were consequently dependent on the United States for recovery and security. In addition, both were forced to deal with a fundamental decline in world power.

The United States also had similar need of both Great Britain and France. As far as economics is concerned, the United States wanted to open up their empires and remove preferential trade barriers. This was important to the United States both for economic gain and also for its vision of maintaining peace. The Americans believed that economic conflict led to military conflict, and that the establishment of a multilateral system of world trade with no discriminatory trade barriers would promote world peace.⁹³ Further, the United States needed both nations to become stronger in order to defend Europe against potential Soviet expansion. The longer that Europe lay in economic ruin, the greater the chance that it would fall to communist forces. It was this threat that forced the “penny-pinching” American Congress out of its isolationism.⁹⁴

However many the similarities between their situations, France and Great Britain's vastly dissimilar foreign policies nevertheless demonstrated that there were also profound differences. While both were keen to minimize their loss of power during the American and Soviet ascension, they still adopted drastically different policies. Great Britain tended to dovetail its policies with American policies, turning itself into a sort of deputy of the United States, and consequently forming the "special relationship." Great Britain had no image of weakness to fend off, and its objectives were similar enough to those of the United States that it was able to cultivate close Anglo-American relations without sacrificing many of those objectives. In fact, many American economic policies were similar to those of Great Britain before the establishment of British Imperial Preference in 1932.⁹⁵ Therefore, "the new US policies could still be seen as a return to 'our' policies: Britain had finally converted the USA to the correct way of organising the world!"⁹⁶

The French situation was different, because the realities of defeat and weakness were so much harder to deny. Humiliated and shamed, French officials knew that they were fighting to reestablish a national position and to sustain a necessary national myth. They knew they were vulnerable and that they had to demonstrate their independence every step of the way.⁹⁷ The French therefore strove to reconcile their aspirations with their actual capabilities.

Furthermore, the French initially did not have a strong preference for creating close relations with the United States rather than with the USSR. They recognized Stalin's brutality and resented Russian domination of Eastern Europe. However, the

Americans and the British often seemed equally overbearing and contemptuous of the French, provoking the Soviets as much as the Soviets provoked them.⁹⁸ In both cases, the French saw that they were to play a subservient role, following the wishes of others.

The French were therefore situated between two opposing powers, neither of which was fully in tune with French thinking. French dependence on American aid absolutely precluded alignment with the USSR, but its own foreign policy goals and Communist Party kept it from becoming an enthusiastic ally of the United States. The ever-present German problem was a constant reminder of how different American and French foreign policies were. Fostering closer ties with the United States would have required major sacrifices of French foreign policy goals as well as profound change in French popular opinion. For all these reasons, it is not surprising that France acted in the way it did following World War II. Close Anglo-American ties cost the British relatively little, whereas close Franco-American ties would have cost the French their sense of independence, their *grandeur*, as well as substantial sacrifices of their foreign policy goals. Therefore, close American ties would only have come at too great a cost.

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