

**Untying the Gaullian Knot: France and the Struggle to Overcome the Cold
War Order, 1963-1968**

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Abstract

On 14 January 1963, French President General Charles de Gaulle shook the Western world. During a press conference, he announced that France was not only vetoing the British application to join the European Economic Community, but that it was also rejecting US President John F. Kennedy's proposal to integrate the French nuclear *force de frappe* into the Multilateral Force. In the aftermath of the Algerian War, De Gaulle's spectacular *double non* was meant to signal the shift to a more ambitious diplomatic agenda, which centred on the twin aims of recapturing France's Great Power status, and striving to overcome the Cold War bipolar order. In the next five years, France placed itself at the forefront of international affairs through a series of bold initiatives that affected all areas of the world. Yet, by the summer 1968, the General's grand design was effectively in ruins, following a series of domestic and international setbacks.

Despite the fact that there is vast literature on the subject, there are still important divisions when it comes to assessing the exact intentions of the French President. Was he primarily pursuing revisionist goals, or was he in fact more interested by traditional Great Power interests? Was De Gaulle anti-American? This dissertation aims to present a more nuanced picture of French foreign policy between 1963 and 1968. It will attempt, thanks to its multi-archival and multi-national research, to place Paris' actions in a more international context. It will further argue that the General's grand design is best understood by underlining the role of linkages, which is to say by systematically studying the interactions between the various policy spheres, rather than considering them in isolation.

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List of Abbreviations

ANF:	Archives Nationales Françaises
ASP:	American Selling Price
CAP:	Common Agricultural Policy
CDU:	Christian Democratic Union
COMECON:	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CRU:	Collective Reserve Unit
DDF:	<i>Documents Diplomatiques Français</i>
DF:	<i>Documentation Française</i>
DPC:	Defence Planning Committee
EEC:	European Economic Community
FFA:	<i>Forces Françaises d'Allemagne</i>
FNSP:	<i>Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques</i>
FO:	Foreign Office
FRUS:	Foreign Relations of the United States series
G10:	Group of Ten
GATT:	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GNI:	Gross National Income
ICBM:	Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles
ICC:	International Control Commission
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
LBJL:	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library
MAEF:	<i>Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Français</i>
MLF:	Multilateral Force
NAC:	North Atlantic Council
NARA:	National Archives Record Administration
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDAC:	Nuclear Defense Affairs Committee
NLF:	National Liberation Front
NPG:	Nuclear Planning Group
NPT:	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OAS:	<i>Organisation de l'Armée Secrète</i>
OAU:	Organization of African Unity
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PCF:	<i>Parti Communiste Français</i>
PRC:	People's Republic of China
PTBT:	Partial Test Ban Treaty
SALT:	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SDR:	Special Drawing Rights
SEATO:	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SECAM:	<i>Séquentiel Couleur Avec Mémoire</i>
TEA:	Trade Expansion Act
TNA:	The National Archives (previously Public Records Office)
UN:	United Nations
UNR:	<i>Union pour la Nouvelle République</i>
US:	United States
WEU:	Western European Union

Introduction

On Monday 7 March 1966, French President General Charles de Gaulle sent a letter to his American counterpart Lyndon Baines Johnson. The tone of the message was generally cordial, even including a tribute to the role played by the United States [US] in the defence of the Western world. The content, though, was not so courteous. While remaining a member of the Atlantic Alliance, established by the Washington Treaty in April 1949, De Gaulle solemnly and unilaterally announced that France intended to withdraw from the integrated military structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO]¹. This was a crucial moment for France and the Atlantic organisation. While it was the culmination of the policy of independence initiated by the General since his return to power in 1958, it was also a clear attempt to dispute the whole architecture of Atlantic relations, which helped generate “the most traumatic moment in NATO’s history”². Interestingly, in this same letter to Johnson, De Gaulle justified his bold initiative by referring to the changes that had taken place, or were taking place, since 1949 in Europe, Asia and elsewhere³.

There is no doubt that the Cold War had undergone an important transformation within a generation. At the time of its inception, in the late 1940s, the multi-dimensional confrontation – covering ideology, culture, economic development and nuclear weapons to name a few – between the world’s two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, had helped create a rigid bipolar order. As a consequence, Europe and Germany had been divided into two hostile and monolithic camps, separated by the Iron Curtain and protected by new military alliances, NATO in the West and the Warsaw Pact in the East. In the respective blocs, Washington and Moscow possessed an overwhelming share of power and authority, leaving the European countries devastated by World War Two very limited influence over their fate.

¹ De Gaulle, Charles, Lettres, Notes et Carnets: Tome X [LNC: X], (Paris: Plon, 1987), pp.261-262

² Ellison, James, “Defeating the General: Anglo-American Relations, Europe and the NATO Crisis of 1966”, *Cold War History*, Vol.6/1 (2006), p.85

³ De Gaulle, LNC: X, p.261

Yet, in the early 1960s, as the Cold War entered a less acute phase, the nature of the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, as well as the international order itself, seemed to be evolving. For a start, Europe was progressively losing its central role in the superpower rivalry. By 1963, following the building of the Berlin Wall two years before and the end of the Berlin crisis, a relatively stable system had emerged on the old continent based on three pillars: a general respect for the status quo in Central Europe, especially Berlin, the non-nuclear status of West Germany, and the continuing American military presence on German soil. It was not that the Cold War was over or that a final settlement had been reached, but the threat of a major war had receded significantly⁴. Concomitantly, the Third World was fast becoming the main stage of the competition between Washington and Moscow. The process of decolonisation had led to the creation of a large number of independent states in Asia and Africa, thereby complicating the international system. The emergence of this vast grey zone between East and West certainly attracted the superpowers and gave them an opportunity to expand their influence throughout the world, but it also increased the risks of conflict. Nowhere was this clearer than during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when the world moved to the threshold of nuclear holocaust. It was a crucial turning point, and a sobering reminder for the US and the Soviet Union that despite their hostility, they shared common interests, starting with the need to prevent their mutual destruction. The limited superpower détente or the relaxation of tension in the aftermath of the Cuban episode was effectively an attempt to guarantee more predictability in East-West relations.

Regional conflicts and national forces in the developing world still had the potential to cause big power collision, but they mostly convinced Moscow and Washington to pursue a more regularised cooperation and crisis-defusing dialogue. Yet, if the international order in the 1960s was still structured around the US-Soviet competition, there were growing signs that the scales

⁴ Trachtenberg, Marc, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp.398-399

of power were tipping away from both superpower⁵. The Cold War system was becoming more diffuse. The Big Two were no longer as predominant as they once had been and they now had to deal with far less docile allies. It seemed as if they were facing a bigger threat within than outside their respective blocs.

In the East, the People's Republic of China [PRC] was the most visible, but not exclusive, example of this trend. Following its success in the civil war in October 1949, the Chinese Communist Party had initially decided to align itself on the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, within less than a decade, Beijing began to actively challenge Moscow's leadership of the world communist movement. Profound differences over the concept of peaceful coexistence, and the best strategy to adopt towards the US, caused serious friction, and by 1960, relations between China and the Soviet Union had reached breaking point. The Sino-Soviet split effectively signalled the end of the communist world as a monolithic entity. Moreover, the Cuban Missile Crisis further strengthened the aspirations of small states for greater autonomy. As Mastny explains, both the US and the Soviet Union had to pay a price for what they had allowed to happen. Their allies were alarmed about how close they had been to getting embroiled in a war not of their making, but rooted in a confrontation between two superpowers over which they had no control⁶.

If the Cold War was in a state of flux in the early 1960s, the same applied to the Western world. At the outset, the Atlantic Community established after World War Two depended entirely on America's leadership, the US' overwhelming superiority in all domains, and its ability to carry a disproportionate share of the burden. NATO and the American troops provided security for Western Europe, and the nuclear umbrella played the role of ultimate defence against a Soviet invasion. Similarly, Washington's supremacy meant that it could shape the post-war economic and financial order. The Marshall Plan gave a much-needed boost to European and

the economy

⁵ Dumbrell, John, President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet communism, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.26
⁶ Mastny, Vojtech, "Détente, the Superpowers and their Allies, 1962-64", in Loth, Wilfried (ed.), Europe, Cold War and Coexistence, 1963-1965, (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p.215

kick-started trade, while the Bretton Woods conference in July 1944 created a new international monetary system based on a fixed dollar-gold parity for official reserve transactions. Considering how the US possessed half of the world's gold reserves, it was only natural that the dollar was at the centre of this new mechanism. Western Europe, devastated by the recent conflict, was largely confined to a subordinate role.

However, important changes in the 1950s, starting with the dramatic European economic recovery, put pressure on the foundations of the Western bloc and strained relations between partners on both sides of the Atlantic⁷. The creation of the European Economic Community [EEC] in 1957 – a customs union including six states, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – and the subsequent efforts to improve political cooperation, symbolised the resurgence and growing ambition of the old continent. The US viewed this development with both satisfaction and apprehension. On the one hand, it welcomed regional integration as a way of strengthening the European economies and increasing their unity. On the other hand, it feared that the EEC might raise protectionist barriers, shut out US exports, and undermine the cohesion of the Western Alliance⁸.

The Western European economic revival also had implications for the international monetary system. By the late 1950s, the in-built flaws of the Bretton Woods system were becoming very apparent, especially the so-called Triffin dilemma, after Yale economist Robert Triffin. The world was dependent on US deficits for growth of reserves, but an increase in dollars in circulation carried the risk of fostering inflation and undermining the international faith in the dollar. Yet, if US deficits were eliminated, the world would be deprived of its major source of reserve growth, with detrimental effects on world trade and economic activity. Additionally, American gold stocks began to decline steadily, and its balance of payments consistently showed a deficit. US international accounts were being drained by a variety of factors, including its overseas military commitments tied to the Cold War, its support for free

⁷ See Giaque, Jeffrey, Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

⁸ Zeiler, Thomas, American trade and power in the 1960's, (New York: Columbia University Press, c1992), p.27

trade, and the European economic recovery that was pushing American companies to invest offshore. Many Europeans complained about these deficits, and worried that they would force Washington to end dollar convertibility. In such a case, the billions of dollars in foreign government treasuries would drastically decline in value. At the same time, European officials could not push the US too far. The easiest way for the US to end its balance of payments deficits was to eliminate or significantly decrease its defence commitments to Europe⁹.

Furthermore, the erosion of the credibility of the nuclear deterrent posed a serious dilemma. Once the Soviet Union developed Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles [ICBM] in 1957, the American territory was no longer invulnerable to Soviet nuclear attacks. Would the US government then sacrifice New York to defend Hamburg? This was the heart of the problem, and to overcome Washington decided to switch NATO's nuclear strategy from massive retaliation to flexible response. The idea was to reduce the Alliance's dependence on nuclear weapons and develop a variety of responses to any Soviet invasion, which included a build-up of the member-states' conventional capabilities. Yet, for the Europeans, this appeared as a sign that the US was decoupling itself from the defence of Western Europe¹⁰.

By 1962, as Mahan points out, mistrust and tension had infected the Atlantic Alliance¹¹. It was in reaction to these complex problems that US President John F. Kennedy decided to put forward his Grand Design in a speech in Philadelphia on 4 July 1962, in which he stressed the importance of the two pillar Atlantic partnership, the US and Western Europe, 'developing coordinated policies in all economic, political and diplomatic areas'. This was essentially a

⁹ For more on the international monetary system, see Solomon, Robert, The International Monetary System, 1945-1976: An Insider's View, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), pp.26-33; Kunz, Diane, "The American Economic Consequences of 1968", in Fink, Carole, Gassert, Philippe, and Junker, Detlef (ed.), 1968: The World Transformed, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.85-88; Gavin, Francis, Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp.17-31; for the link between monetary and security issues, see Zimmermann, Hubert, Money and Security: troops, monetary policy, and West Germany's relations with the United States and Britain, 1950-1971, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

¹⁰ For more on the nuclear dilemma, see Bozo, Frédéric, Deux Stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, les États-Unis et l'Alliance Atlantique, 1958-1969, (Paris: Plon, 1996); Haftendorn, Helga, NATO and the Nuclear Revolution: A Crisis of Credibility, 1966-1967, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Pagedas, Constantine, Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem, 1960-1963: A Troubled Partnership, (London: Frank Cass, 2000)

¹¹ Mahan, Erin, Kennedy, De Gaulle, and Western Europe, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.122

proposal for interdependence under US guidance, which centred around three key initiatives¹². Firstly, Washington supported the British application to join the EEC, which had been on the table since July 1961¹³. Secondly, Kennedy pushed for a new more ambitious round of talks of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] – dubbed the Kennedy Round – to prevent the Atlantic Community from dissolving into separate trade systems. Thanks to the Trade Expansion Act [TEA] passed by Congress, he was granted extensive authorities for the five year period ending on 30 June 1967. The two more noticeable powers allowed the President to negotiate a reciprocated and across the board 50% reduction in tariffs on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as to completely eliminate tariffs when the US and the EEC combined for at least 80% of world exports. This was the so-called “dominant supplier” provision, which would only be meaningful if Britain joined the European Community¹⁴. Finally, the US sought to create a Multilateral Force [MLF]. First proposed in December 1960 at the Atlantic Council by US Secretary of State, Christian Herter, the MLF project was an attempt to establish an integrated nuclear force for NATO. The aim was to try to restore European confidence in the American nuclear umbrella, and concede some limited European role in matters of nuclear strategy¹⁵.

Kennedy, however, was not the sole Western statesman with a grand design. After coming back to power in May 1958, De Gaulle immediately set out to implement his vision for the future of the Atlantic Alliance, which rested on two key ideas. On the one hand, he sought to restore French independence, especially in the military field. Generally opposed to the principle of integration, the General specifically disapproved of NATO’s organisation. He considered that France was not being given its rightful place, and that it was effectively subordinated to the Anglo-Saxon powers. As he made clear in his September 1958 memorandum to US President

¹² Bange, Oliver, The EEC crisis of 1963: Kennedy, Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer in conflict, (New York: St. Martin’s Press in association with Institute of Contemporary British History, 1999), p.42

¹³ For more on the British application and negotiations with the EEC, see Ludlow, N. Piers, Dealing with Britain: The Six and the First UK Application to the EEC, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

¹⁴ For more on the Kennedy Round, see Zeiler, American Trade; Preeg, Ernest, Traders and Diplomats: an analysis of the Kennedy Round of negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1970); Evans, John Walker, The Kennedy Round in American trade policy: the twilight of the GATT?, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971)

¹⁵ Barbier, Colette, “La Force Multilatérale”, *Relations Internationales*, Vol.69 (Printemps 1992), p.3

Dwight Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, “France cannot consider that NATO, in its current form, satisfies the conditions of the security of the Free World and, especially, its own security”¹⁶. Instead, he called for a reform of the Atlantic Alliance through the establishment of a tripartite directorate. When Eisenhower and Macmillan failed to follow up on his suggestion, the General began to progressively disengage French troops from NATO’s integrated military structure¹⁷.

On the other hand, Paris accepted the Rome Treaty and fully invested itself into the development of the EEC. Of course, this was partly motivated by self-interest, and in particular guaranteeing the establishment of the Common Agricultural Policy [CAP] as a compensation for the creation of a common industrial market. Yet, France was also genuinely keen to develop a Western European political entity. The latter would remain allied with the US, but ultimately become more independent, and would be limited to the Six members of the EEC – in other words, there was no desire to let Britain join the European Community. To this end, French leaders initiated a rapprochement with West Germany, and proposed the Fouchet Plan for an intergovernmental political union between the Six¹⁸. During his first four years in power, though, De Gaulle faced a series of significant obstacles that prevented him from fully pursuing his grand design. Domestically, he realised that France first needed to strengthen its economy and its army, which meant especially completing the development of a nuclear arsenal, before it could aspire to an independent foreign policy. Externally, the brutal Algerian conflict and the tense East-West relations further limited France’s diplomatic margin of manoeuvre.

All was to change, however, in 1962¹⁹. Thanks to his success in the referendum of 28 October, which modified the constitution and ensured that the president would be elected by universal suffrage, and the victory of the Gaullist party *Union pour la Nouvelle République*

¹⁶ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Français [MAEF]: Secrétariat Général [SG], Entretiens et Messages [EM], Vol.5: Memorandum for Eisenhower and Macmillan, 17.09.58

¹⁷ Evidence seems to suggest that De Gaulle expected Eisenhower and Macmillan to reject his memorandum, see Peyrefitte, Alain, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.1*, (Paris: Éditions de Fallois: Fayard, 1994), p.352; De Gaulle, Charles, *Mémoires d'espoir: tome 1*, (Paris : Plon, 1970), p.215

¹⁸ For the *Plan Fouchet* see Giaucque, *Grand Designs*; Soutou, Georges-Henri, “Le général de Gaulle, le plan Fouchet et l’Europe”, *Commentaire*, Vol.13/52 (Winter 1990-1991)

¹⁹ See Burin des Rozières, Étienne, *Retour aux Sources: 1962, l’année décisive*, (Paris: Plon, 1986)

[UNR] in the parliamentary elections of 18-25 November, the General had significantly strengthened his domestic position. He could now look ahead to three years free from electoral constraints. At the same time, key changes on the international sphere seemed to open up new opportunities for France. The Évian Accords in March finally ended the Algerian war, and removed a major thorn in the French side. Having turned the page of colonisation, Paris could now look towards expanding its action throughout the Third World. Furthermore, the Cuban Missile Crisis was again decisive. While De Gaulle gave his unconditional support to Washington during the crisis, the lessons he drew were to have a lasting impact on French strategy. In his view, the Cuban episode convinced him that neither the US nor the Soviet Union wanted to fight a war. It was clear that Moscow would not dare to attack Europe, which meant that there was a chance in the future that it would be interested in peace and improving relations with Paris. Additionally, the crisis confirmed to the General that the US would not be willing to risk a nuclear conflict to defend Europe. This was the best justification for his policy of independence and the need to develop a nuclear arsenal, or *force de frappe*²⁰.

Thus, by the end of 1962, the situation was ripe for a change of course in French diplomacy. On the one hand, France had the means to pursue a more independent policy, and it now faced a more favourable international environment. In the space of four years, the economy had grown remarkably, and the government had managed to repay its debts and stabilise its currency²¹. Despite the failure of the Fouchet Plan in April, the Franco-German rapprochement at least had made great strides forward. As both sides discussed the option of signing a reconciliation treaty, the creation of a Paris-Bonn axis, as the basis of a more independent Western Europe, was now a distinct possibility. At the same time, the Nassau Accords of December 1962, which highlighted the British dependence on the US in military matters and the strength of the 'special relationship', essentially gave De Gaulle a pretext to veto London's

²⁰ Vaïsse, Maurice, "Une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps": La France et la crise de Cuba", in Vaïsse, Maurice (ed.), *L'Europe et la Crise de Cuba*, (Paris: A. Colin, 1993), pp.104-105

²¹ Vaïsse, Maurice, *La grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969*, (Paris: Fayard, 1998), pp.42-43

application to the EEC²². On the other hand, there was an urgent need for decisive action. Kennedy's Grand Design threatened to establish a large Atlantic Community, which would subsume the General's goal of developing a more independent Western Europe.

This dissertation is a study of the underlying motivations of French foreign policy between 1963 and 1968. This was a significant period when Paris pursued in all spheres a very ambitious and independent diplomatic agenda, placing it at the forefront of international affairs. It was also a time when it increasingly resorted to unilateral and forceful actions, angering its allies in the process. If France played such a prominent and controversial role, it was in no small measure due to its intriguing and charismatic leader, General de Gaulle. Already a prestigious figure thanks to his wartime past, the French President further distinguished himself by his bold initiatives and his distinctive style. As a master tactician, he relied on an impeccable sense of timing, along with his eloquence and carefully prepared speeches, to give a maximum impact to his decisions. His semi-annual press conferences, which hosted the press corps and other notables, were a perfect example of this. According to John Newhouse, they resembled a piece of theatre, an event, a happening – a ritual with all the panoply and pomp of a royal ceremony, which few performed as well as De Gaulle²³.

Moreover, the General cultivated secrecy and surprise with great skill, in order to add more weight to his policies. This reflected in part his natural separateness and remoteness. Even his closest advisers declared that it was impossible to achieve familiarity or intimacy with him²⁴. It also stemmed from his conception of authority and leadership. For De Gaulle, the chief was necessarily distant, because authority depended on status, and status required distance. There could be no prestige without mystery, as one could not worship what one knew too well²⁵. Thus, the French President never hesitated to resort to deliberate ambiguity. What he meant by a 'European Europe', a 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals', or the neutralisation of Vietnam,

²² Ibid, p.219

²³ Newhouse, John, *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*, (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p.237

²⁴ Jackson, Julian, *Charles de Gaulle*, (London: Haus, 2003), pp.55-57

²⁵ De Gaulle, Charles, *Le Fil de l'Épée*, (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1944), p.44, 66

was never clearly spelt out. He constantly kept his allies in the dark and second guessing about his ultimate intentions, much to their frustration. The key point, as Logevall points out, is that vagueness and a certain blurring of categories generally suited De Gaulle's purposes²⁶.

However, this same elusiveness certainly has not facilitated the task of historians. The vast number of memoirs, biographies, and scholarly works focusing on the General – in excess of three thousand items – are a testimony to the enduring fascination with Gaullism, but also to the fact that there are still very sharp differences when it comes to analysing the fundamental goals of its foreign policy. Considering the size of the literature, it makes little sense to provide a complete and exhaustive historiographical review. Instead, the discussion will be restricted to a certain number of central and controversial debates, which are particularly relevant for this dissertation.

The first, and most important one, focusses on whether or not De Gaulle possessed a grand design, and if so what was he trying to achieve with it. Thus, a certain number of former officials and scholars have rejected, or tried to downplay, the fact that the French President had any sort of plan, or broader vision for his diplomacy. Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's former spokesman, claimed that the General was mainly interested in restoring France's pride and convincing its population that they were now independent. In a similar vain, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger believed that his aim was essentially pedagogical, that is to say he wanted to teach his people to adopt a more independent attitude²⁷. More recently, in the field of European integration, Andrew Moravcsik suggested that Paris was driven by the desire to secure commercial interests for its agriculture and industry, rather than by any attempt to accomplish grand political and ideological goals²⁸.

²⁶ Logevall, Fredrik, Choosing war: the lost chance for peace and the escalation of war in Vietnam, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p.104

²⁷ Salinger, Pierre, in De Gaulle ou l'éternel défi: 56 témoignages, (Paris: Seuil, 1988), Lacouture, Jean and Mehl, Roland (ed.), p.144, 152; Quoted by Durandin, Catherine, La France contre l'Amérique, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), p.113

²⁸ Moravcsik, Andrew, The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.177

Alternatively, another school has argued that the French President did have a design, but one that was essentially negative, and which sought to achieve narrow, selfish, or even irresponsible objectives for his country. For example, former Secretary of State Dean Rusk pointed out that De Gaulle's diplomatic agenda aimed at establishing a continental system led by France²⁹. Similarly, Newhouse believed that although the General was the sole figure who could lay a strong claim to leadership in Europe, he generally deployed his strength only to advance some largely irrelevant claims to greatness. This included a very dangerous attack against the principle of integration in both the EEC and NATO³⁰. Éric Roussel largely followed this line in his recent very detailed biography of De Gaulle. In his view, the General's grand design from 1963 onwards was centred on three main pillars: restoring French grandeur, building Europe around France, and countering as much as possible America's hegemonic power³¹.

A final group of scholars have defended the French President's foreign policy as a genuine attempt to overcome the Cold War order and change the international status quo. De Gaulle viewed the Cold War as a dangerous system, where all states were permanently threatened by two contradictory, but equally dangerous trends, that is to say either a superpower war or a superpower joint hegemony. According to Maurice Vaïsse, he believed that a multipolar world would be more balanced and stable than the existing bipolar system³². He was driven, in the words of Stanley Hoffman, by a sort of "global revisionism". Not only did he want, in the view of Edward Kolodziej, to recapture France's lost *grandeur*, but he also tried to undo superpower rule and fashion a world order based on the multiplicity of nation-states and responsive to their individual needs³³.

Moreover, De Gaulle's attitude towards America has equally generated much debate within the literature. On the one hand, many American officials in the Kennedy administration

²⁹ Rusk, Dean, *As I Saw It: A Secretary of State's Memoirs*, (London: Tauris, 1990), p.240

³⁰ Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.248

³¹ Roussel, Éric, *Charles de Gaulle*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p.738

³² Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.51

³³ Hoffman, Stanley, *Essais sur la France: Déclin ou Renouveau?*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), p.321; Kolodziej, Edward, *French international policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou: the politics of grandeur*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p.56

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felt that the General not fully rational, and that his policy was “largely animated by anti-US prejudice”. He was the ultimate free rider, a “highly egocentric” leader, “with touches of megalomania”, and who welcomed confrontation with the US as a way to regain France’s identity as a great power³⁴. For Richard Kuisel, the French President was even anti-American in the sense that he challenged US leadership and harboured strong antipathy for its society³⁵. On the other hand, some authors and former French officials have rejected the idea that De Gaulle was obsessed with Washington. In their view, there were disagreements and opposition, but nothing that could be construed as systematic hostility. The tension was more the result of conflicting national goals, and if anything, the General was more anti-hegemonic than anti-American³⁶. Finally, there is also a divide when it comes to assessing the goals of France’s Third World policy. Former French Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, defended Gaullist policy as a grand charitable mission, which aimed to train and foster the progress of the Third World states. Authors such as Anthony Hartley or Philip Cerny, however, have focused more on the imperatives of Great Power status, and how these pushed France towards pursuing self-interested goals, such as economic and industrial benefits³⁷.

Amidst this vast and polarised literature, this dissertation will try to contribute to the field in the following ways. It will argue that while De Gaulle was not anti-American in the sense of a systematic hostility, the growing tension between France and the US did push him to become more and more obsessed with his powerful ally, to the extent that it pervaded other aspects of his policy. It will further claim that the General had a grand design, which centred on two key and interrelated aims, that is to say restoring French independence and overcoming the Cold War

³⁴ Trachtenberg, Constructed Peace, p.393; Gaddis, John Lewis, The Cold War: A New History, (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), p.140

³⁵ Kuisel, Richard, Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanisation, (Berkeley, Cal: University of California Press, 1993), p.145

³⁶ See Alphand, Hervé in Lacouture, Jean, De Gaulle: vol. 3, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1986), p.344; Costigliola, Frank, France and the United States: the cold alliance since World War II, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p.136; Vaisse, La grandeur, p.39

³⁷ See Couve de Murville, Maurice, Une politique étrangère, 1958-1969, (Paris: Plon, 1971); Cerny, Philip, The politics of grandeur: ideological aspects of de Gaulle's foreign policy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Hartley, Anthony, Gaullism: The Rise and Fall of a political movement, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972)

order. Yet, his vision was more complex and less coherent than previous authors have suggested. On the one hand, in regards to Europe, the French President was attempting, as George-Henri Soutou pointed out, to completely transform the Continent's security system, rather than look for a way to reinforce transatlantic ties as suggested by Frédéric Bozo³⁸. On the other hand, it was essentially a Euro-centric model, in which the Third World was little more than an area of competition for Great Powers keen to spread their spheres of influence. Similarly, there is a need for a more nuanced assessment of why the Gaullist project failed, which goes beyond blaming either French weaknesses, or blaming the rigidity of the international system³⁹. Instead, the emphasis will be placed on the inability of Paris to deal with the complex challenge of interdependence.

Furthermore, this thesis will also distinguish itself by its methodology and sources. Despite the fact that De Gaulle's private papers remain closed, this work tried to overcome that obstacle by relying on very extensive multi-archival and multinational research in French, American and British government documents, as well as private papers and interviews. This means it was able to benefit from the large amount of materials on the 1960s that were declassified in the last few years in France, including for example the files on the Vietnam War or on the withdrawal from NATO at the Quai d'Orsay, or the boxes on monetary policy at the Archives Nationales. Most recently the private papers of Michel Debré during his time as Minister of Finances in 1966-1968 have been made available to scholars, and provide a wealth of useful information. The evidence from the US and Britain helped to compensate some omissions from the French archives, noticeably by giving a better sense of how the Quai d'Orsay reacted to De Gaulle's actions, and were very helpful in placing French foreign policy in its larger international context.

³⁸ Soutou, Georges-Henri, "La décision française de quitter le commandement intégré de l'OTAN (1966)", in Harder, Hans-Joachim (ed.), *Von Truman bis Harmel: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von NATO und europäischer Integration*, (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2000), p.188; Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.16

³⁹ See Wolton, Thierry, *La France sous influence: Paris-Moscou, 30 ans de relations secrètes*, (Paris: Grasset, 1997), p. 443; Charbonnel, Jean, *L' Aventure de la Fidélité*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), p.126

The main contribution of this dissertation, however, is the method it uses to conceptualise the General's grand design. It will seek to explain French policy by underlining the role of linkages. Of course, previous authors have occasionally pointed out the connections between certain of De Gaulle's initiatives, especially the close ties between the withdrawal from NATO and his rapprochement with the Eastern Bloc⁴⁰. Yet, this is the first time that any scholarly work has engaged in such a systematic analysis of the links between the various policy spheres. It emphasises not only the interactions between France's *Westpolitik*, *Ostpolitik* and its policy towards the Third World, but also the way in which decisions towards NATO impacted other spheres, such as the European Community level or even the monetary negotiations. By adopting this methodology, and by not looking at the various policy strands in isolation, it is possible to reach a better and more dynamic understanding of the De Gaulle's grand strategy.

Finally, the topic of French foreign policy between 1963 and 1968 is a very broad one, and it is thus essential to set out the limits of the subject, in order to keep it manageable. This dissertation is not meant to be an exhaustive work. It is concerned with France's attempts to overcome and transform the Cold War order, which explains why Africa only features briefly. It mostly focusses on the international, rather than domestic scene. This is not to say that domestic factors had no influence whatsoever on De Gaulle's strategy, quite the opposite. As Kolodziej claims, part of the appeal of pursuing *grandeur* was that it was a way to harness the energies of Frenchmen, distracting them from petty personal concerns and mutual animosities⁴¹. Yet, it would be misleading to suggest that domestic goals were the main motivation behind the General's foreign policy.

Moreover, while it also covers economic, monetary and military affairs, this thesis is essentially looking at policy from a diplomatic and political standpoint. As such, it clearly places De Gaulle at the heart of the decision-making process. Naturally, the French President was never omnipotent nor omniscient. He could not possibly be in control of all aspects of policy at the

⁴⁰ For example Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.163

⁴¹ Kolodziej, *French international policy*, p.28

same time. He also, obviously, relied on advice from a variety of sources, including ambassadors, his diplomatic advisers, Étienne Burin des Rozières, Secretary General of the Élysée between 1962 and 1967, and of course Maurice Couve de Murville, who held the position of Foreign Minister between 1958 and 1968. Nonetheless, De Gaulle still played a predominant role when it came to devising France's grand strategy. His distrust of the Quai d'Orsay, and its tendency to compromise, meant that he often kept it in the dark when it came to key decisions – for example the recognition of China or the withdrawal from NATO⁴². Similarly, the Council of Ministers was a very formal affair, and rarely led to any decision-making. According to Jean Charbonnel, a junior Minister between January 1966 and March 1967, there were only four instances of round-the-table debates during his time in government⁴³. Instead, decisions were generally taken in small committees, especially during Inner Councils⁴⁴. It is therefore justifiable for a study of French foreign policy in this period to focus primarily on De Gaulle.

This study is divided into two broad chronological sections. The first part, covering the period between 1963 and 1965, is organised thematically and geographically. Considering how De Gaulle followed multiple paths in his quest to restore France's Great Power status, this arrangement makes it easier to examine the separate strands of his policy, and the specific goals he pursued in each of them. It is also a useful way to detail the various challenges that Paris faced. Thus, the opening chapter will focus on France's policy towards the Western world. It will explain why the General moved away from his ambition to build an independent Western Europe, centred on the Franco-Germany axis, and shifted towards a more critical stance towards the American hegemony. It will also emphasise the close interactions between events in NATO, the EEC, the international monetary negotiations, and the Kennedy Round. Chapter two will concentrate on the relations between France and the Communist world. More specifically, it will analyse why De Gaulle reversed his opposition to East-West détente, and how the

⁴² Hartley, *Gaullism*, pp.196-197

⁴³ Interview with Jean Charbonnel, Paris, 15.09.04

⁴⁴ See Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, pp.284-314 for a more in-depth look at the decision-making process; See also The National Archives [TNA]: Foreign Office [FO] 371/177865: Paris to FO, 13.05.64

rapprochement progressively took place between France and the countries of the Eastern bloc. The third chapter will highlight the policy towards the developing states. It will discuss to what extent De Gaulle actually had a coherent policy towards the Third World, and whether there was a gap between the rhetoric and reality. It will also try to show how France's Third World policy fitted in its overall strategy, and how that evolved through time.

The second part, which includes the period following the General's re-election as President in December 1965 up to August 1968, is organised in chronological fashion. Such a procedure has the advantage of not only bringing together the broad threads of the first three chapters, but it also helps to give a more convincing explanation of the rise and fall of the Gaullist grand design. De Gaulle's bold and spectacular initiatives in 1966, including the withdrawal from NATO, his trip to the Soviet Union, and his Phnom Penh speech, are at the heart of chapter four. This was without doubt the high point of his attempt to transform the international order, and the clearest expression of his ultimate grand design. Chapters five and six will detail the major challenges faced by Paris throughout 1967. In particular, the decisive problem was how to deal with the question of interdependence. If France needed to maintain the unity of the Six over monetary matters, it was also pursuing policies towards the EEC and NATO that were inimical to the interests of its European Community partners. Finally, the fall of De Gaulle's ambitious diplomatic agenda during the first eight months of 1968 will dominate chapter seven. His grand design, it will be argued, was dead months before he left office in April 1969.

Part I: The Quest for Great Power Status, 1963-1965

Chapter I: All (not so) Quiet on the Western Front

I. Introduction

January 1963 was, without doubt, an extremely traumatic and significant month for the Western world. Not only did the French President, General Charles de Gaulle, veto British entry into the EEC during his press conference on 14 January, but he also rejected American President John F. Kennedy's proposal to integrate the French nuclear *force de frappe* into the MLF. By doing so he effectively destroyed Kennedy's Grand Design for a partnership between Western Europe and the US. With that move, he also prevented the establishment of a vast Atlantic zone of free trade. The Kennedy Round as such was not in ruins, but De Gaulle had managed to limit its scale and make the 'dominant supplier' provision meaningless¹. Additionally, the treaty signed a few days later between Paris and Bonn caused panic in Washington that West Germany was about to follow in France's footsteps. Though this hysteria died down quickly, the events of January were to leave lasting scars at all levels of the Atlantic Community.

January 1963 was equally a significant turning point for French foreign policy as a whole, and especially its *Westpolitik*. Certainly, De Gaulle felt that he had to act decisively to face the challenge posed by Kennedy's plan, and as both his domestic and international position had been strengthened in late 1962 – thanks to the victories in the referendum and the legislative elections, and the imminent Treaty with West Germany – he believed that he could now resort to more dramatic methods. More importantly, with the perspective of having to face no major elections for the next three years, the General wanted his press conference and the Treaty to signal a shift in France's policy towards the Western bloc, with his three main goals of promoting France's quest for Great Power status, resisting American hegemony, and helping to develop a more independent Western Europe through the Franco-German axis.

¹ Jouve, Edmond, Le Général de Gaulle et la Construction de l'Europe (1940-1966) Tome I, (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, R. Pichon et R. Durand-Auzias, 1967), p.614

French Prime Minister George Pompidou summed up well this new direction a few days before the conference. “If Britain entered the EEC, nothing could stop the American firms from invading the continent. [...] We are the only ones defending Europe against the American invasion. [...] We have decolonised the French empire. We now have to shake off the Anglo-Saxon colonisation”².

II. January-May 1963: *Le Double Non* and its consequences

Through his press conference, De Gaulle believed he was defending Western Europe and preventing the consolidation of American hegemony. Because of London’s close relationship with Washington, allowing it to join the EEC would threaten the Community’s fragile equilibrium, and undermine its cohesion and distinctive European nature. The end-result could only be the emergence of a “colossal Atlantic Community under US direction and leadership ... [that would] quickly absorb the European Communities”³. In the same way, accepting the MLF appeared dangerous to the French President because it opened the way to complete US dominance in nuclear matters, at a time when the Cuban missile crisis highlighted how the defence of Western Europe “is no longer a top priority [of the US]”⁴.

Apart from resisting the Anglo-Saxon “challenge”, taking the lead in opposing their initiatives strengthened France’s claim to Great Power status. By not integrating the *force de frappe* into the MLF, De Gaulle ensured that France would not lose control of its independent nuclear deterrent, which was for him a vital criterion of Great Power status. Such an independent arsenal was both a right for Great Powers and an “equaliser” versus more powerful states, or what De Gaulle called la *dissuasion du plus faible au plus fort*. Similarly, rejecting British entry into the EEC guaranteed that France remained the sole power in the EEC with an independent nuclear force, and thus safeguarded its position as the leading power in Western Europe.

² Peyrefitte, Alain, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, (Paris: Éditions de Fallois: Fayard, 1997), 07.01.63, p.16

³ De Gaulle, Charles, *Discours et Messages : Tome IV, [DM: IV]*, (Paris: Plon, 1970), p.69

⁴ *Ibid*, p.72

However, De Gaulle's press conference was not simply an exercise of obstruction and self-promotion. It also outlined an alternative organisation for the Western World around the idea of "independence and alliance"⁵. The ongoing Soviet menace certainly justified an alliance between Western Europe and the US, but equally he argued "alliances do not have absolute virtues"⁶. Western Europe needed to develop as an independent political entity, separate from the Americans, in charge of its own fate and ready to defend itself. Instead of Kennedy's "Great Partnership", De Gaulle envisaged Western Europe as tied to the US by a minimal alliance – the promise to mutually defend each other in case of war – but centred on the blossoming Franco-German axis.

The Franco-German treaty signed on 22 January laid the foundations for increased collaboration in all fields between both states; in particular, De Gaulle attached great importance to defence because "without organised military cooperation, political cooperation would lose its purpose"⁷. Both the French President and West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer perceived the treaty as key, albeit for different reasons. If De Gaulle saw it as vital for his European strategic project, Adenauer considered it as the crowning achievement of the Franco-German reconciliation before he left power, and as a way of restraining De Gaulle's tendency of undermining NATO⁸. Nevertheless, the General's attachment to the Treaty was also an emotional one, and not solely a strategic calculation. As he confessed a few weeks later: "When I went to Germany [in September 1962], I was expecting to be well received. However, in front of the warmth of the welcome, in front of the popular enthusiasm, I saw the profound feelings of the German people towards the French people. And that is not misleading. That is why we have to solidly anchor West Germany to Europe and to the West"⁹. In other words, De Gaulle hoped that the Franco-German reconciliation could usher a new era in the relations between both states.

⁵ Ibid, p.72

⁶ Ibid, p.71

⁷ Maillard, Pierre, *De Gaulle et le Problème Allemand: Les leçons d'un grand dessein*, (Paris: Guibert, 2001), p.187; MAEF: Cabinet du Ministre [CM], Couve de Murville [CD], Vol.375: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting 2, 21.01.63

⁸ Soutou, Georges-Henri, *L'Alliance Incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands 1954-1996*, (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p.253

⁹ Jouve, *De Gaulle II*, 12.02.63, p.290

If they managed to develop a common policy, they could create a model around which the other EEC partners could gravitate, and foster the development of a more independent Western Europe.

Taken together, the press conference and the Franco-German treaty were meant to signal the “rebirth” of France as a Great Power, but they mostly triggered a major crisis within the Western world. If France was certainly not alone in feeling that the negotiations with Britain were getting bogged down, it was De Gaulle’s unilateral method of action – possibly even more so than the content – that truly shocked the other Five EEC members¹⁰. At the same time, the Franco-German treaty threw the US government into a state of panic. Kennedy considered the Franco-German Treaty as a “very unfriendly act”, while interpreting French actions as an attempt to kick the US out of Europe and break up NATO¹¹. The American administration also feared the monetary power of the Franco-German bloc. Possessing more dollars in reserves than other countries, France and West Germany could potentially expose the US’ monetary weaknesses by running down the American gold supply, and thus shaking confidence in the dollar¹².

Despite the initial shock, the Five refused to cave in to the French demands, and pressured Paris into accepting a new EEC meeting in Brussels on 28 January¹³. The Five were further egged on by Washington. Believing that their allies could force France to change its mind if they remained united, American officials did not hesitate to pressure the Five; US Secretary of State Dean Rusk even ominously warned West German Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder that “if this negotiation [EEC] should fail, there would result a most serious injury to Western cohesion in the cooperation across the Atlantic”¹⁴. This vigorous resistance surprised the French government and created divisions on how to respond, a development that emerged during

¹⁰ Marjolin, Robert, *Architect of European Unity: Memoirs, 1911-1986*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p.338

¹¹ Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS]: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 60, 23.01.63 and Document 169, 25.01.63

¹² Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.94

¹³ For more details on the Five’s reactions and attempts to pressure France, see Bange, *EEC crisis*

¹⁴ Jauvert, Vincent, *L’Amérique contre De Gaulle: histoire secrète (1961-1969)*, (Paris: Seuil, 2000), pp.103-105; FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 62, 28.01.63

the Council of Ministers on 24 January. While French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville was worried by his country's isolation and advocated delaying tactics, De Gaulle preferred the option of a brutal crisis¹⁵. In the end, the President's line prevailed and France stuck to its guns during the Brussels meeting. In the absence of a consensus over enlargement, the EEC had no choice but to end negotiations with London on 29 January. The Five's anger and frustration with France at that moment was seldom to be matched again¹⁶.

By vetoing Britain's candidacy to join the EEC and by signing the Franco-German Treaty soon after, De Gaulle dealt a serious blow to Kennedy's goal of a "Great Partnership" between the US and Western Europe, and caused major drama within the Atlantic Alliance. Yet, the consequences of these twin blows, at least in the short and medium-term, were limited. Despite strong domestic support for his policies, the French President had no intention, at that moment, of launching a full-frontal challenge in all spheres against the US¹⁷. That is not to say that he was not worried by America. As he confessed to his Minister for Information, Alain Peyrefitte, on 27 February, "US imperialism, no field can escape it. It takes all forms, but the most insidious one is the dollar [...] Luckily we prevented the British from coming into the EEC. If not, American investments in Britain would have multiplied. It would have been the bridgehead of the American invasion of capital in Europe". He added to Peyrefitte on 30 April "the Americans are engaged in a process of dominance of all the political, financial, economic and military circuits. [...] That is why we must create the irreversible. The irreversible, for currencies, would be the gold standard"¹⁸. De Gaulle, however, did not really publicise those concerns.

In the same way, French policy towards NATO and the MLF after January remained largely non-confrontational. De Gaulle argued to Adenauer that a future reform of NATO could

¹⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.1, p.369

¹⁶ Ludlow, N. Piers, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist challenge*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p.11; See also Bange, *EEC crisis*, pp.229-230

¹⁷ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.351, in January 1963 47% of French people approved De Gaulle's policy towards the US, 17% disapproved, and 36% had no opinion; Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, *Les Français et De Gaulle*, (Paris: Plon, 1971), p.277, in February-March 1963 44% approved France's initiative to end negotiations with Britain, 21% disapproved, and 35% had no opinion.

¹⁸ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.2, pp.74-75

be possible if European cooperation developed enough, but “for the moment there is no alternative to US omnipotence”¹⁹. Thus France minimised both its involvement in NATO’s affairs and its obstructive policies. Couve indicated that France could not accept the MLF proposal, but would still take an interest in how it developed²⁰. Nonetheless, this aloof behaviour did not translate into any major improvement of French relations with the organisation. Couve did not object to the MLF because he felt that it had little support amongst NATO members, and thus was unlikely to ever become a reality²¹. Additionally, while not openly challenging NATO, France pursued its policy of reclaiming national control over its armed forces, and made plans to withdraw from the integrated military command²². Finally, while reminding allies that France wanted to contribute significantly to the defence of Western Europe and develop its nuclear deterrent, De Gaulle’s official speeches continued to question America’s commitment to defend its Atlantic allies²³.

Fundamentally, though, the French government backed down from a clash with its allies because its aims were more defensive than is generally believed. Having repealed Kennedy’s “Great Partnership”, the key focus was now on consolidating its claim to Great Power status and defending French interests. In particular, agriculture was of paramount importance as De Gaulle explained in his 14 January press conference. “We cannot conceive of a Common Market where agriculture would not receive its rightful place and we feel that amongst the Six, we are the country that needs this the most”²⁴. True, the French simultaneously pursued more ambitious and revisionist goals through the Franco-German axis, which was meant to provide the basis of a more independent Western Europe. However, this remained a long-term objective for De Gaulle, especially as long as Europe still lacked a clear political will²⁵. Couve thus summed up French thinking nicely when he indicated that the priority for the Six was to complete the tasks they had

¹⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting 1, 22.01.63

²⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: Couve-Merchant meeting, 25.02.63

²¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: Couve-Rusk meeting, 07.04.63

²² De Gaulle, Charles, LNC: IX, (Paris: Plon, 1986), De Gaulle to Maillard, 21.03.63, p.324

²³ De Gaulle, DM: IV, Televised Speech, 19.04.63, p.96

²⁴ Ibid, p.67

²⁵ Peyrefitte, C’était de Gaulle: vol.2, 30.01.63, pp.19-20

set themselves, and that first meant establishing the CAP, while the Franco-German Treaty would prepare the stage for future political developments within Europe²⁶. Yet, in order to get the EEC running again, France needed to be conciliatory enough to overcome the crisis, but not so much as to undermine its vital interests.

After the Brussels split, the French adopted a mixed strategy. On the one hand, officials went to great lengths to reassure Allies, explaining that the door of the Common Market was not closed to Britain, and that France did not want an autarkic, inward-looking Western Europe²⁷. To appease their partners, the French also made a certain number of compromises to show their good-will, such as by going ahead with tariff cuts and external tariff alignments planned for 1 July, or claiming that they were approaching the forthcoming Kennedy Round in a positive spirit²⁸. On the other hand, France's restraint and conciliatory behaviour was not incompatible with relying on confrontational tactics when need be. De Gaulle openly confronted the Dutch, complaining about their obstructionist behaviour towards the Common Market since the Brussels split, and accusing them of displaying a total loss of interest in the latter's establishment²⁹. Moreover, the Five helped the French. Noting that De Gaulle opposed further integration between the US and Western Europe, it made little sense for them to further endanger the EEC; instead, they attempted to revive the Community while maintaining a close bond with Britain. West Germany, under criticism for the supposed exclusive nature of the Franco-Germany treaty, took a leading role in this process. During the 2 April meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Six, Schroeder presented his 'synchronisation' plan – a broad programme of work for the future development of the Community – to restore political momentum to the EEC³⁰.

²⁶ Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques [FNSP]: Fonds Couve de Murville [CM] Carton 1: Speech to l'Assemblée Nationale, 24.01.63

²⁷ MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1952-1963, Vol.358: Alphanth interview with ABC, 30.01.63

²⁸ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.23

²⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Luns meeting, 16.03.63

³⁰ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.23

France had thus adopted a cautious attitude expecting that, with time, the hostile attitude of its partners would lessen and that the Six could move on. The 2 April meeting highlighted the relative success of this strategy. Jean-Marc Boegner, French permanent representative to the EEC, concluded that the improvement in atmosphere had been progressive, due both to the Five's unwillingness to paralyse the Common Market, and France's reassurances that it was committed to developing the Common Market and an outward-looking EEC. The crisis was not over, but getting back to work seemed to be on everyone's agenda³¹. Similarly, the agreement on 9 May for the Community's future agenda represented a victory for France. The Council decided to define the basic elements of the CAP before any negotiation on agriculture within the Kennedy Round, prevailing over the German-Dutch thesis, which wanted greater simultaneous progress on both fronts. Moreover, the Council unambiguously emphasised the need to reach an agreement on the next three sets of CAP regulations – beef, rice and dairy products – by 31 December 1963, rather than the preferred German deadline of 1 July 1964. Finally, regarding the industrial component of the Kennedy Round, the Council agreed on a strategy, which fitted well with the three aims the French were hoping to achieve with tariff negotiations: lessening obstacles to international trade, removing disparities between tariffs, and equilibrium in reciprocated concessions³².

If France's priority in this period was consolidating the CAP, it nonetheless saw distinct advantages in cooperating on the Kennedy Round. The latter forced the EEC states, very divided after the split of January 1963, to work towards a common effort in order to conciliate their often diverging interests, while the Five's strong attachment to the success of the negotiations – especially Bonn – gave France a valuable lever for other questions³³. Moreover, the French also managed to win over their partners on the EEC strategy towards the Kennedy Round, in particular on tariff disparities. For example, during a talk with US officials, Belgian Foreign

³¹ Documents Diplomatiques Français [DDF]: 1963, Tome I: Boegner to Couve, Telegram number 566-578, 03.04.63

³² DDF: 1963, Tome I: Boegner to Couve, Telegram number 768-794, 10.05.63

³³ Boegner, Jean-Marc, Le Marché Commun de Six à Neuf, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1974), p.129

Minister Paul-Henri Spaak “confessed that he was personally impressed by the arguments put forward by France that our equilinear approach did not in itself represent an entirely satisfactory or equitable solution for the high tariffs problem”³⁴.

Indeed, the French appealed to legitimate concerns of the EEC members. If the Community seemed to accept the procedural implications of linear tariff reductions, “they would not trust them to produce the kind of reciprocity they had sought in past negotiations and still continued to seek”; instead the EEC suggested *écrêtement*, a formula for automatic and unequal cuts³⁵. The Community certainly felt vulnerable to the US export policy, but not to the extent of threatening to scupper the Kennedy Round. France’s partners generally supported Kennedy’s trade aims, and in any case the American government was desperate to keep the negotiations on track. If the Kennedy Round failed, and it did not obtain a bigger trade surplus to make up for its balance of payments deficit, the US feared that it would have to cut its economic and military expenditures – i.e. probably reduce the number of American soldiers serving abroad³⁶. In those conditions, after intense discussions during 16-21 May ministerial meeting in Geneva, all the parties involved achieved a breakthrough. The talks over agriculture remained in a dead-end, but thanks to postponement and ambiguity, the Ministers agreed “in those cases where there are significant disparities in tariff levels, the tariff reductions will be based upon special rules of general and automatic application”³⁷. The battle over disparities was not over, but at least the negotiations in this rule-making stage could move forward before the planned official opening of the Kennedy Round in May 1964.

On a superficial level, it seemed as if the Atlantic Alliance had successfully overcome the challenge posed by De Gaulle in January; both the EEC and the Kennedy Round, for example, had taken important steps forward in their May meetings. Unfortunately, this was largely misleading. These agreements had not resolved some of the key differences, especially the clash

³⁴ National Archives Record Administration [NARA]: Record Group [RG] 59, Central Foreign Policy Files [CFPF], 1963, Box 3911: Brussels to State Department, Telegram number 1704, 12.05.63

³⁵ Evans, *Kennedy Round*, pp.185-188

³⁶ Zeiler, *American trade*, pp.163-166

³⁷ Evans, *Kennedy Round*, p.192

between Paris and Bonn over the future direction of the Community. Moreover, as Spaak points out, the 14 January press conference was a turning point for the EEC. The veto left a strong legacy of mistrust that would plague the Community for years to come, and a desire for revenge persisted among France's partners³⁸. Finally, there was the little matter of the major American offensive to improve relations with Western Europe and to nip the Franco-German Treaty in the bud.

To counter De Gaulle, the Kennedy administration espoused a carrot-and-stick approach. They sought to restore US-European trust by pushing for closer integration, while privately encouraging the Five to unite and stand up against De Gaulle. They also refrained from starting an open battle with the French President, fearing that it would give credence to the General's attacks against the US, and adversely affect the unity of the Atlantic Alliance³⁹. Moreover, the US leaders relied on the MLF as a means to promote closer integration. Walter Dowling, American Ambassador in Bonn, emphasised that it could be the answer to De Gaulle's allegations that the US was abandoning Europe⁴⁰. At the same time, the US also resorted to threats and blackmail. Kennedy hinted to Adenauer that continuing European hostility might convince the American people and Congress to return to isolationism, while his government made it clear to West Germany that if they ratified the Franco-German treaty in its present form, they would be putting their relations with the US at risk⁴¹.

Washington's strategy proved successful, especially in Bonn. Karl Carstens, West German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, confessed to Roland de Margerie, French Ambassador in Bonn, "the situation in the US is serious, it deserves all our attention. It is essential we restore the trust that is shaken there ..."⁴². Additionally, the US had strong supporters within the West German government. Schroeder and Ludwig Erhard, the Minister of Finance who was due to replace Adenauer as chancellor in October, were determined to

³⁸ Spaak, Paul-Henri, *Combats Inachevés: vol.2*, (Paris: Fayard, 1969), p.406

³⁹ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 67, 02.02.63

⁴⁰ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 173, 12.02.63

⁴¹ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 65, 01.02.63; Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, p.374

⁴² MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1952-1963, Vol.358: Margerie to Couve, Telegram number 1190-1209, 10.02.63

neutralise the Franco-German treaty⁴³. In any case, by early February, the idea of adding a preamble to the Franco-German treaty had emerged, with the intention of making clear that the latter would not affect Bonn's loyalty to NATO, the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC⁴⁴. Very quickly, the whole German political class rallied around this proposal. On 16 May, the Bundestag ratified the Treaty with the preamble. Publicly, France raised no objections, but this was not the case privately. De Gaulle was angry because he felt the preamble was emptying the Franco-German treaty of its content⁴⁵.

III. June-December 1963: A Fragile Status-Quo

By mid-1963, the Western bloc had recovered from the shock of De Gaulle's *double non*. The following year was free of such drama, as all governments sought to avoid serious clashes. Yet, the challenge posed by the General in January 1963 – the future of relations between Western Europe and the United States in the political, economic and military spheres – had not been decisively settled and would resurface. This was even more likely because the events of the first half of 1963 left lasting scars amongst all parties. The US regretted Western Europe's lack of cooperation in trade negotiations and refusal to carry more of the security burden of the Alliance, the Five could not forgive De Gaulle for his veto of Britain, West Germany felt trapped amidst the Franco-American rivalry for its favours, and France resented the preamble added to the Franco-German treaty.

The preamble and the initial mechanism of Franco-German cooperation certainly disappointed De Gaulle, as he told Margerie and later Peyrefitte on the eve of the Bonn summit of 4-5 July⁴⁶. It is easy, however, to overstate the preamble's immediate impact. Even if it did push France to follow a slightly more independent course, it was not quite the complete turning

⁴³ Bange, *EEC crisis*, pp.229-230

⁴⁴ The preamble's exact origin is uncertain. Some suggested it was inspired by Jean Monnet, others claimed it came from the American State Department, and others traced it to Eugen Gerstenmaier, a German Christian Democrat deputy.

⁴⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 24.04.63, p.228

⁴⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Margerie meeting, 04.06.63; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, p.231

point that Maillard suggests. Soutou is closer to the mark when he argues that the failures of the Franco-German Treaty did not become as quickly apparent to the French leaders as is generally believed⁴⁷. The preamble, in fact, had only limited consequences on French grand strategy, and De Gaulle continued to hope he could develop Franco-German cooperation, despite existing obstacles.

Indeed, French foreign policy displayed a great deal of continuity during the second half of 1963. When France acted independently, it did so in domains for which it had been the case beforehand – nuclear and military questions. Thus, it announced the withdrawal of its Atlantic fleet from NATO on 21 June, and refused to be bound by the Partial Test Ban Treaty [PTBT], signed by Britain, the US and the Soviet Union on 5 August. Additionally, France blocked in the autumn all attempts to adopt flexible response as the new nuclear strategy of the Atlantic Alliance⁴⁸. These actions were all driven by a desire to safeguard France’s autonomy of action, a vital component in its quest for Great Power Status. For French leaders, a national community needed to be in charge of its own defence to keep control of its destiny, whilst they perceived the nuclear arsenal as the core element of their policy of independence⁴⁹. Moreover, De Gaulle firmly believed that flexible response, and the concept of a nuclear break, posed a real threat to Western Europe’s security in case of a Soviet attack, because there was no guarantee that the US would defend its allies. The *force de frappe*, therefore, could serve to defend the French territory in case of a Soviet invasion, and could force the US – the only truly plausible defenders of Western Europe – to react before it was too late⁵⁰. This clear difference in strategy between the US and Western Europe did not invalidate their alliance, but it certainly made “integration” in NATO unjustifiable⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Maillard, *Problème Allemand*, pp.194-197; Soutou, *L’Alliance Incertaine*, p.255

⁴⁸ See Haftendorn, *NATO*, pp.39-41

⁴⁹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 03.07.63 and 21.08.63, p.27, 32

⁵⁰ See FNSP: CM Carton 8: De Gaulle to Couve, 01.05.63; or TNA: FO 371/172078: De Gaulle-Dixon meeting, 23.11.63

⁵¹ De Gaulle, *LNC: IX*, Note for Pompidou and Couve, 27.10.63, p.383

Withdrawing its Atlantic Fleet, not signing the PTBT, and the stubborn opposition to flexible response, were all calculated to portray France as an independent player to reckon with on the international scene. By taking spectacular initiatives, France was both strengthening its claim to be a Great Power, and providing a model for other countries to follow. As Couve claimed, France could speak in Europe with great authority, and by its example show that solidarity was different than conformity⁵². However, for all its opposition to NATO and integration, France still avoided a major “conflict” with the organisation. For a start, the EEC remained the priority, and French leaders felt that the situation within NATO was not yet ripe for reform⁵³. Couve hinted this to Kennedy in October 1963, as well as France’s discontent with the organisation. He pointed “NATO, as it is now, corresponds less and less to realities. Western Europe needs a bigger share of responsibilities”, but he also added that it was preferable to “leave the situation as it is and not talk about it”⁵⁴. France, under no illusions regarding a possible reform of NATO, was thus happy to bide its time and stick to its aloof attitude.

Equally Paris, despite the General’s criticism of dollar imperialism, kept a low profile during the debates over the international monetary system. Part of this was the result of serious divisions within the French government over the strategy to pursue. On the one hand Couve and Jacques Rueff, the influential economic adviser to De Gaulle, argued against the Bretton Woods system. Couve wanted an increase in the price of gold, while Rueff pushed the General to convert France’s dollar reserves into gold, so to indicate his displeasure with American abuses of the reserve-currency system. On the other hand Pompidou, and Finance Minister Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, were more favourable to the US, believing it was in the French national interest to stabilise the international monetary situation⁵⁵. In the short-term, Giscard prevailed over Rueff and, along with Pompidou, they convinced the President that the time was not right to denounce

⁵² FNSP: CM Carton 1: Speech to l’Assemblée Nationale, 29.10.63

⁵³ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.2, 27.11.63, p.49

⁵⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: Couve-Kennedy meeting, 07.10.63

⁵⁵ For a good discussion of these divisions see Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, pp.76-77

the international monetary system⁵⁶. Giscard was thus able to present a moderate line at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund [IMF]. Though he underlined the flaws in the mechanism of the international monetary system, he also declared his country's readiness to help improve the system, including the possibility of increasing liquidity should developments in world trade make this necessary⁵⁷. General goodwill at the meeting enabled the Ministers and Governors of the Group of Ten [G10] – a select group of IMF states including the US, Canada, Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium – to agree that their deputies should “undertake a thorough examination of the outlook for the functioning of the international monetary system and of its probable future needs for liquidity”⁵⁸.

France's less confrontational *Westpolitik* in this period was essentially shaped by the dynamics of the Paris-Washington-Bonn triangle. Admittedly, French leaders were disappointed by the fact that their German partners had ran to the US for pardon, after the signing of the Franco-German treaty⁵⁹. De Gaulle thus sent a clear warning to Bonn when he chose to withdraw the Atlantic fleet from NATO without prior consultation, and four days before Kennedy's triumphant visit to West Berlin⁶⁰. Yet, as long as there was hope for Franco-German cooperation, it was in Paris' interest to avoid open competition with Washington for Bonn's loyalty. Thus, Couve publicly denied that the preamble was either a surprise or a major blow to French ambitions⁶¹. Privately, De Gaulle reassured Adenauer that he had never intended to make a policy against the US, and later dismissed as a “bad joke” – during a talk with Erhard – the idea that Bonn had to choose between Paris and Washington⁶². At the same time, Couve explained to US officials that there was no contradiction in Bonn maintaining good relations with both Paris and Washington⁶³. France also played down its conflict with the US, whilst not

⁵⁶ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.2, 18-19.09.63, p.78

⁵⁷ TNA: PREM 13/2050: Giscard speech to IMF, 01.10.63

⁵⁸ Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.65

⁵⁹ DDF: 1963, Tome I: Note by French delegation to NATO, 10.06.63

⁶⁰ Maillard, *Problème Allemand*, p.192

⁶¹ FNSP: CM Carton 1: Speech to l'*Assemblée Nationale*, 12.06.63

⁶² MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting 2, 05.07.63; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.19: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting, 22.11.63

⁶³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: Couve-Ball meeting, 09.10.63

ignoring the existing problems. For example De Gaulle, during his press conference of 29 July 1963, was quick to point out that if changes in France's political, economic and military situation had affected Franco-American relations, they certainly did not undermine the alliance between the two countries⁶⁴.

That is not to say there was a real improvement in relations, and both the US and France remained suspicious of the other's intentions towards West Germany. Moreover, if De Gaulle dismissed the competition as a "bad joke", in reality he still entertained the hope that Bonn would eventually side with Paris rather than Washington, as he confided to Peyrefitte: "It is important for West Germany to understand that its destiny is Europe, and Europe is mainly its union with France"⁶⁵. There was no question, however, of France forcing West Germany to make such a choice in the short-run, especially because of the influence of other external factors. For a start, as explored in chapter three, Franco-American differences partially shifted from European to Asian questions, a region that was of far less interest to West Germany. More importantly, the change of leadership in both Bonn and Washington – Erhard succeeding Adenauer as chancellor, and Lyndon Johnson replacing Kennedy after his assassination – naturally created uncertainty in regards to their future policy. If De Gaulle did not think much of the new American President, he believed that Erhard's pro-American inclination was not necessarily irreversible⁶⁶.

Furthermore the EEC, rather than Bonn's ties with Washington, remained the main focus of France's *Westpolitik* in the second half of 1963. Indeed, for Couve, the Six needed to achieve their economic union before they could focus on military and political cooperation and trade relations with the rest of the world⁶⁷. This meant moving forward on the vital CAP, and making sure the Six respect the deadline of 31 December 1963 for agricultural settlements. Unfortunately, this also implied overcoming German resistance to the CAP, which escalated in

⁶⁴ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.119; for another example of this approach, see Couve's interview with *Notre République* in NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1963, Box 3911: Anschuetz to Rusk, Airgram number 972, 28.10.63

⁶⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 25.06.63, p.26

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 27.11.63 and 20.11.63, p.48, 246

⁶⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: Couve-Kennedy meeting, 25.05.63

the weeks after the 9 May agreement⁶⁸. De Gaulle, convinced that Bonn's policy was not helping the EEC, was determined to express his disappointment during the upcoming Franco-German summit in July; the Franco-German entente would be clearly meaningless unless both countries could overcome their differences at the Community level⁶⁹.

At the summit, France followed a mixed strategy of confronting and pressuring Bonn about the CAP, while simultaneously displaying signs of empathy and understanding. De Gaulle upped the stakes when he accused Bonn of not really wanting to complete the Common Market. Couve, on the other hand, agreed with the West Germans that they could not accept exaggerated sacrifices. Yet, he also reminded his interlocutors that completing the CAP was vital for any common trade policy, and was a prerequisite for the Kennedy Round talks⁷⁰. Both De Gaulle and Couve's approach ultimately shared the same aim, but neither approach was particularly successful. Bonn did not trust its partner and doubted its commitment to succeed on the Kennedy Round front. The July meeting really achieved little as the German government stuck to its positions: it still complained about the inherent flaws of the CAP and its impact on its trade with the outside world, and wanted the EEC foremost to agree on a common position for the upcoming Kennedy Round. France's response to this deadlock was swift and threatening. In his press conference of 29 July 1963, De Gaulle made it crystal clear that France considered an agreement on the CAP as vital for its agricultural interests and the upcoming tariff negotiations with the US. Alternatively, any failure to respect the self-imposed deadlines might cause the Common Market to completely disappear. The General also reminded his EEC partners that success in the economic field could significantly increase the chances of developing a common European policy, a vital aim when the Anglo-Saxon powers were negotiating with the Soviet Union over issues that involved the fate of Western Europe⁷¹.

⁶⁸ NARA: RG59, CFPPF, 1963, Box 3912: Brussels to Rusk, Telegram number 1817, 08.06.63

⁶⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Margerie meeting, 04.06.63; Archives Nationales Françaises [ANF]: 5^{ème} République Archives de la Présidence De Gaulle [5AG1], Carton 161, Allemagne RFA: Maillard-Blankenhorn meeting, 18.06.63

⁷⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Luebke meeting, 05.07.63, and Pompidou-Erhard meeting, 04.07.63

⁷¹ De Gaulle, DM: IV, p.128-129

In the final months of 1963, French leaders stuck to the line according to which the Common Market could only survive if the Six respected their deadlines. De Gaulle even dropped hints that France could easily live without the Common Market⁷². However, this was more of an example of brinkmanship and a way of pressuring the Five, rather than a genuine threat. Paris sometimes feigned indifference towards the Common Market, but remained strongly committed to its completion. Therefore, the French President showed flexibility in his attempt to win over the Germans. He accepted the possibility of agreeing to a temporary solution for cereal prices, so long as Germany agreed to reach an agreement for the other three settlements by the end-of-year deadline⁷³. Even in the final days of December, France still worked hard towards a solution. Meeting Manfred Klaiber, West German Ambassador in Paris, on 21 December, De Gaulle again hinted that France could live without the Common Market. More importantly, he confronted the West Germans and questioned their commitment to the EEC. He mentioned that France had compromised on the Kennedy Round, and added that doing the same for the European Community would not amount to capitulation for Bonn⁷⁴. All this confirmed that France was far from indifferent to the fate of the Common Market.

In the end Sicco Mansholt, the European Commissioner responsible for agriculture, helped break the deadlock when he presented his plan on 5 November. In his bold attempt to solve both the Community's internal and external problems, Mansholt put forward three main proposals: a common cereal prices by 1 July 1964, the basis of the EEC's agricultural offer in the Kennedy Round, and a Community position on disparities in industrial tariffs for the Kennedy Round – the *double écart*⁷⁵. This was sufficient to push Bonn to step back and compromise on the three outstanding CAP regulations. Not only was West Germany isolated on the latter issue, but also its government realised that the Mansholt Plan, and especially the proposal on cereal

⁷² MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.19: De Gaulle-Bohlen meeting, 05.11.63

⁷³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.19: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting, 22.11.63

⁷⁴ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.19: De Gaulle-Klaiber meeting, 21.12.63

⁷⁵ Evans, *Kennedy Round*, pp.208-209; Preeg, *Traders and Diplomats*, p.73

prices, presented a graver threat⁷⁶. On 23 December, the Six finally reached a package agreement for the CAP and the Kennedy Round; the issue of cereal prices was left for later discussions.

1963 thus seemed to end on a high note, and the French were especially pleased. Boegner seemed convinced that “the December 23 deal has erased the immediate consequences of the crisis caused by the breaking off of negotiations with England”, while De Gaulle approvingly spoke to Adenauer of “the success of our Europe in Brussels”⁷⁷. Yet, this was misleading because many of the divisive questions, including a common price for cereals and the financial settlement for the CAP, had not been sorted. Moreover, France’s future Western policy would largely depend on the developments of the Paris-Bonn-Washington triangle. In other words, it would depend on how long Paris could tolerate Bonn’s complete loyalty to Washington.

IV. January-July 1964: Crisis in the Making

During the first half of 1964, the Western world had seemingly overcome the drama of the previous year, as all states appeared to cooperate for the good of the Alliance. The changes of government in the US, Britain, West Germany and Italy, combined with the willingness of most states to limit the general crisis, had helped to cancel out the effects of lingering disputes and divisive topics. France, for its part, was focussing less on Europe, and giving more priority to gestures that announced future policy axes, rather than resorting to spectacular diplomatic initiatives⁷⁸. However, this peace was fragile, especially as a major Franco-German crisis was brewing beneath the surface.

The 23 December agreement was an important achievement for the EEC, even if it neither solved all outstanding questions for the Community nor really altered France’s strategy, as shown by De Gaulle’s press conference of 31 January. The French President made it clear that his priority remained the CAP, and he again warned his EEC partners that failure to complete

⁷⁶ Ludlow, European Community, p.35

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.37

⁷⁸ Roussel, De Gaulle, p.764

this would lead his country to “reclaim its freedom”. However, if the Six accomplished their economic goals, they could then focus on other pressing matters, such as negotiations with external states – especially the US – and the vital question of developing their political cooperation, as long as the latter was not drowned within a wider Atlantic framework and did not involve supranational integration⁷⁹. French leaders essentially supported the principle of a political union, but were cautious on the subject since the failure of the Fouchet Plan two years earlier.

In any case, as long as Western Europe lacked a common will to become an independent political power, they believed that this was not a question for the immediate future⁸⁰. France’s partners, with the noticeable exception of West Germany, shared this assessment, albeit for different reasons. For example Giuseppe Saragat, the Italian Foreign Minister, explained to his American counterpart Rusk that the December agreement was an important step towards a CAP, but it did not mark progress towards political union; there could be no united Europe without Britain⁸¹. Yet, this relative stalemate did not impede the cautious optimism that prevailed within the EEC at the time. In a meeting with the same Rusk, the European Commissioners pointed out that the Community’s ability to overcome successive crises in 1963 had created a momentum, which would allow it to move rapidly in 1964. Existing tensions could prevent progress on the political front, but the Commission seemed confident that the EEC would further its economic unity, and expected success in the Kennedy Round negotiations⁸².

The trade talks actually progressed smoothly during the first half of 1964. The great debate over disparities was finally shelved when all parties agreed to disagree on the subject⁸³. Moreover, the mood was relaxed at the formal opening of the Kennedy Round on 4 May, thanks to a tacit desire to avoid major confrontations. The participants were thus able to agree unanimously on two points: adopting 50% as a working hypothesis for linear cut, and setting 16

⁷⁹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, pp.176-177

⁸⁰ FNSP: CM Carton 1: Speech to l’Assemblée Nationale, 28.04.64

⁸¹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 2, 14.01.64

⁸² FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 11, 06.03.64

⁸³ Preeg, *Traders and Diplomats*, p.69

November as the date to table exception lists –the list of items not being offered a 50% cut⁸⁴. This general goodwill also extended to France. Certainly, De Gaulle feared that a Western Europe without a common tariff would invite an invasion of US products⁸⁵. It convinced French officials that it was essential for the Six to maintain their cohesion, in order to ensure success in the Kennedy Round negotiations⁸⁶. This is not to say, though, that Paris wanted the EEC to become an autarkic community. As Émile Noël, the European Commission's Executive Secretary, confirmed to American officials, the French negotiators were showing no intentions of torpedoing the trade negotiations, although he felt this could change if future CAP talks did not succeed⁸⁷.

Similarly, during their monthly meetings between October 1963 and June 1964, the G10 deputies managed to discuss changes in the international monetary system without major disputes. The participants aired their views and criticisms frankly, but the atmosphere remained conciliatory. Giscard criticised the existing system for its lack of 'automatic machinery' to bring about a prompt return to balance of payments equilibrium for reserve currency states, the American deputies argued that the US balance of payments was improving, and the views of other deputies ranged between those of the US and France. The end result was a compromise report presented by the deputies to their Ministers in mid-June⁸⁸. The report, published in August, essentially defended the international monetary system, and argued that the current stocks in gold and reserve currencies could cover liquidity needs. However, it also pointed out that the future growth in world trade and world payments would increase demand for liquidities, which could be either covered by expanding credit facilities or by establishing new reserve instruments; Rinaldo Ossola, of Bank of Italy, was thus asked to lead a group to examine those

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp.81-83

⁸⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.377: De Gaulle-Pearson meeting, 15.01.64

⁸⁶ DDF: 1964, Tome I: Note of *La Direction des Affaires Économiques et Financières*, 07.02.64

⁸⁷ Lyndon Baines Johnson Library [LBJL]: Presidential Papers [PP], National Security Files [NSF], Subject Files [SF], Box 48: Bator-Noël meeting, 01.06.64

⁸⁸ Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.65-67

different options⁸⁹. Despite the fact that French criticisms of the international monetary system were softened in this report thanks to Anglo-Saxon pressures, De Gaulle nonetheless found the compromise acceptable during an Inner Council meeting on 9 June⁹⁰.

The French President's apparent unwillingness to start a conflict in the monetary sphere certainly gave Giscard more leeway in the negotiations. Unlike some of his colleagues within the government, the Minister of Finances seemed ready to work with American authorities, and did not intend to end the use of dollar as a reserve currency. What he wanted, instead, was to give the French franc a place in a broadened monetary scheme that used additional currencies as reserves. As such, Giscard proposed the establishment of a Collective Reserve Unit [CRU], that is to say artificial units representing a certain amount of gold, which would have been distributed according to the reserves of all states. The CRU would be used outside the IMF – where the US exercised great influence – and would address French concerns about curbing global inflation, while meeting the demands for expanded international liquidity⁹¹. Giscard realised, however, that his margin of manoeuvre was curtailed by the fact that some of De Gaulle's advisers, especially Couve, were pushing for a tougher stand against the dollar⁹².

Paris cooperated with its partners in the economic, monetary and commercial fields, but it also balanced this stance with more independent actions that aimed to promote its claim to Great Power status. Indeed, French leaders hoped Western Europe would eventually take increasing control of its fate, and force the US to transform its “leadership” into a more equal “partnership”. They were convinced that this evolution was inevitable in the long-run, even if they acknowledged that there was no such will to act in common in the present⁹³. In the meantime, the French government was happy to lead the way for other states and defy its powerful American ally, especially since it felt more empowered now that the *force de frappe*

⁸⁹ Esteve, Pierre, in *De Gaulle en son siècle: vol.3 [DGESS III]*, Institut Charles de Gaulle (ed.), (Paris: La Documentation française, 1992), p.148

⁹⁰ Prate, Alain, *Les Batailles Économiques du Général de Gaulle*, (Paris: Plon, 1978), p.220

⁹¹ On the CRU, see Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.80; Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.219; Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.66

⁹² LBJL: PP, Confidential Files [CF], Box 8: Memo for Lyndon Johnson, 26.05.64

⁹³ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: De Gaulle-Segni meeting, 20.02.64; FNSP: CM Carton 1: Speech to l'Assemblée Nationale, 28.04.64

was finally operational⁹⁴. Thus, Paris surprised most of its allies when it unilaterally announced, on 27 January, its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing. This move, as described in chapter three, was very closely connected to the situation in South-East Asia, but it was also for the General a great opportunity to irritate the Americans and emphasise his country's margin of manoeuvre⁹⁵. As Couve remarked to Schroeder, Great Powers did not always consult their allies: witness the US during the Cuban Missile Crisis⁹⁶. Similarly, during a televised speech, De Gaulle explained to his compatriots that without a nuclear deterrent, they would be forced to rely on a "foreign protectorate", or a veiled attack against the presence of American troops on French soil⁹⁷.

Defence was the central pillar of France's independent ambitions, and this emerged clearly in its policy towards NATO. On 4 March, De Gaulle decided that French naval ships would no longer be under the organisation's command⁹⁸. For Jean de la Grandville, head of the Quai's *Service des Pactes*, this was a further sign – as he confided to British officials – that the General's attitude was hardening and that he was preparing France for a complete break with NATO⁹⁹. It was also clear that the French President was the driving force behind this policy, and neither Couve nor the French navy were able to soften his instructions regarding the role of French ships within the Atlantic organisation¹⁰⁰. However, the General's growing animosity towards NATO largely remained concealed in this period, and did not lead to an open confrontation. For example, during the mid-May Ministerial meeting in The Hague, Couve underlined the split between France and its allies when it came to possible reforms of NATO. While France wanted more military freedom, other members were pushing for more integration. Yet, he concluded it would be vain to open a debate about the future of the Atlantic Alliance,

⁹⁴ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.124-125

⁹⁵ Interview with Henri Froment-Meurice, Paris, 24.04.03

⁹⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 14.02.64

⁹⁷ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 16.04.64, p.207

⁹⁸ De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, De Gaulle to Pompidou, p.43; on 27 April, French officers were also withdrawn from the inter-allied naval general staff.

⁹⁹ See TNA: FO 371/179064: Paris to FO, 14.02.64; TNA: FO 371/179016: Paris to FO, 13.03.64

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FO 371/179064: Paris to FO, Telegram number 299, 21.04.64

considering the irreconcilable gap between the various parties¹⁰¹. As Spaak later surmised, Couve avoided all controversial questions during this meeting, because maintaining mystery about France's intentions would better serve its long-term goals towards NATO¹⁰².

Fundamentally, though, Paris' policy towards NATO was tied to the fortunes of the Franco-German axis; as long as an effective partnership with Bonn still seemed feasible, France would not engage in a full-frontal attack against the Atlantic organisation. However, tension had been brewing between both countries ever since they had signed the Treaty in January 1963. Within its first year, the preamble, France's withdrawal of its Atlantic fleet from NATO, and tough negotiations over the EEC and the Kennedy Round, had certainly dampened the enthusiasm of both governments for the Treaty, not to mention public opinion¹⁰³. Moreover, the trend persisted in the first half of 1964 thanks to France's unilateral recognition of Communist China and the Argoud affair. The latter incident involved the French secret services kidnapping a member of the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* [OAS] – involved in murder attempts on De Gaulle but roaming free in West Germany – without informing the authorities.

These episodes did not cause a major Franco-German crisis on their own, but their accumulated impact exacerbated doubts held by supporters of the Treaty concerning its usefulness. In West Germany, any hope that the Treaty could act as a restraint on French foreign policy appeared more and more illusory. As the Secretary to the Chancellery, Ludger Westrick, complained to Margerie, Paris's decision to recognise the PRC, without consulting Bonn, only made life more difficult for the German "Gaullists" who pushed for closer cooperation with France¹⁰⁴. De Gaulle suggested similar concerns when he spoke of "trying to give a new basis to our relations with Germany" during a speech on 31 December 1963; while the Treaty had

¹⁰¹ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.21: Couve to Seydoux, Telegram number 3714-3729, 14.05.64

¹⁰² Spaak, *Combats*: vol.2, p.387

¹⁰³ See TNA: FO 371/172109: Bonn to FO, 17.12.63; In October 1962, 61% of West Germans thought De Gaulle's policy was favourable for their country, and 6% thought it was unfavourable; By November 1963, the number had dropped to 38% favourable and 27% unfavourable.

¹⁰⁴ MAEF: Asie-Océanie, Chine 1956-1967, Vol.526: Margerie to Couve, Telegram number 1026-1040, 03.02.64

worked well in terms of procedures and regular meetings, French officials were convinced it could have worked better if Bonn had not constantly looked towards Washington¹⁰⁵.

This was clearly the heart of the problem for the French. In all fields, the American influence presented an insurmountable obstacle to their hopes of closer cooperation with their neighbour. This was true for the field of defence where projects to develop and build common weapons, such as tanks, and to establish common strategic and tactical concepts faltered quickly. Undoubtedly, the significant arms deal signed in August 1963 – without informing nor consulting the French – by Kai-Uwe von Hassel, the German Defence Minister, and his American counterpart Robert McNamara, played a significant part in undermining Franco-German military cooperation¹⁰⁶. Similarly, if De Gaulle questioned America's commitment to defend Western Europe in case of a Soviet aggression, Erhard had a total and loyal belief in the US nuclear umbrella¹⁰⁷. Essentially, though, the crucial factor proved to be the shift in foreign policy introduced by Erhard once he became chancellor. Taking a more independent stance towards De Gaulle, the new chancellor quickly moved to repair relations with the US, and increasingly based his political fortunes on the assumed steadfastness of the American commitment in Europe. As such, he promised several times to his American partners that his government accepted full offset for American troops stationed in Germany, despite the concerns of many of his officials¹⁰⁸. Erhard had clearly chosen Washington over Paris, and a crisis appeared pretty inevitable.

The trigger for the crisis was not paradoxically over Europe, but over Vietnam, which largely seemed a marginal interest for Bonn¹⁰⁹. Yet, on 12 June, a few days after Schroeder had mentioned to Couve Bonn's lack of interest in the situation in Indochina, Erhard offered US

¹⁰⁵ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.153; DDF: 1964, Tome I: Note number 4 of *Direction Europe-Centrale*, 06.02.64

¹⁰⁶ Soutou, *L'Alliance Incertaine*, pp.261-262; DDF: 1963, Tome II: Note of *Sous-Direction d'Europe Centrale*, 17.09.63

¹⁰⁷ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.XIII: Document 87, 26.11.63

¹⁰⁸ For more on offset, see the excellent Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, pp.162-166. Offset basically refers to the idea that the West German government agreed to purchase American armaments and other monetary measures in order to cover the costs of the American troops stationed in Germany.

¹⁰⁹ For background see Mausbach, Wilfried, "The United States, Germany, and French Peace Initiatives for Vietnam", in Gardner, Lloyd, and Gittinger, Ted (ed.), *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, c2004)

President Johnson his full support for the war effort in Vietnam¹¹⁰. According to Klaiber, De Gaulle considered Erhard's statement as a "slap in the face" and yet another proof that Bonn had failed to stand up to the US on each and every issue¹¹¹. If Bonn could not show independence from Washington on a question as marginal to German interests as Vietnam, what were the chances that it would cooperate closely with France to develop a more independent Western Europe? Disappointed by West Germany's excessive friendliness towards the US, and the fact that "they [Germans] do not want it [Franco-German treaty] to be a treaty of friendship and cooperation", De Gaulle was determined to confront the German chancellor during the forthcoming Franco-German summit of 3-4 July in Bonn¹¹².

De Gaulle's first meeting with Erhard set the tone for the following discussions. He began by announcing "he had no illusions concerning the results of this meeting with West Germany", and presented Bonn with a clear choice. "Either you [Bonn] follow a policy subordinated to the US or you adopt a policy that is European and independent of the US, but not hostile to them"¹¹³. Erhard and his colleagues, however, rejected the General's challenge by pledging total loyalty to Washington. The French leaders spared no efforts to convey their irritation to their German counterparts, and displayed none of the diplomatic restraint, which had come to be usually associated with these summits. Equally, they abandoned their restraint towards the US, typified by Couve's very clear description of French strategy towards NATO: "withdraw from the integration system and restore national command of our troops". Likewise, Couve showed no flexibility on the project of a European political union, despite the fact it was a subject close to Erhard's heart¹¹⁴.

¹¹⁰ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.21: Couve-Schroeder meeting 2, 08.06.64; Joint Statement Following Discussions with Chancellor Erhard, 12.06.64, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26311&st=&st1=>

¹¹¹ Mausbach, "The United States", in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace*, pp.176-177

¹¹² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 23.06.64, p.257

¹¹³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting 1, 03.07.64

¹¹⁴ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 03.07.64

Unsurprisingly, the talks ended with no concrete results, as expected by De Gaulle¹¹⁵. If he still believed that Bonn would eventually follow France's independent stand in the long-run, he could see no such prospect as long as Erhard remained chancellor. The French government had hoped that the January 1963 treaty would help foster a common European policy, which could serve as a model for other EEC states and provide the basis of an independent and politically strong Western Europe. Yet, the preamble had confirmed that Bonn had not adopted the treaty in the same spirit and, instead of working towards a united Europe, it had chosen to always side with Washington, even over Vietnam. The consequences were very clear for Couve. Without a common European policy, there was no chance of reforming Western Bloc, and no more reason for France to accept integration into NATO and general subservience to Washington¹¹⁶.

V. July-December 1964: Towards a New Strategy

The July 1964 Franco-German summit was a turning point for France's *Westpolitik*. De Gaulle bitterly acknowledged, "West Germany is an American protectorate in political, military and economic terms. There is thus no way of developing a common Franco-German policy"¹¹⁷. Without this basis, there was no hope either of creating a more independent Western Europe and reforming the Atlantic partnership, even though this remained a long-term goal for France. In the short-run, the shortcomings of the treaty freed Paris from the restraint it had displayed earlier so to appease Bonn, and pushed it to harden its stance and adopt more independent policies to promote its claim to Great Power status. The treaty had clearly lost its special place at the heart of French strategy; at the same time, French leaders still believed that cooperation with West Germany could serve some interests, especially over the EEC.

The summer months led to no improvement in relations between Paris and Bonn; if anything, the situation escalated after De Gaulle's press conference of 23 July 1964. After

¹¹⁵ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting 1, 04.07.64

¹¹⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 04.07.64

¹¹⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 07.07.64, p.262

referring to the “minor successes” of the Franco-German treaty, the master of the Élysée then listed the numerous areas for which both states had failed to agree on a common policy¹¹⁸. The German government, however, refused to give in to France’s independent behaviour and rejected its criticisms. In response to the General’s press conference, Schroeder made it clear that Bonn had not signed the treaty to “adopt France’s policy”¹¹⁹. Relations between both partners had reached a sort of stalemate, as they blamed each other for the current tensions. Whereas Erhard denied that there had ever been a Franco-German consultation over Indochina, the French replied that there had been such talks in June, and that the Germans had chosen the American, rather than French line, on the subject¹²⁰.

Germany’s apparent subservience to Washington also led France to adopt a new attitude towards the US. As De Gaulle told Hervé Alphand, his Ambassador in Washington, “... the Americans have to realise they are not the dictators of Western Europe. It is clear for France, but others will surely follow, even if they do not seem to for the moment”¹²¹. In the meantime, France increasingly sought to mark its independence vis-à-vis the US, first and foremost within NATO. Just a few days after the July Franco-German summit, De Gaulle privately confided to Peyrefitte “the Americans have to leave. [...] Not a single American uniform must remain”¹²². Additionally, France’s more confrontational stance towards the Atlantic organisation became more public. During a meeting with Manlio Brosio, the new Secretary-General of NATO, De Gaulle forcefully rejected integration as no longer appropriate, and hinted that it would no longer apply to his country by 1969 – the date when member states could theoretically denounce the April 1949 North Atlantic Treaty¹²³. For Charles Bohlen, US Ambassador in Paris, this was more brutal and specific than previous De Gaulle statements on NATO, and a way for the French

¹¹⁸ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.230

¹¹⁹ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1604: Aumale to Couve, Telegram number 4951-4957, 24.07.64

¹²⁰ See MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Aide-mémoire of the German government to the French government, 10.08.64, and the French reply, 17.08.64

¹²¹ Alphand, Hervé, *L'étonnement d'être: journal, 1939-1973*, (Paris: Fayard, 1977), 30.07.64, p.435

¹²² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 07.07.64, p.55

¹²³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: De Gaulle-Brosio meeting, 03.09.64

President to send a message to his allies, because he was aware that Brosio would repeat the content of their talk¹²⁴.

The shortcomings of the treaty with Germany had undoubtedly a very significant impact on French foreign policy, but it was actually only after the complex crisis of October-November that France changed the strategy of its *Westpolitik*. This new round of tension erupted in the autumn when the fate of various negotiations and projects, normally quite independent from one another, suddenly became closely intertwined. This included the MLF, which began receiving more active support from the US administration in the spring 1964, and especially from its more “Europeanist” elements like George Ball, the Under-Secretary of State for European Affairs. For Ball, the MLF presented multiple advantages. Not only would it give West Germany a legitimate role in the Alliance’s defence, albeit “on a leash”, but it would also provide “an Atlantic solution to the problem of the nuclear defence of the West, and weaken French and British determination to hold on to their national nuclear establishments”¹²⁵. Erhard enthusiastically supported this project, and after his meeting on 12 June with Johnson, both men pledged to reach an agreement on the MLF by the end of the year. During an interview on 6 October, Erhard went a step further when he publicly mentioned the possibility of a German-US bilateral agreement over the MLF¹²⁶.

In parallel, the West German government was also working hard on a plan to re-start talks on European political union, which was eventually completed on 4 November. The plan outlined progress through several stages, and involved some supranational elements with the establishment of a consultative commission to help governments push forward the process¹²⁷. Bonn’s willingness to achieve political union stood in stark contrast with its obstructive policies towards the CAP. Despite the European Commission’s repeated pressure, with the backing of

¹²⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 33, 14.09.64

¹²⁵ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 16, 10.04.64; for more on the MLF, see Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.110-117 or Schwartz, Thomas, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp.39-42

¹²⁶ Haftendorn, *NATO*, p.132

¹²⁷ See Germond, Carine, “La France et l’Allemagne face à l’Europe Politique dans les Années 1960”, in Bitsch, Marie-Thérèse (ed.), *Le Couple France-Allemagne et les Institutions Européennes: Une postérité pour le Plan Schuman?*, (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2001), pp.206-212

France and the Netherlands, West Germany continuously refused to agree a common price for cereals during meetings in spring and summer 1964; a situation complicated by the fact the Community needed to urgently establish a opening stance for the Kennedy Round discussions of agricultural trade¹²⁸. Already bitter because of the failure of the treaty and further disappointed by Bonn's opposition to the CAP and its excessive befriending of Washington, France responded forcefully.

On 21 October, reverting to the brinkmanship tactics of the previous year, Peyrefitte issued a clear warning to France's partners in the official communiqué after the Council of Ministers: "The President and the French government stressed that France would cease to participate in the EEC if the agricultural market were not organised as it had been agreed that it would be organised"; he also added "France maintains in this regards the position it has always taken. There is no possibility of negotiating usefully with the US as long as the EEC - including agriculture - is not completely organised and this will not be the case as long as the Common Market for agriculture is not organised"¹²⁹. To achieve its goals for the CAP, France was clearly ready to resort to all kinds of threats and linkages.

Along with the CAP, Paris launched a major offensive against the MLF. Initially unconcerned by the latter because they never thought it would materialise, French officials stepped up their opposition to the nuclear force once it became a real possibility, and in particular after Erhard's interview in October¹³⁰. Additionally, once De Gaulle came back in mid-October from his month-long trip in Latin America, his collaborators immediately informed him of the latest changes in the MLF negotiations. Describing the force as an American tool to "block French diplomacy", they pushed the President to place this affair on the political level: failure to do so would mean France gave the "impression it accepted the indefinite postponement of a political Europe in line with its views, and the supremacy of the US in Western Europe"¹³¹.

¹²⁸ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.43

¹²⁹ LBJL: PP, NSF, SF, Box 48: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 2298, 21.10.64

¹³⁰ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 1756: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram 2004, 07.10.64

¹³¹ Soutou, *L'Alliance Incertaine*, p.278

Convinced by this argument, De Gaulle and his colleagues immediately went about undermining the MLF by specifically targeting their German partners. In a meeting with Carstens, Couve tied the fate of the plan for European political union to the CAP and the MLF: there could be no European union without an agreement on aims and policy, but the discussions on the nuclear force confirmed this was not the case. Moreover, how could the Six agree on a political organisation if they could not agree on the bases of the Common Market¹³²? Pompidou went even further when he claimed, in early November 1964, that the MLF would not be compatible with the Franco-German treaty¹³³. Olivier Wormser, head of the Quai's *Direction Économique*, was right when he pointed out to American officials that the atmosphere reminded him very much of January 1963¹³⁴.

Yet, France's forceful policies were to a certain extent a defensive reaction, and were not solely for selfish reasons. They reflected a growing mistrust of the US, as well as an understanding of the events of October-November as part of a wider Franco-American struggle over the future of the Western world. Wormser, for example, felt the Americans were clearly undermining the CAP, by insisting to the Germans that they did not consider the common price of cereals to be of any use for the Kennedy Round¹³⁵. Couve could thus sum up those agricultural questions as an "open and resolute conflict between France and the US"¹³⁶. In the same way, Paris was convinced that the MLF, like the Kennedy Round, was an American weapon aiming to divide Europe¹³⁷. Additionally, it feared that the MLF would allow West Germany to indirectly possess nuclear weapons¹³⁸. This was vital because French plans for cooperation with West Germany had always centred on Bonn's subordination, which depended greatly on the fact that France was the sole country to possess nuclear weapons amongst the Six.

¹³² MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Couve to Margerie, Telegram number 9200-9223, 26.10.64

¹³³ Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.575

¹³⁴ LBJL: PP, NSF, Country Files [CO], Box 170: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram 2354, 23.10.64

¹³⁵ *Idem*

¹³⁶ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 21.10.64, p.265

¹³⁷ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.23: Couve-Hasluck meeting, 04.11.64

¹³⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.23: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 09.11.64

In the end, though, the October-November crisis disappeared as quickly as it had emerged. Combined pressure from the EEC and the US, along with hard negotiations, eventually convinced West Germany to accept a common price for cereals¹³⁹. The Kennedy Round also moved forward: on 16 November, sixteen countries including the US, Japan, Czechoslovakia, the Six and the seven members of the European Free Trade Association submitted their exceptions list to an otherwise across the board cut in industrial tariffs¹⁴⁰. As for the MLF, American interest in the project petered out quickly from late November onwards. Considering the numerous obstacles, such as British reluctance, French opposition, divisions within Erhard's Christian Democratic Union [CDU] party, and lukewarm support in Congress, the American Ambassador in Bonn George McGhee recommended that the US should let the MLF "sink out of sight"¹⁴¹. The MLF was not completely dead yet, but the key issue for the Johnson administration was now how to back away from it without offending or humiliating Bonn.

Yet, the consequences of this crisis were far-reaching. Despite the optimism resulting from the agreement on a common price for cereals, the Community had in fact been weakened by this new episode of brinkmanship. On the French side, German resistance made the government even more determined to reach a quick agreement on the financial settlement of the CAP, the final step needed for its implementation. On the other hand, the Five and the Commission expected future compensation from France in exchange for the agreement on cereal prices. In particular, the Erhard government felt it had made great concessions on cereal prices, and expected progress in other domains, noticeably its plan for political union¹⁴². Disappointed by Paris' opposition to the MLF, Bonn was less likely to make new concessions on the CAP. In such circumstances, the margin for compromise in future EEC discussions could only be very limited.

¹³⁹ Ludlow, *European Community*, pp.43-44

¹⁴⁰ Preeg, *Traders and Diplomats*, p.87

¹⁴¹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 52, 25.11.64

¹⁴² MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.378: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 09.12.64

Furthermore, the events in the autumn had a serious impact on Paris' attitude towards both Bonn and Washington. There is no doubt that De Gaulle felt very bitter against the Germans and was disappointed by their consistent subservience to the US¹⁴³. As for Franco-American relations, they were already poor, but the French leaders believed they were facing a different situation: with the MLF, the American government seemed to be trying to create a sort of German-American axis, which would forever prevent the emergence of a more independence Western Europe¹⁴⁴. The consequences for France's *Westpolitik* – as well as for its policy towards the Soviet Union as we will see in the next chapter – were fundamental. Instead of simply defending its independence against its powerful ally, France was now determined to actively attack US leadership within the Western world, starting with NATO. Thus, De Gaulle clearly accelerated the timing for withdrawal, and he now privately hinted at a move as early as 1967, instead of 1969¹⁴⁵. As he unambiguously explained to Peyrefitte, “between us and the Americans, behind the courteous conversations, it is a struggle. We are the only ones resisting”¹⁴⁶.

VI. January-June 1965: Challenging America

On 31 December, De Gaulle announced to his compatriots his determination to protect France's independence and reject “all systems which ... would hold us under the hegemony that we know”¹⁴⁷. True to his word, the French President in 1965 increasingly condemned America's political, economic and military leadership in the Western world, at a time when the Johnson administration was dramatically escalating its involvement in Vietnam. Despite its spectacular

¹⁴³ See for example TNA: FO 371/177867: Bonn to FO, Telegram number 1153, 16.11.64; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, pp.269-270

¹⁴⁴ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.118; NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 1756: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 2771, 06.11.64

¹⁴⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 09.12.64, p.67

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 16.12.64, p.67

¹⁴⁷ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.319

nature, public opinion largely supported this new direction for French foreign policy, as well as De Gaulle's attitude towards the US¹⁴⁸.

In the monetary field, the fragile compromise of mid-1964 broke down because of interrelated political and economic differences between France and its Anglo-Saxon partners. Both parties disagreed over the need for liquidity, Britain and the US looked for ways to create liquidity while France wanted to establish a rational objective system of sound international finance, and France was preoccupied with the dangers of European inflation resulting from the American balance of payments deficit. Politically, France wanted to magnify its own role in monetary affairs but distrusted international organisations, while the US wanted to improve the IMF mechanisms¹⁴⁹. By the time of the annual IMF meeting in September in Tokyo, the controversy had become more pronounced. Criticising the gold exchange standard for its inflationist tendencies, and for its lack of corrective mechanism for the deficits of the reserve currency states, Giscard suggested instead an international monetary system organised in concentric circles, with gold at the centre of the system of international payments¹⁵⁰. However, Douglas Dillon, US Secretary of the Treasury, firmly rebuffed Giscard's criticisms, and argued that a national increase in the contributions to IMF would take care of the problem of liquidity for the next few years. The battle lines were now clearly drawn with France keen to see gold replace the dollar as the cornerstone of the monetary system, and the Anglo-Saxon powers defending the existing organisation¹⁵¹.

The developments in the following months only served to reinforce Paris' objections. With dollar and sterling facing growing problems in late 1964, the French government had further evidence to support its views on the lack of discipline of the main debtor countries.

¹⁴⁸ See TNA: FO 371/182937: Paris to FO, 26.02.65, according to *Le Figaro's* survey in February 1965, 44% were satisfied with the role played by France on the international scene, and only 16% were dissatisfied with it. In February 1963, only 36% were satisfied and 17% were dissatisfied; See IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.268, in May 1965, 16% thought De Gaulle's attitude towards the US was too harsh, 6% thought it was too conciliatory, and 50% felt it was as it should be.

¹⁴⁹ Morse, Edward, *Foreign Policy and Interdependence in Gaullist France*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp.222-223

¹⁵⁰ TNA: PREM 13/2050: Giscard speech to IMF, 09.09.64

¹⁵¹ Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.72-73

Moreover, the discussions within the Ossola group, regarding the creation of new reserve instruments, had quickly demonstrated a lack of support for Giscard's CRU proposal¹⁵². With the failure of Giscard's plan, the time was thus ripe for a presidential initiative and a more forceful stance in monetary matters, especially as France now possessed the means to do so. Its economy was growing faster than those of its main Western competitors, and its dollar reserves had increased by \$5 billion between 1959 and 1963¹⁵³. It was in this context that De Gaulle gave his press conference on 4 February 1965.

Taking advantage of this very public platform, the French President denounced the gold exchange standard in an eloquent and scathing manner. Not only was it no longer fitted to the current situation – if the US possessed most of the world's gold reserves after World War Two, by 1965, the Six's total gold reserves were nearly equal to those of the Americans – but the dollar's special status gave the US unfair privileges. It could run a balance-of-payments deficits for free and export its inflation abroad, while all other states were forced to rigourously maintain equilibrium¹⁵⁴. For the General, the only alternative solution was to establish a system where international exchanges would be tied to gold, “a monetary basis that is not controversial and bears the sign of no country in particular”¹⁵⁵.

As David Calleo rightly argues, the gold standard appealed to De Gaulle because it was a metaphor for the requirements of a healthy international order, that is to say a multipolar world system based on interdependence without hegemony, and where everyone obeyed the same rules¹⁵⁶. Yet, at the same time, the master of the Élysée also realised that with this dramatic and political denunciation of the dollar and Washington's monetary predominance, he was defending French prestige and placing his country at the forefront of international affairs. This is not to say that he did not genuinely seek a reform of the existing international monetary system, but his

¹⁵² Esteva, *DGESS III*, p.149

¹⁵³ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.133, during the sixties, the French economy grew by an average of 5,8% *per annum*, against 2,9% for Britain, 3,9% for the US, and 4,9% for West Germany. Only Japan grew at a faster rate, see annex 1; Bourguignat, Henri, *DGESS III*, p.112

¹⁵⁴ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.332

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.333

¹⁵⁶ Calleo, David, “De Gaulle and the Monetary System: The Golden Rule”, in Wahl, Nicholas, and Paxton, Robert (ed.), *De Gaulle and the United States, 1930-1970: a centennial reappraisal*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994), pp.240-241

priority was to accommodate French ambition for greater responsibility in world affairs; there was no need to start a prolonged monetary war because the General was convinced that the flawed gold exchange standard would not survive in the long-run¹⁵⁷. In the meantime, the French government was just happy to lead the way for other states by publicly and progressively converting most of its dollars reserves into gold, and by refusing to vote for the American request for a 25% increase in national contributions to the IMF.

Moreover, France in this period was clearly distancing itself from NATO, although the General and his close collaborators kept their cards close to their chest when it came to the timing of their move and their ultimate intentions. Maintaining a certain amount of mystery, with both French and foreign officials, was an integral part of De Gaulle's strategy because it dramatised and added weight to the eventual action. Thus, for example, in a meeting with Brosio on 27 February, the French President told his interlocutor that it was his firm intention to withdraw from the NATO organisation by 1969, but then cryptically added that he would not attack the organisation between now and 1969 "as long as matters remained substantially as they are"¹⁵⁸. Similarly, in case they were asked about the intentions of the French government towards NATO, Couve simply advised the relevant ambassadors to reply that Paris was hoping for a complete reshaping of the organisation by 1969¹⁵⁹. To a certain extent, De Gaulle was also considering various scenarios, including a project for a possible bilateral Franco-American Treaty that would follow NATO, or even, as he hinted to Alphand, a series of bilateral accords to replace the Atlantic Alliance altogether. Bozo, though, is probably correct when he argues that the latter idea was more of a trial balloon than a serious option¹⁶⁰. De Gaulle was privately less hesitant, however, when it came to timing, as he confirmed to Alphand that France would make

¹⁵⁷ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.213

¹⁵⁸ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 171: Finletter to Rusk, Telegram number 1247, 01.03.65

¹⁵⁹ DDF: 1965, Tome I: Couve to De Leusse, Circular Telegram number 107, 22.05.65

¹⁶⁰ See De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, Personal note, 23.02.65, p.134; Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 07.05.65, pp.452-453; Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.138

an announcement concerning NATO in early 1966 – or after the December 1965 Presidential election¹⁶¹.

There is no doubt De Gaulle wanted to speed up preparations for the eventual withdrawal. In March, he instructed Couve to have a study made on the following theme: “the political, legal and practical implications of a reconsideration of the decisions taken, which have the effect of inserting France into the military integrated structure of NATO”. According to worried Quai officials, this was the first time they had been asked to write such a comprehensive paper in conjunction with the military authorities¹⁶². Additionally, American interventions in Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic hardened De Gaulle’s attitude, and further encouraged him to act quickly towards NATO. Not only did he fear the consequences of US actions for world stability, but also he worried that America had now reached a level of power whereby it could do whatever it wanted¹⁶³. It was no great surprise that after a meeting with De Gaulle in early May, Bohlen commented that he “had never heard him before state so flatly that all foreign military installations would have to leave French soil”¹⁶⁴.

If France in this period mostly focussed on opposing American hegemony, it also ended up at the centre of a major crisis within the EEC when it chose to boycott the Community institutions and recalled its permanent representative, after the failure to agree over the CAP’s financial settlement – the so-called “empty chair” policy. Unsurprisingly, this dramatic incident has generated fierce scholarly debates on its origins and Paris’ motivations in pursuing such a policy. Was the “empty chair” part of a wider, coordinated French attack against the principle of integration at both the European and Atlantic levels, or was it as, Loth argues, a narrow campaign to defend French agricultural interests¹⁶⁵? Was it an opportunistic political move by the French government, or was it premeditated and mostly driven by economic

¹⁶¹ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 07.05.65, p.452

¹⁶² See LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 171: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 5335, 22.03.65; TNA: FO 371/184420: Paris to FO, 25.03.65

¹⁶³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: De Gaulle-Wilson meeting, 02.04.65

¹⁶⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 83, 04.05.65

¹⁶⁵ Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.280; Loth, Wilfried, “Français et Allemands dans la Crise Institutionnelle de 1965”, in Bitsch, *Le Couple*, p.240

considerations¹⁶⁶? While not taking anything away from the past literature on the subject, there is room for a different approach, which seeks to fit the “empty chair” within the wider context of France’s *Westpolitik*. The crisis did not come about because of a pre-planned French attack on integration, but it was largely the result of the interaction between three normally independent disputes: the battle for CAP, the divisions surrounding the future development of the EEC, and the growing gap – especially since January 1963 – between France’s vision of transatlantic relations and that of its partners.

Indeed, the breakdown of trust between France and the Five, symbolised by the lack of progress in European political union talks, played a significant part in the crisis. The prospects for closer political cooperation had initially improved in early 1965, especially since the new Labour government in Britain did not appear particularly interested in the European Community at that time¹⁶⁷. Additionally, during their talks in Rambouillet, both De Gaulle and Erhard had seemed to agree on a meeting of the Six heads of state¹⁶⁸. However, any hope from this meeting rested on a crucial misunderstanding: the French government supported in principle the idea of a meeting, but would only agree to a procedure if it felt there was a genuine desire to establish a common policy¹⁶⁹. Essentially, the French president still doubted these talks could succeed as long as the Six continued to disagree on all essential issues, including defence¹⁷⁰. He believed his partners were mostly driven by cynical motivations, such as Erhard with his forthcoming elections, and regretted that France was alone in its criticisms of American actions in Vietnam or the Dominican Republic¹⁷¹. Furthermore, there was also the fact that the French government no longer considered developing an independent Western Europe as its immediate priority, and so it

¹⁶⁶ Vaïsse, Maurice, “La politique européenne de la France en 1965: pourquoi ‘la chaise vide’?”, in Loth, Wilfried (ed.), *Crises and Compromises: The European Project 1963-1969*, (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2001), pp.213-214; Moravcsik, *The Choice*, p.194

¹⁶⁷ Parr, Helen, *Britain's policy towards the European Community, 1964-1967: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p.42

¹⁶⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.23: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting, 19.01.65

¹⁶⁹ Germond, “L’Europe Politique”, in Bitsch, *Le Couple*, pp.215-216

¹⁷⁰ See LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 170: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 4580, 12.02.65; or MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.24: De Gaulle-Bentinck meeting, 09.03.65

¹⁷¹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 47, 04.05.65; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: De Gaulle-Brandt meeting, 02.06.65

preferred to do nothing rather than start a process that would lead to nothing¹⁷². Thus on 27 March, Couve rejected the Italian proposal for a meeting of the EEC Foreign Ministers to discuss plans for a political union.

France's rejection angered the Five, especially the Bonn government which had expected compensation from Paris after its sacrifices on cereal prices in December 1964. Erhard just could not understand De Gaulle's change of mind since the Rambouillet meeting¹⁷³. For the West German government, already uncomfortable with some of the EEC's development, this was yet another proof that France was only interested in imposing its own priorities on the Community. Already frustrated by France's poor relations with the US and its rapprochement with the Soviet Union, Bonn decided in early May that it was time to challenge Paris over the CAP's financial settlement, with the aim of forcing it to accept progress on other EEC matters that were of interest to the Five¹⁷⁴. At the same time, the Dutch and Italians also had grievances with the French, and perceived the financial settlement as a last opportunity to exert pressure. The atmosphere was thus very tense as the EEC approached the 30 June deadline for the financial settlement negotiations. "Never before had the Community encountered a situation in which so many national delegations had decided independently that the outcome of a particular negotiation was a vital issue of national interest and something on which compromise and concession might undermine the very bases of the integration process"¹⁷⁵.

However, the crisis went beyond the disputes between member states, as it also involved the European Commission led by Walter Hallstein and centred on the key question of integration. It has to be remembered that the Commission's relationship with the French government had never been smooth: if they sometimes allied when it came to completing the CAP, De Gaulle always feared that Hallstein and his colleagues wanted to make France "suffer

¹⁷² MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: Lucet-Meyer-Lindenberg meeting, 25.03.65

¹⁷³ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1605: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 2071-2075, 29.03.65

¹⁷⁴ Ludlow, European Community, p.60

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p.68

over the agricultural Common Market and push Europe in the direction of a federation”¹⁷⁶. The General was not far off the mark. With the Commission’s mandate to make proposals for the financial settlement covering the period between July 1965 and 1970, Mansholt and Hallstein believed they had a last chance to exploit the leverage stemming from De Gaulle’s desire to complete the CAP. Breaking with tradition, they prepared their proposals in secret, before presenting them on 24 March first to the European Parliament rather than the Council of Ministers, a procedure considered unacceptable by Couve¹⁷⁷. Yet, the truly controversial aspect of the plan was the suggested increase of both the budgetary powers of the European Parliament and the Commission’s funds¹⁷⁸. De Gaulle immediately grasped the implications: Accepting that the Commission controls the financial administration of agricultural matters risked making the whole of the EEC supranational, and giving the responsibility of massive funds to an organisation without responsibility¹⁷⁹.

In the two months following the Commission’s proposals, the situation got worse for Paris as all its partners, except Belgium, sought to take advantage of the confusion to postpone difficult decisions and to block an agreement on the financial settlement¹⁸⁰. This is not to say that the Five wholeheartedly supported Hallstein’s plan, but they undoubtedly saw it as an opportunity, especially the Dutch, to make the French pay for the January 1963 veto¹⁸¹. Taken together, the Commission’s challenge over integration and the Five’s obstruction led the French government to believe that they were facing a new and radical threat to the CAP. Before that, neither De Gaulle nor French officials thought that the Rome Treaty provision to implement majority voting by 1 January 1966 would really be accepted or substantially affect EEC decision-making¹⁸². There now appeared to be a real possibility that this institutional procedure

¹⁷⁶ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.2, 27.01.65, p.281

¹⁷⁷ Moravcsik, *The Choice*, p.228; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.24: Couve to Hallstein, 26.03.65

¹⁷⁸ Marjolin, *Memoirs*, pp.349-350

¹⁷⁹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.2, 14.04.65, p.281

¹⁸⁰ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.331

¹⁸¹ DDF: 1965, Tome I: Note by Wormser, 11.06.65; Spaak, *Combats*: vol.2, p.406

¹⁸² LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 170: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 4580, 12.02.65; Ludlow, *European Community*, p.58

could be used to outvote France and undermine all its previous hard-earned successes in the agricultural sphere.

Paris' reaction to this threat was a mixture of anxiety and anger. On the one hand, until the expiration of the 30 June deadline, French officials did their very best to make sure that the negotiations would succeed¹⁸³. In particular, they tried to work closely in cooperation with their German partners to find a way out of the deadlock. On the other hand, the sense that their national interest was at stake pushed the French leaders to be less flexible and to consider more dramatic solutions. In late May, Couve first suggested to De Gaulle the possibility of a generalised boycott if the Six failed to accept the financial settlement, a move which would offer the added bonus of blocking the adoption of majority rule in January 1966¹⁸⁴. After negotiations broke down in Brussels on 30 June, De Gaulle did not hesitate: the next day, after the Council of Ministers, the French government officially announced its decision to withdraw its representatives from Brussels and abstain from any future meeting until a solution was found.

VII. July-December 1965: Preparing the Future

Coming on the tails of its very public attacks on the dollar and its progressive disengagement from NATO, France's decision to boycott the EEC naturally seemed ominous to its allies. Yet, despite the appearances, Paris was not about to destroy the Atlantic Community, and this came across clearly in its management of these various spheres during the second half of 1965. De Gaulle preferred not to fight "several wars" at once, and he gave priority to the turmoil within the European Community. This crisis represented a more immediate problem because of the Treaty of Rome's provision to introduce majority voting on a grand scale from 1 January 1966 onwards. Additionally, De Gaulle wanted France to be in a position of strength before pushing forward with its challenge against US leadership, and withdrawing from NATO. Finally, with the first round of the French Presidential elections scheduled for 5 December, it also made

¹⁸³ Vaïsse, "Politique européenne", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, p.214

¹⁸⁴ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.554-555

sense to focus more on European matters, which were of greater interest to the electorate than say the policy towards NATO¹⁸⁵. While De Gaulle only announced on 4 November that he was candidate, the upcoming elections had a significant influence on his foreign policy in this period. In particular, he postponed all crucial decisions to the following year, or until he received a new mandate; his main goal in the second half of 1965 was to prepare for the future.

If the outbreak of the EEC crisis changed priorities, it does not mean the French government ignored other matters altogether. For example, it still converted regularly its dollars into gold, while Giscard reminded American officials that his government would continue to underline the need for a reform of the international monetary system¹⁸⁶. Yet, it is true that French leaders adopted a more cautious stance, at a time when it was actually the American government that seemed to take the initiative in the monetary field. Responding to De Gaulle's challenge against the dollar, Henry Fowler, the new US Secretary of Treasury, dramatically stated in a speech on 10 July that his government now embraced reform, which hardly convinced Giscard who told De Gaulle that Fowler "takes on the theme of international monetary reform as his, but without giving it any practical contents"¹⁸⁷. Moreover, the Ossola report, completed in May and published in August 1965, had also revealed four main points of contention – mainly between France and the US – regarding the creation of reserve assets on which a range of views existed: the link between gold and the new asset, the width of the membership for the management and distribution of the asset, the role of the IMF in the reserve creation, and rules for decision-making concerning the creation of reserve assets¹⁸⁸.

On the back of this report, the Americans suggested the creation of a new asset called Special Drawing Rights [SDR], which aimed to alleviate the burden on the dollar while still guaranteeing adequate international liquidity. The SDR would be international money, not credit

¹⁸⁵ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.142

¹⁸⁶ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 50, 08.07.65

¹⁸⁷ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, pp.126-127

¹⁸⁸ See Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.74-79

as the French wanted, and allocated according to a ration based on dollar and gold holdings¹⁸⁹. Nevertheless, despite the mistrust between Paris and Washington, both parties still cooperated with their G10 partners in their quest to improve the international monetary system. At the 1965 IMF annual meeting in Washington in September, the Ministers and Governors of the G10 countries instructed their Deputies to “determine and report to the Ministers what basis of agreement can be reached on improvements needed in the international monetary system, including arrangements for future creation of reserve assets, as and when needed, so as to permit adequate provision for the needs of the world economy”¹⁹⁰.

Similarly, the American government took the initiative within the Atlantic Alliance on the thorny matter of nuclear strategy. Robert McNamara, US Secretary of Defence, sought in spring 1965 to give a less radical formulation to flexible response, with the intention of re-establishing the strategic consensus by taking into account European reservations and isolating France. McNamara’s approach proved successful, even if his original idea of a select committee with four or five representatives eventually underwent some changes. On 27 November, ten Ministers of Defence of the Atlantic Alliance – representing Belgium, Canada, the US, Turkey, Britain, Denmark, West Germany, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands – formally established a special committee in charge of nuclear consultation, which was meant in principle to be *ad hoc*¹⁹¹. Very quickly, De Gaulle confirmed that France would not take part in this committee, largely because it provided no substantial improvement to the Alliance strategy and had the additional disadvantage of tying France down when it came to the use of its *force de frappe*¹⁹². However, there was little Paris could do to stop McNamara’s proposal going forward. During the NATO Ministerial meeting on 14-16 December, Couve was effectively isolated as his allies were

¹⁸⁹ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.129

¹⁹⁰ TNA: PREM 13/2050: FO to Certain Missions, InTel number 44, 07.11.66

¹⁹¹ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.141-142, 146-147

¹⁹² DDF: 1965, Tome II: Note by De Gaulle, 05.07.65

not only determined to see the Alliance “moving on again”, but also growing increasingly used to the idea of a NATO without France¹⁹³.

Indeed, during the second half of 1965, De Gaulle’s policy towards NATO was essentially concerned with preparing the disengagement, whilst misleading his allies as to the exact timing of his move. As a mole of the French Foreign Ministry confirmed to American officials, De Gaulle, because of his advanced age, was in a hurry to act; privately, he had requested the Quai to send him in mid-December the dossiers on the “US occupation of France”, which he had asked for originally back in February¹⁹⁴. During their talks with foreign officials, though, the French President and his collaborators took a very different line. They essentially took a reassuring line by claiming that the NATO treaty was valid until 1969, and that there was no rush to modify it¹⁹⁵. Publicly, De Gaulle adopted the same tactic of criticising NATO, whilst remaining vague in regards to timing. During his 9 September press conference, electoral concerns undoubtedly pushed De Gaulle to defend French independence in even more forceful terms than usual. Besides referring to France’s rapid expansion, the General condemned the “subordination that is integration”; but he nonetheless stuck to the line that integration “would end by 1969 at the latest”¹⁹⁶. The final months of 1965 saw no substantial changes to this strategy, except the fact that America’s increasing involvement in Vietnam only strengthened De Gaulle’s desire to rapidly disengage from NATO. In his view, the US had become unreasonable and too powerful, and with the risks of war between China and the US increasing in Asia, he felt that France’s membership in NATO might force it to take part in a war it had not chosen¹⁹⁷.

Any future policy towards NATO, however, would depend on what happened within the European Community. Failure to agree on the CAP’s financial settlement had initially triggered the “empty chair”, but the motivations of the French government went beyond agricultural

¹⁹³ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 118, 18.12.65

¹⁹⁴ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2186: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 1433, 17.09.65

¹⁹⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Ball meeting, 31.08.65; TNA: PREM 13/1042: Paris to FO, Telegram number 483, 10.07.65

¹⁹⁶ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.383

¹⁹⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Reilly meeting, 01.10.65; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Heath meeting, 22.11.65

matters. As De Gaulle stated on 7 July, “we have to take advantage of this crisis to deal with political problems in the background. It is not acceptable that on 1 January 66, our economy could be submitted to a majority rule, which could impose on us the will of our partners ... As for the Commission, it proved partial ... and needs to be completely replaced”¹⁹⁸. In addition to the CAP, Paris now demanded a revision of the Treaty of Rome, as De Gaulle made very clear during his press conference of 9 September. Going to great lengths to appear as the defender of French independence to the voters, he also used the latter speech to explain his reading of the turmoil that rocked the EEC. Not only did he place full responsibility on his partners and on the Commission, but the General also warned that this crisis could last for a very long time¹⁹⁹.

Yet, below the surface, the tension within the EEC was not quite as bad as it appeared. For a start, the French boycott was not complete and their chair did not remain empty for all meetings. Crucially Maurice Ulrich, Boegner’s deputy, stayed behind in Brussels to make sure that his government remained well informed of any development²⁰⁰. Moreover, De Gaulle’s threats and warnings were mostly part of his strategy of brinkmanship. As he confided to Peyrefitte, “last time, you gave the impression it would all work out in the end. You must not use that tone! You have, instead, to worry everyone. It is the best way to defeat our opponents. If they are not afraid, they will figure that it will all be fine ... In reality we will win, won’t we? We will not win immediately because we want a total victory”²⁰¹. Equally, Couve very early on reassured Bohlen that the crisis would probably last a few months, but he was confident that they would find a solution²⁰². The simple fact is that while France was ready to wait, it could not afford to delay the EEC crisis indefinitely because of its planned move against NATO. Indeed, De Gaulle was even ready to show some flexibility if need be. Speaking to Peyrefitte a few days

¹⁹⁸ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, p.292

¹⁹⁹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, pp.377-381

²⁰⁰ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.73

²⁰¹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 13.07.65, p.293

²⁰² LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 171: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 83, 06.07.65

after the press conference, he implied that France could settle for a formal agreement instead of a revision of the Rome Treaty²⁰³.

Until the Presidential elections, the French leaders mostly adopted a carrot-and-stick policy towards their partners. During a meeting with Baron Adolph Bentinck, the Dutch Ambassador in Paris, De Gaulle stuck to a hard-line strategy. He explicitly accused the Five of causing the split, by both ignoring past promises and accepting the Commission's proposals. This implied that the ball was in the Five's court when it came to renewing talks, but any discussion could not take place in the Brussels framework. Additionally, De Gaulle reminded Bentinck that the supranational question took priority, because the absence of agreement on voting procedures could undermine at any time any agreement on the financial settlement. Considering how important the matter was, France could only accept written engagements²⁰⁴. He was still happy thus to use the idea of a revision of the Rome Treaty as a negotiating card. The General revealingly ended the meeting by mentioning that France did not object to a meeting of the EEC's Foreign Ministers, as long as it was not in Brussels.

Couve's speech to l'*Assemblée Nationale* a few days after shared the same approach. He paid lip service to the motto of independence, referring to France as the only defender of French interests, and again demanded guarantees to prevent the reoccurrence of the crisis that the EEC was experiencing. At the same time, he also sent signals to Bonn by underlining how the latter had fought against the principle of majority rule during the talks on a common price for cereals. Lastly, Couve also waved the promise of progress on political union if the six managed to solve the current crisis²⁰⁵. Yet, these diplomatic games could only last so long. Both sides had strong incentives to eventually end the crisis: there was no doubt that the EEC had been a very beneficial entity for France, while the Five needed to get their Paris back in the frame if they wanted to push forward the Kennedy Round, which had been effectively at a standstill since the

²⁰³ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 15.09.65, pp.299-300

²⁰⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Bentinck meeting, 18.10.65

²⁰⁵ FNSP: CM Carton 2: Speech to l'*Assemblée Nationale*, 20.10.65

start of the “empty chair”²⁰⁶. Since late October, De Gaulle had already made up his mind that France should restart talks with its allies in January²⁰⁷.

VIII. Conclusion

Despite initial difficulties, De Gaulle eventually won the Presidential elections on 19 December with 55% of the popular vote. Four days later, Couve indicated to Giovanni Fornari, Italian Ambassador in Paris, that France was ready to meet the Five for talks in Luxemburg on 17-18 January²⁰⁸. The crisis was not officially over, but this was an important step towards settling it, and De Gaulle could now contemplate his move against NATO. As he reflected at the end of his first term, “This *septennat*, it was primarily *une liquidation. La liquidation* of the Algerian affair, which was painful and terrible in many ways. [...] And also the *liquidation* of the subordination to the Americans. [...] Independence, it is done, at least virtually, there are only a few formalities left. We will no longer be integrated”²⁰⁹.

Between 1963 and 1965, France had been successful at underlining its independence and showing that it could still matter in international affairs. This was true not only in the political and military sphere, by its determination to act against Alliance solidarity whenever it felt it was in its national interest, but also in the international monetary sphere through its challenges against the privileges of the dollar. France felt that its sound balance of payments gave it the right to demand more influence. However, the balance sheet appeared more mixed when it came to its desire to reform the Western bloc. It had not managed to develop Western Europe as a political counterweight to the US, especially after the failure of the Franco-German axis. In addition, the complete lack of agreement between the Six concerning the political role of Western Europe also affected seemingly less controversial issues, such as the economic development of the EEC.

²⁰⁶ Ludlow, *European Community*, pp.91-92

²⁰⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 27.10.65, p.588

²⁰⁸ FNSP: CM Carton 9: Couve to Seydoux, Telegram number 5930-5932, 24.12.65

²⁰⁹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 21.12.65, p.613

The challenges for France in 1966 were thus clear. Could it convince its partners that it was a credible Great Power and that they should follow its independent policy vis-à-vis the US? Would public opinion, for the moment largely supportive of De Gaulle's foreign policy, be prepared to accept the costs of an even more ambitious agenda²¹⁰? Chapter four will begin to answer these questions. Beforehand, however, it is necessary to understand the evolution of French attitudes towards the non-Western world, starting with the communist bloc.

²¹⁰ IFOP, De Gaulle, p.164, in a survey conducted between 22 October and 5 November 1965, 76% thought De Gaulle had had a good influence in the last seven years on France's place in the world, 7% thought he had had a bad influence, and 4% thought he had no influence.

CHAPTER II: The Long Road to Moscow

I. Introduction

In a meeting in mid-November 1965 with West Germany's Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder, French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville reflected on the development of détente in Europe. In his view, the transformations in Europe had happened progressively, rather than suddenly. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 had proved a first turning point as it showed that neither Russia nor the US wanted a nuclear war, while the dismissal of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964 had further crystallized the change in Moscow's attitude¹. In line with the changes in the East-West situation, by late 1965 détente with the communist bloc had become the main strategic priority of French foreign policy.

This was in stark contrast to the period between 1958 and 1962, when Franco-Soviet relations were poor and France consistently adopted a firm line in its dealings with Moscow over the Berlin crisis and the German question. Not surprisingly, there have been divisions within the literature regarding when and why this shift took place, or in other words when Franco-Soviet relations switched from confrontation to cooperation. On the one hand, Gomart traces the beginnings of the rapprochement back to summer 1963, and Lacouture claims that it was the French recognition of Communist China in January 1964 which started the long process of normalising relations between France and the Eastern Bloc². On the other hand, Newhouse and Soutou date the turning point to late 1964³. The latter, however, provide a more persuasive case because, as Vaisse points out, Franco-Soviet relations were still dominated by confrontation and controversy for most of 1963 and 1964⁴. What helped to change this situation was a combination

¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 12.11.65

² Gomart, Thomas, Double Détente: Les relations Franco-Soviétiques de 1958 à 1964, (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003), p.384; Lacouture, De Gaulle: vol. 3, p.398

³ Newhouse, De Gaulle, p.271; Soutou, Georges-Henri, "De Gaulle's France and the Soviet Union from Conflict to Détente", in Loth, Europe, Cold War, p.180

⁴ Vaisse, La grandeur, p.413

of the first signs of independence by the satellite states, and the relative failure of the Franco-German treaty.

II. 1963: Incompatible Strategies and Differing Visions of Détente

At the height of the crisis that rocked the West in January 1963, rumours emerged in London suggesting that De Gaulle was about to make a major deal with the Soviet Union⁵. However, once the situation quieted down, it soon became apparent that there were no grounds for these reports. Whereas France pursued a very ambitious *Westpolitik* in 1963, its attitude towards the Communist world, especially the Soviet Union, was distinctively more cautious and low-key. Both sides often claimed that they wanted to improve relations, but they were not ready to take serious steps to initiate a rapprochement. In part, this stemmed from the fact that, while relations between Paris and Moscow were not hostile, they remained ambivalent and mistrustful.

As he made clear during his meetings with Sergei Vinogradov, Soviet Ambassador in Paris, De Gaulle still considered the Soviet Union as a possible threat, and he deplored its actions during the Berlin and Cuban crises⁶. At the same time, French leaders acknowledged that the Soviet Union was facing severe problems, leading De Gaulle to perceive it as a declining power. As he pointed out to Peyrefitte on 24 January 1963, “it [Russia] understands that its time has passed”⁷. Not only did Moscow have to contend with the growing split with Beijing, which according to the General would inevitably culminate one day in open struggle, but it also had to deal with internal problems and its failure to assimilate and conquer the populations of the Eastern Bloc⁸. Moreover, France believed that the Soviet Union itself was slowly undergoing fundamental changes that might open prospects for peace. As Couve argued, the nationalist

⁵ MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1952-1963, Vol.358: Alphanth Interview with ABC, 30.01.63

⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.18: De Gaulle-Vinogradov meeting, 29.01.63; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Vinogradov meeting, 12.07.63

⁷ Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.738

⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Queen Juliana meeting, 16.03.63; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Margerie meeting, 04.06.63

element in Russia was becoming more predominant at the expense of ideology, and this meant that one day Western Europe might no longer face a communist threat⁹. Yet, considering Russia's huge nuclear arsenal, De Gaulle did not consider these small shifts in attitude as sufficient to ensure peace¹⁰. Despite these emerging changes within and outside the Soviet Union, France remained wary and adopted a wait-and-see approach. In that context, there was a sense in which the 22 January treaty with West Germany was made to strengthen Western Europe's resolve and ability to stand up to the Soviet Union. As De Gaulle indicated during the Council of Ministers on 13 February, "we did not sign the Franco-German treaty to please the Soviet Union"¹¹.

As for the communist bloc, its attitude towards France was initially shaped by its negative reaction to the Franco-German treaty. Vinogradov reported home that the Paris-Bonn axis was unequivocally hostile to the Soviet Union¹². The Eastern European states were equally critical: Czechoslovakia, for instance, claimed that the treaty could have dangerous repercussions for international relations in general and Franco-Czech relations in particular¹³. That said, Moscow and its allies were predominantly concerned with West Germany, rather than France. As Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko explained to Maurice Dejean, French Ambassador in Moscow, the Franco-German treaty was essentially a military pact and a tool in West Germany's policy of *revanche*¹⁴. It worsened Soviet fears that West Germany might one day gain access to nuclear weapons, either through the MLF or through cooperation with France, and they emphasised that they would consider such move as a grave threat to Soviet interests¹⁵.

Moreover, certain voices within the Soviet foreign policy community, such as Daniil Mel'nikov of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, were calling for a more nuanced assessment of the Franco-German treaty. According to Mel'nikov, the Franco-

⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: Couve-Ikeda meeting, 19.04.63
¹⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Queen Juliana meeting, 16.03.63
¹¹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, p.226
¹² Mastny, "Détente", in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.217
¹³ DDF: 1963, Tome I: Lescuyer to Couve, Telegram number 88-91, 14.02.63
¹⁴ DDF: 1963, Tome I: Dejean to Couve, Telegram number 655-662, 05.02.63
¹⁵ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.18: Vinogradov to De Gaulle, 30.01.63

German rapprochement was a danger for world peace, but it also contributed to the decline of the US in Europe; in other words, Soviet policy towards Western Europe needed to be more flexible, and try to play on existing divisions within the Atlantic Alliance¹⁶. This applied specifically to France: aware of the ever-worsening Franco-American relations, many Soviet scholars were paying more attention to France and pointing out that Moscow could gain from De Gaulle's centrifugal pull away from NATO and Washington¹⁷. These arguments seemingly had some influence on the Soviet leaders. In the following months, they began to moderate their criticisms of France, and sought instead to benefit from any tensions between France and its Western partners. Thus, on 17 May, a day after the Bundestag ratified the Franco-German Treaty and its preamble, the Soviet government sent a note to its French counterpart. Beside the usual attacks against the Franco-German treaty, the note not-so-subtly referred to past Franco-Soviet cooperation against Germany during WWII, and expressed hope that both countries might cooperate once again for the sake of European peace¹⁸. In July, Khrushchev repeated similar arguments to Dejean and added that he wanted to invite De Gaulle to visit Moscow¹⁹.

During the autumn 1963, there were further signs suggesting friendlier contacts between Paris and Moscow. In October, Khrushchev renewed his invitation to the General, while De Gaulle reassured Vinogradov that the moment would come when relations between France and the Soviet would improve²⁰. In the same month, the French government sent an invitation to Konstantin Rudnev, Soviet State President for scientific and technical coordination, to visit Paris, while Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, French Minister of Finance, agreed to go to Moscow in the winter. However, these moves were not particularly meaningful and it is excessive to claim, as Gomart does, that the summer 1963 marked the beginning of a Paris-Moscow

¹⁶ Sodaro, Michael, *Moscow, Germany and the West from Khrushchev to Gorbachev*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), p.49

¹⁷ Newton, Julie, *Russia, France and the Idea of Europe*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.20

¹⁸ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Laboulaye to Couve, Telegram number 2613-2636, 17.05.63

¹⁹ DDF: 1963, Tome II: Dejean to Couve, Telegrams number 3810-3834 and 3835-3836, 17.07.63

²⁰ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.394

rapprochement²¹. Taking the example of trade, both sides were undoubtedly in favour of expanding commercial links, but not so much for political reasons. France wanted to develop economic relations and sell food to the Soviet Union because it was normal trade and good for business²². As for the Soviets, they were really driven by necessity. Facing serious economic problems, especially in the agricultural sector, they needed all the help they could get from the West. While they appealed to France, they were also buying wheat from the US and herbicides from West Germany²³.

Furthermore, differences in grand strategy presented a more fundamental and serious obstacle to a rapprochement. As long as the axis with West Germany remained the cornerstone of French foreign policy, there was no real possibility for an entente with Russia – even if Vaïsse is right to point out that De Gaulle considered Russia as a fall-back ally²⁴. Even in late 1963, despite the difficulties in implementing the treaty, De Gaulle had neither given up on cooperation with Bonn nor shown an inclination to make a move in Moscow's direction. As he reminded Peyrefitte on 11 December, "we [France] decided to make a policy of entente with the Germans to the detriment of our relations with Russia, with Poland, with Czechoslovakia, with Yugoslavia"²⁵. Besides, the French government believed that the Soviet Union was only really interested in a dialogue with the US²⁶. This was particularly valid, indeed, for Khrushchev. He seemed happy to exploit differences between the NATO allies, but he was also essentially an 'Atlanticist': he never lost sight of American dominance and was not entranced by the unlikely prospect that Western Europe would abandon its powerful protector²⁷. Within this perspective, France naturally had a limited appeal for the Soviet Union, and this was reinforced by Khrushchev's feelings about De Gaulle. On the one hand, he disliked De Gaulle's view of détente as a means of undoing Soviet ideology and worried about Gaullism as a symbol of the

²¹ Gomart, *Double Détente*, p.384

²² MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: Couve-Rusk meeting, 07.10.63

²³ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.V: Document 341, 31.07.63; Sodaro, *Moscow, Germany*, p.51

²⁴ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.566

²⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, p.254

²⁶ DDF: 1963, Tome I: Couve to Alphand, Telegram number 3133-3142, 09.02.63

²⁷ Sodaro, *Moscow, Germany*, p.49

growing centrifugal forces in the world. On the other hand, he sometimes showed contempt for the General and claimed that he reminded him of the emperor without clothes in the old story!²⁸

There could be no clearer illustration of how minor a priority were relations with France for the Soviet leader than the diplomacy leading up to the Partial Test Ban Treaty [PTBT], which he believed could help to solve other international problems²⁹. Nonetheless, despite initial optimism in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile crisis, negotiations moved slowly at first and stalled around the question of inspections. At the same time, Khrushchev had to contend with possible criticism from Communist China. As the Sino-Soviet rift reached a critical stage, he decided to make one last effort at conciliating the Chinese by inviting them for talks in Moscow in July³⁰. A breakthrough eventually occurred in June-July. Whereas the Sino-Soviet talks ended in complete acrimony, US President Kennedy's speech on 10 June, calling for a new attitude towards the Soviets, and Khrushchev's speech in Berlin on 2 July – where he expressed Soviet readiness “to conclude an agreement on the cessation of nuclear tests” and offered to sign a non-aggression pact between NATO and the Warsaw Pact – helped to break the deadlock³¹. On 5 August, Britain, the US and the Soviet Union finally signed the PTBT, therefore agreeing to end all over-ground nuclear tests.

While some states considered the signing of the PTBT as an opportunity to improve East-West relations, France took the opposite viewpoint. For a start, it could not accept the PTBT because it needed additional tests to finalise the development of its *force de frappe*, which was, as Couve stated, the core pillar of its policy of independence³². Moreover, French uneasiness also resulted from its differing conception of détente. According to De Gaulle, peace could only be possible if the Soviet Union abandoned its aggressive ideology and loosened its grip on the

²⁸ Newton, *Russia, France*, p.56; TNA: FO 371/169119: Paris to FO, 19.07.63

²⁹ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.V: Document 284, 25.01.63

³⁰ Mastny, “Détente”, in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.218

³¹ FRUS: 1961-1963, Vol.V: Document 328, 10.06.63 and Document 335, 02.07.63; Khrushchev first suggested a non-aggression pact on 20 February.

³² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 21.08.63, p.32

satellite states³³. Nevertheless, for French leaders, the superpower talks were a false détente, an illusion because they gave the impression that East-West relations could improve without a real change of atmosphere, and a threat because they risked consolidating the Cold War bloc logic³⁴. The French foreign policy-making elite worried that the superpowers might acquire the habit of deciding the fate of the world without consulting other states³⁵. Finally, Paris also took into account Bonn's attitude and how this could work to the advantage of France. The West German government had eventually signed the PTBT, but it had been very upset by the "upgrading" of East Germany as a signatory to this same treaty; additionally, it criticised the non-aggression pact because it risked giving a certain degree of recognition to Pankow and permanently codifying the status quo in Central Europe³⁶. De Gaulle quickly seized the opportunity to warn Adenauer that both France and West Germany were threatened by the relations between the Anglo-Saxon powers and the Soviet Union³⁷.

The contrast between how the French and Soviets approached détente, as well as the aftermath of the PTBT, was another obstacle to their rapprochement. While the Soviet Union hoped to keep the momentum in their talks with the US, France was determined to prevent the bipolar Cold War developing into a bipolar process of détente³⁸. Paris resisted the exclusive superpower conversation, and sought to increase its margin of manoeuvre vis-à-vis Washington and Moscow. Thus, during his 29 July press conference, De Gaulle very publicly signalled that France would not sign the PBTB³⁹. Similarly, French leaders also tried to undermine the US-Soviet dialogue by emphasising its inherent dangers to the other NATO members, who were

³³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 04.07.63

³⁴ Mahan, Kennedy, De Gaulle, p.147; Couve, Politique étrangère, p.193

³⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: De Gaulle-Chang-Huan meeting, 02.09.63

³⁶ Gray, William Glenn, Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p.143; Locher, Anna, and Nuenlist, Christian, "What Role for NATO? Conflicting Western Perceptions of Détente, 1963-65", *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol.2/2 (2004), p.189

³⁷ De Gaulle, LNC: IX, De Gaulle to Adenauer, 23.08.63, p.364

³⁸ Rey, Marie-Pierre, La tentation du rapprochement: France et URSS à l'heure de la détente (1964-1974), (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1991), p.16

³⁹ De Gaulle, DM: IV, p.123

already much divided about the question of post-PTBT détente initiatives⁴⁰. They warned – again in part to appeal to Bonn – that the talks between the Anglo-Saxon powers and the Soviet Union, especially the project of a non-aggression pact, might lead to the neutralisation of West Germany and hence be catastrophic for Western Europe⁴¹. They took essentially a negative stance, which was nicely summed up by Couve during his speech at the December 1963 NATO Ministerial meeting. If he welcomed the beginnings of change in the communist world, he added that détente could happen only if the Soviets wanted it and if they adopted a less menacing attitude. Paris was, in any case, willing to wait as it believed that détente with the East would inevitably happen once it became clear that they did not want a war⁴².

However, France did not only resort to negative measures in its struggle against the superpowers, but also tried to benefit from the growing fragmentation of the communist world. In view of the timid signs of independence in Eastern Europe, France decided in December to raise the status of its delegations in Romania and Hungary to that of embassies⁴³. Additionally, there was obviously the case of Communist China. Ever since the end of the Algerian war – the main bone of contention between Paris and Beijing – and in view of the growing Sino-Soviet split, De Gaulle had seriously considered the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC. Such a move, as he explained to Peyrefitte, presented the advantage of annoying the Americans and strengthening France's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. "We need fall-back allies. It has always been the policy of France [...] One day I will make an alliance with China to strengthen us against Russia. Well, alliance, we are not there yet. We will first renew

⁴⁰ See Locher, and Nuenlist, "What Role for NATO?", pp.189-193. While France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Greece and Turkey opposed the idea of a non-aggression pact, small states such as Belgium, Canada, Norway and Denmark were more favourable.

⁴¹ See for example MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: De Gaulle-Dixon meeting, 17.09.63; TNA: FO 371/172077: Paris to FO, Telegram number 217, 10.09.63

⁴² MAEF: Service des Pactes [Pactes] 1961-1970, Vol.270: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 380, 16.12.63; Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.196

⁴³ DDF: 1963, Tome II: Bouffanais to Couve, Telegram number 1318-1323, 07.12.63; Schreiber, Thomas, *Les Actions de la France à l'Est, ou les Absences de Marianne*, (Paris: Harmattan, 2000), p.90

relations”⁴⁴. At the same time, Chinese officials in Berne were repeatedly pointing out that their government wanted to establish official relations with France⁴⁵.

Thus, when China also refused to sign the PTBT, it was another confirmation for De Gaulle that both countries were tied by a common opposition to the double US-Soviet hegemony, and that China could be an element of equilibrium between both superpowers⁴⁶. As we will see in the next chapter when we study the rapprochement in more details, De Gaulle was motivated by other factors as well, but the PTBT incident did contribute to convincing the French President that the time was right to make a move towards the Chinese. In late September, he secretly asked former President of the Council Edgar Faure, who was about to go to Beijing, to explore the possibility of a mutual recognition with the Chinese leaders⁴⁷. Once Faure had successfully reached a provisional understanding with the Chinese regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations, Couve then instructed Jacques de Beaumarchais, head of the Quai’s Europe department, to finalise the agreement with the Chinese officials in Berne⁴⁸. The stage was set for the major announcement on 27 January 1964.

III. January-October 1964: Evolution in the East

Addressing the French people on 31 December 1963, De Gaulle outlined his hopes for future developments behind the iron curtain. “We have to [...] envisage the day when, maybe, in Warsaw, in Prague, in Pankow, in Budapest, in Bucharest, in Sofia, in Belgrade, in Tirana, in Moscow, the totalitarian communist regime, which still rules captive populations, would progressively evolve in a direction compatible with our own transformation”⁴⁹. This was not, however, the signal for a new policy towards the communist states. In early 1964, superpower relations were at their closest since the start of the Cold War, and Franco-Soviet cooperation was

⁴⁴ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.1*, 24.01.63 and 13.03.63, p.317, 320

⁴⁵ DDF: 1963, Tome I: Baudet to Couve, Dépêche number 940, 26.03.63

⁴⁶ Jianqing, Zhou, *DGESS IV*, pp.403-404

⁴⁷ De Gaulle, *LNC: IX*, 26.09.63, pp.374-375

⁴⁸ DDF: 1963, Tome II: Instructions for de Beaumarchais, 11.12.63

⁴⁹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.155

not an option as long as Moscow preferred to deal with the US⁵⁰. Additionally, De Gaulle remained wary of the Soviets. He doubted that it was possible to have political negotiations with Khrushchev, and turned down Vinogradov's invitation to visit Moscow⁵¹. The French leaders were more open to improving practical relations with the Soviets, but they had no intentions to go to great lengths to court them. Regarding trade for example, Couve instructed Giscard, before his trip to Moscow, that France would not break solidarity with other Western nations and grant long-term credits to the Soviets⁵². Yet, 1964 witnessed several key developments that helped to change the French perspective on East-West détente, and narrow the gap with the Eastern bloc.

The first factor was the recognition of Communist China, which France hoped would strengthen its position vis-à-vis the superpowers and which, Alphand expected, would not be welcomed by the Soviet government⁵³. In practice, the opposite proved to be true. When Dejean informed Vasilii Kuznetsov, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, that his government was about to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, the latter congratulated France for its realistic and reasonable decision⁵⁴. According to Wolton, the Soviet reaction can be partly explained by the fact that they were not surprised as they had secretively been informed of De Gaulle's intentions since 3 December 1963. It seems that Faure told Vinogradov about the forthcoming decision to normalise relations with China, and added that the move needed to be seen in line with Franco-US relations and had nothing to do with the Sino-Soviet split. Moscow was naturally pleased with Paris' decision, because it believed that it consolidated the socialist camp and worsened Franco-American relations⁵⁵. At the same time, if the surprise effect failed, the recognition of the PRC was more successful in pushing the Soviets to pay more attention to France's role on the international scene⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ Mastny, "Détente", in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.228

⁵¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.377: De Gaulle-Pearson meeting, 15.01.64; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: De Gaulle-Vinogradov meeting, 03.01.64

⁵² DDF: 1964, Tome I: Couve to Dejean, Telegram number 676-685, 15.01.64

⁵³ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 01.01.64, p.420

⁵⁴ DDF: 1964, Tome I: Dejean to Couve, Telegram number 312-316, 18.01.64

⁵⁵ Wolton, *France sous influence*, pp.406-7

⁵⁶ Puaux, François, *DGESS V*, p.433

Indeed, growing Soviet interest was clearly demonstrated soon after when Nikolai Podgorny, a senior member of the Presidium, suddenly replaced a lesser figure to head a delegation of Soviet parliamentarians for a visit to Paris that had been planned for a long time⁵⁷. Podgorny used the opportunity to have high-level contacts with Couve and Pompidou, and also a friendly meeting with De Gaulle. He once again hailed the recognition of China as a realistic and positive initiative, underlined past Franco-Soviet cooperation, and referred to the lack of conflicts between both countries. De Gaulle, for his part, also expressed relative optimism for future Franco-Soviet relations, especially as he was under the impression that the Soviet was changing in a direction that suited France⁵⁸. Both sides' attempts to improve relations in other fields certainly helped create this better atmosphere for political talks. During his meetings in Moscow Giscard discussed the possibility of signing a five year commercial agreement starting the following year, while Rudnev expressed his interest in French technology and argued that France and the Soviet Union should develop their cultural and scientific exchanges⁵⁹.

Moreover, Paris and Moscow were brought closer by their stands on events in South-East Asia. As we will see in more details in the next chapter, the conflict in the former Indochina escalated in 1964, particularly in Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. In this period, the French also became more openly critical of American policy in Indochina as the US started to increase its military involvement in the region, and instead, like the Soviet Union, advocated a political solution to the crisis based on the 1954 Geneva accords. The fact that they approached the conflict in similar ways obviously did not go unnoticed in Paris and Moscow. The Soviet Union repeatedly praised French policy towards South-East Asia, and even expressed hope that both countries might unite their efforts to ensure Indochina's independence⁶⁰. Equally, during a meeting with Vinogradov, De Gaulle claimed that as the Soviet Union did not want to cause

⁵⁷ TNA: FO 371/177870: Paris to FO, Telegram number 146, 24.02.64

⁵⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: De Gaulle-Podgorny meeting, 02.03.64

⁵⁹ See MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Giscard-Khrushchev meeting, 27.01.64; ANF: 5AG1, Carton 186, URSS: Pompidou-Rudnev meeting, 10.02.64; DDF: 1964, Tome I: Couve to Moscow, Telegram number 2445-2447, 20.02.64

⁶⁰ See MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 2311-2316, 30.04.64; MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: AFP Dépêche, 12.09.64

trouble in South-East Asia, there might be a possible convergence in this domain between French and Soviet policy⁶¹.

That said, the steps taken by Paris and Moscow towards each other were very tentative, and there were still significant obstacles to a rapprochement. For a start, the Soviet leaders still expressed their disapproval over French policy towards West Germany, even if they felt that this should not prevent an entente on other questions⁶². On the other side, there was a consensus at all levels of the French diplomatic establishment that they should respond to the Soviet moves with caution. Couve stated that “we were always on known ground” with the Podgorny visit, while Pompidou denied that there was any specific development in Franco-Soviet relations, and added that France was waiting for the Soviets to approach European issues by peaceful means⁶³. As De Gaulle summed up nicely, the Soviet “smile campaign” did not change the basic European situation, which would remain the same so long as the Soviets tried to impose their will on the world⁶⁴. Similarly, the Quai d’Orsay doubted that there was a genuine change in Soviet policy. A note written in early March, at the time of Podgorny’s visit, suggested three complementary reasons to explain the Soviets’ motivations for better relations with France: a desire to overcome the negative effects of France’s opposition to its European policy by taking advantage of tensions between Paris and its main Western allies, a need for Western aid to offset its serious economic problems, and an embarrassed reaction to France’s recognition of the PRC⁶⁵.

Whereas France’s relations with the Soviet Union only improved slowly, its attitude towards the satellite states changed significantly. On a basic level, France followed the broader trend amongst Western states determined to increase contacts with their neighbours in the East, in response to their first signs of independent behaviour. Thus, the US government, as summed up by President Johnson in his 23 May 1964 Lexington speech, wanted to “build bridges across

⁶¹ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: De Gaulle-Vinogradov meeting, 18.06.64

⁶² DDF: 1964, Tome I: Dejean to Couve, Telegram number 637-641, 09.02.64

⁶³ DDF: 1964, Tome I: Couve to Margerie, Telegram with no number, 05.03.64; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.377: Pompidou-Ikeda meeting, 07.04.64

⁶⁴ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 04.05.64, p.429

⁶⁵ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe Centrale*, 02.03.64

the Gulf which has divided us from Eastern Europe [...] bridges of increased trade, of ideas, of visitors and of humanitarian aid”⁶⁶. It granted, for example, “most-favoured nation” status to Poland and Yugoslavia in March, and signed a limited cultural and trade agreement with Romania on 1 June. Similarly, West Germany established a series of trade missions in the East, starting with Romania in October 1962, then Poland in March 1963, Hungary in November 1963, and finally Bulgaria in March 1964. Bonn saw this as an opportunity to increase trade with Eastern Europe and try to isolate East Germany within the Warsaw Pact⁶⁷. Paris also successfully developed practical relations with the Eastern European states: on 28 February, it signed a cultural agreement with Poland, followed by another with Yugoslavia on 19 June⁶⁸. The French leaders welcomed these agreements because they felt any future dialogue with the East would be meaningless if limited to the Soviet Union⁶⁹.

However, on a more fundamental level, they believed they were witnessing the beginnings of a profound transformation within the Eastern bloc – in particular when looking at Romania. Indeed, Soviet-Romanian tensions had increased markedly since 1962. Not only did Bucharest oppose Khrushchev’s plans for further integration of the economies of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance [Comecon], because they feared this program would impede their modernisation plan and relegate them to their traditional role as agricultural supplier for advanced economies, but they also took a neutral stand on the Sino-Soviet split⁷⁰. This more independent orientation was again confirmed when the Romanian Communist Party adopted a new resolution in April 1964. “It is the sovereign right of all socialist states to decide, to choose and change the forms and methods of their social construction. No state has the right to present its own interests as the general interest...”⁷¹. Moreover, in addition to their growing national pride, Romanian officials repeatedly emphasised to their French counterparts that they were

⁶⁶ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XVII: Document 4, 03.06.64

⁶⁷ Griffith, Michael, The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, c1978), pp.120-121

⁶⁸ Schreiber, Les Actions, p.91

⁶⁹ Couve, Politique étrangère, p.197

⁷⁰ Rothschild, Joseph and Wingfield, Nancy, Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II (2nd ed.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.162-163

⁷¹ Schreiber, Les Actions, p.93

interested in extending contacts⁷². This included practical relations, especially trade, but also talks at the highest levels. Thus, in early June, Bucharest contacted the French embassy and announced that Prime Minister Ion Maurer wanted to visit Paris. This was a particularly symbolic event because it would be the first visit of a Romanian Prime Minister to any Western capital, and it was further evidence for France that Bucharest was seeking to progressively free itself from Soviet dominance⁷³.

The trip eventually took place in late July and Maurer met with De Gaulle. Besides the discussions on possible economic, cultural and scientific agreements, the particularly striking part of their conversation was Maurer's analysis of the situation within the Eastern bloc. He argued that the communist world was changing, as a consequence of Russia's own evolution and the Sino-Soviet split. This was allowing Romania to strive for more independence, especially in the economic sphere, while still remaining part of the socialist bloc. As such, Bucharest wanted to improve its relations with the West, including West Germany and the US. Maurer also hinted that France held a special status within the West because it was not trying, as he felt the US was, to detach the Eastern European states from the socialist camp. When De Gaulle asked Maurer why he had gone to Moscow before coming to Paris, the Romanian Prime Minister replied that he had done so to dissipate Soviet worries that he wanted to go to France to criticise them. Despite some difficulties, Maurer felt he had been eventually been successful in removing Soviet mistrust⁷⁴. The impact of this meeting on French leaders cannot be understated. Despite his customary caution, Couve argued that Maurer's visit to Paris "is a spectacular sign of the beginning of new relations between European states of both camps, and opens up some interesting perspectives for a thaw of the situation created twenty years ago"⁷⁵.

⁷² DDF: 1964, Tome I: Bouffanais to Couve, Telegram number 219-222, 29.02.64 and Telegram number 562-567, 20.05.64; ANF: 5AG1, Carton 183, Roumanie: Burin des Roziers-Dimitriu meeting, 23.04.64

⁷³ TNA: FO 371/177619: Bucharest to FO, Telegram number 1, 02.07.64 ; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.378: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 03.07.64

⁷⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.378: De Gaulle-Maurer meeting, 28.07.64

⁷⁵ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Couve to French diplomatic representatives, Circular Telegram number 90, 31.07.64

De Gaulle endorsed this view, as Alphand noted two days after the Maurer meeting: “he can feel the world is changing, and as a proof of this, the conversations he just had with the Romanian representative. The Romanian representative was in Moscow before his visit to France. Khrushchev was incapable of imposing his will because he is weakened by internal problems and his conflict with Mao”⁷⁶. Yet, the French President went even further in his analysis of Soviet problems. In a personal note written in July, and to whose conclusions he referred in his 23 July press conference, the General argued that communism had ultimately failed because it could not fulfill three key conditions: the dying away of nations under a common ideology, the growth and victory of communism in other industrialised states besides Russia, and the establishment of obedient communist regimes in the Third World⁷⁷. He anticipated that Russia’s problems would effectively compel it to take a less threatening stand in Europe, which would allow the development of a new equilibrium and security order on the continent. This is why De Gaulle instructed Philippe Baudet, his new Ambassador in Moscow, that his posture should be to show the Russians that “we are not afraid of them anymore”⁷⁸.

Although Baudet had reservations about the implication that Russia was no longer dangerous, there were signs that the Quai d’Orsay’s perceptions of the Eastern bloc were evolving in a way not so different from De Gaulle. As Soutou indicates, the Quai was still split. On the one hand, the mainstream conclusion was that Moscow was incapable of resolving the problems of the world communist movement, and that the process of differentiation among communist parties was irreversible. On the other hand, the specialists on the Soviet Union Jean Laloy, the *directeur-adjoint des affaires politiques*, Jean-Marie Soutou, the director of the European department, and Henri Froment-Meurice, head of the Eastern Europe department, were more sceptical and doubted that Moscow had lost its full control over Eastern Europe. However,

⁷⁶ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, p.435

⁷⁷ De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, 07.64, p.75; De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 23.07.64, p.227

⁷⁸ TNA: FO 371/177870: Paris to FO, 14.03.64

in 1963-1964, Laloy was side-tracked, whilst Soutou and Froment-Meurice were moved to other departments⁷⁹.

Aside from the transformations within the Eastern bloc that seemed to offer new perspectives for France's *Ostpolitik*, shifts in strategies and diplomatic alignments were also drawing France and the Eastern states closer together. As detailed in the previous chapter, the relative failure of the Franco-German axis, which emerged all too clearly during the 3-4 July 1964 summit, was a turning point for French foreign policy. That said, the consequences for France's relations with the communist states were not immediately obvious, apart from some small progress in practical talks. Soviet representatives visited Paris in June-July to discuss a possible new Franco-Soviet trade agreement, while France considered, despite Bonn's protests, breaking Western solidarity and granting longer-term credits to the Soviets. Finally, Gaston Palewski, French Minister for Scientific Research, Nuclear and Spatial questions, talked with Khrushchev about scientific exchanges and cooperation on French colour television technology, i.e. *Séquentiel Couleur Avec Mémoire* [SECAM]⁸⁰. The key point, though, was that the shortcomings of the Franco-German treaty had led De Gaulle, as he told Peyrefitte a few days after the failed July summit, to prepare his diplomatic alternatives: if in the future there was no progress with West Germany, France would seek an entente with Eastern Europe⁸¹. At the same time, superpower contacts lost some momentum in 1964. Despite a series of small steps to ease international tension, like the consular convention signed in June, events in Vietnam were starting to interfere and adversely impact other spheres of US-Soviet relations. Moreover, Johnson somewhat pushed the US-Soviet dialogue to the side as he focussed on the upcoming presidential election⁸².

⁷⁹ Soutou, "De Gaulle's France", in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, pp.178-179

⁸⁰ On credits, see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Erhard to De Gaulle, 16.07.64 and De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, De Gaulle to Erhard, 29.07.64, pp.80-81; On Palewski's trip see DDF: 1964, Tome II: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 4967-4977, 14.10.64

⁸¹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 07.07.64, p.261

⁸² Dumbrell, *President Johnson*, p.35, 39; Dobrynin, Anatoly, *In Confidence: Moscow's ambassador to America's six Cold War presidents (1962-1986)*, (New York: Times Books, Random House, c1995), pp.119-126

The final new factor that prepared the grounds for a rapprochement between France and the communist world was tied to Khrushchev. As mentioned before, the Soviet leader never considered France as a serious player and he had concluded, as he told Danish Prime Minister Jens Krag, that De Gaulle “had little influence in world affairs and knows it”⁸³. Instead, in 1964, Khrushchev focussed his efforts on trying to improve relations with West Germany. This was not so much a result of any change of view on the German question, but more a case that the Soviet government hoped to get trade benefits for its ailing economy, and a *modus vivendi* with Bonn in the spirit of Rapallo so as to have a free hand with China⁸⁴. These reports caused great concern amongst East German leaders, who absolutely wanted to be part of any talks on the German question. The Soviet leader did make a gesture towards his ally with the signing of the Soviet-East German friendship treaty on 12 June, but this was predominantly for Khrushchev a way to mark the last word on the Berlin crisis he started in November 1958, and a starting point for the normalisation of relations with Bonn⁸⁵. On 2 September, there seemed to be a breakthrough when the West German government formally invited Khrushchev to visit Bonn in January 1965. However, this trip was never to be. On 14 October, the Soviet Central Committee toppled Khrushchev and replaced him with a collegial leadership dominated by new Secretary General of the Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev, the new Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin and the new President, Anastas Mikoyan.

IV. October 1964-February 1965: Turning Point

The important developments in the Eastern bloc, combined with Franco-German tensions, had helped to narrow the gap between France and the Soviet Union. In the period between late 1964 and early 1965, both states would go further and move towards political cooperation. According to Couve, the fall of Khrushchev played a crucial role, because it meant

⁸³ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2188: Krag-Johnson meeting, 09.06.64

⁸⁴ See Sodaro, *Moscow, Germany*, pp.51-64; Selvage, Douglas, “The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Non-proliferation, 1963-65”, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFB0E.pdf>

⁸⁵ Selvage, “Warsaw Pact”; Gray, *Germany's Cold War*, p.163

a return to collegial rule and to more tranquillity in Soviet foreign policy⁸⁶. Furthermore, the Quai d'Orsay had always felt that Khrushchev was not interested in France⁸⁷. Yet, the change of Soviet leadership only played a small part in bringing Paris and Moscow closer together. The profound shift in France's *Westpolitik* at that time, and the growing independence of the satellite states, were far more significant factors.

The new rulers of the Kremlin – Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny – were not forthcoming when it came to foreign policy. This was partly because they saw domestic problems as more urgent, but it was also tied to the controversy between the advocates of hard-line policies and those who supported a moderate approach. The former wanted to provide more aid to Hanoi and to take a tough stand against West Germany, while the latter were keen to work towards a negotiated solution in Vietnam and wanted stability in Europe⁸⁸. This is not to say, as Vinogradov claimed, that the change of leadership did not affect Soviet foreign policy⁸⁹. They tried to reverse some of the decisions of their predecessor, starting with their attempt to repair relations with China. In regards to Vietnam, Moscow opted for the middle path of sending more aid to North Vietnam, whilst at the same time undertaking efforts in order to end the conflict⁹⁰. Moreover, the conservative Soviet leaders decided to side with Poland and East Germany, the more orthodox states of the Eastern Bloc, on the German question and ended Khrushchev's attempted rapprochement with Bonn. Beyond that, the Soviets' European policy was fairly subdued and they appeared hesitant about fully exploiting the growing tensions between the US and some of its Western European allies⁹¹.

This emerged very clearly in Moscow's attitude towards Paris, which initially seemed to flip-flop. On 17 and 20 October, *Pravda* attacked French positions on Vietnam and Latin America, but a mere week later, it devoted a whole article flattering France for its indispensable

⁸⁶ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.201

⁸⁷ Interview with Jacques Andréani, Paris, 15.02.06

⁸⁸ Wolfe, Thomas, *Soviet Power and Europe: 1945-1970*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p.256, 265; for more on the controversy over peaceful coexistence, see Newton, *Russia, France*, pp.58-73

⁸⁹ MAEF: CM, Couve, Vol.378: Vinogradov-De Gaulle meeting, 19.10.64

⁹⁰ Gaiduk, Ilya, "The Soviet Union faces the Vietnam War", in Goscha, Christopher, and Vaisse, Maurice (ed.), *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973*, (Paris: Bruylant, 2003), p.193

⁹¹ Wolfe, *Soviet Power*, pp.280-281

role in solving European problems⁹². This was reinforced by Gromyko on 27 October, or the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and the Soviet Union, when he underlined that “concrete possibilities” existed for further improvement in Franco-Soviet relations⁹³. The French leaders, for their part, were curious about the changes happening in Moscow. Thus on 21 October, De Gaulle encouraged Peyrefitte to visit Moscow so to develop cooperation on SECAM, and also because he wanted him to sound out the new Soviet leaders⁹⁴. There was additionally the welcomed development of the new five-year trade agreement signed on 30 October. That said, neither the Quai nor De Gaulle believed they were witnessing any changes in Soviet policy after Khrushchev’s removal; the Quai, in particular, argued that the latest Soviet statements were in line with previous efforts to exploit French tensions with the US and West Germany⁹⁵.

The MLF crisis, however, unlike the change of Soviet leadership, played an important role in the Franco-Soviet rapprochement. For a start, both states faced a common threat as they were bitterly opposed to West Germany gaining access to nuclear weapons. More importantly, the MLF episode led France and the Soviet Union, albeit for different reasons, to consider future cooperation as potentially beneficial. Moscow, for its part, became more sensitive to the opportunities offered by De Gaulle’s policies to undermine American influence in Europe and isolate West Germany⁹⁶. Soviet officials, starting with Vinogradov on 18 November, systematically began to push their French counterparts for more regular consultation on issues where they adopted similar views, including South-East Asia, the MLF, or Germany’s borders⁹⁷. In late December 1964, during a meeting with Baudet, Kosygin repeated the appeal for closer collaboration. Not only did he suggest giving a contractual form to the growing Franco-Soviet entente, but he also emphasised the numerous areas of Franco-Soviet agreement, and highlighted

⁹² Newton, *Russia, France*, p.59

⁹³ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: AFP Dépêche, 27.10.64

⁹⁴ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 21.10.64, p.312

⁹⁵ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe Orientale*, 29.10.64; NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2188: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 2607, 30.10.64; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 28.10.64, p.312

⁹⁶ Wolfe, *Soviet Power*, p.288

⁹⁷ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Note of *Directeur Politique* to Couve, 19.11.64

the dangers associated with a US-German rapprochement⁹⁸. In early January 1965, during Peyrefitte's visit to Moscow to discuss potential Franco-Soviet cooperation on SECAM, Kosygin equally made it clear that his government had chosen the latter for political, rather than technological reasons⁹⁹.

In France's case, the tension over the MLF and the CAP were important insofar as they contributed to a serious deterioration of relations with West Germany. De Gaulle, in particular, felt very bitter against the Germans and, according to Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, his mood towards them was reminiscent of that towards the British in January 1963¹⁰⁰. The General saw the pronounced dispute over the MLF as yet another proof of the shortcomings of the Franco-German treaty, and the fact that it would not become the basis of a more independent Western Europe in the foreseeable future. This acknowledgement pushed him to seek diplomatic alternatives, as he confirmed to Peyrefitte: "automatically we [France] are getting closer to the Russians to the extent that the Germans are moving away from us"¹⁰¹. Indeed, there is no doubt that resentment towards the West Germans, and the fear of a German-American military axis, were pushing the General to consider the traditional alliance with Russia to contain Germany. French leaders made little effort to hide this fact, quite the contrary. During a speech to *l'Assemblée Nationale*, in which he condemned the MLF, Couve warned that the latter would worry the Soviet government, a stand that really pleased Gromyko¹⁰².

At the same time, the continuing developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain were playing an equally essential role in the Franco-Soviet rapprochement, especially the list of Eastern European visitors to Paris which kept getting longer and longer¹⁰³. The Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia came in November, while the Hungarian representative followed soon after in January 1965. If the discussions mostly dealt with

⁹⁸ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 6087-6122, 24.12.64

⁹⁹ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 99-105, 11.01.65

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FO 371/177867: Bonn to FO, Telegram 1153, 16.11.64

¹⁰¹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 18.11.64, p.62

¹⁰² FNSP: CM Carton 1: Speech to *l'Assemblée Nationale*, 03.11.64; MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Laboulaye to Couve, Telegram number 5513, 07.11.65

¹⁰³ Schreiber, *Les Actions*, p.94

commercial and cultural relations, the French officials nonetheless considered these meetings as a confirmation that important changes were beginning to take place within the Eastern bloc. Couve, for example, was cautious enough to speak of an evolution rather than revolution, and dismissed the idea that France should seek to detach the Eastern European states from Russia. Yet, he also believed that a general normalisation of relations between all European states was possible, and that the satellite states were being attracted to France because of its exceptional *rayonnement* throughout the world¹⁰⁴. Similarly, De Gaulle thought that the situation in Europe was changing in the right direction and, even if this was not irreversible, it was up to France to encourage the Eastern Bloc states to reclaim their national sovereignty and personality. Depending on the results of the evolution, German reunification might even become feasible in the future¹⁰⁵.

Thus, both the MLF crisis and the growing emancipation of the satellite states were pushing France towards cooperation with the Eastern bloc, but it was the latter that eventually proved the decisive factor in persuading De Gaulle to follow that path. Despite their similar views on the issue of German nuclear armament, the French President remained wary of Soviet intentions and did not know what value to give to their openings¹⁰⁶. On the one hand, he believed both countries had a lot in common, and that Russia was taking into account France's growing prestige in the China and the Third World. On the other hand, he feared that the Soviets were only interested in France in order to gain an edge over the US, or in other words as a pawn in a new Yalta. In the end, however, his conviction that Europe was witnessing dramatic changes, especially the crumbling away of both Blocs slowly making the Cold War obsolete, helped the General overcome his doubts¹⁰⁷. Additionally, the general momentum of French foreign policy was in the direction of greater assertiveness and independence. As France was preparing to challenge US leadership in monetary and military matters, better relations with the Soviet Union

¹⁰⁴ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Couve to French diplomatic representatives, Circular Telegram number 174, 09.12.64

¹⁰⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.378: De Gaulle-Mende meeting, 02.12.64

¹⁰⁶ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 03.01.65, p.445

¹⁰⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 04-06-12.01.65, pp.313-317

were another way to challenge American hegemony and its right to speak for its allies in their relations with the other superpower¹⁰⁸.

The rest of the foreign policy establishment was more sceptical about the prospects of a Franco-Soviet dialogue. The Quai was very mistrustful of the Soviet Union. It doubted that the latter saw France as the best interlocutor, and argued repeatedly that the Soviets' main goal was to exploit divisions within the Atlantic Alliance¹⁰⁹. Couve, for his part, supported the principle of more extensive talks with Moscow, as long as they avoided misunderstandings and did not ignore the existing differences on many key subjects, including Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. According to a well-placed source, he even had to strengthen a telegram of instructions to Baudet, which was originally drafted by the Élysée, so that it conformed more fully to the requirements of Western orthodoxy¹¹⁰. De Gaulle was thus undoubtedly the real driving force behind seeking better relations with the Soviet Union. Meeting with Vinogradov on 25 January, he emphasised that he would be happy to visit Moscow if bilateral relations continued to progress. Yet, he did warn his interlocutor that Franco-Soviet collaboration would fail if the latter sought to divide France from its allies, or if the Soviets sought to obtain French recognition of East Germany¹¹¹. This was effectively a conditional green light to start exploring the possibilities of a Franco-Soviet political cooperation. It was in this context that the General gave his all-important press conference of 4 February, or twenty years exactly after the start of the Yalta conference.

The press conference was firstly for the General an opportunity to reflect on the recent developments in East-West relations, and to outline very clearly his vision of how the division of Germany could be overcome in a European framework¹¹². He argued that the German problem could not "be solved by the confrontation of the ideologies and the forces of the two camps

¹⁰⁸ Cerny, *Politics of grandeur*, p.179

¹⁰⁹ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Draft note on Franco-Soviet relations, 05.01.65

¹¹⁰ DDF: 1965, Tome I: Couve to Baudet, Telegram number 375-390, 08.01.65; TNA: FO 371/182941: Paris to FO, 29.01.65

¹¹¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: De Gaulle-Vinogradov meeting, 25.01.65

¹¹² Soutou, "De Gaulle's France", in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.180

opposed to each other”; it needed to be considered from a different perspective, that is to say “the entente and conjugated action of the peoples that are and will remain most interested in the fate of Germany, the European nations”¹¹³. Yet, he was careful to point out that such a solution could only occur in the long-term and depended on many conditions. The Eastern Bloc would have to evolve so to allow Russia to move away from totalitarianism and let the satellite states play a more significant role in Europe. The states of Western Europe would have to extend their organisation to cover political and defence matters. West Germany would have to accept that any reunification would involve a settlement on its borders and weapons that was accepted by all its neighbours. Finally, a solution to the German question was only conceivable once a general “détente, entente and cooperation” had developed between all the European states¹¹⁴.

Yet, this press conference was also significant in a more fundamental way, as was claimed by a source in the Quai when he argued to American officials that the German section of the speech marked a definite turning point in the evolution of French foreign policy¹¹⁵. It was effectively a signal of a change in the French strategic priorities: as De Gaulle had temporarily given up on his hopes of seeing a more independent Western Europe centred on the Franco-German axis, he was now pinning his hopes for a radical transformation of the European system on his emerging *Ostpolitik*.

V. February 1965-June 1965: First Chapter with the East

Following De Gaulle’s press conference, France pursued in 1965 the process of developing a political cooperation with the Eastern Bloc, starting with the Soviet Union. It was not always a straightforward process, and during this period, the rapprochement remained often more concrete in the scientific and commercial sphere than the political field¹¹⁶. On 23 March 1965, the Soviet Union officially adopted the French SECAM technology, and on 12 May, both

¹¹³ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.341

¹¹⁴ *Idem*

¹¹⁵ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2178: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 4451, 05.02.65

¹¹⁶ Rey, *La tentation*, p.38

states signed a protocol of cultural exchanges. Six days later, they signed an agreement for cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Yet, the international context and the general increase in contacts did help to bring both sides closer together.

Indeed, while less dramatic, progress also occurred at the political level in early 1965. Paris and Moscow, keen on high-level consultations, quickly agreed that Gromyko would visit Paris in April, and Couve would return the visit in the autumn¹¹⁷. Moreover, the appointment in March 1965 of Valerian Zorin, as Soviet Ambassador in Paris, reinforced this sense of a new phase in Franco-Soviet relations. Whereas Vinogradov had been mainly active in cultural and technical matters, it was widely believed that with Zorin, a former deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and expert on European and German policies, the Soviets expected to do business in those fields¹¹⁸. The Kremlin leaders believed that improving Franco-Soviet relations did not involve big risks, and that they could benefit by simply sending signals in response to De Gaulle's positive speeches, especially his 4 February press conference. It cost Moscow very little to thank France by upgrading their embassy in Paris or by sending Gromyko¹¹⁹. As for the French, they seemed pleased that a dialogue was possible not only on Vietnam, where they held similar views, but also on the crucial question of Germany, despite differences in their viewpoints¹²⁰.

Both the French and Soviet leaders strove to present an optimistic picture of their future relations. Zorin mentioned to Pompidou that his government "really wants to improve its friendly relations with France, as a great European power itself". Pompidou replied that as in the past, good Franco-Soviet relations could provide a solid base for European peace¹²¹. Gromyko's visit in late April only reinforced French optimism, leading De Gaulle to comment, "it is obvious the Russians have a strong desire to develop contacts with us"¹²². The General, after all, was

¹¹⁷ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Couve to Baudet, Telegram number 2370-2373, 16.02.65

¹¹⁸ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2188: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 5046, 08.03.65

¹¹⁹ Newton, *Russia, France*, pp.60-61

¹²⁰ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.205

¹²¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: Pompidou-Zorin meeting, 22.04.65

¹²² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 28.04.65, p.318

convinced that Russia was facing a combination of serious problems, which meant, as he told Gromyko, that it no longer appeared as threatening as it once had¹²³. In that context, as Soutou explained, despite the fact that the French official position supported reunification, De Gaulle was ready to make a concession to the Soviets. If he believed that the partition of Germany was “abnormal” and would not last for ever, he was “in no hurry” to overcome it and accepted that partition was “an accomplished fact” for the time being. With Gromyko replying that Moscow was not against reunification, provided it was agreed by both German states, there was now a measure of overlap between the French and Soviet positions¹²⁴.

However, it is important not to overstate the extent of the Franco-Soviet rapprochement by the time of Gromyko’s visit. The latter was more a probing exercise than anything else, a first chapter in their dialogue. The French were equally careful not to move too quickly towards the Soviets. When Gromyko questioned De Gaulle about the possibilities of a Franco-Soviet treaty, his reply was voluntarily ambiguous: he excluded no options in the future, but added that this was not an immediate topic¹²⁵. Furthermore, France also made it clear that it wanted actions, not just words, to strengthen their bilateral ties. As Pompidou told Zorin, any improvement in Franco-Soviet relations depended on solid foundations in all spheres, not just the political field. He particularly complained about the low level of Franco-Soviet trade and Soviet delays in fully implementing the October 1964 agreement¹²⁶. Similarly, De Gaulle refused to get carried away and still remained wary of Moscow. Speaking to Alphand soon after Gromyko’s visit, he explained that Russia was “trying to take advantage of our disagreements with the US”, but “for the moment it is not really going anywhere”¹²⁷. Indeed, the Soviets barely hid the fact that they

¹²³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: De Gaulle-Gromyko meeting, 27.04.65

¹²⁴ Soutou, “De Gaulle’s France”, in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.181. When Couve went to Moscow later in the year, he added more forcefully than De Gaulle that Germany should be reunited at the end of the détente process.

¹²⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: De Gaulle-Gromyko meeting, 27.04.65

¹²⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.379: Pompidou-Zorin meeting, 22.04.65

¹²⁷ Alphand, *L’étonnement*, 07.05.65, p.452

were mainly engaging in a dialogue with France to annoy the US, as Ussachev, a Soviet chargé d'affaires in the Paris Embassy, strongly implied to an American diplomat¹²⁸.

Additionally, as a US State Department report pointed out, neither France nor the Soviets could go very far in their relations without causing unpredictable consequences with their allies¹²⁹. De Gaulle's 4 February press conference had already caused some uneasiness in the West: Washington feared that the General's "European" approach to the German problem was an attempt to exclude the US from any settlement, while Schroeder believed it was not up to the French President to discuss the fate of Germany¹³⁰. Thus, French officials tried early on to reassure their Western colleagues that they were not seeking any "reversal of alliances", and to show that they were not fundamentally departing from Western orthodoxy on East-West matters. For example, De Gaulle told Bohlen that he saw no real differences in principle between the American and French approach to détente, while he explained to Brosio that the purely European approach to the German problem would only be appropriate if there were significant changes within Russia and the satellite states¹³¹. Likewise, France made a gesture towards West Germany when it issued on 12 May 1965 a tripartite declaration with Britain and the US, which stressed that German unification could only occur via peaceful means and in agreement with the Soviet Union, thus reaffirming the responsibility of the four major powers in the German question¹³².

At the same time, France's *Ostpolitik* was pushed forward by the growing contacts with the satellite states of Eastern Europe. The latter were particularly important as a counterweight to Russian power, and to help maintain a certain equilibrium within Europe. After the increasing activities in Franco-Soviet relations in the first few months of 1965, Paris made sure to keep a hand in the Eastern European game and balance its rapprochement with Russia¹³³. In June 1965, hot on the heels of a commercial agreement with Romania, France signed a scientific and trade

¹²⁸ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2180: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 5591, 03.04.65

¹²⁹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 46, 24.04.65

¹³⁰ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.135; Seydoux, François, *Dans L'Intimité Franco-Allemande: Une Mission Diplomatique*, (Paris: Albatros, 1977), p.45

¹³¹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 47, 04.05.65; LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 171: Finletter to Rusk, Telegram number 1247, 01.03.65

¹³² MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.25: Courcel to Couve, Telegram number 1984-1989, 12.05.65

¹³³ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2173: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 7298, 24.06.65

cooperation agreement with Czechoslovakia, and a new trade and industrial cooperation agreement with Poland. Moreover, several French Ministers visited Eastern Europe in the first half of 1965, including the Minister for administrative reform Louis Joxe who went to Belgrade and Prague, and Giscard who went to Bucharest. That said, the French leaders were realistic and understood that any substantial progress in détente in Europe depended on Soviet good will. They realised that they should attempt to increase contacts with the Eastern European states, not try to detach them from the Soviet sphere of influence¹³⁴.

Despite that cautious attitude, the French government undoubtedly viewed the evolution of the satellite states with great hope. According to a Quai D'Orsay analysis, the Soviet Union surely disapproved or was concerned by the rapprochement between Western European and Eastern European states, but they felt that Moscow already had its hands full with their own economic and external problems, and that prevented it from fully opposing this evolution in Europe¹³⁵. De Gaulle agreed with the analysis of the Quai d'Orsay, and was convinced that the satellite states would inevitably and eventually recover their independence. He adamantly believed that "Eastern Europe will start moving", so "it is our role to help and nobody can do it better than France"¹³⁶. Moreover, it was true that on the economic and cultural fronts, France offered nothing more really than other Western powers like West Germany, Britain or Italy, and often France lagged behind those powers in terms of trading with Eastern Europe. However, the Quai d'Orsay officials banked on the fact that France was the only Western European power that possessed a certain political credit within the Eastern bloc, and that might allow it to eventually become the main interlocutor of the satellite states¹³⁷.

De Gaulle liked to play states against each other. Better relations with the satellite states provided a balance to the rapprochement with Russia, whereas closer ties with the Soviets helped

¹³⁴ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, pp.197-198

¹³⁵ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2665: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe-Orientale*, 20.04.65

¹³⁶ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 10.02.65, pp.317-318

¹³⁷ DDF: 1965, Tome I: Account of Joxe's trip to Prague, 30.06.65

counter American hegemony¹³⁸. The latter was particularly relevant in a period when the US was stepping up its involvement in the Third World with the interventions in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic – of which more will be said in the next chapter. United by their opposition to both of Washington’s moves, France and the Soviet Union were encouraged to consult more closely. Peyrefitte’s official statement of 24 February expressed his government’s willingness to “consult with the Soviet Union” in seeking “peace in Southeast Asia thanks to an international conference”; as for the Dominican Republic incident, French and Soviet representatives enjoyed frequent contacts on the matter and shared very similar views¹³⁹. The international context was, in other words, facilitating a Franco-Soviet rapprochement. The war in Vietnam was particularly significant because it compromised Moscow’s dialogue with Washington¹⁴⁰.

Finally, France’s Eastern policy was also benefiting from the fact that Paris’ *Westpolitik* was leading to serious tension with its allies. The split between France and America only grew in the first half of 1965 thanks to their differences over NATO and the international monetary system. In parallel, the brewing crisis within the EEC finally erupted on 30 June when France decided to boycott the Community institutions. In this context, France’s Western allies, especially West Germany, could not help but view De Gaulle’s openings towards Eastern Europe with fear and suspicion. In stark contrast, the prospects for France’s *Ostpolitik* appeared far more promising by mid 1965. The rapprochement with both the Soviet Union and the satellite states was only at its beginning, and with the Western path at a dead end, the Eastern road appeared to offer more opportunities for France to attain Great Power status and promote its national independence¹⁴¹.

VI. July 1965-January 1966: Freeze in the West, Opportunities in the East

¹³⁸ Andrieu, René, in *De Gaulle*, Lacouture and Mehl, p.224

¹³⁹ NARA: RG59, CFPP, 1964-1966, Box 2186: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 4916, 01.03.65; DDF: 1965, Tome I: Couve to Seydoux, Telegram number 2924-2928, 05.06.65

¹⁴⁰ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.424

¹⁴¹ Kolodziej, *French international policy*, p.344

In the second half of 1965, French strategic priorities shifted even further towards the East because of its differences with its Western allies. On a basic level, France's boycott of the EEC institutions and its aloof position within NATO – as it continued to prepare its withdrawal – meant that it was able to focus far more on its relations with the Eastern bloc. More importantly, Bonn's persistent pursuit of the MLF played a key role in bringing Paris and Moscow closer together. During the summer, officials from the Quai were not so worried by Bonn's renewed demands for involvement in nuclear matters. They felt, like the head of the European department François Puaux, that many of the West German statements on the MLF were being made with an eye on the upcoming German general elections scheduled in September¹⁴². However, Bonn's stubborn insistence on the MLF after the elections angered French leaders, especially De Gaulle. As he warned American Senator Mike Mansfield, West Germany's nuclear ambitions might prevent the possibility of any real peace between Western and Eastern Europe¹⁴³. It was also yet another factor contributing to his complete disillusionment with West Germany by the end of 1965: "The Germans have taken a dissident position towards our treaty of cooperation and friendship. We cannot stop them. Germany follows its way, it is not ours. They look for reunification at all costs and without delay; they will not get it as long as the Soviets resist"¹⁴⁴. When discussing with Soutou his forthcoming trip to Moscow, Couve thus argued that France's best option was to revert to the historic policy of an alliance with Russia, in order to counter the resurgence of German nationalism and their apparent desire to participate in nuclear defence matters¹⁴⁵.

This was significant because despite general improvement during the first half of 1965, the Soviet government had showed signs of frustration with the slow progress in Franco-Soviet relations. Iouri Doubinin, Soviet counsellor in the Paris embassy, had complained to Puaux that his government was disappointed by the fact France had not "responded" more rapidly to

¹⁴² MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1933: Puaux-Doubinin meeting, 15.07.65

¹⁴³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Mansfield meeting, 15.11.65

¹⁴⁴ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 13.10.65, p.303

¹⁴⁵ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 172: CIA Intelligence Info Cable, 25.08.65

Gromyko's visit "by taking an initiative on the German problem"¹⁴⁶. Indeed, the Soviet government had to a certain extent misunderstood the implications of De Gaulle's February press conference. When he had claimed that a solution to the German question needed the agreement of all Germany's neighbours, Moscow had wrongly assumed that this included East Germany, and was later surprised to hear that France's position on East Germany had not changed¹⁴⁷. Yet, Bonn's renewed campaign for the MLF had caused significant anxiety in Moscow and encouraged it to resume efforts to improve ties with Paris. Knowing full well that France also opposed the MLF, Soviet officials in Paris lobbied the French government intensively during the month of July. They effectively suggested some kind of cooperative effort to prevent Bonn from gaining access to nuclear weapons in one form or another.

While French leaders undoubtedly shared Moscow's opposition to the MLF and were keen to give greater attention to the Eastern Bloc, they were equally quite prudent and cautious vis-à-vis the Soviet openings¹⁴⁸. When Zorin pointed out to De Gaulle that France and the Soviet Union had failed to agree on common positions, despite similar views on many international problems, De Gaulle adopted a "wait and see attitude". He agreed that both Paris and Moscow shared similar views on crucial problems such as Vietnam and Germany, but those were questions that would take a long time to solve. Nonetheless, he still wanted to discuss those problems with the Soviet Union, and attached key importance to Couve's upcoming visit to Moscow¹⁴⁹. Furthermore, despite the conflicts with its West European allies, France tried not to jeopardise even further its relations the latter, especially West Germany. Thus, Puaux reminded Doubinin that while France and the Soviets held close views on the MLF, they still belonged to different alliances and it would be difficult for Paris to take a common stand with Moscow against Bonn¹⁵⁰. Finally, the General also adopted a prudent attitude for tactical reasons. He was convinced, as he told Alphand, that "our position is unique: Russia is courting us and China

¹⁴⁶ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2173: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 6760, 28.05.65

¹⁴⁷ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1933: Lucet-Ussachev meeting, 23.07.65

¹⁴⁸ Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol. 3*, p.400

¹⁴⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.380: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 05.07.65

¹⁵⁰ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1933: Puaux-Doubinin meeting, 15.07.65

congratulates us for our courage and independence”¹⁵¹. Having the luxury of being on good terms with several Great Powers, France did not need to appear desperate to respond the Russian advances.

At the same time, the rapprochement with the Soviet Union was gaining in momentum as a consequence of France’s ever-increasing contacts with the satellite states. French officials saw the visit in September by Polish Prime Minister, Josef Cyrankiewicz, as a particularly important step in Eastern Europe’s evolution towards greater independence, starting with the fact that it would be the first time a Polish Prime Minister would come to an Atlantic Alliance state since World War Two. They also considered it an excellent opportunity for France to improve its cultural, commercial and political presence. As for De Gaulle, he was planning to give Cyrankiewicz a finer reception than the one for Maurer in 1964, because of his deeper personal interest in Poland – dating from his time in Warsaw in 1920 – and Poland’s more significant role in the overall European picture¹⁵². Yet, if the General was confident that the Eastern European states would slowly, but inexorably, reclaim their national independence, he understood that any improvement in France’s relations with those states could not happen without parallel improvement in its relations with Russia. During his talks with Cyrankiewicz, De Gaulle was careful to balance his calls for greater contacts between Poland and France with a cautious statement that as long as “you [Poland] keep your national personality ... we have no problems with your alliance with the Soviet Union”. He further added that France wanted to cooperate more with this Russia, which it saw as less threatening, beset with problems, and no longer set on dominating Europe¹⁵³.

As such, De Gaulle was attaching a lot of importance to Couve’s imminent trip to Moscow, unlike the Quai officials who were more sceptical about the prospects of Franco-Soviet cooperation. A note drafted before Couve’s visit acknowledged the growing Soviet interest in

¹⁵¹ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 17.07.65, p.459

¹⁵² DDF: 1965, Tome II: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe Centrale*, 30.08.65; LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 172: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 1191, 03.09.65

¹⁵³ FNSP: CM Carton 9: De Gaulle-Cyrankiewicz meeting, 10.09.65

France, and the more distant relations between the superpowers, but warned that the US and the Soviet Union had enough common interests to make it likely that they would engage in a close dialogue in the future¹⁵⁴. However, despite that warning, Couve's positive talks with his Russian hosts played a central role in fully committing the French government towards its relations with Russia and the goal of East-West rapprochement in Europe. The meetings with Brezhnev, Gromyko and Kosygin undoubtedly produced no changes in respective viewpoints. Nevertheless, the repeated meetings between high-level French and Soviet officials – after Gromyko's visit in April and Gromyko's meetings with Couve in Vienna in May and at the United Nations [UN] in October – were strong evidence of the new friendlier atmosphere between France and the Soviet Union¹⁵⁵. The Kremlin leaders went to great lengths to flatter and please Couve during his trip, often complimenting De Gaulle and his policies, and suggested the latter should visit the Soviet Union. Brezhnev promised Couve that the General “would be warmly welcomed”¹⁵⁶. Kosygin also mentioned that De Gaulle's trip could offer the opportunity to “draft a serious document to organise our relations for the coming years”, or in effect underlining that Moscow took its relations with Paris seriously. Couve hinted that De Gaulle would be interested in the invitation, but he could only reply after the Presidential elections¹⁵⁷.

Couve's trip to Moscow was a very important landmark in Franco-Soviet relations and the confirmation of the series of small improvements throughout 1964-65. Furthermore, it helped to overcome some of the lingering doubts on both sides. In regards to the Soviets, on the one hand the foreign policy community was to still undecided and caught up in the “great debates” about peaceful coexistence, which helps explain Brezhnev's skimpy tribute to Franco-Soviet relations as merely “not bad” during the Central Committee plenum in September 1965¹⁵⁸. On the other hand, certain officials were pushing for closer ties with Paris, like Zorin who was

¹⁵⁴ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1933: Notes of *Sous Direction Europe Orientale*, 22.10.65

¹⁵⁵ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.209

¹⁵⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.25: Couve-Brezhnev meeting, 01.11.65

¹⁵⁷ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.25: Couve-Kosygin meeting, 31.10.65

¹⁵⁸ Newton, *Russia, France*, p.61

delighted by the current spirit of Franco-Soviet cooperation¹⁵⁹. As the political report for 1965 of the Soviet Embassy in Paris argued, “the political orientations of the French government present for us undeniable advantages in regards to the general aims of Soviet foreign policy, because, first and foremost, this tendency destabilises the Western camp in its current organisation, weakens objectively the United States – our main imperialist enemy – and compromises West Germany’s chances for military and political progress”¹⁶⁰.

In the same way, it is true that France did not abandon its prudent stance. For example, De Gaulle mentioned to British conservative leader Edward Heath that while the Soviets appeared more reasonable, the West still needed to remain cautious; similarly, French leaders were wary of hasty and adventurous positions, which explains why they were very lukewarm towards the Soviet proposal for a European security conference¹⁶¹. Yet, there was also a clear optimism because, according to Couve, his trip had shown that Paris could “objectively cooperate” with Moscow¹⁶². He came back from the Soviet Union extremely pleased and impressed with the results of the talks, and as he told Schroeder, he was struck by the changes in the Soviet Union since his last visit in 1947, and by the apparent freedom of expression prevailing¹⁶³. By the end of 1965, as a source from the Quai d’Orsay confirmed to American officials, De Gaulle now considered the East-West rapprochement in Europe as his main strategic objective¹⁶⁴.

¹⁵⁹ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 172: CIA Intelligence Info Cable, 25.08.65

¹⁶⁰ Narinsky, Mikhaïl, “Le retrait de la France de l’organisation militaire de l’OTAN, vu de Moscou”, in Vaïsse, Maurice (ed.), *De Gaulle et la Russie*, (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2006), p.164

¹⁶¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Heath meeting, 22.11.65; Rey, Marie-Pierre, “De Gaulle, l’URSS et la sécurité européenne, 1958-1969”, in Vaïsse, *De Gaulle*, p.223. First proposed during the Khrushchev period, the project of a European security conference was promoted again by the new Kremlin leaders, who mobilised the satellite states with the second Rapacki plan in December 1964.

¹⁶² Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.415

¹⁶³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 12.11.65

¹⁶⁴ NARA: RG59, Bureau of Atlantic Affairs, Files of Robert J Schaetzle Deputy Assistant Secretary for Atlantic Affairs, Box 1: Funkhouse to State Department, 13.12.65

VII. Conclusion

Between 1963 and 1965, France's attitude towards the communist bloc underwent a very significant evolution. From bitter opponent in early 1963, separated by the Franco-German treaty and its different conception of détente, France had moved by late 1965 to the position of champion of East-West détente in Europe. The failure of the Franco-German treaty, combined with the growing emancipation of the satellite states within the Eastern bloc, proved instrumental in this change of situation. After his victory in the second round of the presidential elections on 19 December, De Gaulle went to the next level and quickly moved to give a new impetus to France's relations with the Soviet Union. During a meeting with Zorin on 12 January 1966, he announced that he had accepted Brezhnev and Kosygin's invitation to visit the Soviet Union in June¹⁶⁵.

In 1966, the French President was thus preparing to initiate a bolder foreign policy, and one that would actively challenge the Cold War order in Europe, thanks to the withdrawal from NATO and his trip to Moscow. Yet, he again faced a series of significant challenges. Would France be able to stay at the vanguard of East-West détente? Would it be able to compel the Eastern European states to adopt more flexible positions on the German question? Finally, would French public opinion continue to support the rapprochement with the Soviet Union¹⁶⁶? Chapter four will consider these questions, but before that, it is necessary to focus on how French policy towards the Third World evolved between 1963 and 1965.

¹⁶⁵ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 187, URSS: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 12.01.66

¹⁶⁶ According to IFOP, De Gaulle, p.264, in 1963, 23% had a good opinion of the USSR, 30% neither good nor bad, 35% had a bad opinion, and 12% had no opinion; for 1964, the figures were 25%, 42%, 25% and 8%; for 1965, 27%, 40%, 14%, and 19%.

Chapter III: A “Shining Light” for the World?

I. Introduction

The four years following De Gaulle’s return to power in 1958 marked the end of the French colonial empire. Paris swiftly granted independence to its black African colonies in 1960, before finally ending the Algerian War with the Évian Accords of March 1962. The latter were a very significant turning point, not only because they removed a major burden and enabled France to focus on its quest for Great Power status, but they also allowed it to try and make a comeback in the Third World. Free from its colonial past and the Algerian quagmire, Paris was keen to start a new phase with the Third World states, and present itself as the champion of their development. The creation in late 1962 of the Ministry of Cooperation, headed by Raymond Triboulet, for France’s relations with its former African colonies seemed to confirm this new direction. The new Ministry would be distinct from the Quai d’Orsay, and would provide technical aid on the margins of the Quai’s political diplomacy¹.

Yet, this policy towards the developing states, based on cooperation rather than colonial domination, raises three main questions. First, did Gaullist France follow a coherent policy towards the Third World as a whole? Second, what effectively drove this policy of cooperation? There is a clear divide on the subject within this literature, as described in the introduction². Finally, how important was the Third World in De Gaulle’s overall grand strategy, and did its role evolve significantly between 1963 and 1965? Did the French openings towards the Third World, as Vaïsse suggests, translate the General’s will to look for a third way and place French policy outside the framework of the Cold War struggle³?

¹ Triboulet, Raymond, Un Ministre du Général, (Paris: Plon, 1985), p.198

² See Introduction, footnote 37

³ Vaïsse, La grandeur, p.452

II. The Rhetoric ...

Judging by rhetoric alone, there was a coherent and defined French approach towards the Third World and its place in the international system. Presenting the maintenance of world peace as one of their central foreign policy goals, French leaders consistently denounced the Cold War bipolar order because they felt that “a simplistic division of the world into two blocs invariably led to opposition and conflict”⁴. It was thus normal that they wanted to prevent the Third World from becoming another East-West battlefield because, as Couve argued in the case of the Middle East, superpower involvement in the region undermined its stability⁵. Paris essentially viewed the Cold War as an unstable system and believed that global equilibrium could not solely depend on agreements between Moscow and Washington; it needed the participation of the rest of the world⁶.

For De Gaulle, the emergence of a multitude of new independent states was a profound change in modern civilisation. Yet, as he reflected to Luis Giannattasio, President of the Uruguayan National Council, the Cold War threatened to sterilise this development⁷. The spread of ideological competition throughout the globe presented the clear danger of turning Third World states into pawns in the superpower rivalry. In that respect, the policy of neutralisation, often advocated by France and especially in South-East Asia as we will see later, represented a possible alternative and an attempt at freezing out some areas from the US-Soviet struggle. French leaders were convinced that neutralisation was in the interest of the small, lesser-developed states caught between the great free nations and communist powers⁸. Promoting neutrality also had the advantage of encouraging Third World independence and the attempts to resist subordination to Great Powers. As De Gaulle explained to the Laotian Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma, “a state can have friends and receive aid. But, it has to solve its own

⁴ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.446

⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: Couve-Peres meeting, 15.06.63

⁶ DDF: 1964, Tome II: De Gaulle-Illia meeting, 04.10.64

⁷ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 08.10.64, p.297

⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: Pompidou-Ikeda meeting, 07.04.64

problems without foreign intervention”⁹. In other words, this was connected to the central Gaullist creed according to which nationalism, rather than the sterile (and self-serving) struggle between the US and the Soviet Union, was the real driving force in world affairs¹⁰.

Moreover, not only was the emergence of an independent Third World important for world equilibrium, but according to De Gaulle in his 31 January 1964 press conference, this was the true global challenge as “two billion men are aspiring for progress, well-being and dignity”¹¹. It was just not possible, as he told Peyrefitte, to let the universe “be divided into haves and have-nots. The whole world is part of a common civilisation”¹². The General was keen not to consider all international relations, including French policy towards the Third World, through the prism of the East-West conflict¹³. Instead of the Cold War’s divisive ideologies and desires for domination, Gaullist rhetoric thus outlined an ambitious alternative model for relations between developed and developing states. Speaking at Mexico University, he explained that the dominating fact in the world was the unity of the universe and the need for fraternal relations between states, which implied richer states had to help those requiring aid to progress¹⁴.

If Gaullist rhetoric argued that helping developing states, rather the Cold War rivalry, was the fundamental global task for rich nations, what did it have to say about France’s contribution to this mission? On a basic level, it referred to historical circumstances to justify why France should have an active role in the Third World. In addition to its colonial past, France possessed traditional links of friendship with many states throughout the world, and De Gaulle often used this argument when urging foreign statesmen for further collaboration¹⁵. Furthermore, French leaders often pointed to their country’s history as providing it with an authoritative standing on extra-European affairs. On the thorny issue of Vietnam, for example, Couve regularly told American officials that France had spent more than ninety years in Indochina, in

⁹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 12.09.63, p.133

¹⁰ Costigliola, *Cold alliance*, p.139

¹¹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.170

¹² Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 11.03.64, p.472

¹³ Gorce, Paul Marie de la, *DGESS VI*, pp.73-74

¹⁴ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 18.03.64, p.198

¹⁵ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.19: De Gaulle-King Hussein meeting, 10.09.63

effect reminding them that it possessed a great knowledge of the region¹⁶. Gaullist rhetoric effectively presented France – with its blend of tradition and experience – as a privileged interlocutor for Third World states. After all, this was important because the latter needed to have more options available to them besides turning to either Washington or Moscow for aid¹⁷.

Yet, besides history and tradition, French leaders argued that their country's unique nature drove it to seek closer cooperation with developing states¹⁸. As Couve explained in his memoirs, the spirit, the soul and the genius of France pushed it towards the universal. It was the flag bearer of the fundamental principles of the time, that is to say national independence, peace, and cooperation between peoples¹⁹. An independent France was a major source of inspiration for all states fighting foreign intervention²⁰. It was a model for the Third World thanks to its assertive stance against the superpowers, and the constant values it stood for. In other words, French leaders believed that their country had a special position and role to play in the world, as De Gaulle made clear to Peyrefitte: "France's authority is moral [...] Our country is different than others because of its disinterested and universal vocation [...] France has an eternal role. That is why it benefits from an immense credit. Because France was a pioneer of American independence, of the abolition of slavery, of the rights of people to dispose of their own fate. Because it is the champion of nations' independence against all hegemonies. Everyone realises that: France is the light of the world, its genius is to enlighten the universe"²¹.

This belief in France's special role led De Gaulle to present it as leading the way when it came to helping Third World states, as he did during his 31 January 1964 press conference, when he sought to justify the principles of its cooperation policy and emphasise its humane and disinterested nature. Reminding his audience that France dedicated more of its income to aid

¹⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: Couve-Kennedy meeting, 07.10.63

¹⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.377: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting 1, 15.02.64

¹⁸ See Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.453, and Hartley, *Gaullism*, p.205

¹⁹ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, pp.431-432

²⁰ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, Speech in Lyon, 28.09.63, p.138

²¹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.1*, 13.02.63, p.283

than any other state in terms of percentage of total gross national income [GNI]²², the General added that the material gains they received from helping developing states were very insignificant compared to what France spent in terms of aid. In addition, he argued that France's cooperation policy was not a cynical effort, which involved splashing out money in exchange for allegiance. Instead, he claimed that beyond financial aid, it was France's duty to "educate and train" the men of the Third World so to enable them one day to follow their own path towards progress²³. Additionally, this was a duty that applied to all states irrespective of their regimes or ideologies, as shown by Paris' ties with socialist Algeria or its recognition of Communist China²⁴.

Considering the latter point, and with its emphasis on cooperation and overcoming the Cold War's divisive logic, Gaullist rhetoric towards the Third World naturally disavowed exclusive links. If it continued to give priority to its former colonies, France had grander ambitions for its relations with developing states. The *rapport Jeanneney*, published in January 1964, was instrumental in determining whether French aid should be limited, and it offered strong conclusions that influenced De Gaulle's thinking: "We should remove all geographical limits. Wanting to set up a list of states with which to cooperate would lead to wrongful exclusions and inclusions. Cooperation must be directed globally..."²⁵. Indeed, between 1963 and 1967, the share of French aid for states outside the franc zone – especially in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America – doubled²⁶.

Gaullist rhetoric thus underlined how France's history and values created a strong bond between itself and the developing states. Yet, it also strove to emphasise France's commitment to

²² According to Pascallon, Pierre, "Les Aspects Économiques de la Politique Tiers Mondiste du Général de Gaulle de 1962 à 1969", in Institut Charles de Gaulle (ed.), *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, (Paris: A. Pedone, 1984), p.189, throughout the 1960s, France dedicated a higher percentage of its GNI to aid than the average member-state of the Development Aid Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. See annex 2.

²³ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.173; See also Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 16.09.64, p.517

²⁴ Gorce, *DGESS VI*, p.74

²⁵ Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol.3*, p.422; In March 1963, a decree established a commission, presided by former Minister Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, that was in charge of making a report on the policy of cooperation with the developing countries.

²⁶ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.457

practical steps to help the cause of Third World progress. Starting with world peace, official discourse repeatedly pointed to the government's active steps towards furthering that noble cause. French leaders presented themselves as reasonable statesmen who advised moderation to belligerent states, as when they dealt with officials from the Middle Eastern states²⁷. They tirelessly condemned war as solving nothing and advocated political solutions to conflicts, with the repeated calls to convene an international conference for the conflict in Indochina as a prime example.

Moreover, Paris also used all opportunities to show its complete respect for Third World states by underlining the four core principles underpinning its policy: non intervention in the internal affairs of other states; the right of peoples to self-determination; independence of nations; and respect for other states²⁸. This respectful stand was a way for De Gaulle to highlight the distinction between France and the superpowers. As he ceaselessly explained during his trip to Latin America in September-October 1964, France – unlike the US and the Soviet Union – did not want to dominate other states. It only wanted to walk *la mano en la mano* with Third World states on their journey towards progress²⁹. France wanted therefore to appear as a state with Third World sensitivities, as genuinely concerned with their development. This was the case, for example, with the issue of the global prices of raw materials. France advocated stable and fixed prices for those raw materials, so to protect the agricultural countries of the Third World³⁰.

Gaullist rhetoric depicted the development of the Third World as the great global challenge, as vital for world equilibrium, but threatened by the expansion of the divisive Cold War struggle. France, thanks to its colonial experience and universal genius as the champion of human rights, human freedom and national self-determination, had a special role to play by guiding the Third World towards greater independence and protecting it from the ambitions of the superpowers. Thus, to use Viansson's oceanic analogy, rather than being a small fish in a big

²⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.378: Pompidou-Eskhol meeting, 28.06.64

²⁸ FNSP: CM Carton 1: Toast for the Mexican President Adolfo Lopez Mateos, 27.03.63

²⁹ De Gaulle, DM: IV, Speech at the Mexican National Palace, 16.03.64, p.189

³⁰ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: De Gaulle-Mateos meeting, 16.03.64; For more on this, see Pascallon, "Aspects Économiques", in Institut, De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde, p.175

sea, France was acting as a big fish in a small sea and, in the name of the small fish, was ready to challenge the biggest fish³¹!

III. ... And Reality

Yet, as appealing as Gaullist rhetoric was, it is impossible to ignore the influence of more pragmatic and self-interested goals. For a start, there were limits to the collusion between France and the Third World, which in part stemmed from the tensions between the ostensible French championing of universal nationalism, on the one hand, and on the other hand its pretensions to sharing the role of world policeman with the other nuclear powers³².

Indeed, if De Gaulle tried to present France as sympathetic to the cause of developing states, his conception of the world remained very aristocratic, and he was far from being a partisan of the principle of equality between states³³. Even when France actively courted the Third World states, it was not ready to jeopardise its independence of action just to please them. For example, French leaders always categorically refused to discuss relations with Israel during their meetings with Arab officials³⁴. Similarly, France also refused any alliances or engagements that would limit its diplomatic freedom, such as when De Gaulle turned down Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion's offer for an alliance in 1963, at a time when Paris was renewing relations with the Arab world³⁵.

This desire to maintain a certain distance was even more obvious in the dealings with former colonies. Indeed, the General felt that since France had granted them independence, it was no longer its duty to solve all their problems. Acting in such a way would only get France bogged down in the internal affairs of these new states. But, at the same time, the master of the Élysée saw these new states as utterly dependent on France, and constantly asking for more

³¹ Vianson-Ponté, Pierre, Histoire de la République Gaullienne: vol.2, (Paris: Fayard, 1971), p.79

³² Zorgbibe, Charles, "De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde: Orientations Générales", in Institut, De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde, p.165; Cerny, Politics of grandeur, p.204

³³ Vaïsse, La grandeur, p.454

³⁴ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Lucet to Roux, 07.09.64

³⁵ De Gaulle, LNC: IX, De Gaulle to Ben Gurion, 11.06.63, p.341

financial aid³⁶. As a consequence, he often had little respect for them: “They say Youlou [President of Congo-Brazzaville until August 1963] is independent. But I am paying for him. So for me, Youlou is not independent”³⁷.

There was a further divide between France and Third World states when it came to economic goals. As an advanced industrial power, France’s interests in maintaining supplies of raw materials, including oil, spreading its political influence and gaining access to new markets, did not really fit with the more extreme demands of poor states³⁸. Thus, if France was the world’s most generous donor in terms of GDP percentage it devoted to Third World aid, it was not quite as disinterested as suggested by Gaullist rhetoric. Paris expected concrete benefits – especially in the domain of trade – from its cooperation policy. In the case of Algeria, French officials made it clear that the aid was not a gift and depended on significant counterparts, including a military base, a location for nuclear tests, a significant amount of oil for domestic consumption, a decent market for French exports, and an opportunity to maintain influence³⁹. Equally, the military agreements signed with the former African colonies included clauses that gave France priority in the purchase of strategic raw materials and equipment, while the new African states also offered great markets for the French weapons industry⁴⁰.

Moreover, the nature itself of France’s aid program itself was ambiguous. It certainly did involve a “conceptual shift from direct aid for friendly allies to a more ‘infra-structural’ form of assistance based on the sending of teachers, technical advisers and so on”⁴¹. Of course, Gaullist rhetoric emphasised this evolution, claiming that France’s policy sought solely to “train” Third World elites and facilitate their states’ development. Yet, as Marcel points out, in some ways France’s aid to under-developed states appeared neo-colonial, and simply the historical continuation of the assistance to colonies: “It tends to shift from the direct and administrative

³⁶ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 24.01.63 and 06.03.63, pp.462-463

³⁷ Wauthier, Claude, *Quatre Présidents et l’Afrique, De Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard d’Estaing, Mitterrand: Quarante ans de politique africaine*, (Paris: Seuil, 1995), p.170

³⁸ Zorgbibe, “Orientations Générales”, in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, p.165; Cerny, *Politics of grandeur*, p.204

³⁹ DDF: 1963, Tome II: Note on French financial aid to Algeria, 13.11.63

⁴⁰ Zan, Semi-Bi, *DGESS VI*, p.295

⁴¹ Cerny, *Politics of grandeur*, p.203

forms of domination specific to colonialism to more indirect forms control that are more appropriate for neo-colonialism. This aid safeguards the monopolies' control on the resources of under-developed states and maintains them in a situation of providers of raw materials and clients for industrial goods"⁴². By sending teachers and advisers to Third World states, De Gaulle undoubtedly hoped to channel the latter's development along a path favourable to French interests. He expected that the promise of cultural, technical, commercial and linguistic aid could entice the former African colonies to develop according to a French model⁴³. This reasoning also extended to other Third World states. In the General's view, training Latin American engineers and elites would lead them to speak French, and naturally to look to France on a human and material level. Technical assistance was thus not an end in itself, but could lead to concrete economic benefits⁴⁴.

The fact is that France's Third World policy was not as humane as the Gaullist rhetoric suggested. France sent many advisers and teachers to developing states, but it equally made a decent profit by selling weapons to them⁴⁵. Moral considerations rarely stood in the way of good business. Paris did not hesitate to supply arms to both Algeria and Morocco, despite the fact that these states fought each other in a border conflict in 1963, while it also provided weapons to both Israel and Arab states, such as Lebanon or Jordan. It also engaged in military trade with pariah states like Portugal and South Africa, despite UN recommendations. France tried to justify its attitude by claiming its attachment to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, and by repeating the guarantees that South Africa made to not use these weapons for internal repression. Yet, the concrete benefits it received in exchange for the weapons sales, be it

⁴² Quoted by Pascallon, "Aspects Économiques", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, p.194

⁴³ De Gaulle, *LNC: IX*, Draft before a Minister's Council, Not Dated 03.63, p.318

⁴⁴ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Note on De Gaulle comments after his South American trip, 21.10.64

⁴⁵ Hartley, *Gaullism*, p.238

gold and uranium from South Africa, or a satellite station in the Azores from Portugal, were surely more persuasive⁴⁶.

Additionally, French policy towards the Third World was not as coherent and consistent in practice as implied by Gaullist rhetoric. This was particularly obvious when comparing how Paris dealt with its former African colonies, and how it dealt with states attempting to “free” themselves from superpower hegemony, like Vietnam as we will see later⁴⁷. From 1963 onwards, Africa was certainly no longer a top priority for De Gaulle as he focussed more on global affairs, whereas Couve had never been particularly interested in the continent⁴⁸; this certainly allowed the all-powerful *Secrétaire Général pour les Affaires Africaines et Malgaches*, Jacques Foccart – who tended to see Africa as France’s backyard – to have great influence on policy and pursue goals far less magnanimous than those implied by Gaullist rhetoric⁴⁹. As a consequence, the main French goal in the region was effectively to manage its sphere of influence, and prevent other Great Powers from intruding. This applied, for example, to the US, as De Gaulle actively sought to “refuse any American attempts towards harmonisation [of policy], that is to say ‘leadership’ in Africa”⁵⁰. He felt that cooperation with the US threatened to undermine France’s prime position in Africa, and subordinate it to American interests. Equally, Quai d’Orsay officials seemed keen to prevent the spread of communism in the continent. For example, they maintained officially that France had no problems with a socialist Algeria. In private, however, the same officials emphasised the importance of making sure that Algeria did

⁴⁶ Wauthier, *Quatre Présidents*, pp.139-143, 144-145; Between 1961 and 1965, France sold 700M francs worth of weapons to South Africa, while Pretoria was a key source of uranium for Paris, see DDF: 1966, Tome I: Note on Franco-South African economic relations, 28.04.66 and Note, 09.05.66

⁴⁷ Kouassi, Edmond Kwam, *DGESS VI*, p.77

⁴⁸ Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.480, although the French President did continue to regularly receive African leaders; Interview with Jean Charbonnel, Paris, 15.09.04

⁴⁹ It is difficult to separate fact and fiction on Foccart, but amongst those who suggest his great influence see Péan, Pierre, *L’homme de l’ombre: Éléments d’enquête autour de Jacques Foccart, l’homme le plus mystérieux et le plus puissant de la V^{ème} République*, (Paris: Fayard, 1990); Wauthier, *Quatre Présidents*; Interview with Michel Habib-Deloncle, Paris, 15.12.04

⁵⁰ De Gaulle, *LNC: IX*, De Gaulle to Couve, 22.10.63, p.380

not join the Eastern Bloc. France did not want on its doorstep a hostile power that could adversely affect the other North African states⁵¹.

In this context, France's military agreements with certain former African colonies helped to protect its sphere of influence. Officially, they were meant to guarantee the internal and external security of the former colonies and, according to Pierre Messmer, the French minister for armed forces, De Gaulle saw instability and anarchy as "the biggest threat to these new states"⁵². Yet, if Paris eventually withdrew most of its troops from Africa – from 35,000 in West Africa and 12,000 in Equatorial Africa in 1960, to respectively 9,000 and 6,600 respectively in 1964 – this was not necessarily incompatible with the goals previously mentioned. Progress in transport enabled French troops based in the metropolis to intervene in Africa if and when the need arose. Equally, by withdrawing most of its troops, France reduced part of the financial burden attached to its military policy, maintained its freedom of action, and countered the criticisms made by the Organization of African Unity [OAU] in regards to the presence of foreign troops⁵³. France thus had fewer troops in Africa, but it would not hesitate to intervene at the expense of other states' sovereignty if it suited its interests to do so.

The Gabon episode in 1964 is particularly revealing of the goals and the decision-making process of France's African policy. On 17-18 February, Gabon's army toppled President Léon M'Ba, which immediately prompted the French government to act to restore him to power. The Quai d'Orsay was not involved in the process, and it was instead Foccart who pushed for the intervention, without M'Ba's request, before informing De Gaulle⁵⁴. Gabon possessed a lot of mineral resources such as oil, manganese and uranium, in itself a powerful incentive to act, and on top of that, France wanted to send a signal to its other African partners that it could be trusted

⁵¹ DDF: 1963, Tome II: Note on French financial aid to Algeria, 13.11.63

⁵² Zan, Semi-Bi, *DGESS VI*, p.295

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp.295, 299-301

⁵⁴ TNA: FO 371/177285: Paris to FO, Telegram number 142, 20.02.64; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 26.02.64, p.471; Foccart, Jacques, *Foccart parle: entretiens avec Philippe Gaillard*, (Paris: le Grand livre du mois: Fayard: Jeune Afrique, c1995), p.273

to guarantee general order and their security⁵⁵. Foccart and other French officials also often claimed that American intrigues were behind the military putsch's slogans, and they suggested that companies, such as US Steel, possessed an interest in exploiting the mineral resources of Gabon⁵⁶. Yet, Pierre-Michel Durand, in recent research, argues strongly that there is no real evidence to support the claim of American involvement. The latter essentially played the role of a founding myth, a confirmation and a pretext for French authorities for their anti-American policy in Africa⁵⁷. In other words, Paris acted in Gabon of its own accord, to maintain order and to protect its influence, rather than because of external competition.

Thus, French Third world policy effectively appeared as an uneasy coexistence – one might even say competition – between its stated revisionist and generous goals, and its ambitions for Great Power status. If the latter consideration generally prevailed, it was also because of inherent difficulties that limited the implementation of the aims of Gaullist rhetoric. For a start, France's cooperation policy faced significant opposition, especially in regards to black Africa, coming from both the left and right of the political spectrum. On the one hand, *Cartiérisme* from the journalist Raymond Cartier's slogan of financing "la Corrèze avant le Zambèze", argued that it was preferable to spend aid money on France rather than waste it on Africa; on the other hand, the leftist critique of people such as the sociologist René Dumont accused the French government of showing too much complacency towards the African leaders⁵⁸. At the same time, this policy of cooperation was the subject of a fierce internal struggle over jurisdiction, involving the Ministry of Cooperation, the Quai d'Orsay and Foccart's *Secrétariat Général pour les Affaires Africaines et Malgaches*. It was a fight from the very beginning, and Couve made clear to Triboulet that he had negative feelings about the new Ministry that he was heading⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ Péan, *L'homme de l'ombre*, pp.304-305

⁵⁶ Foccart, *Foccart parle*, p.276; Wauthier, *Quatre Présidents*, p.127

⁵⁷ Durand, Pierre-Michel, "Les relations Franco-Américaines au Gabon dans les Années 60 ou la 'Petite Guerre Froide'", in Melandri, Pierre and Ricard, Serge (ed.), *Les Relations Franco-Américaines au XX^{ème} siècle*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), especially pp.120-124

⁵⁸ Interview with Jean Charbonnel, Paris, 15.09.04; for more on the divided domestic reactions to De Gaulle's Third World policy, see Decraene, Philippe, "Les Réactions de l'Opinion Publique Française à la Politique Tiers Mondiste du Général de Gaulle de 1962 à 1969", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, pp.367-377

⁵⁹ FNSP: CM Carton 8: Triboulet to Couve, 03.01.63

Triboulet believed that the Quai resented the competition from the Ministry of Cooperation, while the Quai was very angered by Triboulet's imperialist attempts to use his special funds, more or less behind the backs of the Quai and Foccart, to undermine Guinea's leader, Sékou Touré⁶⁰. It was only in late 1965 that this struggle was finally settled to the detriment of the Ministry of Cooperation.

Furthermore, Gaullist rhetoric was always confronted by financial limitations. For example, when Paraguayan President, General Alfredo Stroessner, asked De Gaulle for more aid, he replied that France could only do little because it was already dedicating more than 2% of its national wealth to cooperation⁶¹. To overcome this obstacle, the General often relied on symbols as a way of increasing the impact of his policy. In many areas of the Third World, he sought to establish a very visible French presence, sometimes instead of a concrete one, in order to add further legitimacy to its claim of being a Great Power with a global role⁶². His highly theatrical and heroic trips abroad, particularly the tour of South America in 1964 when he visited every country of the continent, in effect complemented an aid policy that depended on high visibility. Not surprisingly, De Gaulle used an ambitious rhetoric during these spectacular trips rhetoric, if only to add effect. In that context, it has to be remembered that symbols could be particularly useful, as an American official explained. France had resorted to unpopular actions towards developing states, including the intervention in Gabon or the termination of aid to Tunisia, to which we could add De Gaulle's disdainful attitude towards the UN, one of the sacred cows of anti-colonialism. Yet, De Gaulle, aware of his enormous popularity in the Third World that stemmed from his unquestionable acts of decolonisation and his constant nose-thumbing at the superpower hegemonies, relied on this prestige to gloss over some of the contradictions of French policy⁶³.

⁶⁰ For more on this internal struggle, see Triboulet, *Un Ministre*, especially pp.198-261; Information on the moves to destabilise Touré comes from interview with Jean Charbonnel, Paris, 15.09.04

⁶¹ Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.768

⁶² Cerny, *Politics of grandeur*, p.203

⁶³ NARA: RG59, CFPP, 1964-1966, Box 2168: Bovey to State, Airgram number 940, 29.10.64

A visible and active policy reinforced France's global prestige, and gave weight to Gaullist claims that France was sensitive to the concerns of developing states, and pursuing a policy that sought cooperation with these states rather than domination. In that sense, relations with Algeria played a very symbolic part when it came to substantiating the latter claim. After the trauma of the Algerian war, Paris wanted above all to develop new relations with Algiers based on equality and friendship, as highlighted by the agreement of 29 July 1965 that set up a cooperative partnership for the joint exploitation of Algeria's oil reserves⁶⁴. Maintaining good Franco-Algerian relations played a vital role for France, because it served to remove the stain of its colonial past and raise its prestige in the Third World. Algeria was indeed the "door through which we [France] can penetrate the Third World"⁶⁵. Not surprisingly, it received the lion's share of France's aid to North Africa, and a substantial share of the total money sent to underdeveloped states – 75% of the total aid for North Africa and 22% of the public and private credits given to the Third World for the period 1962-1969⁶⁶. Thus, De Gaulle often proved far more patient with Algeria than he did with other countries. Despite the repeated problems with the Évian accords, there was no public cancellation of aid, as there was for Tunisia in May 1964 after it breached an agreement on the progressive transfer of French properties to the local population.

Therefore, considered from the point of view of realities, France's Third World policy appears in a very different light than when described by Gaullist rhetoric. The latter referred to France's universal role as the great champion of human freedom and national independence. It presented France's policy as a coherent, principled and humane mission that attempted to foster the development of the poorer states and prevent them from becoming a Cold War battlefield. In practice, however, it often followed a more traditional Great Power, and sometimes neo-colonial, approach that centred on limiting the costs of its aid, while maximising influence and benefits. Additionally, Paris acted differently depending on whether it was dealing with a state within its

⁶⁴ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.442

⁶⁵ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.462

⁶⁶ Riffi, Bouhout El Mellouki, *DGESS VI*, p.195

loose sphere of influence – especially its former African colonies – or whether it was dealing with a state that needed to be “freed” from superpower hegemony. It could loudly declare its support for Vietnam’s independence, as we will see later, while also intervening in Gabon and disregarding its sovereignty. Finally, France’s cooperation policy was impeded by domestic divisions and financial limitations.

IV. The Third World in France’s Grand Strategy

France’s desire to play the role of world’s policeman, along with its pursuit of economic and political benefits, were thus not always compatible with its stated aim of helping the developing states and preventing them from becoming pawns of US-Soviet rivalry. Furthermore, the policy of cooperation outlined in the Gaullist rhetoric had to compete for time and resources with other French foreign policy priorities. If De Gaulle hoped to engage more with the Third World after 1962, within a few years it was clear that it would had not become a top priority ahead of France’s *Westpolitik* and *Ostpolitik* in Europe.

Initially, the more ambitious foreign policy agenda adopted by the General towards the West in early 1963, and symbolised by his spectacular veto of Britain’s candidacy to the EEC, also impacted to a lesser extent other geographic areas, starting with Latin America. As a State Department analysis pointed out, De Gaulle began to pay increasing attention to the region in 1962, and he sent former Ambassador Jean Chauvel on a fact-finding mission there. It was widely believed that Chauvel called for a more active French presence, which could help to buttress its claim to world power status, and restore its cultural influence in a region where it had been in decline since World War Two⁶⁷. Additionally, De Gaulle believed that there might be a “great card to play” in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, especially considering the ambivalent relations between the US and its southern neighbours⁶⁸. There is no doubt that “nose-thumbing” Washington in its own backyard, as part of the wider policy of opposing American

⁶⁷ NARA: RG59, Records of Policy Planning Council, Box 252: Hughes to Rusk, Research Memo INR-14, 04.04.63

⁶⁸ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, pp.503-504

hegemony, also played a key role in pushing the General to develop relations with the Latin American states⁶⁹.

The March 1963 visit by Mexico's President, Adolfo Lopez Mateos, which culminated with the announcement of a \$150 Million credit from France to Mexico for the building of a petro-chemical industry, was the first concrete sign of this new French interest in Latin America. Yet, taking place so soon after the January 1963 crisis that rocked the Western world, De Gaulle made sure Mateos' visit would not further inflame Franco-American relations. In a toast for his counterpart, he underlined France's desire to cooperate "without changing your [Mexico's] relations with the US"⁷⁰. In the same way, he reassured Juan Bosch, the President of the Dominican Republic that France and America remained friends despite certain temporary differences. He was not trying to criticise the US, but he just felt that an exclusive dialogue between the latter and the Latin American states was not desirable⁷¹. In private, the General showed far less restraint and talked much more candidly about his designs towards the region. Acknowledging that Mexico and its neighbours were in state of catastrophic economic dependence on the US, he explained to Peyrefitte that "France could enable them to a certain extent to escape American dominance", and he later mentioned his plans for a trip to Latin America in 1964⁷². Nevertheless, ambitious rhetoric aside, Paris' main concern during the first half of 1963 was unquestionably its partnership with Bonn, rather than the Third World.

In that context, Indochina hardly featured very high on the list of France's priorities. As was the case for Latin America, French leaders avoided taking a confrontational stance, and when meeting their American counterparts, they generally expressed a minimal solidarity with their policies towards the region. Thus, De Gaulle reminded American Secretary of State Dean Rusk that "if South East Asia turned against the West, we would act in common with you and the

⁶⁹ See for example Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol.3*, p.445; Viansson-Ponté, *République Gaullienne: vol.2*, p.79; Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.256

⁷⁰ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 26.03.63, p.91

⁷¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Bosch meeting, 01.02.63

⁷² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 27.03.63 and 22.04.64, p.508

allies of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization [SEATO]”⁷³. In reality, however, De Gaulle and his colleagues were far from supportive of their ally. Couve complained about France’s exclusion from affairs in South Vietnam, while the General described the situation in Indochina as rotten, and mentioned to his Ministers that France had “no interest in taking sides ... and even less in siding with the US”⁷⁴; part of De Gaulle’s criticism of the US included a sense of revenge for the way it had replaced France in Vietnam, following the humiliating French withdrawal in 1954 after the battle of Diên Biên Phủ⁷⁵.

This historic connection meant that despite the American presence in Indochina and France’s relatively limited influence, De Gaulle continued to consider the region as part of the French “sphere”, and so he could not stay indifferent to events there. Additionally, his policy towards the former French colony rested on a certain number of well-established principles, starting with his belief that the forces of national self-determination unleashed since World War Two could not be ignored. He doubted that the conflict in Southeast Asia could be solved by military might, and the Algerian war had only strengthened this feeling⁷⁶. Instead, De Gaulle, along with Couve, pushed for a political solution through the return to the 1954 Geneva accords – which had sought to establish an independent Vietnam, free from foreign interventions – and they regularly criticised the American and communist failures to live up to these agreements⁷⁷. Despite the ambiguity of the concept, the General considered neutralisation as the best the West could hope for. As Logevall argues convincingly, he envisaged a situation whereby the Vietnamese would settle their own problems without external interference, leading possibly to reunification. Even if he agreed that the most likely outcome of an American withdrawal would be a reunified Vietnam under communist control, he saw little to fear from this because he

⁷³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Rusk meeting, 08.04.63

⁷⁴ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 20.02.63, p.474

⁷⁵ Vaisse, Maurice, “De Gaulle et la guerre du Vietnam: de la difficulté d’être Cassandre”, in Goscha and Vaisse, *Guerre du Vietnam*, p.169

⁷⁶ Sullivan, Marianna, *France’s Vietnam policy: A Study in French-American relations*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood press, 1978), p.71

⁷⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.375: De Gaulle-Pelaez meeting, 08.02.63, and Couve-Martin meeting, 21.05.63; Note that Geneva Accords gave France a residual role in the region, i.e. that it could officers to train the Laotian National Army.

considered that Vietnam's traditional animosity towards Beijing would prevent China from controlling Indochina⁷⁸.

The strength of his convictions, combined with the historic connections with the former colony, made it likely that De Gaulle would attempt to give France more influence in Indochina; significant changes in 1963 gave him the opportunity to try just that. For a start, Roger Lalouette, French Ambassador in Saigon, was constantly reporting to Couve that the American presence in South Vietnam was causing growing acrimony between the President, Ngo Dinh Diem, and its patrons; in May 1963 Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, even called for the withdrawal of half of the American advisers⁷⁹. At the same time, French officials were receiving reports from Hanoi that the North Vietnamese leaders were feeling increasingly squeezed between Moscow and Beijing, and that moderates were pushing for relief from fighting in the South as a means of reducing Chinese pressure⁸⁰.

Moreover, Lalouette, helped by his friend Mieczyslaw Maneli, the Polish representative to the International Control Commission [ICC], believed there was a real opportunity for a political solution, and had been acting more or less as mediators between Diem and the North Vietnamese leadership⁸¹. With Hanoi less intransigent than hitherto in its confrontation with Saigon, and with a change in the South's power structure becoming more likely – the growing Buddhist opposition to Diem provided yet more evidence – there seemed to be a new environment emerging that appeared more favourable for French action, especially as both South and North Vietnamese officials underlined the role Paris could play in the future evolution of

⁷⁸ Logevall, *Choosing war*, p.13

⁷⁹ See MAEF: Asie-Océanie, Sud-Vietnam 1954-1964, Vol.78: Lalouette to Couve, *Dépêches* number 161 and number 350, 02.03.63 and 22.05.63; it seems that in April Lalouette had advised Diem that he should 'gently' ask the Americans to leave, according to Marianna Sullivan interview with Roger Lalouette, Versailles, 19.07.72. I would like to thank Prof. Sullivan for lending me her notes.

⁸⁰ TNA: FO 371/170107: Paris to FO, 12.09.63

⁸¹ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 241, Sud-Vietnam: Note du *Secrétariat Général de la Présidence*, 20.06.63; DDF: 1963, Tome II: Note of *Direction des Affaires Politiques Asie-Océanie*, 06.09.63; The extent of Diem's peace feelers, as well as Lalouette's role and his exact intentions, are still subject to debate, see Maneli, Mieczyslaw, *War of the Vanquished*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Logevall, *Choosing war*; Sullivan, *France's Vietnam policy*; Gnoinska, Margaret, "Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the 'Maneli Affair'", http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/CWIHP_WP_45b.pdf;

their country⁸². It is in this context that on 29 August, De Gaulle made his solemn public declaration in support of a reunified and independent Vietnam, free from foreign intervention⁸³.

This was an important moment for Gaullist policy, and its implications went well beyond Vietnam. In the aftermath of the PTBT signed by the Soviet Union and the two Anglo-Saxon powers, De Gaulle was keen to underline France's independence vis-à-vis the superpowers, and its ability to have an impact on world affairs. At the same time, the shortcomings of Paris' European policy, and its partnership with Bonn, was leading France to give more emphasis to the Third World in its grand strategy; as the General told Peyrefitte, he believed that his declaration marked the beginning of France's great return in Asia⁸⁴. Furthermore, Paris' policy towards Indochina went hand-in-hand with its rapprochement with Beijing. Even more so than the PTBT and the common opposition to the superpowers, De Gaulle's stand on Vietnam, and his desire to play a bigger role in Southeast Asia, convinced him that the time was right to send Faure on a negotiating mission to China⁸⁵.

As France continued to move its pawns in the region, it made more and more sense not to ignore the PRC. When Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia unilaterally denounced American aid on 20 November 1963, he appealed to Paris for help. The French government swiftly obliged and agreed to send Messmer in early January 1964 to discuss future cooperation. For De Gaulle, encouraging Cambodia was essential for Indochina's neutrality and independence, but he also believed that contacts with Beijing would help relations with Phnom Penh⁸⁶. According to Couve, during the Council of Ministers on 22 January 1964, the establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC confirmed a certain number of important

⁸² TNA: FO 371/170107: Paris to FO, 12.09.63; MAEF: Asie-Océanie, Sud-Vietnam 1954-1964, Vol.16: Note for Couve, 26.03.63;

⁸³ De Gaulle, *LNC: IX*, Declaration concerning Vietnam, p.367

⁸⁴ Uribe, Armando, "Le général de Gaulle et l'Amérique Latine", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, pp.246-247; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 29.08.63, p.476

⁸⁵ For more on the rapprochement with China, see chapter 2, footnotes 44-48

⁸⁶ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 11.12.63, p.483

changes, including the re-emergence of China and the Sino-Soviet split, but the most fundamental one was France's great comeback in Southeast Asia⁸⁷.

Thus, on a basic level, the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Communist China simply reflected Paris' increasing involvement in Southeast Asia. However, the connection worked both ways. According to Devillers, the PTBT had already created a convergence between both countries through their rejection of superpower hegemony, but for the General this was not enough. France and the PRC needed to understand each other, and possibly cooperate⁸⁸. The obvious choice for this was Indochina, because De Gaulle believed that the recognition of Communist China would yield benefits and provide a great asset for his Vietnam diplomacy; although it has to be noted that on this point, the Chinese leaders viewed the situation very differently, and actually feared that the normalisation of relations with Paris would prove a liability in their dealings with Hanoi⁸⁹. Irrespectively, in De Gaulle's view, China played a pivotal and inescapable role in the region. There could be no political reality in Asia, he argued in his 31 January 1964 press conference, "regarding Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, or India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, Korea or Soviet Russia or Japan which does not include nor involve China [...] Therefore, it would be impossible to have a neutralisation agreement for Southeast Asia without China"⁹⁰.

The rapprochement with the PRC was undoubtedly a prerequisite for any active role in Asia. However, De Gaulle also expected this move to have a more global impact. As a Quai source claimed to a British official, the General had deliberately arranged the timing of the recognition of Communist China just before his 31 January 1964 press conference, so to draw attention to the announcement of his trips to Mexico and Latin America later that year⁹¹. In other words, the master of the Élysée palace believed that the establishment of diplomatic relations

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.491

⁸⁸ Devillers, Philippe, "Le Général de Gaulle et l'Asie", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, p.306

⁸⁹ Zhai, Qiang, "China's Response to French Peace Initiatives", in Gardner and Gittinger, *Search for Peace*, pp.279-280

⁹⁰ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.180

⁹¹ TNA: FO 371/173687: Paris to FO, 27.01.64

with China could act as a stepping stone for a more active French policy towards the Third World.

Thus, according to Peyrefitte, the trips to Latin America would be the most important event of 1964⁹². This was not solely rhetoric. With his *Westpolitik* offering limited opportunities at that time, De Gaulle naturally pinned his hopes on the Third World path as a means to boost France's prestige as a global power. It needed to make its presence felt in Latin America, and frustrating the Americans was an added bonus; as De Gaulle told Raymond Offroy, French Ambassador in Mexico, his intention was to "plant a French flag there, on the US doorstep"⁹³. Additionally, besides spreading French influence, the General expected that his visits to Latin America could help to highlight a general atmosphere defined by less concentration upon the two superpowers⁹⁴. While he was careful to make a distinction between the Soviet tyranny and US as a country respectful of freedom, nonetheless the dominant message of his public and private speeches centred on the need for the Latin brothers of Western Europe and Latin America to cooperate in order to prevent the division of the world between the two giants⁹⁵. Obviously, De Gaulle realised that his rhetoric denouncing the double hegemony of Moscow and Washington would appeal to his hosts, and reinforce the image of France as a truly independent power. But, the primary interest of these trips was to establish a first contact and to sow seeds for future developments, rather than any clear concrete goal. This was what De Gaulle meant when he wrote to former Prime Minister, Michel Debré, that he was going to Latin America "without a clear diplomatic program, but in some ways instinctively"⁹⁶.

Furthermore, describing the trip as laying the grounds for future cooperation between Western Europe and Latin America presented distinctive advantages for the French leaders, in particular as a way of giving impetus to the stalling Paris-Bonn axis. During the February 1964

⁹² NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2186: Paris to State, Airgram number 1941, 13.02.64

⁹³ Loaeza, Soledad, *DGESS VI*, p.508

⁹⁴ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 198, Voyage du Général de Gaulle en Amérique Latine: De Gaulle-Ambassadors to Latin America meeting, 03.06.64

⁹⁵ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, Speech in Santiago University, 01.10.64, p.277; DDF: 1964, Tome II: De Gaulle-Valencia meeting, 23.09.64

⁹⁶ De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, De Gaulle to Debré, 18.09.64, p.88

Franco-German summit, De Gaulle tried to convince West German chancellor, Ludwig Erhard, that the French and American policies towards Latin America were compatible. He explained that France and West Germany could become an alternative partner for these states, thereby reducing the risks of an exclusive US-Soviet competition that could end up with Latin America choosing the latter⁹⁷. Bonn's help would be also particularly welcome if it agreed to participate in a joint aid effort, which would enable the French to respond to critics who suggested its policy towards Latin America was solely driven by anti-American aims⁹⁸.

In parallel, France continually strove to promote peace in Indochina through neutralisation, as De Gaulle outlined in his 23 July 1964 press conference. If a military solution could not end the conflict in Southeast Asia, then there was no other choice but peace along the lines of the 1954 Geneva Accords. Additionally, the Great Powers would promise not to intervene, and instead provide a massive economic and technical aid to the states of the region⁹⁹. This approach was certainly short of details, and publicly the French leaders did not really make it clear how exactly neutralisation would come about, especially for the case of Vietnam. Privately, however, they believed that Hanoi would refuse neutralisation and that it should first be applied to the South, in the hope that a truly Vietnamese government would emerge in Saigon¹⁰⁰. As Logevall argues, vagueness suited De Gaulle's purposes. He saw no reason to give too many specifics because negotiations required a certain blurring of categories. It also suited the General to wait and see how the situation would develop¹⁰¹.

At the same time, Paris also resorted to more concrete, and less ambiguous, actions in favour of peace. De Gaulle actively encouraged Lucien Paye, his Ambassador in Beijing, to sound out the Chinese leaders and determine whether they would support a peaceful solution for Indochina¹⁰². France wanted a dialogue with China, but without siding with it either. In their

⁹⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.377: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting 1, 15.02.64

⁹⁸ TNA: FO 371/177909: Paris to FO, Telegram number 114, 11.02.64

⁹⁹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, pp.236-237

¹⁰⁰ DDF: 1964, Tome I: Couve to Alphand, Telegram number 2917-2920, 02.02.64

¹⁰¹ Logevall, *Choosing war*, p.104

¹⁰² Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 04.05.64, p.427

meetings with Huang Chen, the Chinese Ambassador in Paris, Couve and De Gaulle both pointed out that to all the preconditions and recriminations put forward by China, the US would respond with similar accusations and conditions. The most important issue was to try and convene an international conference with participants that were keen to reach a settlement for Southeast Asia¹⁰³. To this end, France's policy focussed on all the states of Indochina, not just Vietnam. It went to great lengths to prevent Cambodia from abandoning its neutral and independent foreign policy, and in March, it was partly thanks to strong French persuasion that Sihanouk did not break with London and Washington, in order to get closer to Hanoi and Beijing¹⁰⁴. Paris continued to support the idea of an international conference to guarantee Cambodia's independence and territorial integrity, while simultaneously advocating in May 1964 an international conference for Laos, after the coup in April that had shaken its fragile equilibrium. It decided later to host the representatives of the three Laotian factions – the Pathet Lao, the neutralists, and the rightists – in August-September 1964, in an attempt to restore 1962 Geneva accords that had effectively established Laos' neutrality.

However, there were clear limits to France's bid to give more attention to the Third World, which were essentially related to its relations with the other Great Powers. In particular, as the situation in Indochina gradually deteriorated, so did the relations between Paris and Washington. That said, the real tension existed at the higher levels of government. Quai officials were often dismayed by De Gaulle or in disagreement with his Vietnam policies, and they suspected that he was working deliberately against US policies¹⁰⁵. Additionally, the disagreements between Paris and Washington did not come to the forefront immediately, and in late 1963, French leaders continued to show restraint when dealing with their American counterparts. For example in a talk with President Kennedy, Couve strongly denied the

¹⁰³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.21: De Gaulle-Huang Chen meeting, 19.06.64; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: Couve-Huang Chen meeting, 21.07.64

¹⁰⁴ DDF: 1964, Tome I: Note of *Direction Asie-Océanie*, 17.06.64

¹⁰⁵ See NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1963, Box 3910: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 2358, 15.11.63; TNA: FO 371/177865: Paris to FO, 04.06.64; Journoud, Pierre, "Le Quai d'Orsay et le Processus de Paix, 1963-1973", in Goscha and Vaïsse, *Guerre du Vietnam*, p.392

accusation that De Gaulle's August 1963 declaration was trying to add further problems to America in Indochina¹⁰⁶. Similarly, De Gaulle expressed a certain understanding and outward solidarity with the US when Cambodia unilaterally repealed the latter's aid¹⁰⁷. Behind closed doors, of course, his assessment of American policy appeared far more damning. After the coup against Diem in November 196~~3~~³, he warned Peyrefitte that the US' involvement would only end in catastrophe if they became more engaged in the region¹⁰⁸.

As the situation in Vietnam continued to worsen with every passing month in 1964, the General abandoned some of his restraint and his attitude towards Indochina hardened¹⁰⁹. Matters truly came to a head during the SEATO meeting in April 1964, when France alone refused to publicly support America's policy¹¹⁰. For Couve, the US would never achieve a solution via military means. Only a political settlement, starting with the neutralisation of South Vietnam, would be successful and prevent a serious escalation of the conflict with North Vietnam and China. In addition, Couve disagreed with Rusk's view of China as a fully expansionist power. He believed that the US' dominance in the Pacific, along with China's internal problems, could lead the latter to agree to a political settlement¹¹¹. De Gaulle made his position very clear to Under Secretary of State, George Ball: "I do not believe you can win in this situation [Vietnam] even though you have more canons, more planes, etc... [...] The more the US becomes involved in the actual conduct of military operations, the more the Vietnamese will turn against you, as will others in Southeast Asia"¹¹².

Furthermore, Paris' frustrations with Washington's Indochinese policy were affecting other spheres, noticeably Latin America. When De Gaulle visited Mexico in March 1964, he seemed far more willing to criticise the American attitude towards Latin America than he had when Mateos had visited a year before, and this even in public speeches. Thus, during a toast for

¹⁰⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: Couve-Kennedy meeting, 07.10.63

¹⁰⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: De Gaulle-Rusk meeting, 16.12.63

¹⁰⁸ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 06.11.63, p. 481

¹⁰⁹ Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.260

¹¹⁰ See for example Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.527 or Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.769; Logevall, *Choosing war*, p.131, according to one of Rusk's staffers, the Secretary of State's talk with Couve on 12 April was "extremely frank".

¹¹¹ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.21: Rusk-Couve-Carrington meeting, 14.04.64

¹¹² LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 170: Ball to Rusk, Telegram number 5876-5878, 05.06.64

Mateos, after repeating his usual comment that France did not want to affect Mexico's relations with the US, he described Franco-Mexican cooperation as a force for good "in opposition to older axes and pacts seeking domination", a barely hidden reference to the Monroe doctrine¹¹³. His rhetoric unquestionably suggested a desire to play more on Latin American frustrations with the US, and to encourage them to take some distances with their powerful neighbour in the North. Indeed, unlike their March 1963 meeting, the General openly criticised the US in front of Mateos. He deplored America's failure to both recognise certain new changes in the world, such as the emergence of a "Third World with its own ambitions and views", and to accept independent policies from its allies¹¹⁴.

During his autumn trip to Latin America, De Gaulle seemed to adopt an even more critical language towards the US than the one he used in Mexico. He denounced for the form the two superpower hegemonies, but his criticism of the blocs possessed an undeniable strong anti-Yankee tone¹¹⁵. He called for the emergence on the world scene of both Latin America and Europe, but he also made it clear that they both needed to develop as allies of America, and not subordinate entities¹¹⁶. Thus, the General was no longer merely criticising American hegemony in Latin America, but he was also taking more active steps to try and undermine it. According to US officials in Chile, De Gaulle made the following confession to the former Chilean President, Jorge Alessandri, which only adds further evidence to the latter point: "He [De Gaulle] described the US as an octopus which had exploited the Latin American countries, was sucking them dry of their natural resources, and which controlled their foreign policy. He called on Alessandri to free Chile from the US grasp and regain its liberty in both the economic and political spheres"¹¹⁷.

Equally, Franco-American differences played a crucial role at a time when De Gaulle's assessment of the nature of the conflict in Indochina was changing. He increasingly viewed the conflict in Southeast Asia through the Great Power lens, noting how the war looked more and

¹¹³ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, 17.03.64, p.192

¹¹⁴ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.20: De Gaulle-Mateos meeting, 17.03.64

¹¹⁵ Loaeza, Soledad, *DGESS VI*, p.503

¹¹⁶ DDF: 1964, Tome II: De Gaulle-Stroessner meeting, 07.10.64

¹¹⁷ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2186: Jova to State, Airgram number 384, 16.11.64

more like a Sino-American struggle rather than a battle about Vietnam itself¹¹⁸. In such a context, the tensions with Washington certainly contributed to the French leaders' perceptions that the US held more responsibility for the current problems in Indochina. While presenting Moscow as less virulent and Beijing as generally cautious, De Gaulle stressed that American illusions concerning military force threatened to cause a universal crisis¹¹⁹. Paris mainly based its assessment of Chinese intentions on the meetings between its officials and their Chinese counterparts. The Chinese leaders, such as Foreign Minister Chen Yi, repeatedly proclaimed their attachment to peace and hoped France could help in that endeavour¹²⁰. Yet, evidence suggests that China's attachment to peace was quite ambivalent. During a trip to Hanoi in July 1964, Prime Minister Zhou En-lai suggested a mix of military and political struggles: in the military area they would strengthen forces, and on the political front, they would adhere to the Geneva accords and seek to exploit Franco-American differences¹²¹. Nonetheless, France to a certain extent "bought" into this Chinese rhetoric and perceived China as more defensive-minded than it actually was. It believed that American interventionism bore the most guilt in the escalation of the conflict, a belief only strengthened after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. Franco-American relations had reached such a level of mistrust, that Couve could describe the latter incident as a conspiracy inspired by an America keen to stop communist insurgencies¹²².

By late 1964, not only Indochina but also France's Third World policy seemed to be at a turning point. On a first level, it is in this period that French grand strategy underwent an important shift, whereby it decided to move closer to the Soviet Union in the East, and start to more actively challenge American leadership in the West. The inevitable result of this renewed emphasis on Europe was that the Third World took a back seat in De Gaulle's plans. Moreover,

¹¹⁸ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 22.04.64, p.496

¹¹⁹ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.22: De Gaulle-U Thant meeting, 21.07.64

¹²⁰ DDF: 1964, Tome II: Paye to Couve, Dépêche number 204, 29.08.64

¹²¹ Zhai, Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p.131

¹²² Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 31.08.64, p.438

the situation in Southeast Asia reinforced that tendency. As 1964 came to an end, the gap between Washington and Paris on Indochina had become unbridgeable. Couve now denounced American policy in South Vietnam as the equivalent of a colonial occupation¹²³. De Gaulle, for his part, had given up on helping Washington in the region: “In the last two years, the US has accumulated mistakes. What do you want me to do? They should have been less stupid. I did what I could to push them towards a reasonable path. If they do not want to understand, it is too bad”¹²⁴. Since the fighting was becoming more serious, the chances of organising a conference on Vietnam appeared less and less feasible¹²⁵. Finally, the crisis in Southeast Asia impacted on France’s attitude towards the developing states in two other crucial ways. Firstly, not only was the Third World less important in the overall French strategy, but the crisis in Vietnam made sure that it was the only area of any interest for France, to the detriment of other regions. Secondly, as Devillers argues, American growing involvement in the war led De Gaulle to consider his Asian policy as an extension of his general attitude towards the US¹²⁶.

Washington’s decision to start a systematic bombing campaign of North Vietnam in February 1965, accompanied by a massive dispatch of troops in the following months, caused another serious escalation in the Indochinese conflict and a further deterioration in Franco-American relations. That said, after the initial bombing of Hanoi on 7 February, France made another attempt to promote peace. On 10 February, Peyrefitte officially repeated France’s desire to urgently convene an international conference so to settle all the outstanding problems in Indochina¹²⁷. Couve also went to Washington between 18 and 20 of February, in the hope of rallying US leaders to the idea of the conference¹²⁸. Additionally, France made it clear to the

¹²³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.23: Couve-Hasluck meeting, 04.11.64

¹²⁴ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 08.12.64, p.499

¹²⁵ Alphand, *L’étonnement*, 03.01.65, p.445

¹²⁶ Devillers, “L’Asie”, in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, p.310

¹²⁷ MAEF: Asie-Océanie, *Conflit Vietnam 1955-1975*, Vol.162: Declaration of French government, 10.02.65

¹²⁸ For Couve’s talks in the US, see MAEF, CM, CD, Vol.379

Soviet government that they would be ready to consult and cooperate, as long as Moscow agreed that it was best to convene a conference on Indochina without preconditions¹²⁹.

Yet, the attempts to organise a conference proved extremely short-lived, once it became clear that some protagonists of the conflict lacked the will for a settlement. In particular, France increasingly perceived American intransigence as the main obstacle to peace; for Couve, Beijing and Hanoi wanted to negotiate, but not the US¹³⁰. With a conference unlikely to happen, De Gaulle felt that the best France could do was take a step back and bide its time: “At one moment, we will say ‘That is enough!’ We have already said what we needed to at the right moment. The Americans still went to war. And there will be a moment when everyone will have enough of this war. Then, we will say so”¹³¹. During the Council of Ministers meeting on 14 April, he added that if America did not withdraw from Indochina, the war would last for many years and inevitably end in shame for them¹³².

If France took a step back in its peace efforts, it became more vocal in its criticism of the US’ war effort. During the NATO Council in May 1965, Couve launched a scathing attack against his ally. After claiming that he regretted America’s failure to listen to advice on Indochina, Couve denounced its vision of the conflict. According to France, South Vietnam faced a civil war, a war of national liberation, and not a manifestation of world communism as suggested by America. To Vietnam, Couve contrasted the example of Algeria, underlining how France had successfully managed the conflict and maintained acceptable relations with the latter, which had not become communist. Finally, Couve ended on a pessimist note, pointing out that it was impossible in current conditions to convene an international conference to negotiate peace¹³³. America’s intervention in the Dominican Republic in April only further exasperated De Gaulle: “The policy the US is leading in Vietnam, in South America and elsewhere is provoking the hostility of peoples of Asia and elsewhere. It is the same thing in South America after

¹²⁹ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1961-1965, Vol.1931: Couve to Baudet, Telegram number 3068-3073, 01.03.65

¹³⁰ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.24: Couve-Stewart meeting, 02.04.65

¹³¹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.2*, 07.04.65, p.502

¹³² *Ibid*, p.503

¹³³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.25: Couve speech to NATO Council, 12.05.65

sending troops to the Dominican Republic. We are against those operations, which are supposedly part of a crusade against communism, but which in fact seek to defend economic interests”¹³⁴.

For De Gaulle, as Costigliola argues correctly, the Vietnam War showed all that was wrong with American foreign policy: a naïve self-righteousness, a readiness to quash smaller nations’ independence, a tendency towards military actions that threatened to drag France into war, and a stubborn persistence in containing “communist” expansion while underestimating the Sino-Soviet split and Vietnamese nationalism¹³⁵. Yet, for all the harsh criticism, France temporarily pushed the issue of the Vietnam War to one side after May 1965, as other policy spheres became more urgent in that period, especially NATO and the EEC. Moreover, as the war continued to escalate in the second half of 1965, French pessimism grew accordingly, and De Gaulle could see no possibilities of ending the conflict¹³⁶. During a meeting with Arthur Goldberg, Lyndon Johnson’s special envoy, he claimed that most of Indochina would surely become communist one day, albeit an Asian form of communism. Hanoi would never accept the American presence in the South, so only an American withdrawal could lead to negotiations¹³⁷. In the meantime, as the war escalated, the General believed that France needed to refrain from further intervention in the conflict, and develop its relations with all the other protagonists in the region¹³⁸. Thus, Paris pursued a serious dialogue with Moscow and Beijing in this period, while it was able to get closer to North Vietnam after Saigon broke off diplomatic relations in June 1965¹³⁹. Moreover, Quai officials established during the summer a first contact in Algiers with the representatives of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁴ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 07.05.65, p.452

¹³⁵ Costigliola, *Cold alliance*, p.140

¹³⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.380: De Gaulle-Shiina meeting, 20.07.65

¹³⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.381: De Gaulle-Goldberg meeting, 31.12.65

¹³⁸ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 02.01.66, p.468

¹³⁹ Journoud, “Quai d’Orsay”, in Goscha and Vaïsse, *Guerre du Vietnam*, p.387, 389

¹⁴⁰ DDF: 1965, Tome II: Sanviti-Huyen Van Tam meeting, 29.07.65

V. Conclusion

Despite its best efforts to take a more active role in the Third World after the end of the Algerian War, France could never quite live up to the ambitious aims of the Gaullist rhetoric of cooperation with the developing states. For a start, there was always an inherent tension between Paris' sincere desire to help these emerging states, as shown by the amount of aid it dedicated to the latter, and its Great Power ambitions. Moreover, with the exception of 1964, the Third World never became a central priority for the French leaders. This was largely a result of the blossoming Franco-American hostility during this period, in particular over Vietnam, which progressively ended up invading all aspects of French policy. By the end of 1965, France's Third World policy appeared as largely an extension of its relations with the other Great Powers, rather than as a policy distinct from the Cold War and the East-West conflict.

Thus, the story of the three years between 1963 and 1965 had been one of a twin struggle by De Gaulle, with the aim of restoring his country's Great Power status, and overcoming the Cold War bipolar order. If he had given priority to the former goal in that period, he had shown an ability to explore different means to achieve it: such as the Franco-German Treaty in the West, the spectacular trips in the Third World, and finally détente with the Eastern Bloc. Freshly re-elected President for seven years in December 1965, the General could now pursue a more ambitious, and revisionist foreign policy, whereby he would actively challenge the international system led by the superpowers.

Part II: The Rise and Fall of the Gaullist Project, 1966-1968

Chapter IV: 1966, Gaullist Zenith

I. Introduction

In his ritual end of year television address to the French people, General de Gaulle boldly announced on 31 December 1965 that: “starting from our rediscovered independence, and not wishing to reverse our alliances and friendships [...] it is the year [1966] of ardour. It is the end of doubts, hesitations and renunciations”¹. Indeed, in the period between 1963 and 1965 – and by extension since his return to power in 1958 – the General had largely concentrated on re-establishing his country’s confidence, power and prestige. Despite some disappointments, he had ended the Algerian War, strengthened the economy, and succeeded in making France count on the international scene through a more independent and spectacular diplomacy, leading to frequent clashes with the US.

In 1966, however, freshly re-elected President, the master of the Élysée was ready to start a new phase of French foreign policy. The aim was no longer to simply show that France mattered, but that it could actually help transform the international order. Thus, while keeping his cards close to his chest, De Gaulle was planning major initiatives towards NATO and the Eastern Bloc. With France a seemingly more confident and powerful player, and with emerging East-West détente in Europe, the General believed the timing was right to pursue the twin goals of his grand design: asserting his country’s Great Power status, and striving to overcome the Cold War order.

II. Disengaging in the West

On 7 March 1966, De Gaulle sent a letter to US President Lyndon Baines Johnson announcing that while France would stay in the Atlantic Alliance, it proposed “to recover the

¹ De Gaulle, *DM: IV*, p.445

entire exercise of its sovereignty on its territory, [...], terminate its participation in the 'integrated' [NATO] commands and no longer to place its forces at NATO's disposal"². The withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure ended the process of disengagement initiated by De Gaulle after his return to power in 1958. It represented the culmination of his quest to restore his country's independence. As he told Adenauer, soon after sending the letter to Johnson, any country that was neither independent, nor in charge of its own fate, eventually risked losing its self-confidence³. On the one hand, Paris was certainly trying to redefine its relations with the organisation, rather than simply "leave" NATO, in order to claim what it considered as its rightful status and influence⁴. It remained a member of the Atlantic Alliance and accepted some degree of collaboration with its allies, which raised the complex problem of establishing a new legal, institutional and military framework for this cooperation⁵.

On the other hand, if the withdrawal from NATO was unsurprising and in line even with the French position towards the Atlantic Alliance since its origins – a consistent criticism of integration and the Anglo-Saxon leadership – the unilateral decision and the forceful method of negotiation shocked the other member-states, and caused a major crisis⁶. From the start, France sought to dramatise the situation, and effectively presented its Allies with a *fait accompli* that left little room for compromise. For example, in an aide-mémoire sent to its partners in late March, the French government announced that from 1 July 1966 onwards, it would no longer affect to NATO its troops located ⁱⁿ Germany, it would withdraw French personnel attached to the Allied Integrated Command, and it demanded the evacuation from its territory of all foreign troops and organisations by 1 April 1967⁷. Similarly, it informed the Johnson administration that it no longer considered the five 1950s Franco-American agreements – that establishing the Châteauroux military base, that covering the Donges-Metz pipe-line, the US Military

² De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, pp.261-262

³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.382: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 10.03.66

⁴ Bozo, Frédéric, *La France et l'OTAN: de la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen*, (Paris: Masson, 1991), p.104

⁵ Soutou, "La décision française", in Harder, *Von Truman bis Harmel*, p.185

⁶ *Ibid*, pp.186-187

⁷ Documentation Française [DF]: La Politique Étrangère de la France [PEF], Textes et Documents 1966-1967: Aide-mémoire to the NATO Allies, 29.03.66

Headquarters agreement, the Air Bases agreement (1952), and the System of Communications Agreement (1958) – as valid⁸.

Through this forceful style, France tried to make it clear to its Allies that they should abandon any hopes of questioning, or undermining its decisions. According to a Quai source, the government, and De Gaulle especially, stubbornly refused any compromise. The same source, during a talk with Bohlen, confirmed that the General was determined to see the American forces begin their evacuation from France immediately. If Washington tried to delay their departure, he warned, De Gaulle's reaction could be violent⁹. Moreover, the master of the Élysée palace realised that France possessed a certain amount of leverage over its Allies. As he told Hervé Alphand, now Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, "if our partners prove difficult, we can make life complicated for them: we can refuse to provide vital services for the survival of their bases, we can deny them authorisations to fly over France"¹⁰. On 3 May 1966, he proved true to his word, when Paris announced to its allies that any authorisation for military planes to over fly France would now be renewed on a month-to-month basis, rather than an annual one. For the Quai's *Service des Pactes*, this move would emphasise to France's partners the precarious nature of their current situation. Any change in the over flight regime would depend on the evolution of the negotiations linked to France's withdrawal from NATO¹¹.

These uncompromising tactics aimed to convey the following clear message to the NATO Allies: they needed France more than France needed them. As De Gaulle pointed out during the Council of Ministers meeting on 31 March 1966: "... Our allies will realise that it is in their interest to be accommodating, just to be able to benefit from the North-South air communications. No plane going from Germany to Italy can do so without flying over our territory"¹². The General and his officials firmly believed that they were in a position of strength,

⁸ MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1964-1970, Vol.576: Beaumarchais to Lucet, Telegram number 1303-1309, 04.06.66

⁹ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 177: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 6552, 06.04.66

¹⁰ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 31.03.66, p.476

¹¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.339: Note of *Service des Pactes*, 23.04.66

¹² Peyrefitte, Alain, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, (Paris: Éditions de Fallois Fayard, 2000), p.189

and so felt they could act tough and not be *demandeurs* when it came to negotiations. They adopted this strategy not only when making threats on the over flight regime, but also during other discussions. For example, France's decision to no longer commit its *Forces Françaises d'Allemagne* [FFA] to NATO created uncertainty about their future: would they leave West Germany, or would they remain under a new status? If they stayed, what would be their mission? Schroeder insisted that the October 1954 convention – which had set the legal ground for the presence of foreign troops in West Germany – was rendered invalid by France's withdrawal from NATO, and that both states would need to agree on a new legal status, whereby France recognised the sovereignty of the host state. However, Paris rejected this logic and claimed that the ball was in Bonn's court. In an aide-mémoire, it declared its readiness to withdraw its troops from West Germany by July 1967, unless the German government made it clear it wanted to keep the FFA¹³.

As Bozo argues, France possessed many advantages during the negotiations. Considering its geostrategic situation, a profound break with the rest of NATO would be more disadvantageous for its allies than for itself. It also had a clear idea of the type of relations it wanted with the organisation, and it sought in priority to reach agreements on cooperation with the allied forces in case of war. The Allies, for their part, America especially, wanted to obtain the maximum cooperation with France, and that placed them in a position of petitioner. Additionally, Washington was unsure about France's ultimate intentions, which they estimated ranged somewhere between a neutral position and support for a "diluted NATO"¹⁴. Be it before the announcement of its withdrawal from NATO, or during the subsequent negotiations, Paris sent mixed signals about its aims and desires. By creating uncertainty and anxiety amongst its partners, France hoped not only to bolster the importance of its initiative, but also to keep the advantage in the ongoing NATO episode.

¹³ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: French aide-mémoire, 18.05.66

¹⁴ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.158

Indeed, puzzling his allies and keeping his cards close to his chest were an integral part of De Gaulle's policy towards NATO, in particular in the period between January and early March 1966. Quai officials were not well informed of the General's plans, and were often reduced to getting information from foreign statesmen who met the French President¹⁵. Thus, they were surprised and worried when they heard that during a meeting on 20 January with Manlio Brosio, NATO's Secretary General, De Gaulle had pointed out that France intended to denounce the Atlantic Pact of 1949, and effectively withdraw from the Atlantic Alliance altogether¹⁶. On 10 February, however, De Gaulle reassured Bohlen that French policy would only affect the organisation, not the Atlantic Pact; before misleading him by claiming that France was in no hurry to act¹⁷. The General stuck to this line during his 21 February press conference, when he stated that while France would end its subordination to NATO before April 1969, it would do so progressively and without causing problems to its Allies¹⁸.

Did De Gaulle seriously plan to denounce the Atlantic Pact, and why did he change his mind between his conversation with Brosio and his comments to Bohlen? A definitive answer to the first question might ultimately depend on historians gaining access to De Gaulle's private papers, but interestingly his former collaborators provide very different views. Whereas Alphanand claimed that De Gaulle decided not to denounce the Atlantic Pact only after Couve and others convinced him not to do so, Couve denied that the French President had ever really considered the idea of leaving the Atlantic Alliance¹⁹. As for the second question, Soutou refers to the fact that in mid-January 1966, both *les Services de l'Élysée* and the Quai's *Service des Pactes* were looking for formulas whereby France would undermine its participation in NATO, but not the Atlantic Alliance. Soutou adds that the Quai recommended this formula, because France would

¹⁵ Bozo, Frédéric, "Chronique d'une décision annoncée: Le retrait de l'organisation militaire 1965-1967", in Vaisse, Maurice, Melandri, Pierre, and Bozo, Frédéric (ed.), *La France et l'OTAN, 1949-1996*, (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexes, 1996), p.337

¹⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.26: Note for Couve, 21.01.66

¹⁷ Bohlen, Charles, *Witness to History*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p.506

¹⁸ De Gaulle, Charles, *DM: V*, (Paris: Plon, 1970), p.19

¹⁹ For Alphanand's view, see Alphanand, *L'étonnement*, 28.02.66, p.473; For Couve's view, see Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol.3*, p.377; Pierre Messmer, French Minister for armed forces at the time, agreed with Couve, interview, Paris, 12.06.03

lose its right to keep its troops stationed in West Germany if it left the Atlantic Alliance²⁰. This was the feeling of a source from the French administration, who confirmed to the Americans that the Quai had sent a paper to De Gaulle the day after his meeting with Brosio, where they repeated the arguments about the troops in West Germany. The source believed that this had probably had an effect on the French President²¹.

Yet, if the German factor played a part, it was not necessarily decisive. While there is no clear evidence to back this point, it is more plausible that the General quickly abandoned the idea of withdrawing from the Atlantic Alliance because, as we will see later, this would not really benefit his other key foreign policy goals. His announcement to Brosio, in that case, was more likely to be a typical example of his strategy of sowing anxieties amongst his allies about his intentions; as Paul-Henri Spaak explained in his memoirs, De Gaulle skilfully made people expect the worse, and when he settled on a less excessive position, they breathed a sigh of relief thinking they had won a lot²². The fact he authorised Brosio to repeat the contents of the conversation to the representatives of other NATO states, surely hoping that this would foster their anxiety, tends to substantiate Spaak's argument. Moreover, the cat and mouse game continued during the negotiations on the details of the French withdrawal. Paris remained fairly vague and mysterious about its ultimate aims. For example, on the FFA, De Gaulle privately claimed several times that he wanted the French troops to remain in West Germany, as their presence was a consequence of their victory – a source of prestige – in World War Two, and had nothing to do with NATO²³. In his talks with foreign officials, however, the General was ready to threaten a withdrawal of the FFA, undoubtedly as a way of putting pressure on Bonn²⁴.

²⁰ Soutou, *L'Alliance Incertaine*, p.291; For the Quai's note mentioned by Soutou, see MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol. 261: Note of *Service des Pactes*, 17.01.66

²¹ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 172: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 4867, 11.02.66

²² Spaak, *Combats*: vol.2, p.391

²³ See MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.263: Inner Council in Élysée, 02.06.66 and Note by De Gaulle, 04.07.66

²⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 60, 11.06.66

By the summer 1966, according to a Quai source, French leaders appeared extremely confident that they had won their battle with NATO²⁵. Certainly, while the discussions concerning the French withdrawal had barely started – France only selected its negotiating teams at the Inner Council on 2 June – De Gaulle had at least successfully accomplished his aim of imposing a redefinition of France’s relations with NATO²⁶. In many ways, delaying the negotiations had served French interests. It had strengthened the symbolic split between France and the organisation, and forced the Allies to accept this new French status. Paris had achieved its main goal but the situation was far from being resolved, as De Gaulle told his collaborators during the same 2 June meeting: “This NATO business is both simple and complex. Simple, because we know what we want and where we are going. Complex, because there are in fact several negotiations”²⁷.

Yet, the relevance of the withdrawal from NATO went much further than simply redefining France’s relations with the organisation and claiming a new status within the Alliance. It was not only a powerful symbol of De Gaulle’s pursuit of Great Power status for his country, but it was also to be both the cornerstone and the starting point for the more ambitious foreign policy he planned for France. This emerges very clearly when considering the reasons behind the timing of the move against NATO, as well as its interactions with other spheres of French policy.

For a start, domestic factors pushed the General to act quickly against NATO. On the one hand, freshly re-elected President in December 1965, he possessed a clear mandate from the French people. On the other hand, according to Bruno de Leusse, French representative to NATO, he probably feared that he might not stay in office for more than a couple of years. Considering that the parliamentary elections scheduled in 1967 might leave him with less margin of manoeuvre, it was really now or never. De Gaulle also firmly believed that no other French

²⁵ NARA: RG59, Records of Under-Secretary of State George Ball, 1961-1966, Box 21: Rusk to Johnson, 12.06.66

²⁶ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.163

²⁷ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, p.191

leader beside him would be capable of carrying out such a policy²⁸. The domestic response to the withdrawal was, however, fairly mixed. While the government easily supported its policy in front of parliament – the right defended the move, the socialists condemned it, but the communists interestingly did not follow the socialists – public opinion reacted with more uneasiness and in contradictory ways²⁹.

The international context, especially the Vietnam War, provided further impetus for a prompt disengagement. Apart from Philippe Devillers, few authors have pointed out that De Gaulle sent his letter to Johnson a mere five weeks after the US put an end, on 31 January 1966, to the truce on its bombings of North Vietnam³⁰. Couve later confirmed how this influenced De Gaulle's decision, stating "he [De Gaulle] took the resolution just after the renewal of his Presidential mandate, and even more firmly as the Vietnam War was becoming bloodier"³¹. Leaving NATO's integrated military structures at a time when America was seriously escalating its involvement in Vietnam was not without its benefits for France. It added more weight to its criticism of US leadership, and to the arguments that NATO no longer seemed suitable in a changing world, when Asia, rather than Europe, was the main field of Cold War conflict³².

At the same time, the initiative against NATO also interacted to a certain extent with the policy vis-à-vis the EEC. Boycotting the Community since 30 June 1965, Paris had agreed in late December to restart talks with its five partners. After more acrimonious debates, France finally rejoined the EEC after the Luxemburg compromise of 30 January 1966³³. France did not push ahead with the disengagement from NATO for so long as the EEC crisis was in its full-blown phase. The General, it has to be remembered, usually shied away from dealing with two crises

²⁸ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 177: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 6146, 23.03.66; This was a view shared by the main American source within the Quai, see LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 177: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 5422, 03.03.66

²⁹ See Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.155; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.350; Brunet, Jean-Paul, "Le Retrait de la France de l'OTAN: La Scène Intérieure", in Vaïsse, Melandri, and Bozo, *France et l'OTAN*, pp.393-394

³⁰ Devillers, "L'Asie", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers monde*, p.314

³¹ Couve de Murville, Maurice, *Le Monde en Face: Entretiens avec Maurice Delarue*, (Paris: Plon, 1989), p.40

³² French officials made these points its Allies and to the domestic audience. See French aide-mémoire to its Allies in FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 142, 11.03.66, or DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Pompidou speech to l'*Assemblée Nationale*, 13.04.66

³³ For more on how the "empty chair" crisis ended see Ludlow, N. Piers, "The Eclipse of the Extremes. Demythologising the Luxembourg Compromise", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, pp.247-264

simultaneously. Attacking NATO while the EEC remained deadlocked would give the impression that France intended to undermine the whole organisation of the Western world. Instead, by first ending the “empty chair” boycott, France could try to appear as an independent but loyal ally, solely targeting American leadership within the Atlantic Alliance. To the pleasant surprise of French leaders, the NATO crisis hardly disrupted the EEC debates³⁴. While the Atlantic organisation was undergoing a severe test, the European Community effectively secured its future through the three agreements of 11 May, 14 June, and 27 July. Not only did they finalise the CAP’s financial regulation, and set 1 July 1968 as the date when the common industrial and agricultural markets would come into operation, but they also devised part of the EEC’s stance on the agricultural questions for the Kennedy Round³⁵.

In fact, in many ways, the NATO crisis shielded the EEC. After France announced its withdrawal from the Atlantic Organisation, this naturally became the key problem for senior officials, and with good consequences for the Community. As Émile Noël, the European Commission’s Executive Secretary, pointed out, the French administration took advantage of De Gaulle’s preoccupation with NATO to move ahead in Brussels. Similarly, according to Jean Dromer, advisor in the Élysée, the absence of the quite anti-French Schroeder from the Belgian capital, certainly made Franco-German cooperation easier³⁶. Furthermore, both France and the Five believed they were ultimately benefiting by moving ahead on EEC issues, which US officials named the “double trap” theory. France thought that by sucking the Five into having a vested interest in the maintenance of the EEC, this might cause them to be soft on the NATO front; the Five, for their part, believed this was a way of trapping France into greater than ever enmeshment in the Community³⁷. As Ludlow suggests convincingly, rather than being communicating vessels, “the Community and NATO spheres were hence more like separate

³⁴ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 13.04.66, p.185

³⁵ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.109; for the details of the 11 May agreement, see DDF: 1966, Tome I: Note of *Service de Coopération économique*, 12.05.66

³⁶ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2182: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 7062, 22.04.66

³⁷ NARA: RG59, Bureau of European Affairs [European Affairs], Files of Robert Schaezel Deputy Assistant Secretary for Atlantic Affairs [Schaezel], Box 3: Fessenden to Schaezel, 25.05.66

billiard balls, liable at times to touch and affect each other's advance but otherwise subject to independent stimuli and dynamics"³⁸.

Unlike the EEC, however, there was a significant link between the timing of the withdrawal from NATO and De Gaulle's upcoming trip to the Soviet Union in June 1966, despite Couve's claims to the contrary during the Council of Ministers on 9 March 1966³⁹. De Gaulle needed imperatively to push ahead with the disengagement from NATO before going to Moscow. As Roussel argues, and this was also President Johnson's view at the time, this would enable De Gaulle to have *les mains libres* in his talks with the Soviet leaders, or in effect strengthen France's position⁴⁰. If the initiative against NATO came after the trip to the Soviet Union, this might have led some of France's Allies and De Gaulle's domestic opponents to claim that his policy had been the result of a deal with the Kremlin⁴¹. Moreover, besides bolstering France's Great Power status during the Moscow trip, De Gaulle wanted to use the withdrawal from NATO as a diplomatic tool in his dealings with the states of the Eastern Bloc. In effect, he hoped that it would become the motor for new East-West relations in Europe⁴². Thus, rather than seeming disruptive, De Gaulle wanted his policy towards the Atlantic organisation to appear as the latest stage in his pursuit of East-West détente, which ultimately aimed to overcome the Cold War order in Europe.

III. Extending a hand to the East

By withdrawing from NATO, De Gaulle hoped to strengthen his country's claim to Great Power status before the talks with the Soviet leadership. Yet, the connection between his goal of East-West détente in Europe, and disengagement from the Atlantic Alliance, went deeper than the mere tactical level. Paris argued that the new international context, marked by a growing

³⁸ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.114

³⁹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, p.186

⁴⁰ Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.796; LBJL: Telephone Conversations, White House Series 6603.03, Citation 9841: Johnson to Reuther, 07.03.66

⁴¹ See for example Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.285; or NARA: RG59, CFPPF, 1964-1966, Box 2179: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 5542, 07.03.66

⁴² Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.163

thaw between states of both blocs in Europe, effectively justified its stand in the Western military Alliance. As Couve emphasised during an interview, the departure from the Atlantic organisation was largely the consequence of the changes in East-West relations:

...within each camp, the Western and the Communist camps, things have changed and [...] the various members of both camps have rebuilt their economies and reclaimed their personalities. All this means that the situation is very different today [than it was in 1945]. It is under this angle that we have to consider the recent decision taken by France towards NATO⁴³.

De Gaulle confirmed this viewpoint when he stated, during the Council of Ministers on 31 March 1966, "it is natural for us to loosen in times of détente a [military] system established for periods of tension"⁴⁴.

That said, the disengagement from NATO was not solely a result of the new East-West relations in Europe. As François Puaux, head of the European department of the Quai, argued in a circular note, France's policy needed to be understood in a wider political context than the workings of the Atlantic Alliance, because it was effectively in line with the ideas expressed by De Gaulle in his press conference of 4 February 1965, when he outlined the long-term perspectives for overcoming the Cold War order in Europe. Puaux stated that ending military integration was a precondition for the East-West rapprochement pursued by France in Europe, because it prevented European states from reclaiming their independence. Moreover, in response to the criticism that France's policy towards NATO played into Moscow's hands, Puaux concluded that if French moves proved contagious within the Western bloc, they were equally likely to do so in the Eastern bloc. Romania, which relied on French policy to resist the Soviet integration efforts through the Warsaw pact, was a particularly good example of this⁴⁵.

Indeed, French leaders did not hesitate to use the withdrawal from NATO as a bargaining card when dealing with their Eastern bloc counterparts. This strategy featured very prominently during the French diplomatic offensive aimed at the satellite states during the spring-summer 1966. Between April and July 1966, Couve visited successively Bucharest, Sofia, Warsaw,

⁴³ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Interview with O.R.T.F., 23.04.66

⁴⁴ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.190

⁴⁵ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.261: Draft Circular, Not dated 03.66

Prague and Budapest. Whenever he talked with Communist officials, he reiterated the argument that France's policy towards the Atlantic Alliance could serve the cause of détente in Europe. For example, he told Ion Maurer, Romanian Prime Minister, "we [France] took a certain decision towards NATO, which will constitute another step on the path towards the normalisation of political conditions in Europe"⁴⁶. Moreover, Couve shared these thoughts not only with the independent-minded Romanians, but also with the more orthodox Bulgarians and Poles: "That is why we left NATO. This policy is part of our plans for the whole of Europe, which aims to have Western European and Eastern European states living in normal conditions ..."⁴⁷. France's withdrawal from NATO, and its policy towards the Eastern Bloc, were therefore not separate policies but two sides of the same coin, both aiming to end the division of Europe and restore full sovereignty and independence to all its states.

The diplomatic offensive of the spring and summer 1966, if novel in its scale, was in line with Paris' attempts since 1964 to develop contacts and cooperation with all the satellite states, which it considered as a vital component of its East-West policy. Couve used his visits to Eastern Europe to finalise further agreements of cooperation, such as the new cultural and scientific agreements of cooperation that he signed in Poland with his counterpart Adam Rapacki⁴⁸. Moreover, by dealing with all Eastern bloc states, the French Foreign Minister was increasing French prestige in the region, and reminding his hosts that détente involved contacts and openings between all states, not just between the US and the Soviet Union⁴⁹.

That said, France was not hoping to lure the satellite states away from their powerful Soviet protector. In the long-run, the General expected that they would come to show more independence vis-à-vis Moscow, and as he told Zenon Kliszko, Vice-Marshall of the Polish Diet: "An ideology does not prevent a state from being a state, with its own ambitions and policies"⁵⁰. Equally, De Gaulle accepted the strong ties linking the Communist states with their Soviet

⁴⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Couve-Maurer meeting, 27.04.66

⁴⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Gomulka meeting, 20.05.66

⁴⁸ Schreiber, *Les Actions*, pp.102-103

⁴⁹ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.227

⁵⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: De Gaulle-Kliszko meeting, 13.05.66

patron. As Burin des Rozières points out, the French President opposed blocs, but he viewed spheres of influence in a more nuanced way, even accepting them to a certain extent when they resulted from historical roots or affinities⁵¹. In that context, as Couve explained, De Gaulle went to the Soviet Union for his first trip behind the Iron Curtain, because France wanted to show that it “started with the essential, and also not give the Russians the impression it was trying to detach them from their satellites”⁵². Paris realised that no serious thaw in East-West relations could occur without Moscow’s agreement. Nonetheless, De Gaulle’s trip to the Soviet Union represented the crowning moment for France’s *Ostpolitik*⁵³. It stood as a defining moment in the General’s drive to foster an East-West rapprochement in Europe.

However, the prospect of the French President going to Moscow caused serious apprehension in the West, at a time when the complex negotiations that followed the French withdrawal from NATO were still ongoing⁵⁴. It seemed to be a dark omen, further evidence that France was breaking away from the Western bloc. De Gaulle, though, was careful to maintain a certain equilibrium in his policy and to not cross certain boundaries. Before his trip to Moscow, French leaders went to great lengths to reassure their Allies and public opinion in regards to the aims of his visit⁵⁵. In a speech to the parliament, Pompidou explained that the General’s trip to the Soviet Union was not the start of a reversal of alliances, and was certainly not a threat to the European and American allies⁵⁶.

Moreover, French representatives also sought to downplay the possible impact of the trip. During a dinner with his West German, British and American counterparts, Couve emphasised that the General’s upcoming visit to Moscow was a normal development of French policy, and that nothing dramatic would emerge from it⁵⁷. Certainly, De Gaulle and his collaborators were

⁵¹ Burin des Rozières, Étienne, “Le non-alignement”, in Barnavi, Élie and Friedländer, Saül (ed.), *La politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), p.72

⁵² See Schreiber, *Les Actions*, p.101

⁵³ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.222

⁵⁴ See Wenger, Andreas, “Crisis and Opportunity: NATO’s Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.6/1 (2004), p.31; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.390

⁵⁵ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.425

⁵⁶ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Pompidou speech to l’Assemblée Nationale, 13.04.66

⁵⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Schroeder-Rusk-Stewart meeting, 06.06.66

still to a certain extent wary of Soviet intentions, and they set out limits to the cooperation with Moscow. When Zorin again suggested a possible Franco-Soviet treaty, the General shied away from a categorical answer⁵⁸. He was not naïve and did not plan any early far-reaching agreement with Moscow, as he told Adenauer: “the Russians are very polite, which is line with their policy. I am not refusing their politeness, but I will not make any fundamental agreements with them. Maybe we will improve scientific and cultural relations. Surely, we will speak about Germany as we have done in the past”⁵⁹. Rather than a threat to Bonn, De Gaulle wanted to convey the impression that his trip to Moscow could actually help the cause of German reunification.

Indeed, it was vital for the General to not only reassure his Allies, but also give the impression that he was acting in their interests. Speaking to Alain Peyrefitte, now Minister for Scientific Research, Nuclear and Space Questions, he suggested that “it is not at the moment when the two blocs are cracking up that I am going to think of leaving one bloc for the other [...] I will speak for Western Europe”⁶⁰. De Gaulle perceived France as Western Europe’s leading spokesman when it came to improving relations with the Eastern Bloc, and so he defended Western ideas. He had no desire, for example, to recognise East Germany. France, in other words, tried to keep one hand firmly tied to its Western Allies and extend the other one to the states of the Eastern Bloc. Moreover, the visit to Moscow and the talks with Soviet leaders would offer the General an ideal platform to probe and test the Soviet intentions. He wanted “to see where the Soviets are going, and what they can agree on; or at least where they are going and what they can not agree on”⁶¹.

The trip was a perfect example of what Jean Charbonnel, French junior Minister for Cooperation with Francophone Africa in 1966-1967, describes as *une diplomatie du témoignage*. De Gaulle went to the Soviet Union to tell their leaders that France was present and ready to talk,

⁵⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.382: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 29.04.66; For another example of De Gaulle’s suspicions, in this case in the field of scientific cooperation, see Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 22.03.66, p.129

⁵⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.382: De Gaulle-Adenauer meeting, 10.03.66; Similarly, De Gaulle told Erhard that “Germany has nothing to fear” from his trip to Moscow (see De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, p.306)

⁶⁰ Lefort, Bernard, *Souvenirs et secrets des années gaulliennes, 1958-1969*, (Paris: A. Michel, 1999), p.149

⁶¹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, Council of Ministers 15.06.66, p.195

despite differences in regimes⁶². He was ready to discuss any subject or regions with his Soviet counterparts, as clearly shown during the discussions with Zorin to prepare the visit⁶³. But, it would be a mistake to assume that the General had a clear idea of how the talks would develop. He told the Danish Prime Minister, Otto Krag, that he did not know what to expect from his talks in Moscow, but that the Soviet leaders had repeatedly invited him and he wanted to repay the visit made by Khrushchev in 1960⁶⁴. The French President neither believed nor wanted German reunification to happen quickly. He realised that the Soviet Union pursued détente for their own interests, but he also felt that the Soviet Union appeared less bellicose than in the past, and seemed interested in reaching some sort of general détente with the West⁶⁵.

Yet, the fact that De Gaulle sought to downplay the importance of the trip, and was not sure what to expect from the talks, did not mean that he had no clear and ambitious long-term plans –quite the opposite. As Soutou explains, the General envisaged in the future a sort of pan-European security system, where American troops would eventually leave the continent. In return, the Soviet Union would abandon East Germany, allowing German reunification and a real détente in Europe, which would also restore the independence of the satellite states. The two main pillars of the system would of course be France and the Soviet Union, as nuclear powers, but security would be guaranteed by an interlocking set of checks and balances. Paris and Moscow would contain Bonn, while a closer union between the states of Western Europe would contain Soviet power. The US would play its traditional role of underwriter and ultimate arbiter of the European order. This was, in other words, a modernised version of the Concert of Nations of the 19th Century⁶⁶. In this context, withdrawing from NATO just before going to Moscow made complete sense. As Pierre Maillard, former diplomatic adviser to De Gaulle, confirmed to

⁶² Interview with Jean Charbonnel, Paris, 15.09.04

⁶³ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.26: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 18.03.66; or MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.382: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 29.04.66

⁶⁴ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: De Gaulle-Krag meeting, 18.04.66

⁶⁵ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 60, 11.06.66

⁶⁶ Soutou, “La décision française”, in Harder, Von Truman bis Harmel, pp.194-196; the reference to the US as the underwriter of Europe featured in the briefing for De Gaulle’s trip to Moscow, according to a Quai source, see NARA: RG59, Records of the Ambassador Charles Bohlen [Bohlen], Box 33: Grandville-Funkhouse meeting, 09.07.66

Zorin in March 1966, the French President wanted to have something to offer the Soviets, in order to ask in return for their support for his views on German reunification⁶⁷.

The General was thus convinced that his trip could be vital for his long-term goal of transforming the European order. The Soviet Union, rather than West Germany, had become France's main partner⁶⁸. As Couve said in an interview for Soviet radio on 4 June 1966, Franco-Soviet cooperation on European matters could act as a role model for their respective allies, and encourage them to follow the path leading to peace on the continent⁶⁹. He reinforced that message during his speech at the NATO Ministerial meeting in Brussels in early June 1966. While calling for détente without illusions, he attacked the principle according to which the East-West rapprochement should be the competence of the Atlantic Alliance or the Warsaw Pact, or that is to say solely the responsibility of the two superpowers⁷⁰. Détente needed to take place within a European framework.

In 1966, the prospects of Franco-Soviet cooperation were certainly helped by Moscow's conscious effort to seek better relations with Western Europe – except West Germany – and exploit US vulnerability on Vietnam⁷¹. In previous years, as mentioned in chapter two, Soviet leaders had been greatly divided over the desirability of peaceful coexistence with the West⁷². Conservative figures, including Politburo members Aleksandr Shelepin and Mikhail Suslov, were uneasy about peaceful coexistence and they believed that centrifugal forces in the West were bound to intensify independently of Soviet actions. They called for increased military spending because they still considered NATO as a threat, and they feared that peaceful coexistence would undermine the cohesion inside the socialist alliance. The so-called 'instrumental Europeanists' disagreed with this conservative analysis, and instead argued that it

⁶⁷ Narinsky, "Le retrait", in Vaisse, *De Gaulle*, p.166

⁶⁸ For a good example of De Gaulle's pessimistic assessment of West Germany, see De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, Exposé during the Council of Foreign Affairs on West Germany, pp.246-249; De Gaulle mentioned that "there is no problem between us and them now [...] but there is a growing difficulty to agree". He also added that "West Germany is not following the path of reunification [...] and it would be better if West Germany followed our path".

⁶⁹ NARA: RG59, CFPPF, 1964-1966, Box 2180: Bohlen to Rusk, Airgram number 2425, 24.06.66

⁷⁰ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.272: Crouy-Chanel to Couve, Telegram number 568-576, 08.06.66

⁷¹ Wolfe, *Soviet Power*, p.281

⁷² See chapter 2, footnote 88

was the combination of Soviet overtures and the decrease in international tension that had fostered the rise of centrifugal trends. They saw serious benefits in De Gaulle's campaign to reduce, and perhaps eliminate, the American presence in Europe. Finally, a third group, the Americanists including Gromyko, supported peaceful coexistence but were less hostile to the US. They viewed West Germany as the main threat, and felt that if Western Europe was allowed to become a third, independent force, this could undermine the bipolar strategic order and make international relations more dangerous and unpredictable⁷³.

These debates eventually came to a head in March 1966 at the Twenty-Third Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and were solved eventually by a compromise. Brezhnev's speech emphasised vigilance, with only a secondary emphasis on peaceful coexistence. He stressed Soviet-European cooperation as a counterweight to the American and West German menace, whereas Gromyko put more emphasis on German "revanchism" and sang an Americanist tune. France was singled out as the centrepiece of this combined strategy. Brezhnev highlighted Soviet-French ties as the most important element of the European counterweight, and ordered a "further improvement of these relations"⁷⁴. For the Kremlin leaders, Paris' policy corresponded to the Soviet interests because it sought to weaken the links between Bonn and Washington, and some even hoped that Paris might denounce the Atlantic Pact in April 1969, when it would be up for renewal twenty years after its creation⁷⁵.

Thus, both Paris and Moscow wanted De Gaulle's trip to be a success, even if they remained partly cautious. On the ~~other~~^{one} hand, the General went out of his way to praise Russia and the possibilities for a new cooperation with France. As Durandin points out, De Gaulle repeatedly emphasised the point that both Russia and France possessed a past – implicitly opposing both of them to the rootless America – and that history dictated an important role for Russia in Europe⁷⁶. This claim that the Soviet Union needed to take part in the peace process in

⁷³ For more on the debates see Newton, *Russia, France*, pp.58-73

⁷⁴ See *ibid*, pp.73-75

⁷⁵ Narinsky, "Le retrait", in Vaïsse, *De Gaulle*, pp.165-167

⁷⁶ Durandin, *France contre l'Amérique*, pp.98-99

Europe undoubtedly pleased the Kremlin leaders⁷⁷. The actual conversations also highlighted many areas of agreement between both leaders, ranging from Vietnam to a shared opposition to any speedy German reunification. The General also took a step in the Soviet direction when he showed a certain support for the project of a European security conference, even if he suggested that this was not an immediate prospect. On the other hand, during the first talk with Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny, De Gaulle clearly underlined their differences. He made it clear that he would not depart from Western orthodoxy and recognise East Germany. He also highlighted France's independence, pointing out that he accepted Soviet power as a balance against American hegemony, in the same way that he viewed American power as a guarantee against Soviet hegemony. De Gaulle's key aim, though, was to probe Soviet intentions. It is no coincidence that with his first question, he asked his hosts whether they perceived the situation in Europe as definitive, or whether they accepted the possibility of change, in particular over the German question⁷⁸. The General wanted to know whether the Soviet Union would accept to go along with his vision of a new European system, which was why he constantly talked about taking the German question out of the US-Soviet rivalry.

On returning to France, De Gaulle was thus pleased with the results of his trip, as he explained during the Council of Ministers of 2 July 1966:

The [Soviet] regime survives but is transforming itself. It is becoming less ideological and more technocratic. The meetings went well. The differences of opinion on the German question are clear, but were pointed out without insistence [...] They consider that the dialogue with Western Europe must go through France. They want to keep up these contacts. Our policy, which consists in breaking up the Cold War, is coherent with their feelings and interests⁷⁹.

Certainly, the masters of the Kremlin remained fairly inflexible on the German question, but they had not ruled out reunification in the future. Additionally, both states signed various agreements of cooperation, including a common declaration on their relations, established economic commissions, decided to set up a "hot-line" between both capitals, and agreed on the principle of

⁷⁷ Bieloussova, Zinaïda, *DGESS IV*, p.394

⁷⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: De Gaulle-Brezhnev-Kosygin-Podgorny meeting, 21.06.66

⁷⁹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, p.197

regular consultations⁸⁰. The “hot-line”, in particular, pleased De Gaulle and appealed to France’s global ambitions as a Great Power⁸¹. After all, the only other existing “hot-line” was the one set up in 1963 between Moscow and Washington. Moreover, the General appreciated the welcome he received throughout the Soviet Union, and the opportunity to directly address the Russian people, thanks to his travels and speech on Soviet television. De Gaulle wanted his policy of détente to appeal to the peoples of the Eastern bloc, not just its leaders⁸². In the summer of 1966, as Soviet relations with Bonn and Washington remained lukewarm, Paris could thus make a legitimate claim to the role of mediator in East-West relations⁸³.

IV. A Platform in Cambodia

During the first half of 1966, two fundamental and inter-related goals dominated French foreign policy. On the one hand, by leaving NATO and going to Moscow, De Gaulle was spectacularly demonstrating France’s independence and its claim to Great Power status. On the other hand, he hoped both actions could help his overarching goal of overcoming the Cold War order in Europe. In that period, the twin objectives of national independence and revision of the international order also impacted France’s policy towards the Vietnam War. The Third World was no longer a priority for Paris, but the conflict in Vietnam was an exception as a centre of international tension and Great Power rivalry.

France’s attitude towards Vietnam did not change significantly in 1966, and remained at odds with that of the Johnson administration. Fundamentally, French leaders disagreed with their American counterparts about the nature of the conflict. Instead of seeing the war as the result of a North Vietnamese communist aggression, sponsored by Communist China, against the South, they argued that South Vietnam was undergoing a civil war, where the local population fought

⁸⁰ For the declaration, see DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Franco-Soviet Common Declaration, 30.06.66

⁸¹ Andrieu, in *De Gaulle*, Lacouture and Mehl, p.221

⁸² Schreiber, *Les Actions*, p.102; interestingly, French public opinion developed a more favourable view towards the Soviet Union, see IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.264, whereas in 1964 25% had a good opinion of the Soviet Union, 42% had a neither good or bad opinion, 25% had a bad opinion, and 8% had no opinion, by 1966 the numbers had changed respectively to 35%, 31%, 13% and 21%.

⁸³ Rey, *La tentation*, p.48

against a government imposed from the outside⁸⁴. Similarly, French officials generally differed with their American colleagues when it came to assessing the intentions of the main belligerents, giving more emphasis to national rather than ideological considerations. For example, Couve often referred to differences between the PRC and North Vietnam, especially the fact that Hanoi was more receptive than Beijing to the idea of negotiations, and felt the latter would not be able to stop Hanoi should it choose to press forward with peace talks⁸⁵.

Moreover, if Paris continued to consider a settlement in Indochina as unlikely, it nonetheless consistently reaffirmed what it considered as the vital guiding principles for any peaceful end to the conflict. De Gaulle, for example, clearly outlined those principles during his 21 February press conference. There was no military solution to the war in Indochina, and consequently peace could only be the result of a political solution between all parties involved, and a return to the 1954 and 1962 Geneva conferences. In the international sphere, peace would be guaranteed by an entente between the Great Powers – Britain, US, Soviet Union, China and France; locally, it required an end to all foreign interventions in Vietnam, and then neutrality for the country as a whole⁸⁶. The fighting in Indochina posed not only a threat to the independence of the states in the region – in line with De Gaulle's views about the detrimental effect of the Cold War on the Third World – but it risked escalating into a very serious confrontation between the US and Communist China. This is why the General warned Johnson that peace talks could only start once the US government decided to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, and end intervention in the affairs of that country⁸⁷.

This firm and unambiguous stand strengthened France's status in the world. The Eastern Bloc states always applauded France for its criticism of American policy in Southeast Asia, and Couve certainly played on that convergence of views during his extended tour of the satellite

⁸⁴ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Couve-Maurer meeting, 27.04.66

⁸⁵ See for example MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 21.07.66

⁸⁶ De Gaulle, DM: V, p.23

⁸⁷ See for example, De Gaulle, LNC: X, De Gaulle to Johnson, 05.02.66, p.250

states between April and July 1966⁸⁸. French views on Indochina also appealed to others besides the communist states. Leaders and officials from the Third World often complimented France on its position on the conflict, and equally condemned American policies⁸⁹. In many ways, French officials were trying to act as a sort of “bridge” between the West, and both the communist and Third World states. It extended a hand to the latter by largely sharing their assessment of the situation in Southeast Asia, but not necessarily fully agreeing with their often harsh anti-American tone. For example, Couve tried to moderate the criticism of the US delivered by the Chinese Ambassador to Paris, Huang Chen, and he doubted that Washington had any plans to wage war against the PRC⁹⁰.

France took this “bridging” role seriously, as De Gaulle explained to Alphand in early January 1966: “The war will continue and get worse. We must not intervene, but instead establish and develop our relations with all the actors”⁹¹. This was true, of course, with the Great Powers, and De Gaulle made it clear to Huang Chen that Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou En-lai, would be welcome in France⁹². Additionally, French officials also maintained contacts with both South and North Vietnamese officials. Étienne Manac’h, head of the *Asie-Océanie* department of the Quai, regularly met and kept friendly relations with the South Vietnamese General Consul in Paris, Nguyen Huu Tan⁹³. At the same time, Paris continued to get closer to Hanoi. On 24 January 1966, Ho Chi Minh sent a letter to all socialist states, but also non-aligned, neutrals and Western states. Significantly, France was the only state of the Atlantic Alliance to reply through De Gaulle’s letter, and this helped open up a new chapter in the relations between both

⁸⁸ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Couve-Ceausescu meeting, 28.04.66; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Rapacki meeting, 19.05.66; or MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: Couve-Kallai meeting, 29.07.66

⁸⁹ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.26: De Gaulle-Gandhi meeting, 25.03.66; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.382: Malraux-Fawzi meeting, 26.03.66; or see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Report of Sainteny mission in Southeast Asia, 13.07.66, which mentions that North Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, expressed his respect for De Gaulle’s statements on the Vietnam conflict.

⁹⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Huang Chen meeting, 12.05.66

⁹¹ Alphand, *L’étonnement*, p.468

⁹² ANF: 5AG1, Carton 226, Chine Populaire: Burin-Chen meeting, 26.05.66

⁹³ See NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2188: US Embassy to State, Airgram number 1845, 19.03.66

countries⁹⁴. On 13 May, Couve hosted for the first time Mai Van Bo, the commercial delegate of North Vietnam in France, and on 2 August, this same commercial representation was transformed into a general delegation, thus finally fulfilling Hanoi's desire to have equality of status for their representation in Paris⁹⁵. Moreover, France engaged in secret diplomacy with non-state actors, especially the South Vietnamese NLF. Manac'h even agreed to the opening of an NLF "press bureau" in Paris, knowing very well that it would act as a cover for political action⁹⁶.

Thus, if French views about the Vietnam War remained consistent in 1966, the wider developments of its foreign policy did play a growing influence on its attitude towards the Southeast Asian conflict. The disengagement from NATO and the trip to Moscow had already undermined Franco-American relations, and the escalating US involvement in Indochina only caused more friction. After Washington put an end to the truce and re-started its bombing campaign of North Vietnam in late January 1966, the French government issued a *communiqué* on 2 February condemning this course of action, and emphasising that "this renewed bombing [...] compromises even more the cause of peace"⁹⁷. Moreover, France partly justified its withdrawal from NATO by stating its refusal to become involved in a war against its will – in other words, an implicit accusation that American unilateral policies in the Far East could lead to a wider war⁹⁸. It was in that context that the General began planning a trip to Asia. On 24 February, he summoned Jean Sainteny, a former Minister and General Delegate to Hanoi, and asked him to go to North Vietnam on a fact finding mission. Sainteny would eventually go during the summer⁹⁹.

⁹⁴ De Quirielle, François, *A Hanoi sous les Bombes Américaines: Journal d'un diplomate Français, 1966-1969*, (Paris: Tallandier, 1992), p.71; For De Gaulle's letter, see De Gaulle, *LNC: X*, De Gaulle to Ho Chi Minh, 08.02.66, p.251

⁹⁵ DDF: 1966, Tome I: Note number 149 of *Direction Asie-Océanie*, 14.05.66; De Quirielle, *A Hanoi*, p.189

⁹⁶ See MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Note on Manac'h-Huynh Van Tam meetings, 06-07.06.66; or MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.28: Manac'h-Nguyen Van Hieu meeting, 28.08.66

⁹⁷ Quoted by Devillers, "L'Asie", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers monde*, p.313

⁹⁸ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 136, 07.03.66

⁹⁹ Dulong, Claude, *La Dernière Pagode*, (Paris: B. Grasset, 1989), p.138

As Manac'h explained to a British colleague, De Gaulle had essentially prepared his trip to Asia in secret and Quai officials had been kept in the dark about the plan. It was only in June, just before the trip to Moscow, that they had received a telegram drafted by the Élysée, and intended for Phnom Penh, which asked Sihanouk if he would like to welcome De Gaulle in the autumn¹⁰⁰. As the General shifted his focus back to Indochina, in the aftermath of his visit to the Soviet Union, the situation on the ground appeared even more dangerous. The first American bombings of Hanoi had just taken place, at the same time as Sainteny's secret mission in Southeast Asia¹⁰¹. Not surprisingly, his reports painted a grim picture, suggesting that Communist China seemed ready to launch a massive intervention in Vietnam, and that all the elements were in place for a "new Korean war"¹⁰². Additionally, Ho Chi Minh made it very clear to Sainteny that Hanoi would never surrender to America, which must have impressed De Gaulle and further convinced him that the US needed to seek peace through negotiations¹⁰³.

In the summer 1966, French leaders were undoubtedly worried about the developments in Indochina, and especially about their potential repercussions for the rest of the world. Couve complained to Schroeder that the "general situation in the world will depend on those developments [in Indochina]", while De Gaulle warned that, as a result of the Southeast Asian war, the threat of universal catastrophe was growing¹⁰⁴. Moreover, the General was particularly worried because he feared the impact of the Vietnamese conflict on the emerging détente with the Communist states¹⁰⁵. Certainly, on the one hand, America's increasing involvement in Southeast Asia meant that it would focus less on Europe, therefore offering France more leeway in the affairs of the continent. On the other hand, there was always a threat that a sharp escalation of the conflict in Indochina could cause a serious rise in US-Soviet tension, making the process of rapprochement with the Eastern bloc even more difficult. As Sullivan correctly points out, the

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FO 371/185915: Paris to FO, 29.06.66

¹⁰¹ Devillers, "L'Asie", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers monde*, p.315

¹⁰² ANF: 5AG1, Carton 226, Chine Populaire: Sainteny note, 07.07.66

¹⁰³ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam policy*, p.101; Dulong, *Dernière Pagode*, p.159

¹⁰⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: Couve-Schroeder meeting, 21.07.66; De Gaulle, Charles, *DM: V*, Reply to Toast given by Haile Selassie, 27.08.66, p.69

¹⁰⁵ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: De Gaulle-Church meeting, 04.05.66

General's strategy relied on a correct mix of US-Soviet cooperation and conflict; because too much of either restricted French action¹⁰⁶.

Thus, if French criticism of American policy in Vietnam became more outspoken in this period, this was the result of a deep sense of frustration with the latter. De Gaulle and his collaborators sincerely believed that the US government held nearly all the cards in its hands, as it alone could end the war once it finally decided to withdraw its troops¹⁰⁷. Only America could end a pointless war that acted as an obstacle to French President's pursuit of East-West détente in Europe. In those circumstances dominated by frustration, anxiety, and escalation, De Gaulle had no intention of going to Cambodia in early September to participate actively in the settlement of the Vietnamese conflict¹⁰⁸. Rather, as he told US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Edward Korry, just before his stopover in Phnom Penh, while he liked and admired the Americans, he needed to speak his mind and they would later thank him for it¹⁰⁹.

It has to be noted, however, that there was no consensus within the French administration when it came to the Vietnam War. The more Atlantic minded in the Quai often complained about their colleagues who hoped for a humiliating American surrender¹¹⁰. Even at the top level, De Gaulle appeared far more uncompromising than Couve when it came to assessing American policy¹¹¹. According to Manac'h, in a letter he wrote to new Ambassador in Washington Charles Lucet, Couve was not favourable either to the Sainteny mission, which echoed his own pessimism: "Showing that a channel remains open between Paris and Hanoi, that is something, but we have not much to convey ... Unless the General has decided to finally leave the domain

¹⁰⁶ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam policy*, p.92

¹⁰⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: Couve-David meeting, 26.07.66

¹⁰⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.28: De Gaulle-Lucet meeting, 25.07.66

¹⁰⁹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 65, 27.08.66

¹¹⁰ LBJL: PP, CF, Box 8: Kissinger-Grandville meeting, 23.01.66; Henri Froment-Meurice, a Quai official at the time, confirmed this point in an interview, when he stated that the idea of America succeeding where France had failed was certainly not very popular. Paris, 24.04.03

¹¹¹ Compare De Gaulle and Couve's meetings in mid-May with Huang Chen. Whereas Couve highlighted the more limited American aims, De Gaulle underlined the similarity of views between France and China, and pointed to the "growing moral and diplomatic isolation of the US". See MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Chen meeting, 12.05.66 and De Gaulle-Chen meeting, 16.05.66

of ritual declarations on Southeast Asia and make concrete proposals”¹¹². Yet, as was the case for the other key foreign policy decisions of 1966, De Gaulle clearly took command of strategy towards Indochina. The Phnom Penh speech on 1 September, written by De Gaulle during the plane trip to Djibouti, reflected, according to Couve, the General’s deepest feelings about the Vietnam War, and his intention to publicly speak about the subject¹¹³. It was without a doubt his most complete and dramatic statement on the subject of Indochina¹¹⁴.

Delivered to a crowd of near 100,000 people, the speech was a solemn and scathing one-sided criticism of the American involvement in Vietnam, which the General described as a growing threat for the world. According to him, if it was “unlikely that the American war machine would be destroyed, there was no chance, at the same time, that the peoples of Asia would submit to the law of a foreigner from the other side of the Pacific, regardless of his intentions or the power of his weapons”. There could be no military solution to the conflict, and the opening of negotiations depended on the eventual withdrawal of American forces¹¹⁵. The speech not only caused uproar at the time, but it also certainly created controversy in the literature, in particular in regards to the General’s aims. While Roussel describes it as a violent denunciation of American presence in Vietnam and part of a wider global strategy to make France’s voice heard in the world, Lefort presents the picture of an anxious De Gaulle, keen to show his American friends the errors of their ways¹¹⁶. Lacouture, for his part, points out that Prince Sihanouk had offered De Gaulle a great platform to speak to the Third World. This last point was confirmed by De Gaulle’s comments to his *aide de camp*, Jean d’Escricenne, when he mentioned that France had drawn great benefits in the Third World thanks to his address¹¹⁷.

Yet, Phnom Penh can only be truly understood when seen in the context of De Gaulle’s wider strategy. By speaking in Cambodia, the French President certainly possessed a great stage

¹¹² Journoud, “Quai d’Orsay”, in Goscha and Vaisse, *Guerre du Vietnam*, p.393

¹¹³ Couve, *Monde en face*, p.40

¹¹⁴ Sa’adah, Anne, “Idées Simples and Idées Fixes: De Gaulle, the United States, and Vietnam”, in Wahl and Paxton, *De Gaulle and the US*, p.307

¹¹⁵ For the Phnom Penh speech, see De Gaulle, *DM:V*, pp.74-78

¹¹⁶ Roussel, *De Gaulle*, pp.801-805 ; Lefort, *Souvenirs et secrets*, p.155

¹¹⁷ Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol. 3*, p.436; D’Escricenne, Jean, *Le Général m’a dit: 1966-1970*, (Paris : Plon, 1973), p.85

to defend his ideas on neutrality in the Third World, and contrast them with the detrimental impact of Cold War interventions in neighbouring Vietnam. As he told Peyrefitte, “we had to tell the world that there will only be peace in Indochina if the two superpowers do not transform it into a field of their rivalry”¹¹⁸. Moreover, the speech was also a way of emphasising France’s radiance and moral authority, and the reference to the Algerian war enabled De Gaulle to underline his credentials as a commentator of the Vietnam War¹¹⁹. In his view, France had ended the conflict in Algeria without losing its power and prestige, and had subsequently managed to establish a precedent for cooperation with developing states.

Finally, the timing of the speech was closely tied to the larger developments of French foreign policy. Following his spectacular moves towards NATO and the Soviet bloc, De Gaulle believed that the moment had come for France, as a Great and independent power, to take a firm and solemn stand, and denounce an American policy that was increasingly dangerous for the world. As Paris increasingly focussed on fostering East-West détente and overcoming the Cold War order in Europe, it perceived the Vietnam War as a vital obstacle. It is also for this reason that the General essentially singled out America, because he believed Washington held all the cards in its hands to end a conflict that impeded his central goals.

V. Staying the Course

In the aftermath of the Phnom Penh speech, De Gaulle shied away from major initiatives and concentrated on consolidating the gains from his previous initiatives. This included finalising France’s status within the Alliance and the modalities of its withdrawal from NATO, a subject which Paris had somewhat ignored until June 1966. In large part, this resulted from the cat-and-mouse game played by France with its Allies, and its belief that it possessed many advantages in the negotiations. For a start, De Gaulle knew exactly what he wanted from those talks. As he argued during an Inner Council meeting on 2 June, France should not be

¹¹⁸ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.3, 12.09.66, p.147

¹¹⁹ Sullivan, *France’s Vietnam policy*, p.91

automatically committed if a war broke out that involved its NATO allies¹²⁰. The General ultimately aimed to protect France's independence of decision. This principle was to guide officials in the three core negotiations surrounding the disengagement from NATO: the status of the FFA, the possible cooperation between the FFA and NATO troops, and the future use, if any, granted to Americans for the facilities located in France.

For all these issues, France adopted a firm, but not entirely inflexible, stand and refused to appear as a *demandeur*. The French President refused the presence on French soil of American stocks or troops. He rejected any agreement guaranteeing an automatic French intervention in case of a European war. That said, he accepted that the French and NATO Chiefs of Staff could discuss possible cooperation scenarios, which would include providing facilities to American troops, in case of a war in which France also took part¹²¹. Moreover, De Gaulle wanted to keep the FFA in West Germany, but he was not ready to interpret the agreement of 23 October 1954 – which gave a legal basis to the presence of foreign troops – in such a way that it subordinated their maintenance to the desires of the Bonn government¹²².

All parties, Paris included, appeared ready to make some compromises in order to limit the NATO crisis started by the French withdrawal. By autumn 1966, limited success in the various negotiations had helped to establish a *de facto* “14+1” Atlantic Alliance, whereby France remained a full member, but stayed away from most of the common military decisions¹²³. This was helped by the slight improvement in Franco-German relations following the EEC agreement of May and De Gaulle's trip to Moscow, where he had advocated German reunification, and the progress over the status of the FFA. During a meeting with De Gaulle in July, Erhard solemnly declared his desire to keep the French troops¹²⁴. Bonn, as we will see later, was certainly looking for a way out of the deadlock, once it became worried by the threat of Britain and the US

¹²⁰ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.263: Inner Council in Élysée, 02.06.66

¹²¹ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.28: De Gaulle-Lucet meeting, 25.07.66

¹²² Seydoux, *Mission Diplomatique*, p.75

¹²³ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.170

¹²⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: De Gaulle-Erhard meeting 1, 21.07.66

reducing the number of their troops in West Germany¹²⁵. Thus, after the July meeting between De Gaulle and Erhard, it was left to the *Directeurs Politiques*, Jacques de Beaumarchais and Hermann Meyer-Lindenberg, to hammer out the details of a new agreement for the FFA. On 21 December 1966, the dispute formally came to an end after Couve exchanged letters with Willy Brandt, the new West German Foreign Minister.

Furthermore, the discussions around possible cooperation between the FFA and the NATO troops remained for long deadlocked over the issue of adding a political basis to any accord. Despite initially agreeing to this idea during the Brussels NATO Ministerial Meeting in June, France changed its mind soon after and insisted that any agreement should remain strictly limited to the military sphere¹²⁶. De Gaulle was probably no stranger to this change of policy. In his view, the “missions [of French forces] were to be decided by the French government only, and the French and NATO chiefs of staff could only discuss possible links or common actions in case of war¹²⁷. Yet, under the influence of Brosio, France’s Allies eventually agreed on 26 October to go ahead with talks between France and NATO’s military chiefs of staff – respectively led by General Charles Ailleret and General Lyman Lemnitzer – without any directives or pre-established positions¹²⁸. Finally, even in the absence of a definite agreement, France had made it clear that the US could gain access in wartime to some facilities located on its territory, provided it joined the war¹²⁹.

Consequently, by the end of 1966, Paris was confident that it had successfully re-defined its relations with NATO. Couve triumphantly stated “all is being progressively put in place for the establishment, on new bases, of France’s military relations with her allies and the restoration of our full sovereignty”¹³⁰. Moreover, De Gaulle was equally confident that France’s policy towards NATO would act as a role model for other states in the future. As he pointed out during

¹²⁵ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.393 ; In addition, Erhard also wanted to appease the CDU’s Gaullists after the electoral defeats of July 1966, see Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.109

¹²⁶ LBJL: PP, NSF, Agency Files [AF], Box 36: CIA report, 16.09.66

¹²⁷ De Gaulle, Charles, *LNC: XI*, (Paris: Plon, 1987), De Gaulle note, 11.10.66, p.28

¹²⁸ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.189

¹²⁹ NARA: RG59, Executive Secretariat, NSC Meeting Files 1966-1968, Box 1: Katzenbach to Johnson, 10.12.66

¹³⁰ FNSP: CM Carton 2: Speech to l’*Assemblée Nationale*, 03.11.66

the Council of Ministers of 19 October, “it is clear that by leaving NATO, we are anticipating a deep change in the Atlantic Alliance, which was organised for the Cold War and thus called to change”¹³¹.

This perceived significant evolution – the ending of the Cold War in Europe – encouraged France, during the second half of 1966, to pursue even more vigorously its policy of East-West détente. Following De Gaulle’s visit to the Soviet Union, there was a certain feeling amongst French leaders that the trip had produced important results. Couve emphasised to the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, that while the Soviets did not offer any new policy towards Germany and European security, he had been impressed by their frame of mind which was in many ways similar to the French one: a desire to create an atmosphere of peace¹³². Even certain Quai officials and noticeably Puaux, who were generally more wary of the Soviets than De Gaulle or Couve, saw some grounds for optimism. They felt that De Gaulle’s trip had highlighted certain nuances in Russian policy which, while not suggesting fundamental changes in attitude, had hinted at least to moves in France’s direction. The common Franco-Soviet declaration at the end of the visit was based on the French text, the Soviets accepted French formulas and the priority given to détente, and they seemingly no longer saw the US as their sole Western interlocutor¹³³. They could also gain satisfaction from the declaration on European security produced by the Warsaw Pact meeting in Bucharest in early July. The document included some clearly Gaullist passages, with its underlying tone of “Europe for the Europeans”, and its call for the abolition of the military organisations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact¹³⁴.

Driven by this optimistic outlook, the pursuit of East-West détente was becoming even more important in French strategic thinking. As De Gaulle confided to Peyrefitte on 22 September: “I do not want my trip to the Soviet Union to have been in vain. There has to be some follow up. Franco-Soviet cooperation is a grand affair. It has to succeed [...] In all

¹³¹ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.192

¹³² MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.27: Pompidou-Wilson meeting, 06.07.66

¹³³ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2665: Circular Telegram number 196, 12.07.66; Interview with Jacques Andréani, Paris, 15.02.06

¹³⁴ TNA: PREM 13/902: Moscow to FO, Telegram 1325, 11.07.66

domains, it needs to develop. Through this, we will have more exchanges and we will be able to overcome the politics of blocs”¹³⁵. De Gaulle wanted to keep the momentum from his Soviet trip going. The next day, during a meeting with Zorin, he asked about his invitation to Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny – which had been accepted in principle – and pointed out that he hoped their visit could happen as quickly as possible, ideally before the end of 1966¹³⁶. Besides Kosygin’s visit, finally planned for the first week of December, Franco-Soviet relations also received a boost when Peyrefitte went to the Soviet Union in October, soon followed a month later by the new Minister of Finances, Michel Debré. Moreover, France continued to pay attention to the Eastern Europe states when it welcomed the Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov in mid-October.

Relations with the Kremlin leaders remained, obviously, the priority for France in the latter part of 1966. For Kosygin’s visit, the Élysée actually changed the protocol to highlight this point, as De Gaulle welcomed his visitor at the airport despite the fact he was not a head of state¹³⁷. More importantly the General went to great lengths to court the Soviet Prime Minister, in order to enlist his country’s cooperation for the grand goal of East-West détente. He first argued that the Vietnam War, by increasingly drawing America away from Europe and undermining its prestige there, was creating a new situation. There now existed a real possibility for the Soviets and France “to organise a more European policy, which would be well perceived by many Western European states, and maybe even West Germany”¹³⁸. That could only happen, however, if Paris and Moscow offered other perspectives to Bonn, besides subordination to Washington. De Gaulle, in effect, was asking Kosygin to make a gesture to Bonn, to show the latter that the division of Germany was not a permanent feature of Europe¹³⁹. Finally, in what was probably the most fascinating moment of the De Gaulle-Kosygin meetings, the French President confided to Kosygin that he needed Soviet support for domestic reasons. A successful

¹³⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.153

¹³⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.384: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 23.09.66

¹³⁷ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.429

¹³⁸ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: De Gaulle-Kosygin meeting, 01.12.66

¹³⁹ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: De Gaulle-Kosygin meeting 1, 02.12.66

policy of cooperation with the Soviets in Europe could cut the grass under the feet of those in France who wanted closer ties with the US¹⁴⁰. He counted on Moscow to act as a counterweight to Washington, and thus protect France's policy of independence.

At the end of 1966, France appeared very confident about the perspectives for East-West détente in Europe. Certainly, it needed Soviet support in order to satisfy the hopes raised in West Germany¹⁴¹; yet, since Kosygin had not categorically rejected possibility of détente with West Germany, and with the new government in Bonn – as we will be mentioned later – sending out signals that it wanted to improve relations with the Eastern Bloc, De Gaulle could foresee the emergence of some kind of Moscow-Paris-Bonn relationship, which would be essential for his vision of a new European order, with Paris as a mediator. This emerged clearly during a meeting between Brandt and the General, when the French President encouraged his German guest to follow the path of détente, adding that France could help Bonn's position in Moscow and Eastern Europe¹⁴². Moreover, the French were also triumphant as they witnessed their Allies focussing on "détente, entente and cooperation" during the NATO Ministerial Meeting of Paris in mid-December¹⁴³. With their partners seemingly converting to De Gaulle's theses on détente, the French saw further signs confirming that the march towards an East-West rapprochement in Europe was an irreversible one.

That said, the shadow of the Vietnam War continued to hang over East-West links and increasingly, French officials argued that it was the central obstacle to the policy of détente¹⁴⁴. While not providing any significant new elements to its policy towards Indochina in the aftermath of De Gaulle's Phnom Penh speech, Paris stepped up its criticism of American actions in the region. During his meetings with Rusk on 3-4 October, Couve moralised towards his counterpart and ridiculed the idea that a guerrilla fighter could stop fighting before

¹⁴⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.385: De Gaulle-Kosygin meeting 1, 08.12.66

¹⁴¹ De Porte, Anton, *DGESS V*, p.462

¹⁴² MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: De Gaulle-Brandt meeting, 16.12.66

¹⁴³ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 18.12.66, p.482

¹⁴⁴ See for example DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Franco-Soviet Communiqué, 08.12.66, and Couve Interview, 16.12.66

negotiating¹⁴⁵. But, yet again, it was the General who launched the harshest attacks against his ally. In his customary end of year address to the French people, the French President again tied the question of détente to the Vietnam War by contrasting Europe's path of peace with the conflict in Asia. He denounced "an unjust war, as it results from a US intervention" and a "despicable war, as it leads a major nation to destroy a far smaller one"¹⁴⁶.

Despite Vietnam, De Gaulle was in a triumphant mood and no statement better emphasised that than his press conference on 28 October 1966. In a real hymn to France's independence, he denounced all those who wanted to subordinate his country to Moscow, Washington, or any supranational myth. Instead, France had withdrawn from NATO and all signs were pointing "to the re-emergence of our country as a great power"¹⁴⁷. Moreover, the General argued that France's rise as a Great Power served not just its own interests, but also the greater interests of mankind. By once again attacking American policy in Vietnam, and by extension the superpowers' right to impose their will on the peoples of the world, and by defending his country's right to break the superpowers' monopoly on nuclear weapons, France was in fact contributing to the creation of a more multi-polar world that would eventually replace the Cold War's bipolar system¹⁴⁸.

Led by a sort of euphoria, De Gaulle seemed adamant that the Cold War was increasingly a feature of the past, claiming that "between these peoples [in the East] and ours [in the West], the Cold War appears obsolete in a time when a growing and friendly cooperation is being organised"¹⁴⁹. The policy of East-West détente had become such a priority for the General that it overshadowed any other aspects of European project. As he clearly stated, nothing useful could be achieved in Europe, including a political union between the members of the EEC, as long as both East and West did not solve their differences¹⁵⁰. Additionally, De Gaulle was in a strong

¹⁴⁵ Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.534

¹⁴⁶ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, p.130

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.105

¹⁴⁸ *Idem*

¹⁴⁹ Schreiber, *Les Actions*, p.108

¹⁵⁰ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, p.103

position domestically. The economy was still growing rapidly, and public opinion largely supported his foreign policy initiatives¹⁵¹.

VI. Challenges Ahead

Yet, if by all accounts this had been a successful year for Gaullist diplomacy, it would be misleading to ignore some of the challenges and criticisms that had been building up in parallel. This was true for his policy of détente with the Eastern bloc, which was the subject of many sceptical assessments within diplomatic circles, in particular from opponents of the General. For example, American Under-Secretary of State, George Ball, dismissed his designs, arguing that the “Soviets see De Gaulle’s power pretensions as a joke” and adding that they only wanted to exploit him for his divisive potential in the West¹⁵². Indeed, according to an unverifiable rumour, the KGB leaders greatly celebrated France’s withdrawal from NATO, pretending this was in large parts the result of their influence¹⁵³. At the same time, there was more reliable evidence suggesting a certain Soviet uneasiness in regards to France’s disengagement from the Atlantic organisation. Officially, Gromyko, and other officials, congratulated France for its initiative, praising it as a new affirmation of political independence¹⁵⁴. In private, however, the Soviets, along with some of its allies, worried that Bonn would gain more authority within the Atlantic Alliance, and Moscow also feared that Paris’ example could undermine the cohesion of the Warsaw Pact¹⁵⁵.

The Soviets, and certain satellites, undoubtedly worried about the impact of De Gaulle’s diplomacy within their own bloc. As Puaux told American officials, “the Romanian Ambassador [in Paris] Victor Dimitriu informed me that De Gaulle’s effort to ‘unfreeze’ the Cold War and to force reconsideration of the NATO organisation were having a beneficial effect in Romania, but

¹⁵¹ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.164, GDP grew by 5.2% in 1966; IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.260, support for De Gaulle’s foreign policy was consistently high during 1966, see annex 3.

¹⁵² NARA: RG59, Bohlen, Box 34: Ball-Hasluck meeting, 13.04.66

¹⁵³ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.420

¹⁵⁴ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2665: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 903-905, 18.03.66

¹⁵⁵ For the mixed Eastern European reaction to the withdrawal from NATO, see DDF: 1966, Tome I: Note of *Sous-Direction d’Europe Orientale*, 13.05.66

constituted an embarrassment to the Soviets”¹⁵⁶. Romania certainly relied on the French model, but in many ways it was an exception within the Communist bloc. Other states, and Poland in particular as confirmed by its Ambassador in Paris, Jan Druto, tended to instinctively adopt a cautious approach when it came to undermining the status quo¹⁵⁷. In the words of Wladislaw Gomulka, Secretary General of the Polish Communist Party, if Poland was happy in theory to destroy the military pacts in Europe, this was not a realistic policy¹⁵⁸.

The Kremlin leaders, and their partners in the satellite states, appeared reluctant to follow the General completely on the path to European détente. For Jacques Andréani, of the Quai’s Soviet desk, the Soviet regime was “incapable at this stage of embarking on foreign policy ventures which would upset the careful balance it maintains in Eastern Europe and which would stimulate disequilibrium in the Soviet Union itself”¹⁵⁹. Moreover, the limits of Soviet attitude extended to more practical aspects of Franco-Soviet cooperation, especially trade. During an inner council on 17 October 1966, Pompidou expressed the following concerns: “We have to develop our trade with the Eastern bloc. But what worries me is that we are taking unilateral decisions. In fact it should be a trade off. We are being drawn in. We are giving twice”¹⁶⁰. The new Ambassador in Moscow, Olivier Wormser, agreed with Pompidou in his assessment of Debré’s visit to Moscow in November. According to him, the Soviets claimed that Franco-Soviet cooperation was privileged, but in reality they were looking out for other economic partners as well disposed as France. He believed that Moscow tended to view cooperation exclusively in terms of benefits, and it would demand intensive work to make the cooperation more balanced¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁶ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2173: US Embassy in Paris to Rusk, Telegram number 6563, 06.04.66

¹⁵⁷ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Meeting with Druto, 11.06.66

¹⁵⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.383: Couve-Gomulka meeting, 20.05.66

¹⁵⁹ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1964-1966, Box 2188: McBride to State Department, Telegram number 2163, 16.08.66

¹⁶⁰ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.160

¹⁶¹ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2665: Wormser to Couve, Telegram number 5042-5057, 21.11.66; As Debré’s *directeur de cabinet* told the British Ambassador to Paris, Sir Patrick Reilly, the French Finance Minister feared that De Gaulle’s opening to the Soviet Union would come to nothing unless there was a determined effort to implement policy at the higher levels. Franco-Soviet trade commercial exchanges only amounted to 2% of Franco-Soviet trade, and faced obstacles because of the differences between the economic systems. See TNA: FO

Some French officials, though, went even further and questioned whether the Soviet Union's own nature could ever allow it to engage in meaningful cooperation with France over European affairs. This idea was highlighted very clearly by Philippe Baudet, Wormser's predecessor in Moscow, in his last report before leaving the Soviet capital. In his view, the Kremlin's hosts continued to see the policy of the status quo as the wisest, and continued to present the German problem in the same terms. Any agreement between French and Soviet policy was only temporary. As he powerfully stated:

I leave the Soviet Union with the deep conviction that there is no longer, if ever there was, and there will never be again common measure between the European states and the Soviet Union. Disproportion exists everywhere: in dimensions, in population, in climate, in military power [...] The Soviet Union is not really a state: it is a subcontinent, whose vital interests are in Asia and Europe, and for that reason it cannot be part of either an Asian or European system¹⁶².

Baudet, in effect, rejected the idea that Moscow could ever accept the role De Gaulle wanted it to play in his modernised Concert of Nations.

The fundamental developments in the international system in late 1966 gave credence to Baudet's view. Despite the situation in Vietnam, Soviet leaders were still ready to deal with the US on a certain number of questions. This included cultural exchanges, the outer space treaty signed in December, and of course the talks for a Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT]. In the autumn, Rusk and Gromyko achieved some sort of breakthrough over arms control and nuclear non-proliferation, and the American Secretary of State was able to present a treaty proposal to his NATO allies in December¹⁶³. Additionally, the upheaval in the PRC, linked to the Cultural Revolution, and the growing Sino-Soviet tension, served to draw Moscow and Washington closer together. As Gromyko pointed out in his confidential report to the Politburo on 13 January 1967, good relations with the US could act as a bulwark against the "adventurous schemes" of

371/189114: Reilly to Brown, 02.12.66; Debré, Michel, Trois Républiques pour une France: mémoires tome IV, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), pp.133-134

¹⁶² MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2665: Baudet to Couve, Telegram number 3879-3938, 23.08.66

¹⁶³ See Wolfe, Soviet Power, p.267; Dumbrell, President Johnson, pp.43-45

China¹⁶⁴. The US and the Soviet Union, as Gordon Chang argues, “were still trying to arrange some sort of Pax Superpowerica”¹⁶⁵.

The challenges to the Gaullist designs also extended to its *Westpolitik*. France’s withdrawal from NATO had posed a serious threat to the organisation, especially when it combined with other problems besetting the Atlantic Alliance. Thus, in the summer 1966, a serious crisis erupted over the issue of offset payments for the British and American troops in West Germany¹⁶⁶. Erhard, facing an economic recession and budget troubles, claimed he could not increase military spending to offset the costs of the British troops, while London, in the midst of a sterling crisis, argued that it would withdraw its troops unless it received full offset. The situation escalated when Erhard informed Washington in September that West Germany would not be able to fulfill its offset agreements with the US either, contributing two months later to the fall of his government¹⁶⁷. To complicate matters further, US Senator Mike Mansfield introduced a resolution on 31 August stating that “a substantial reduction of US forces permanently stationed in Europe can be made without adversely affecting either our resolve or ability to meet our commitment under the North Atlantic Treaty ...”. The American President realised that a British troop withdrawal from West Germany would increase domestic pressure in the US for a similar move, and that he had to react to prevent the unravelling of the Atlantic Alliance¹⁶⁸.

Indeed, the various crises shook the member-states of NATO into action. Johnson, despite divisions within his government, refused to start a “war” with De Gaulle¹⁶⁹. He told Ball that he did not want to get into a “pissing match” with De Gaulle, which “would serve to build De Gaulle and France up”¹⁷⁰. A public dispute would accomplish little, especially since according to Francis Bator, Johnson’s adviser on European affairs: “... the central point about

¹⁶⁴ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p.162

¹⁶⁵ Chang, Gordon, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.275

¹⁶⁶ For offset see chapter 1, footnote 108

¹⁶⁷ See especially Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, pp.192-207; Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, pp.115-121

¹⁶⁸ Johnson, Lyndon, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p.307

¹⁶⁹ For the debates within the US government, see Wenger, “Crisis and Opportunity”, pp.34-39

¹⁷⁰ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.104

the NATO crisis is that De Gaulle has no real cards. If we play our hand skillfully, we can manage to carry on with NATO without him. In many ways, he is like a lightweight jujitsu artist. All his leverage comes from our over-exertion”¹⁷¹. Johnson and his collaborators understood that they could not contest the General’s decisions or force him to change his mind. Geographical realities meant that any threat to deprive France of American protection was either not credible or plain silly. It would be similar to “threatening to abandon Kentucky in the face of a land attack by Canada. It is hard to do unless one is prepared to throw in Ohio”¹⁷².

Rather than engage in a futile struggle with De Gaulle, NATO, as suggested by British Minister of Defence, Denis Healey, could now focus on moving ahead with projects that France had previously blocked¹⁷³. In other words, Paris’ disengagement from the Atlantic organisation provided an opportunity to improve not only the mechanisms of the Atlantic Alliance, but also its cohesion by encouraging a multilateral response to the French threat¹⁷⁴. Consequently, following its efforts in the autumn 1965, the US government sought to consolidate Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara’s proposals for the Alliance’s nuclear strategy. It made, throughout 1966, a serious information effort about operational nuclear issues, leading to the creation of two groups in December: the Nuclear Defense Affairs Committee [NDAC], open to all interested allies, and a restricted body, the Nuclear Planning Group [NPG], limited to seven members. This was a very important success for the US because it meant it finally consolidated a nuclear consensus with its allies, after years of debate on a question that was at the heart of transatlantic problems¹⁷⁵. In the same way, in order to deal with the offset crisis, Johnson decided to favour trilateral negotiations between West Germany, the US and Britain¹⁷⁶. By late 1966, the fourteen had not only survived De Gaulle’s institutional test and successfully sorted out a new France-

¹⁷¹ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 177: Bator to Johnson, 08.03.66

¹⁷² FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 138, 07.03.66; Clearly, the US government quickly realised it had to accept De Gaulle’s decisions vis-à-vis NATO. As Johnson told his Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, “when a man asks you to leave his house, you don’t argue; you get your hat and go”, Johnson, Vantage Point, p.305

¹⁷³ DDF: 1966, Tome I: Courcel to Couve, Telegram number 961-964, 11.03.66

¹⁷⁴ See for example Wenger, “Crisis and Opportunity”, pp.34-61; Ellison, “Defeating the General”, especially pp.94-102

¹⁷⁵ See chapter 1, footnote 191; Bozo, Deux Stratégies, pp.180-181

¹⁷⁶ Zimmermann, Money and Security, p.209

NATO relationship, but they had managed to make the Atlantic organisation more rational and efficient¹⁷⁷.

Furthermore, they also started to address the second challenge posed by the French initiative, that is to say the continued relevance of NATO in a period of lessened tension in Europe. Johnson and his advisers realised that Paris's actions created an opportunity to revitalise the Alliance by stressing its role in East-West détente¹⁷⁸. In that respect, the US found valuable allies in the smaller states of the Alliance, in particular Belgium. France's disengagement from NATO had created a certain climate of uncertainty and anxiety, and many smaller states feared for the future of the Alliance if Bonn was to follow Paris in its policies of independence. What would happen in 1969, when the North Atlantic Treaty was up for review and states were free to exercise the withdrawal clause? Under the impulse of its Foreign Minister, Pierre Harmel, and building on ideas put forward in 1964 by the Canadian Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, Belgium pushed for an exercise on the future role of the Alliance¹⁷⁹. Harmel had three clear aims with this study: help maintain all the members in the Alliance; define a collective political mission for the Alliance, and in particular towards ending the East-West division in Europe; and finally, use this renewed emphasis on détente to convince France to remain a member in the Alliance after 1969¹⁸⁰. On 16 December 1966, the North Atlantic Council formally authorised the Harmel exercise. The *communiqué* pointed out that the Council had "decided to undertake a large analysis of the changes that have taken place in the international sphere since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, in view of determining their influence on the Atlantic Alliance and to define the tasks to be accomplished in order to reinforce the Atlantic Alliance as an element of lasting peace"¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 223, 07.12.66; Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.170

¹⁷⁸ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.110

¹⁷⁹ See Locher, and Nuenlist, "What Role for NATO?", pp.193-194 for Pearson's ideas

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Pierre Harmel, Brussels, 02.04.04

¹⁸¹ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: NATO Council Meeting *Communiqué*, 16.12.66

The Belgian initiative suited to large extent American aims. On a tactical level, it possessed the not insignificant advantage of coming from a European initiative¹⁸². More importantly, Washington not only wanted to further involve NATO in the process of East-West détente, but also viewed this as an opportunity to restore its leadership on this vital question. On the recommendation of his advisers, Johnson decided to outline his European policy during a speech, on 7 October 1966, to the National Conference of Editorial Writers in New York. The American President called for progress on three fronts: modernising NATO and strengthening the Atlantic Alliance; furthering the integration of the Western European Community; and accelerating progress in East-West relations. In regards to the latter point, he called for the immediate mending of the European division and added that it had to be “healed with the consent of the East European states and with the consent of the Soviet Union”¹⁸³. As a result, the picture of East-West détente in Europe looked increasingly complex and fluid, as both NATO and the US sought a more significant role. This development undoubtedly threatened Paris’s attempt to develop a privileged dialogue with Moscow.

In parallel to Atlantic affairs, the Johnson administration adopted a more active stand towards the monetary debates. Following the agreement at the annual IMF meeting in September 1965 to study ways to improve the international monetary system, the US pushed hard for the creation of a new reserve asset that could either substitute or supplement gold, whereas the French argued that such planning was not needed. This was a particularly important development. Whereas the US had previously been on the defensive when France called for a reform of the international monetary system, Washington now championed change while Paris tried to defend the status quo¹⁸⁴. Despite warnings from his adviser that too rigid an attitude might lead to French isolation in future debates, on 25 February De Gaulle chose to give his officials very restrictive instructions. They were essentially asked to follow a negative strategy,

¹⁸² FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol. XIII: Document 221, 26.11.66

¹⁸³ LBJL: PP, NSF, Speech File, Box 5: Johnson speech to the National Conference of Editorial Writers in New York, 07.10.66

¹⁸⁴ See chapter 1, footnote 190; Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.130-131; Morse, *Foreign Policy*, p.236. French feared that the creation of reserve assets would just perpetuate American dominance under different conditions.

whereby they would try to keep negotiations open and hope to convince the G10 to collectively refuse unreasonable decisions¹⁸⁵.

Yet, this approach hardly proved successful. At the G10 July meeting in The Hague, the other EEC states moved closer to accepting the principle of the creation of a new reserve asset, and accepted that the IMF be involved in the debates about the latter¹⁸⁶. To make matters worse, France's Common Market partners had also seemingly accepted the fact that the removal of the American balance of payments deficit should not be a precondition to any reform of the international monetary system. Considering Paris' isolated position, Debré decided in late 1966 to adopt a new strategy that would focus on enlisting the support of the other states of the European Community¹⁸⁷.

Achieving and maintaining this unity of the Six on monetary matters would be no easy feat for France, especially with other negotiations threatening to undermine the Community's cohesion. The end of the EEC crisis had finally enabled some progress on the Kennedy Round, and the start of serious talks on the agricultural part of the GATT negotiations. But, there was still a large gap between all the parties, especially but not exclusively on agriculture, and there was no guarantee of success before the American Presidential mandate expired on 30 June 1967¹⁸⁸. More significantly, the return of the British question to EEC affairs posed an altogether more complex challenge for France. On 10 November, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced to the House of Commons that "I intend to engage in a series of discussions with each of the Heads of Government of the Six, for the purpose of establishing whether it appears likely that essential British and Commonwealth interests could be safeguarded if Britain

¹⁸⁵ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 28, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Dromer to De Gaulle 31.01.66, and Note by De Gaulle, 25.02.66. De Gaulle believed gold was the only valid international currency and he dismissed as futile the plans to create new currency reserves. Moreover, he felt that France's "isolation" was meaningless as long as its balance of payments was in good shape, see De Gaulle, LNC: X, Personal Note, 31.01.66, p.245

¹⁸⁶ For Hague decisions, see DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Communiqué after the Hague G10 meeting, 26.07.66; MAEF: Direction Économique, Coopération Économique 1967-1974, Vol.884: Brunet Circular Telegram number 213, 01.08.66. The IMF's involvement was a blow because France considered it as a tool of US domination and the dollar hegemony, see Haberer, Jean-Yves, DGESS III, p.156.

¹⁸⁷ Debré, Mémoires IV, pp.164-167

¹⁸⁸ See Preeg, Traders and Diplomats, pp.139-141; Evans, Kennedy Round, pp.238-239; Zeiler, American trade, p.225

were to accept the Treaty of Rome and join EEC”, before concluding that “we mean business”¹⁸⁹. Part of Wilson’s long-term strategy focussed on making it difficult for De Gaulle to veto Britain, as he had done in 1963, by showing its sincerity and willingness to enter the Community¹⁹⁰.

VII. Conclusion

Throughout 1966, France was present on all diplomatic fronts. Besides withdrawing from NATO and recovering its full sovereignty, Paris had taken steps towards fostering an East-West rapprochement in Europe and building a solid cooperation with the Kremlin leaders. Additionally, from his platform in Cambodia, De Gaulle had powerfully denounced American actions in Indochina, thereby strengthening his prestige in the Third World. The French President was in a triumphant mood, convinced that while the march towards détente and overcoming the Cold War order in Europe would be long and difficult, it was nonetheless irreversible. He felt he could look to the future with optimism, noting that “guaranteed in its institutions, free in its foreign policy, experiencing economic growth and with a strong currency, France is walking towards a future of progress, independence, and peace”¹⁹¹.

Yet, fundamental developments in the international sphere were presenting new challenges to the Gaullist designs. Not only would France have to deal with increasing competition on the East-West détente scene, but it faced the prospect of difficult negotiations in its *Westpolitik*, be it in the monetary, trade or EEC sphere. The fate of all these questions would depend to a large extent on the attitude adopted by the new Grand Coalition government in Bonn, under chancellor Georg Kiesinger. Erhard’s successor made it immediately clear that he wanted to improve relations with the Soviet Union and its satellite states, and that he perceived

¹⁸⁹ Wilson, Harold, The Labour Government, 1964-1970: A Personal Record, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p.299; for more on the British decision to probe the Six, see Parr, Britain's policy, especially pp.70-95

¹⁹⁰ Parr, Britain's policy, pp.101

¹⁹¹ De Gaulle, LNC: XI, Draft for a manifesto on general policy, Not dated late 1966, p.50

Franco-German cooperation as vital in that matter¹⁹². What was less clear, however, was whether Kiesinger intended to show real independence from Washington, and follow in Paris' footsteps.

¹⁹² MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1608: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 7063-7069, 13.12.66

Chapter V: Illusion of Independence Part 1, January-June 1967

I. Introduction

1966 had been by all accounts the year of diplomatic achievements and diplomatic flamboyance for France. After the withdrawal from the integrated military structures of NATO, De Gaulle's trip to the Soviet Union and his solemn condemnation of American policy in Vietnam during the speech in Phnom Penh, Paris believed it had reclaimed its Great Power status and ended the year on a euphoric note.

However, in 1967, the French president and his government faced a very different set of challenges. In addition to the parliamentary elections in March, could Paris gain satisfaction in all the complex negotiations – including the Kennedy Round, the reform of the international monetary system and the British application to join the EEC – affecting the Western world? Could it convince its Common Market partners to follow its path and show more independence vis-à-vis the powerful ally on the other side of the Atlantic? Could France convince Moscow and the Eastern bloc to be more flexible towards Bonn's new *Ostpolitik*?

Behind all these difficulties lay the question of whether France could convert its new found status into concrete influence over its partners and allies, and this despite having used two of its best diplomatic trump cards the previous year – the withdrawal from NATO and the trip to the Soviet Union. France was driven by the desire to be recognised as a major player on the international scene, but it was still unclear to what extent it would be listened to by other states.

II. New Challenges in the West

By 1967, the Atlantic Alliance had effectively settled the institutional crisis caused by France's withdrawal from NATO, and devised a working compromise. Whereas military questions would be handled by the Fourteen in the Defence Planning Committee [DPC], France

would join its allies in the North Atlantic Council [NAC] to study matters of general significance¹. Moreover, the Fourteen, under American impetus, stuck to their policy of neither appeasing nor attacking France. Rusk was particularly adamant that while they should encourage Paris' participation in any NATO consultation or studies, they should equally be prepared to deal with French obstruction². This attitude helped to solve some of the remaining problems between France and NATO. The essential Ailleret-Lemnitzer negotiations on the future role of French troops in the common defence were still stalling by mid-1967, but at least an arrangement had been reached in March between the US and France regarding the use of pipe-lines in peacetime³.

At the same time, France's disengagement offered an opportunity to inject some needed energy and sense of purpose into the Alliance. Under the auspices of the DPC, NATO finally adopted flexible response as its strategy on 9 May 1967, after more than four years of American lobbying⁴. This was an important political success for the US because it meant "a decisive step towards ending the strategic disagreements within the Atlantic Alliance", and reinforced both NATO's cohesion and American leadership⁵. Additionally, the Harmel exercise – where Belgium and the US took the lead – progressively emerged as a useful tool to underline NATO's continuing political relevance in East-West affairs and to guarantee a political recommitment to the Alliance⁶. On 17 March, the exercise took an important step forward when the NATO states agreed that it should include four sub-groups, studying the following topics: East-West relations; Intra-Alliance relations; General questions of Defence Policy; and Developments in regions outside the NATO treaty area⁷.

France, for its part, paid little attention to the Atlantic organisation in early 1967. Convinced that he had fulfilled his aim of restoring France's independence, De Gaulle happily

¹ Haftendorn, *NATO*, p.59

² FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 245, 06.04.67

³ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.188-189; Ailleret and Lemnitzer easily agreed on military questions, but talks were at a standstill for political reasons; see chapter 4, footnotes 8 and 129 for the pipe-lines.

⁴ Kaplan, Lawrence, "The US and NATO in the Johnson Years", in Divine, Robert (ed.), *The Johnson Years, volume three*, p.134

⁵ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.182

⁶ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 236, 11.02.67

⁷ Haftendorn, Helga, "The Adaptation of the NATO Alliance to a Period of Détente: The 1967 Harmel Report", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, pp.292-293

oversaw the departure of the last foreign troops in March. He did not worry either about the adoption of flexible response, because in his mind it simply confirmed the developments of the previous years. The US, thanks to its dominant position within NATO, had already modified *de facto* their nuclear strategy, and thus the one of the Atlantic Alliance⁸. French officials were no more concerned about the Harmel exercise, claiming that they wanted to receive additional information before taking a position⁹. To a certain extent, Paris was deceived by the tactics of the Belgian government. Brussels voluntarily avoided introducing politically sensitive questions in the first stages of the study, so as to “avoid frightening off any hesitant governments”, and to give the “French as small a target as possible until the exercise is well under way”¹⁰.

Instead of NATO, France’s *Westpolitik* seemed essentially focussed on the predominant international negotiations of the time, that is to say the Kennedy Round, the reform of the international monetary system, and the possible British application to join the EEC. According to Jean Dromer, an advisor in the Élysée, in a long note written to De Gaulle, all these questions were closely tied to one another because they presented France with the same essential challenge: “Will France convince its [EEC] partners, by persuasion, initiatives or veto, that Europe is ready to claim and achieve its independence, i.e. that it must free itself from the US and Anglo-Saxon supremacy?”. Considering the strong American pressures, Dromer insisted that France needed to stop “this generally defensive attitude whereby we fight on our own, with the neutrality of our partners of the Common Market”, and instead “try and animate them so they veer in our direction”¹¹. He was effectively suggesting that France needed a more flexible Western policy, in which it would make more efforts to rally its European partners, and not solely rely on independent action against the American hegemony.

This applied especially to monetary strategy. France had consistently opposed the Bretton Woods system because it conferred excessive privileges to the reserve currencies – sterling and

⁸ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.183

⁹ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.276: Alphan-Rostow meeting, 14.02.67

¹⁰ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 236, 11.02.67

¹¹ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Note by Dromer, 07.01.67

the dollar – and it enabled the US to continue financing its balance of payments deficit, through the accumulation of dollars by foreign central banks, without having to resort to the same discipline that other states were held to¹². By 1967, however, as we saw in chapter four, Paris had found itself isolated as most of the G10 states supported the creation of a new international currency, without removing the privileges of the reserve currencies. In a context where the Six were split on these issues, Minister of Finance Michel Debré believed that France should try to attract its EEC partners around a common proposal, or at minimum try to associate them to an effort to delay unwelcome reforms¹³. Debré's concerns convinced De Gaulle to a certain extent, and accordingly he provided less rigid instructions for the monetary negotiations. While still critical of the Bretton Woods system, France accepted the possibility of a more extensive resort to the IMF's credit facilities and the creation of Special Drawing Rights [SDR], as long as the IMF rules were revised to give more influence to the European states, and the credits granted were repaid within a predetermined time-frame¹⁴.

This new strategy yielded good results, especially during the meeting of EEC financial ministers in Munich on 17-18 April. Believing they deserved more influence in international monetary institutions, the Six agreed “to seek a common position in the present discussions on the reform of the international monetary system and to maintain a close cooperation in the future” in order “to safeguard their legitimate interests”¹⁵. The Six had seemingly reached a compromise agreement to defend the following points: the aim of the negotiations was to create “drawing rights” within the IMF, rather than a new reserve asset; the SDR would only be created if a lack of international liquidities was collectively acknowledged; IMF voting rules had to be

¹² FNSP: Fonds Michel Debré Ministre des Finances [4DE] Carton 72: Conference in *l'École Polytechnique*, 24.05.67

¹³ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.222; Schenk, Catherine, “Sterling, International Monetary Reform and Britain's Applications to join the European Economic Community in the 1960s”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol.11/3 (2002), p.363. France and Belgium wanted to delay reforms and concentrate on forcing the US to correct its deficit, and the Dutch and Italians were ready to go ahead with proposals for a new reserve unit. West Germans were undecided, Luxemburg did not express a view; MAEF: Direction Économique, Coopération Économique 1967-1974, Vol.886: Note on Debré-French Ambassadors to the EEC states meeting, 09.01.67

¹⁴ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Draft instructions for French delegates in international monetary meetings, 22.02.67

¹⁵ LBJL: Papers of Francis Bator [Bator], SF, Box 10: EEC Official Communiqué, 18.04.67

changed to give the Six a veto on key decisions¹⁶. The French considered this an important success, and Debré insisted to officials involved in the joint IMF-G10 meetings that they needed to defend the Munich accords. In particular, he wanted them to focus on maintaining and strengthening the cohesion between the states of the European Community¹⁷.

Munich certainly offered the EEC an opportunity to flex its collective muscles in the international monetary sphere, but it had not erased all divisions between the Six. Whereas France could assert that what was to be created was another form of international credit, many of its European partners were still seeking an asset, or a form of international currency that was “gold-like”¹⁸. These differences quickly came to the fore in the months following the Munich conference. Paris’ partners remained firm on a certain number of points, including giving the EEC veto power and more influence in the IMF, but significantly they were moving closer to accepting the creation of a new monetary instrument that could complement, and eventually replace, gold and the reserve currencies in the running of the international monetary system. Dromer complained that France’s relatively defensive strategy was being “gnawed away” by the work of the IMF’s experts on the rules for the use of SDR¹⁹. To make matters worse, the other crucial negotiations going on in parallel risked further jeopardising the unity of the Six.

At the start of 1967, six months before the expiration of the US Congressional mandate, there were still plenty of unresolved issues in the Kennedy Round, with two disputes in particular threatening to breakdown the entire talks. Firstly, the Americans wanted access to the European grain market. Secondly, in the chemical sector, the EEC wanted the US to abolish the so-called American Selling Price [ASP], a system of tariffs on four classes of imports. Washington refused to do so without concessions. Yet, despite these obstacles, all parties were determined to reach an agreement, and to make some compromises in order to achieve some sort

¹⁶ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.224

¹⁷ FNSP: 4DE Carton 6: Instructions for French delegation in Washington, 21.04.67

¹⁸ Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.138-139

¹⁹ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 32, Affaires Économiques: Dromer to De Gaulle, 21.06.67

of package settlement²⁰. Lyndon Johnson remained committed to free trade, and believed that “if we could demonstrate our ability to move ahead in an economic partnership, especially with members of the Common Market, we could greatly improve the chances for a healthy NATO and for an increased international monetary cooperation”²¹. French officials also ultimately supported an accord, as long as it was on the basis of strict reciprocity²². Eventually, after a series of marathon sessions in Geneva, the negotiators reached a deal on 15 May. The Kennedy Round brought balanced and reciprocal rewards in the industrial sector, with tariff reductions averaging 36-39% against the original aim of 50%, but few advantages for exporters in the agricultural field²³.

As Ludlow points out, the Kennedy Round helped French interests in two ways. Paris realised that a successful outcome in Geneva would benefit its economy, whereas a breakdown, especially if blamed on French rigidity, could have disastrous economic and political consequences. At the same time the GATT talks also strengthened rather than undermined solidarity between the Six²⁴. French leaders sought to capitalise on this latter fact, by consistently contrasting the reasonable European proposals with the supposed blackmail and negative pressure employed by their American interlocutors²⁵. This was especially apparent during De Gaulle’s press conference of 16 May: “I will only say that it seems to me that a certain impression of the Six’s solidarity vis-à-vis the outside world has been felt recently. In the economic domain this is maybe partly linked to the fact that, in the great tariff battle of Geneva, and even though we achieved an agreement based on reciprocal compensations, the more ‘Atlantic’ states, that is to say the US, Britain, and the Scandinavians, showed that their interests were very different than those of the Community”²⁶.

²⁰ For the tense 1967 negotiations, see Zeiler, *American trade*, pp.232-236; Preeg, *Traders and Diplomats*, pp.159-192; Evans, *Kennedy Round*, pp.265-273

²¹ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p.312

²² ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Note by Dromer, 07.01.67

²³ Zeiler, *American trade*, p.237, 239

²⁴ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.128

²⁵ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.30: Couve-Brandt meeting, 28.04.67

²⁶ De Gaulle, *DM: V*, p.168

However, if the Kennedy Round was an important landmark for the EEC, as the first GATT negotiation conducted collectively by the Community, its positive impact was under threat of being undone once Harold Wilson, British Prime Minister, started his probing tour of the Six' capitals in January-March. He wanted to "establish Britain's sincerity in approaching the European Community" and "emphasised the political case in favour of British accession and enlargement, challenging the French view of the Community". At the same time, he hoped "his exposition of an enlarged Europe's 'strength and independence'" would "appeal to de Gaulle"²⁷. Wilson's strategy, though, did not really convince the General. While the President welcomed his interlocutor's emphasis on independence, he firmly argued that British membership would completely alter the nature of the European Community, if only because of the agricultural question and the weakness of the pound²⁸. The latter issue was very significant. Because of Article 108 of the Rome Treaty, which committed members to help a partner experiencing a balance-of-payments crisis, there was a fear that the Six would have to support the sterling exchange rate if Britain joined Europe²⁹. For Debré, it was simply inconceivable to let Britain join the Common Market under the current international monetary system³⁰. Additionally, French leaders and officials generally opposed the principle of enlargement, and shared a certain wariness towards what they perceived as the Labour government's sudden conversion to the cause of the EEC. Within the Quai's *Direction des Affaires Économiques et Financières*, which played an important role in the management of European affairs, there was a very strong feeling that accepting Britain in the Community would lead to the dissolution of the EEC, and to the creation of a large zone of free trade instead³¹.

If the immediate reactions of the French government to Wilson's visit were certainly unfavourable, De Gaulle also realised he needed to choose a strategy that could avoid a repeat of

²⁷ Parr, *Britain's policy*, pp.111-113

²⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.386: De Gaulle-Wilson meeting, 24.01.67

²⁹ Schenk, "Sterling, International Monetary Reform", p.348; Bossuat, Gérard, "De Gaulle et la seconde candidature britannique aux Communautés européennes 1966-1969", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, p.517

³⁰ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 01.02.67, p.267

³¹ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.418; Badel, Laurence, "Le Quai d'Orsay, la Grande-Bretagne et l'élargissement de la Communauté (1963-1969)", in Catala, Michel (ed.), *Cinquante Ans après la déclaration Schuman: Histoire de la Construction Européenne*, (Nantes: Ouest éditions, 2001), pp.241, 247-250

the first British application to the EEC. As he said during the Council of Ministers on 1 February, “the key is not to be drawn into ever lasting talks, like in 1962. But also to make clear that there is no easy solution, that the pure and simple entry is not so pure and simple”³². By preventing the opening of negotiations with London, Paris would not have to resort to a political veto like in January 1963. This approach, according to French ambassador in Moscow, Olivier Wormser, might still cause a crisis, but at least a far less serious one than if they followed the same procedure as in 1961-1963³³. This was a vital consideration, at a time when France was seeking to maintain the unity of the Six on other matters, especially the monetary talks. De Gaulle even tried to deter the British from filing an early application. Thus, during a meeting with Patrick Reilly, British Ambassador in Paris, he argued that the economic situation was not favourable for any dramatic initiative, and that there would still be the problem of how to fit Britain in the European Community in light of its ties to the US³⁴.

London, however – along with Copenhagen, Dublin and Oslo later on – ignored De Gaulle’s advice and officially announced its application to join the EEC on 2 May. The reactions amongst French leaders showed a certain consensus. Most of the Ministers still opposed British membership, and underlined the insurmountable problems tied to agriculture and the pound sterling. They also insisted that the government needed to pay extra attention to the presentation of its policy, if only to deal with a public opinion favourable to Britain. The General, for his part, believed that there was no rush to take a dramatic decision, and he remained confident that the ball would be in France’s court at the appropriate time³⁵. His press conference on 16 May essentially reflected these views. While De Gaulle avoided the spectacular style of January 1963 so as not to infuriate the other members of the EEC, he nonetheless sought to nip negotiations with London in the bud by emphasising the problematic nature of a British membership – what observers came to call the ‘velvet veto’. The result was a fairly defensive posture whereby the

³² Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.267

³³ FNSP: CM Carton 8: Wormser to Couve, 14.04.67

³⁴ TNA: Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO] 33/62: Paris to FO, Telegram number 255, 20.03.67

³⁵ See Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.3, 03-10.05.67, pp.268-272;

French President described the Common Market as a sort of miracle, which would not be able to withstand a British entry. Instead of membership, he suggested an association between Britain and the European Community³⁶.

The speech hardly had the desired effect. The British, unlike in 1963, were determined to continue in the face of De Gaulle's obstruction, and based their strategy on the long-term hope that the application could outlast him³⁷. At the same time, the French President could not easily convince the other EEC states – a reality which emerged clearly during the Rome meeting of the Six Heads of State. Originally meant to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Rome Treaty, the meeting quickly shifted to the question of enlargement. On the one hand, the Benelux states led the way in arguing that Article 237 of the Rome Treaty legally obliged the EEC to start talks with the new applicants. France, on the other hand, wanted the Six to first discuss together the question of enlargement before opening negotiations with the new candidates³⁸. The debates in June quickly became quite acrimonious, but despite sharp differences, the European Community Council agreed on 26 June to request the Commission's opinion on enlargement. Couve "specifically vetoed the Belgian proposal to invite a British spokesman, but he was unable to block the 'compromise' suggestion that Britain be heard at the 4-5 July meeting of the West European Union [WEU] in The Hague"³⁹.

France faced the difficult challenge of maintaining the unity of the Six on monetary matters, while preventing Britain from joining the EEC. At the same time, in parallel to these negotiations, 1967 witnessed a new round of the bitter struggle between Paris and Washington for Bonn's favours. The new West German government, established in December 1966 and led by Chancellor Georg Kiesinger and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt, immediately sought to repair relations with France. The summit meeting on 13-14 January proved a great success⁴⁰. French leaders obviously welcomed this change of policy, even if Couve struck a cautious note by

³⁶ For the press conference, see De Gaulle, *DM: V*, pp.156-174

³⁷ Parr, *Britain's policy*, pp.155, 160

³⁸ FNSP: CM Carton 9: Conference of Six Heads of State, 30.05.67

³⁹ LBJL: PP, NSF, SF, Box 48: CIA Memo, 01.08.67

⁴⁰ For the memorandums of conversation [memcons] of the summit, see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29

pointing out that “time will tell if the Germans can better resist the Anglo-Saxon pressures”. De Gaulle, though, sounded more optimistic: “They [Germans] are getting closer to us. We have to use that to our advantage in framework of the Six, especially for monetary questions”⁴¹. Regarding the British application to the EEC, Kiesinger certainly gave no signs of wanting to start a conflict with France over the issue, while Franco-German cooperation in monetary affairs proved its worth when both states tried to forge a common EEC position during the Munich meeting⁴². This does not mean, however, that Paris and Bonn had ironed out all differences. German officials still believed they were limits to Franco-German cooperation, and they were not keen to start a conflict against the “supremacy” of the dollar⁴³.

At the same time, Bonn wanted more independence from Washington and not to act, in the words of Brandt, “like a girl who constantly has to be reassured by her boyfriend that he still loves her”⁴⁴. Waiting until late January to agree to restart the trilateral negotiations, Kiesinger made an unprecedented public critique of American foreign policy over the NPT, announcing that American and German interests were not always identical, and that the time of unquestioning acceptance of US leadership was over⁴⁵. The German chancellor’s apparent deference to Paris, his criticism of the US, and the Munich compromise worried the American administration, leading Johnson to have his doubts about whether the German policy of friendship towards US was really unchanged⁴⁶. Yet, as Zimmermann argues, both sides realised it was in their interests to avoid a major crisis. In a memo to Johnson on 23 February, Deputy national security advisor Francis Bator pointed out that there was no chance of getting a 100% military offset deal with the Germans, but that instead the US could try to guarantee some financial compensation, such as a promise not to use their dollars to buy gold. Despite some

⁴¹ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*: vol.3, 18.01.67, p.194

⁴² Böhmer, Katharina, “‘We too mean business’: Germany and the Second British Application”, in Daddow, Oliver (ed.), *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain’s Second Application to join the EEC*, (London: Cass, 2002), pp.215-217; Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.137

⁴³ Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, p.223; Wilkens, Andreas, “L’Europe en suspens. Willy Brandt et l’orientation de la politique européenne de l’Allemagne fédérale 1966-1969”, in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, p.327

⁴⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 235, 08.02.67

⁴⁵ Bark, Dennis and Gress, David, *A History of West Germany*, vol.2, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.99

⁴⁶ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.152

hesitations, Bonn understood that there was no way around the Americans. On 30 March, Bundesbank President Karl Blessing sent a letter that contained a non-conversion pledge to the US treasury, which was according to Bator “by far the most important part of the US-German deal”⁴⁷.

The Franco-American struggle over West Germany reached a high point during Adenauer’s funeral in late April. After briefly speaking to Johnson, De Gaulle met the German chancellor and urged him again to resist Anglo-Saxon pressures. For the General, Paris and Bonn needed to have a common attitude vis-à-vis Washington and to stay together in all negotiations, especially in the monetary sphere⁴⁸. Equally, realising their importance in the outcome on monetary affairs, the NPT and the Kennedy Round, the Americans tried to push the Germans to split with the French and follow their line. Bator was convinced that this could be attained as long as Johnson could develop friendly relation with Kiesinger and make some compromises over the trilateral negotiations⁴⁹. To a certain extent, Johnson succeeded and turned the tables on Kiesinger, underlining the fact that he faced significant problems at home and thus needed Kiesinger’s cooperation, and on 28 April, Britain, West Germany and the US finally signed the trilateral agreement⁵⁰.

Germany’s position between France and the US remained uneasy in May-June as attention shifted to monetary affairs. The French repeatedly reminded their German colleagues of the importance and difficulty of maintaining a common EEC position on monetary problems⁵¹. At the same time, in a meeting with German finance minister Kurt Schiller, secretary of Treasury Henry Fowler denounced France’s unconstructive attitude towards the international monetary system, while Bator advised Schiller not to worry too much about accommodating the French. Schiller, though, reminded his guests that Bonn wanted to act as the honest broker between

⁴⁷ Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, pp.220-227; Kunz, Diane, *Butter and Guns: America’s Cold War Economic Diplomacy*, (New York: Free Press, 1997), p.173-174

⁴⁸ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 163, Allemagne RFA: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting, 25.04.67

⁴⁹ See LBJL: PP, NSF, SF, Box 48: Bator to Johnson, 21.04.67; LBJL: Bator, SF, Box 22: Bator to Rostow, 24.04.67

⁵⁰ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.164; for trilateral negotiations, see Zimmermann, *Money and Security*, pp.212-232

⁵¹ MAEF: Direction Économique, Papiers Jean-Pierre Brunet [Brunet] 1966-1974, Vol.53: Brunet-Neef meeting, 21.06.67

Washington and Paris⁵². By mid-1967, the jury was still out as the fate of the Harmel exercise, the British application to the EEC and the international monetary system were still undecided. Moreover, while relations had improved between Bonn and Washington, Kiesinger and Brandt were determined to pursue the cooperation with Paris.

III. The Paris-Bonn-Moscow Dynamic

France realised that not only would West Germany have a significant role to play in the ongoing Western negotiations, but this was also true for the future of détente in Europe. In that regards, the January 1967 Franco-German summit had confirmed the noticeable improvement in relations between the two governments, especially in the field of East-West relations. Kiesinger renounced the Hallstein doctrine and the MLF, and also accepted De Gaulle's analysis that German reunification could only happen through a rapprochement with the Eastern Bloc. Bonn was now ready to establish diplomatic relations with all satellite states, except East Germany⁵³. Moreover, Brandt and Kiesinger repeatedly asked France to champion their *Ostpolitik*, in particular by vouching for them during talks with Eastern Bloc leaders⁵⁴. Apart from the question of the Oder-Neisse border, the January meetings had largely convinced De Gaulle that "they [Germans] are going through key changes. They realise that détente is the most promising path for them. They are getting closer to us"⁵⁵. He further hoped that if France supported Bonn's *Ostpolitik*, this could help to guarantee German solidarity in Western matters, including monetary questions and the British application to the EEC.

Therefore, Paris went out of its way to cooperate with Bonn and defend the Federal Republic's Eastern policy. On a lower level, Brandt and Couve agreed that their respective *directeurs politiques* should continue to consult and look for possibilities of common action, and they encouraged their *directeurs économiques* to promote common industrial projects in Eastern

⁵² FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.VIII: Document 129, 19.06.67

⁵³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting 1, 13.01.67

⁵⁴ See for example MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: Couve-Brandt meeting, 13.01.67

⁵⁵ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 18.01.67, p.194

Europe⁵⁶. Through their regular meetings, the *directeurs politiques* updated each other about their governments' latest initiatives, and discussed their analyses of developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain⁵⁷. At the top level, France mostly helped West Germany by lobbying important Eastern Bloc statesmen, such as Zorin or Adam Rapacki, the Polish foreign minister. De Gaulle and Couve, for example, defended Bonn's new attitude on détente, the Hallstein doctrine and the MLF as small steps, but still steps in the right direction. Moreover, they emphasised that Germany had taken these initiatives of its own accord, and it was important for the Eastern Bloc to encourage these endeavours in order not to push them back into the arms of the US. This is not say that French leaders ignored altogether the differences between their view of détente and the German one, especially regarding the Oder-Neisse border. They acknowledged this fact, but generally tried to underline Bonn's intentions to follow in Paris' footsteps⁵⁸.

In the longer-term perspective, De Gaulle realised that Germany's policy towards the East, combined with its closer alignment on France, could open up great possibilities for détente in Europe. As various authors point out, relations between Bonn, Paris and Moscow were central to his goal of overcoming the Cold War order in Europe. If West Germany and the Soviet Union could start a rapprochement – as France had done with both previously – and change their reciprocal perceptions of threat, the military blocs in Europe would lose their *raison d'être*, and there would be no need for an American security guarantee in Western Europe⁵⁹. De Gaulle's grand design therefore depended to a certain extent on Bonn and Moscow's ability to improve their relations, which he supposedly made clear to Kiesinger when he stated that “the moment we both go to Moscow will be *le grand jour*”⁶⁰. That said, if he accepted that the three countries had a vital role to play in transforming the European order, he was not trying to establish a sort

⁵⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: Couve-Brandt meeting 2, 13.01.67

⁵⁷ See for example MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: Beaumarchais-Meyer Lindenberg meeting, 17.02.67; MAEF: Direction Économique, Brunet 1966-1974, Vol.54: Beaumarchais-Meyer Lindenberg meeting, 22.03.67

⁵⁸ For the memcons, see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: Couve-Zorin meeting, 19.01.67 and De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 23.01.67; MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.386: Couve-Rapacki meeting, 26.01.67 and De Gaulle-Rapacki meeting, 27.01.67

⁵⁹ On this idea of a triangular relationship see Kolodziej, *French international policy*, pp.350-351; Newhouse, *De Gaulle*, p.295; Ledwidge, Bernard, *DGESS V*, p.505; Bloch, René, *Ibid*, p.513

⁶⁰ See Maillard, *Problème Allemand*, p.231

of triangular partnership either. For a start, as Couve cautiously noted, Paris could only do so much to mediate and improve German-Soviet relations⁶¹. More importantly, he did not intend to give Germany, even once reunified, equal responsibility: it would remain in a subordinate role as only France and Russia would act as pillars in the General's modernised Concert of Nations, which depended on a complex set of checks and balances, and multiple bilateralism⁶².

Yet, De Gaulle's vision for the future of Europe faced clear obstacles, starting with West Germany. Certainly, the latter agreed with the French President that they needed to make more efforts to improve relations with the Eastern bloc, especially Moscow. Keen to create a climate in which the status quo could be changed peacefully, Brandt argued that "realities can be influenced for the better only if they are taken into account"⁶³. West Germany accepted the Soviet Union's central role in any future German reunification, as suggested by Kiesinger's June 14 speech to the *Bundestag*: "We all know that overcoming the division of our people can indeed only be achieved by an arrangement with Moscow"⁶⁴. Thus, Bonn took a series of steps to improve relations with the communist superpower, such as a proposed renunciation of force agreement. At the same time, it sent officials on missions to Bucharest, Prague and Budapest in view of establishing diplomatic relations⁶⁵.

Additionally, Bonn focussed on the intra-German sphere. Despite refusing to recognise East Germany and referring to it as "East Zone", Kiesinger announced a series of proposals to improve communications with Pankow. This included positive and practical steps, such as improving travel possibilities, allowing the joining together of families, and expanding trade⁶⁶. French leaders undoubtedly welcomed these initiatives, but it was not at all clear that Germany would accept the subordinate role expected by De Gaulle. Indeed, for Brandt, the core of Bonn's new *Ostpolitik* was that it would now take greater control over its own fate, rather than rely on

⁶¹ See for example FNSP: CM Carton 2: Interview with French radio, 07.01.67

⁶² For the Concert of Nations, see chapter 4, footnote 66; the expression multiple bilateralism was coined by Georges-Henri Soutou

⁶³ Brandt, Willy, *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975*, (London: Collins, 1978), pp.168-169

⁶⁴ Garton Ash, Timothy, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, (New York: Random House, c1993), p.54

⁶⁵ MAEF: Direction Économique, Brunet 1966-1974, Vol.54: Beaumarchais-Meyer Lindenberg meeting, 10.01.67

⁶⁶ Bark and Gress, *West Germany, vol.2*, p.101

others to speak on its behalf, and become more adult⁶⁷. Even if it followed France's détente policy with great interest and attention, Bonn only expected limited gains from its cooperation with Paris. As Egon Bahr, Brandt's influential advisor on *Ostpolitik*, argued in January 1967, the possibilities of common actions towards Eastern Europe should not be overstated. It was at the bilateral level that Germany could take "decisive steps" towards the Eastern Bloc⁶⁸.

Furthermore, the attempts to start a rapprochement between West Germany and the Eastern bloc were proving particularly difficult. At first, the Soviet leaders did not appear completely hostile to the new German government. They believed that they could possibly benefit from Bonn's *Ostpolitik*, and weaken its alliance with Washington⁶⁹. However, it did not take long for Moscow, along with the more intransigent members of the Warsaw Pact, to shift to a more critical stance. Attacking the new German policy as a tactical rather than concrete change, Moscow and Warsaw criticised Bonn's attitude on nuclear weapons, borders and its failure to recognise East Germany⁷⁰. Soviet policy stiffened even further after West Germany and Romania officially agreed to exchange ambassadors on 31 January, and because of East German pressure in Moscow to prevent Hungary and Czechoslovakia from following Bucharest's example. Without doubt, the masters of the Kremlin felt deep-rooted anxiety about the controllability of a sweeping European détente, its potential to stimulate divisive forces within the Eastern bloc, and about West German influence in Eastern Europe. They chose to side with East Germany, moving away from their maximal goal of isolating Bonn and lowering American influence, and reverting to their minimal aim of consolidating control over Eastern Europe⁷¹.

Indeed, the hardening reaction of the Eastern Bloc was also greatly influenced by East Germany, and its leader Walter Ulbricht. As Garton Ash explains, "Ulbricht quickly moved to counter the new West German offensive [...] Against the "Hallstein doctrine" of Bonn, Pankow

⁶⁷ Brandt, *People and Politics*, pp.168-169

⁶⁸ Wilkens, "L'Europe en suspens", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, p.331

⁶⁹ Griffith, *Ostpolitik*, p.141

⁷⁰ See footnote 58

⁷¹ Newton, *Russia, France*, p.79; Griffith, *Ostpolitik*, pp.142-144; Wolfe, *Soviet Power*, p.316

placed what journalists would label the “Ulbricht doctrine”, according to which no other Eastern bloc states should move faster than East Germany in setting up diplomatic relations with West Germany⁷². His success was all too clearly confirmed when the communist parties of East and West Europe, except Romania, met in April in Karlovy Vary, and heaped abuse upon Bonn’s policies⁷³. This was not enough to convince Kiesinger to give up on *Ostpolitik*, but he was adamant that his policy could not be considered a success in view of the obstruction from the East⁷⁴. Equally, Quai officials regarded the results of Germany’s policy as very limited, considering how the talks with the satellite states, except Romania, were at a dead end⁷⁵.

Despite those bleak developments, French leaders remained fairly optimistic about the prospects of détente in Europe. After the spectacular trips of 1966, De Gaulle did not forecast any major developments in East-West relations. He was pleased with the progress made by the West German government, although he hoped that it would eventually give up its illusions on borders, and make some sort of move, short of recognition, towards East Germany⁷⁶. As he told Zorin, he never expected the Soviets and others to immediately embrace Bonn’s *Ostpolitik*⁷⁷. This fitted with the belief that the East-West rapprochement in Europe, and the resulting German reunification, would take a long time, but the key was to see a movement in the “right direction, even if the road is long”⁷⁸. The French simply felt that they had entered an irreversible phase of détente, and as Couve pointed out during the NATO Ministerial meeting in Luxemburg, the question was no longer to justify détente but to practice it⁷⁹.

For the General and his collaborators, it was normal to see France adopt a more relaxed approach after the dramatic and frantic pace of its own *Ostpolitik* in the previous year. They saw no reasons to worry when relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were developing

⁷² Garton, *In Europe’s Name*, pp.55-56

⁷³ Brandt, *People and Politics*, p.172

⁷⁴ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1608: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 3955-3965, 30.06.67

⁷⁵ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1545: Note of *Direction Europe Centrale*, 14.06.67

⁷⁶ TNA: FCO 33/62: Paris to FO, Telegram number 255, 20.03.67

⁷⁷ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.29: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 23.01.67

⁷⁸ DF: PEF 1966-1967: Couve interview with *Le Figaro*, 30.01.67

⁷⁹ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.272: Paris to Couve, Telegram number 8, 14.06.67

normally in all spheres⁸⁰. De Gaulle's visit to the Soviet Union, and the subsequent Franco-Soviet common declaration of 30 June 1966 had created a framework for cooperation, which included the establishment of various trade commissions. The mixed Franco-Soviet commission first met in Paris between 26 and 31 January. As Rey claims, the years 1967-1968 were meant to be a learning process for the bilateral structures set up the previous year⁸¹. Yet, the realities of Franco-Soviet cooperation – and for that matter with other Eastern Bloc states – hardly matched up to expectations, especially in the field of trade⁸². According to Jacques Andréani, Quai d'Orsay official on the Soviet desk, trade with the Soviet Union only accounted for 1% of France's total foreign trade, and it was unlikely to increase quickly as the Russians had so little to sell⁸³. As for the satellite states, Andréani argued that if France maintained good political relations with them, it would be “necessary for its economic role to match its political status if it were to really play an influential role. But this would be hard to achieve”⁸⁴. In the case of Poland for example, despite improvements in 1966, France was only the fourth largest Western exporter, far behind Britain and West Germany⁸⁵.

More importantly, there were various suggestions of a “cooling off” of Franco-Soviet relations in this period. Wolton claims that Moscow lost interest in France once it left NATO, while Lefort claims that it was giving up on its rapprochement with Paris because of the latter's refusal to align itself on Soviet policy towards West Germany⁸⁶. At the same time, Brezhnev gave a very damning assessment of De Gaulle during a conversation with Ulbricht and Wladislaw Gomulka, Secretary General of the Polish Communist Party, in April 1967:

Take for example De Gaulle. Did we not manage, without any risk, to create a breach in imperialist capitalism? De Gaulle is our enemy and we know it. The PCF [*Parti Communiste Français*], narrow in its conceptions, tried to get us against De Gaulle. And what did we obtain however? A weakening of the position of the US in Europe.

⁸⁰ MAEF: SG,EM, Vol.30: Couve-Brandt meeting, 27.04.67

⁸¹ Rey, *La tentation*, p.53

⁸² Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.433

⁸³ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2089: McBride to Rusk, Airgram number 1255, 09.02.67

⁸⁴ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2089: Bohlen to Rusk, Airgram number 1436, 10.03.67

⁸⁵ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2499: Note of MAEF, 26.05.67. Only 2,4% of Polish imports came from France, against 6,4% for Britain and 2,7% for West Germany. Additionally, 1,6% of Polish exports went to France, against 6,4% to Britain and 5,4% to West Germany.

⁸⁶ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.443 ; Lefort, *Souvenirs et secrets*, p.164

And it is not over. De Gaulle is a sly fox. He wants hegemony for France in Europe, and that is directed against us. But there, we have to act with flexibility. In any case, De Gaulle's European conceptions have no chance of succeeding because there are in Western Europe some strong countries that would never admit it. But the assessment, comrades, is it not favourable?⁸⁷

Bohlen also agreed with the rumours concerning the troubles in Franco-Soviet relations. Aside from the differences over the question of a European security conference, the NPT, and the natural strains caused by Paris' attempt to facilitate a rapprochement between Bonn and Moscow, he rightfully reminded Rusk that "the Franco-Soviet affair was a hurry up business from the outset, and the concrete results have always panted along far behind the grandiose publicity"⁸⁸.

Thus, France's Eastern strategy was facing significant obstacles, but it is important not to overstate them. Certainly, the rapprochement between West Germany and the Eastern bloc would be a slow and difficult affair. Moreover, the Brezhnev quote, as Soutou argues, made it clear that the Soviet leaders were not ready to make the Franco-Soviet couple their main axis in Europe⁸⁹. While they were ready to show more assertiveness and confidence in their relations with France, Moscow's policy towards Western Europe was still "actively reactive", constrained by the fear of a resurgent Germany, and the risk of seeing an American withdrawal from Europe or NATO's collapse. In other words, the Kremlin leaders could not "truly embark on a Europe first policy that would treat Europe as a primary and ultimate focus, rather than a derivative of the superpower relationship"⁹⁰. However, this is not to say that France had lost all its leverage in Europe, or that it was completely ignored by Moscow. Conscious of its pioneering role in European détente, Paris was actually planning to go back on the offensive in the second half of 1967. Pompidou made sure to announce very publicly De Gaulle's trips to Poland in early June and to Romania in the autumn, and his own trip to the Soviet Union in July⁹¹.

⁸⁷ Weit, Erwin, *Dans l'Ombre de Gomulka*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1971), p.188

⁸⁸ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2090: Bohlen to Rusk, Airgram number 1650, 19.04.67

⁸⁹ Soutou, Georges-Henri, *La Guerre de cinquante ans: le conflit Est-Ouest 1943-1990*, (Paris: Fayard, 2001), p.472

⁹⁰ Newton, *Russia, France*, pp.77-78

⁹¹ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Pompidou speech to l'*Assemblée Nationale*, 18.04.67. Because of the Six Day war, the trip to Poland was later postponed to September 1967, and the one to Romania to May 1968.

IV. Six Days that shook the World

While France was facing difficult challenges in both its *Westpolitik* and *Ostpolitik*, the Third World provided little relief. For once, though, the problem was not so much related to Vietnam. In regards to the conflict in Indochina, De Gaulle shied away from any major initiatives, and simply maintained the very critical stance towards America that he had outlined during his Phnom Penh speech in September 1966. He continued to denounce what he considered as a terrible conflict, and stuck to his claim according to which the ongoing war in Indochina was undermining the emerging détente in the world⁹². To further mark its disapproval of American actions, the French government also decided not to bother sending an observer to the SEATO council meeting in Washington⁹³.

Moreover, the General stubbornly refused to take part in any mediation effort in this period. For example, when US ambassador at large Averell Harriman asked Jean Sainteny, a former French general delegate to North Vietnam, to act as an intermediary with Hanoi, De Gaulle reacted negatively. He made it clear to Sainteny that he should “not become, in any way, a messenger for the US”⁹⁴. Why did he adopt this obstructive attitude, when he repeatedly claimed that ending the Vietnam War would benefit détente? Without full access to the De Gaulle private papers it is difficult to be categorical, but there are several possible explanations. Essentially, as Couve stated, France believed that a negotiated solution would only happen when the belligerents agreed on its objectives⁹⁵. As long as this was not the case, the General probably believed that he could have his cake and eat it too. He certainly genuinely perceived Washington as responsible for the conflict in Indochina. Yet, without a foreseeable end in sight, he could, as Jean-Daniel Jurgensen, the Quai’s head of the US department, explained to Bohlen, continually

⁹² De Gaulle, *DM: V*, Toast for Sihanouk, 21.02.67, p.147; MAEF: Asie-Océanie, Conflit Vietnam 1955-1975, Vol.163: De Gaulle speech to diplomatic corps, 01.01.67

⁹³ MAEF: Asie-Océanie, Conflit Vietnam 1955-1975, Vol.163: Manac’h to Lucet, Telegrams number 706-707, 21.03.67

⁹⁴ Vaïsse, “De Gaulle”, in Goscha and Vaïsse, *Guerre du Vietnam*, p.176

⁹⁵ FSNP: CM Carton 2: Interview with French radio, 07.01.67

hammer in a view which appealed to 80% of the French electorate. This position was obviously useful in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections, and also struck a responsive chord in the Third World⁹⁶. Moreover, De Gaulle also felt that the US was morally losing a lot of ground in Europe because of Vietnam, and this provided a golden opportunity for France to push for a more independent Europe along the Paris-Bonn-Moscow line.

Thus, while the shadow of the Vietnam still loomed heavily during the first half of 1967, it was actually the Middle East that ended up taking centre stage on the international scene. Before then, the region had hardly been a key priority for France. Since the end of the Algerian war, De Gaulle had pursued a logic of double normalisation in his Middle Eastern policy. On the one hand, he had loosened ties with Israel since the heyday under the Fourth Republic, and rejected Ben Gurion's offer of an alliance in 1963. On the other hand, Paris had successfully renewed relations with the Arab states, which had been broken after the Suez crisis. The latter goal had been achieved without jeopardising relations with Israel⁹⁷. As Abba Eban, Israeli foreign minister at the time, notes in his memoirs, their Embassy in Paris continued to paint a favourable picture of French policy, despite the rumours suggesting that Paris' attitude towards Tel Aviv was cooling⁹⁸. On the eve of the crisis that culminated in the Six Day War, France essentially sought to keep a balanced approach towards the region⁹⁹.

France's Middle Eastern policy was largely neutral and uncontroversial until mid-1967, but this drastically changed because of the conflict that erupted in the region. Not only did it cause a spectacular break between Paris and Tel Aviv, but it also dealt a blow to France's aspirations to Great Power status. Moreover, the General's decisions before and during the Six Day War created a very sharp split in the literature, one shaped by the memoirs of participants, and not helped by a relative lack of access, on this subject, to the French archives. There is a distinct lack of consensus when it comes to assessing De Gaulle's aims and his reading of the

⁹⁶ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 173: Bohlen to Rusk, Telegram number 10209, 10.01.67

⁹⁷ Cohen, Samy, "De Gaulle et Israël: Le sens d'une rupture", in Barnavi and Friedländer, *Politique étrangère*, pp.193-195

⁹⁸ Eban, Abba, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), p.339

⁹⁹ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.632

situation. For example, Bohlen believed that France's policy was driven by cold blooded reasons. In particular, it realised that the Anglo-Saxons countries had lost their standing in the Arab states, which provided an opportunity for France to move in. Roussel and Gad, for their part, suggest that the Middle East crisis provided another chance to show independence vis-à-vis the US. Finally, Couve justified Paris' rabid defence of peace as tied to the conviction that a war in the region would be vain, and could only lead to further catastrophes¹⁰⁰.

Additionally, the confusion of French policy in the initial stages of the crisis complicates any analysis. Certainly, De Gaulle was aware and worried by the rising tension in the region. In a meeting with an Egyptian official on 9 May, he made it clear that Paris wanted to avoid a conflict¹⁰¹. This did not mean, though, that French officials were particularly prepared for the troubles ahead, as confirmed by Hervé Alphand. During a visit to the Middle East between 6 and 16 May, he met with various Syrian and Egyptian leaders, and despite his hosts' warning that a war was imminent, he assumed that this was an exaggeration¹⁰². However, the crisis in the Middle East soon escalated when Nasser obtained on 18 May the withdrawal of the UN troops stationed on the Egyptian-Israeli border. Four days later, he closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships.

The French government was initially slow to react publicly to these new developments, so much so that the Israeli government, worried by France's lack of public support and its failure to respond to several messages, decided on 23 May to send Eban to Paris for consultations¹⁰³. At the same time, in the absence of clear directives from the highest levels, officials remained cautious and could only provide limited, sometimes even contradictory, insights about French policy when talking with foreign diplomats. Thus, on 15 May Charles Lucet, the ambassador in Washington, mentioned to American officials that the tripartite declaration remained the basis of

¹⁰⁰ See Bohlen, *Witness*, pp.509-510; Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.822; Gad, Mohamed Elsayed, *Les relations franco-égyptiennes et le conflit israëlo-arabe (1956-1970)*, (Lille: Atelier national de reproduction des thèses, 2004), p.112; Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.469

¹⁰¹ Gad, *Relations franco-égyptiennes*, p.175

¹⁰² Alphand, *L'étonnement*, p.488

¹⁰³ For the messages, see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.30: Eshkol to De Gaulle, 19.05.67, and Eban to De Gaulle, 21.05.67; Eban, *Personal Witness*, p.370

France's attitude towards the Middle East. Yet, a week later, during a meeting with Bohlen, Alphand confirmed that he had no objections to informal consultations between France, Britain and the US, but he questioned the value of appealing to the tripartite declaration. He felt that official talks between the three Western powers without Russia "would give it the appearance of the 'cold war'"¹⁰⁴. The same Alphand, in a conversation with a British official, also confirmed that Paris was opposed to an early meeting of the UN's Security Council to discuss the tension in the Middle East, and that the Ambassador in Moscow had been instructed to sound out the Soviets' intentions¹⁰⁵.

It was only during the Council of Ministers of 24 May that the French government seriously discussed its attitude towards the emerging crisis. De Gaulle imposed his view that the closure of the Straits did not constitute a *casus belli*, described war in the region as an absurdity, and claimed that it was up to the four Great Powers – France, the US, Britain and the Soviet Union – to cooperate and facilitate a settlement. He further added that the situation had changed since 1957, when France had made a declaration favourable to freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, and had defended Israel's right to defend itself¹⁰⁶. For the General, France in 1967 was now a Great Power with global responsibilities. He adopted, as Lacouture explains, a very dogmatic position in support of peace, which appeared as the only way to maintain the equilibrium he had developed in the previous years towards the Middle East¹⁰⁷. In his rush to see France act and be considered as a Great Power, De Gaulle – in line with his stance on the Vietnam War – wanted France to play the role of the moral defender of peace in the world, thereby distinguishing itself from the other three Great Powers, which were more closely aligned to the regional actors. This was an approach dominated by global considerations, at the expense of local circumstances.

¹⁰⁴ See FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIX: Document 3, 15.05.67, and Document 47, 23.05.67; The Tripartite declaration was a statement issued on May 25, 1950, by the U.S., British, and French Governments expressing their interest in the maintenance of peace and stability between the Arab states and Israel, their opposition to an arms race in the area, and their opposition to the use of force or threat of force between any of the states in that area. See Foreign Relations, 1950, Vol.V, pp.167-168.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: PREM 13/1617: Paris to FO, Telegram number 484, 23.05.67

¹⁰⁶ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.3, pp.276-277

¹⁰⁷ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*: vol. 3, p.492

The French President held the same line with all the potential belligerents. He told the Egyptian ambassador in Paris, Abdel El-Naggar, that a war would be terrible for Egypt, and that he wanted talks between the four Great Powers so to prevent them from taking sides¹⁰⁸. He equally strongly warned Eban that Israel should not go to war, or at any rate not be the first one to shoot. He warned that “today there are no Western solutions. The more Israel looks exclusively to the West, the less the Soviets will be ready to cooperate. It is essential that the four powers should concert their policies”¹⁰⁹. Why was De Gaulle so obsessed with four power consultation? This stemmed from various reasons, but fundamentally it was tied to his aristocratic conception of the international system. As he explained during the Council of Ministers on 2 June, “those problems [in the Middle East] cannot be solved internally. They must be solved internationally, which implies an agreement between the four [Great Powers]”¹¹⁰. By calling for such a meeting, France was only defending its status and its right to take part in the settlement of the crisis¹¹¹. Moreover, the French were convinced that the crisis was of global and not local importance, and that the superpowers were hiding behind the belligerents¹¹².

Paris’ hopes for high level talks, however, proved illusory after Moscow turned down the offer, and instead proposed that both countries continue their bilateral consultation, which was a disappointment for the French President, but better than nothing¹¹³. Was it, though, a body blow to De Gaulle’s prestige, as suggested by Arthur Goldberg, American ambassador to the UN¹¹⁴? This is a slightly overstated assessment. Couve, as he told Bohlen, recognised that Soviet behaviour was far from clear and that their aim was probably to reduce Western influence in the

¹⁰⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: De Gaulle-Naggar meeting, 25.05.67

¹⁰⁹ Eban, *Personal Witness*, pp.372-375

¹¹⁰ Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, pp.277-278

¹¹¹ Ismail, Hafez, *DGESS VI*, p.401

¹¹² Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.469; See also TNA: PREM 13/1618: Moscow to FO, Telegram number 893, 25.05.67

¹¹³ See MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.30: Kosygin to De Gaulle, 27.05.67; ANF: 5AG1, Carton 190, URSS: Couve to Wormser, Telegram number 1096-1098, 28.05.67; See TNA: PREM 13/1619: Paris to FO, Telegram number 521, 29.05.67, for Lebel, the director of the Quai’s Middle Eastern and African department, the Soviets had probably felt unable to join the four power talks with the US because of the Vietnam situation. Additionally, certain Arab states had not been so keen on the French proposal, because it smacked of Great Power dictation.

¹¹⁴ NARA: RG59, Records of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Transcripts of Phone calls, Box 59: Goldberg to Rusk, 28.05.67

Middle East, but at least they had expressed a desire to keep individual contact with the Western powers. For the American Ambassador, “Couve's general attitude showed [...] that they still are hopeful that the Soviets will change their negative attitude and be willing to join in some form of negotiations¹¹⁵”. In the meantime, as the crisis continued to escalate and war became more and more imminent, France chose to maintain its balanced stance. Thus on 2 June, the government solemnly stated its neutrality, expressed its condemnation of whichever state fired the first shot, and called again on the Great Powers to settle the crisis¹¹⁶.

The outbreak of war on 5 June temporarily improved the perspectives of high-level cooperation. True, French leaders were partly frustrated by the exclusive superpower dialogue in the UN, which aimed to agree on a cease-fire resolution, but at least Kosygin and De Gaulle maintained a regular contact during the war via the hot line between the Élysée and the Kremlin¹¹⁷. Moreover, the reasonable attitude of the superpowers reassured and comforted the General in his belief that neither of them wanted the crisis to go too far¹¹⁸. With the threat of a major escalation out of the way, the French president saw a chance to push again for a Great Power agreement. During the Council of Ministers on 7 June, he argued that the Russians were surely embarrassed by their initial refusal of high level talks, and that it was up to France to remain “the champion of consultation between the four”¹¹⁹.

After the war ended on 10 June, France believed that it could now attempt to play a useful role in the search for peace, thanks to its wise and moderate attitude¹²⁰. On 14 June, France abstained on a Soviet Security Council resolution denouncing Israel as the aggressor, but accepted Moscow's proposal to convene a UN General Assembly¹²¹. However, this optimism proved short-lived as the positions hardened on all sides, and Paris struggled to keep an influence on the course of events. With the communist bloc, except Romania, breaking relations with

¹¹⁵ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIX: Document 133, 02.06.67

¹¹⁶ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Official Declaration of Council of Ministers, 02.06.67

¹¹⁷ Vaïsse, Maurice, “Les crises de Cuba et du Proche-Orient dans les relations franco-soviétiques”, in Vaïsse, De Gaulle, p.161; For the Kosygin-De Gaulle messages, see MAEF : SG, EM, Vol.30

¹¹⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: De Gaulle-Nixon meeting, 08.06.67

¹¹⁹ Peyrefitte, C'était de Gaulle: vol.3, p.278

¹²⁰ Alphand, L'étonnement, 11.06.67, p.490

¹²¹ Vaïsse, “Les crises”, in Vaïsse, De Gaulle, p.157

Israel, and the US temporarily cut off from the Arab world, Couve feared the re-emergence of the Cold War in the Middle East¹²². In this atmosphere of growing danger, Gaulle invited Kosygin to stop over in Paris for a meeting, before heading to the UN, but the talks were hardly very productive. If Kosygin pushed De Gaulle to abandon his neutral stance, the latter remained non-committal and instead warned his guest of the dangers of escalation, emphasising the potentially disastrous consequences for the superpower rivalry that was, in his view, at the core of the conflict¹²³. For the General, the wars in Vietnam and the Middle East, combined with the Chinese exploding their first hydrogen bomb on 17 June, were creating a very dangerous international context, in which none of the Great Powers were truly in control¹²⁴. Thus, on 21 June, in a communiqué after the Council of Ministers, De Gaulle solemnly denounced Israel for starting the conflict in the Middle East, and blamed the spread of war on the American intervention in Vietnam, emphasising that only an American withdrawal from Indochina could bring a peaceful solution to the current global situation¹²⁵.

Why did he make this announcement, which really infuriated the Americans? Was it because he genuinely feared the prospect of World War Three, and the risk of a confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union¹²⁶? If that was partly his motivation, another factor played a key role. De Gaulle wanted to avoid a confrontation between the superpowers, but he equally wanted to prevent the polar opposite scenario of the Americans and the Soviets negotiating without France. In his memoirs, Harold Wilson noted that during their meeting on 19 June the General was very depressed. He supposed that this was linked to the fact that Kosygin had virtually bypassed him, and to the rumours of a possible bilateral meeting between the Soviet Premier and Lyndon Johnson. As Wolton argues, De Gaulle was probably also trying to embarrass the Americans with his declaration, and prevent a superpower rapprochement when

¹²² FSNP: CM Carton 2: Speech to l'Assemblée Nationale, 15.06.67

¹²³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: De Gaulle-Kosygin meeting, 16.06.67

¹²⁴ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: De Gaulle-Wilson meeting, 19.06.67

¹²⁵ De Gaulle, LNC: XI, Communiqué at the end of the Council of Ministers, 21.06.67, pp.119-120

¹²⁶ Lefort, Souvenirs et secrets, p.193; Charbonnel, Jean, L' Aventure de la Fidélité, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976), p.141

Kosygin and Johnson finally met at Glassboro on 23 June¹²⁷. This remains to be proven, but it is interesting to note the shift in French policy away from a strict neutral stance in the aftermath of the Glassboro summit. Paris acknowledged that the crisis in the Middle East had confirmed the relative weakness of the Soviet Union in relation to the US on the international scene. Thus, France sided with the Communist resolution, which called for a strict Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, and pressured the Francophone African states to do the same¹²⁸. With its relations with Israel already jeopardised, the French President undoubtedly believed that he could counter-balance superpower cooperation by siding with the Soviet Union. At the same time, he could make sure that the West maintained some influence in the Arab world, and prevent an exclusive dialogue between the latter and Moscow¹²⁹.

The Six Days war shook the world and seriously impacted on the whole of French foreign policy. On a basic level, Paris abandoned its balanced position towards the Middle East by moving closer to the Arab states, and further away from Israel. Israel felt abandoned and cheated by France, but staunch Gaullists have defended the French president's record by arguing he knew all along that Israel would win the war¹³⁰. Without access to his private papers, though, it is hard to give a conclusive answer. More significantly, and on the back of the not so good results in the legislative elections of March – where the Gaullists barely held on to their majority in the *Assemblée Nationale* – the war in the Middle East undermined the General's popularity. For a start, large sections of the Quai d'Orsay disagreed with his policies and found it hard to accept France siding with the Soviet and Arab theses. Furthermore, as Vaïsse explains, the attitude of the government during the conflict provoked a moral crisis amongst French people – more sympathetic to Israel – and marked the beginning of the slow yet significant erosion of De

¹²⁷ Wilson, *Labour Government*, p.402, 406; Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.450

¹²⁸ Vaïsse, "Les crises", in Vaïsse, *De Gaulle*, pp.159-160

¹²⁹ Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.473

¹³⁰ D'Escricenne, *Le Général*, pp.145-146; Gorce, Paul Marie de la, "La politique arabe du General de Gaulle", in Barnavi and Friedländer, *Politique étrangère*, p.188, after visiting the military authorities of Israel and Egypt, Paul Marie de la Gorce had no doubt Israel would win any conflict, and he was told that De Gaulle shared this view.

Gaulle's popularity¹³¹. He certainly realised that a majority of French people supported Israel, as he told Wilson, but he did not seem unduly concerned, and justified himself by saying that "you do not pursue a policy by following public opinion. Public opinion always ends up following the policy, as long as it is good"¹³².

De Gaulle's stance on the war did not help relations with allies, starting with West Germany. According to the memoirs of François Seydoux, French ambassador in Bonn at the time, the West Germans were very critical: they "accused [De Gaulle] of having anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings. He was also accused of ignoring Germany, seeing it as not worthy enough to be associated to global responsibilities"¹³³. Moreover, the conflict also affected dynamics within NATO, and strengthened the organisation to the detriment of France. As argued by Harlan Cleveland, US ambassador at NATO, after the June Ministerial meeting in Luxemburg, "the whole spectrum has discernibly moved over toward pessimism about Soviet motivations, so that those Ministers [of the member states of NATO] who spoke of détente in [a] hopeful manner, felt constrained to balance their comments with [an] emphasis on maintaining the NATO deterrent as well"¹³⁴.

Last, but certainly not least, the war affected France's global status. To a certain extent, the Kremlin leaders "manipulated" France's policy of independence for their own comfort in the Middle East. It is also possible that the situation in the Middle East, as Wilson told Johnson on 23 June, forced the General "to accept reality, the lack of influence of France in international affairs"¹³⁵. Undoubtedly, the Glassboro meeting symbolically underlined the continuing predominance of the superpowers in international affairs, and certainly strengthened the hands of the 'Americanists' in the Kremlin who believed Moscow needed to deal in priority with

¹³¹ Lefort, *Souvenirs et secrets*, pp.196-197; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, pp.353-354, on 13 June, 57% of people were happy with De Gaulle's policies and 12% were unhappy; by 16 July, numbers had dropped to 48% happy and 19% unhappy.

¹³² MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.387: De Gaulle-Wilson meeting, 19.06.67; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 15.06.67, p.280

¹³³ Seydoux, *Mission Diplomatique*, p.96; Vaïsse, Maurice, "De Gaulle et Willy Brandt: deux non-conformistes au pouvoir", in Möller, Horst, and Vaïsse, Maurice (ed.), *Willy Brandt und Frankreich*, (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2005), p.108

¹³⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 258, 17.06.67

¹³⁵ Soutou, *Guerre de cinquante ans*, p.472; quoted by Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.829

Washington. Moreover, the mix of cooperation, rejection and competition for the favours of the Arab world only highlighted the ambiguities of the Franco-Soviet cooperation in the Middle East¹³⁶. Yet, it is important not to overstate the impact of the Six Day War. After all, according to a CIA analysis and vindicated by Kosygin's two stops in Paris, "De Gaulle appears to have been successful in his efforts to induce Moscow to give consideration to Paris and to prevent 'superpowers' from negotiating without France"¹³⁷. As De Gaulle pointed out about the results of Glassboro, "he [Kosygin] and Johnson agreed on nothing"¹³⁸.

V. Conclusion

By mid-1967, France's situation was noticeably different than in late 1966, and the difficulties of converting status into influence had become painfully clear. In its *Westpolitik*, and despite its best efforts, the question of the British application had created acrimony between Paris and its Common Market partners, and tainted the French efforts to maintain solidarity between the Six over monetary affairs.

In the field of East-West détente, the picture had become far more complex. The Paris-Bonn-Moscow dynamic was facing problems, which were for the moment mostly limited to the relations between West Germany and the Eastern bloc. At the same time, the US and the Soviet Union were increasingly aware of their need to cooperate, be it over nuclear matters or to deal with major international crises, as shown in Glassboro. Finally, the Middle East war had painfully confirmed how hard it would be for France to have its voice heard on the international scene, and had even undermined De Gaulle's domestic position.

That said, it would be misleading to suggest that the decline of Gaullist foreign policy was already inevitable by the end of the first half of 1967. The fate of both France's détente

¹³⁶ Rey, *La tentation*, p.57

¹³⁷ LBJL: PP, NSF, Files of the Special Committee of the National Security Council, Box 3: CIA memorandum on Middle East, 29.06.67

¹³⁸ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 05.07.67, p.282

policy in Europe and the negotiations within the Western world were still in the balance. But, it is equally fair to say that France appeared in a weaker position and locked in a defensive stance, precisely at a time when those key questions were approaching their pinnacle.

Chapter VI: Illusion of Independence Part 2, July-December 1967

I. Introduction

After the euphoria of 1966, the first half of 1967 proved to be a sobering period for France, and one in which the difficulties of having a real influence on international affairs had become all too apparent. This was true for the Middle East crisis, when France had attempted to organise Great Power cooperation, and for its attempts to foster an East-West détente in Europe via the Paris-Bonn-Moscow triangle. In addition, the re-emergence of the British question in the EEC and the growing domestic opposition to De Gaulle – as shown by the results of the March parliamentary elections and the reaction to the criticism of Israel – undermined Paris' position as it sought to unite the Six for a series of crucial negotiations within the Western world.

Clearly, France faced tough challenges at the start of the summer 1967. However, its situation was by no means desperate. For a start De Gaulle's trip to Poland, the first visit of a Western leader to a satellite state of the Eastern Bloc, offered the French president a great opportunity to give renewed impetus to the East-West rapprochement in Europe, and through that the possibility to maintain a certain leverage over Bonn. With Germany on board, France could still find a way to fulfil its goals in the international monetary negotiations, as long of course as it found a way to deal with the British question that was not too divisive.

II. July-August: A breathing space?

The drop in world tension during the summer 1967, after the heights of the Six Day War and the ensuing diplomatic battle at the UN, produced no fundamental change in France's policies towards the Middle East. France continued to refuse to recognise Israel's territorial gains, but also realised from the stalemate in the UN that a negotiated solution to the conflict remained unlikely in the short-term. Similarly, De Gaulle stuck to his view according to which

Egypt's decision to close the Straits of Tiran had been regrettable, but Israel was still more to blame because it had started the war¹. The only slight change in the General's position during this period was a growing anger with Israel for not listening to his warnings, and suspicion - not to say a conviction - that the latter had in fact been patiently waiting for an opportunity to expand its territory².

It was precisely the condemnation of Israel, which had created internal and external opposition to the policies of the French government, but Paris hardly drew lessons from this. True, during the Franco-German summit in Bonn, French leaders attempted to clarify their policy to their West German allies. De Gaulle explained to Kiesinger that France had disapproved of Israel's actions because it was against war, and not because it wanted to please the Soviets. He added that Moscow had condemned Israel for its own reasons³. But, in regard to domestic opposition, the General refused to let public opinion dictate his foreign policy choices, as he made clear soon after in Montreal.

His provocative call of "Vive le Québec libre!" on 24 July caused uproar in Canada and many parts of the world, even pushing US Ambassador at Paris, Charles Bohlen, to question the French President's sanity⁴! Yet, far from being senile, De Gaulle had had clear aims with this spectacular gesture, as he confided to an *aide de camp*. He wanted to show that France could "act without asking other countries' opinion, act on its own, independently, according to its own conscience"⁵. In other words, De Gaulle wanted to convince French citizens that an ambitious foreign policy, as demonstrated by his recent controversial actions, was the correct path for their country. In another justification during a television speech on 10 August, he pointed out that France's energetic action in the service of world peace - according to him widely approved in the

¹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.388: De Gaulle-Hussein meeting, 04.07.67

² Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.640; See also FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 74, 12.07.67 for an explanation of De Gaulle's suspicions.

³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting, 12.07.67

⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 76, 27.07.67

⁵ D'Escricenne, *Le Général*, p.107

world - required an independent stance and could not be affected by “foreign allegiances and the episodic impact of public opinion”⁶.

However, there were undeniable signs that people were not buying this argument. According to polls, a majority disapproved of De Gaulle’s positions on Quebec, meaning that for the first time, public opinion had expressed serious hostility to two of De Gaulle’s major foreign policy initiatives⁷. As Alphand recognised on 12 August, the President’s popularity was clearly being affected by these events⁸. This widespread questioning of the General’s judgement, combined with wider domestic weaknesses when the French government faced Parliamentary difficulty, a budget in deficit and the economy in trouble, hardly placed France in an ideal position to counter Britain’s renewed push to become a member of the EEC⁹.

British Foreign Secretary George Brown’s confident speech to the Western European Union [WEU] on 4 July, where he explained why his country wanted to join the EEC, was symptomatic of a stronger British candidacy. Compared to the first application of 1961-1963, the second effort appeared far less hesitant and conditional, and “was approved by the House of Commons by a sweeping 488:62 majority, with all three of the main English parties voting for EEC membership”¹⁰. Moreover in 1967, according to Ludlow, and unlike the first candidacy five years earlier, “not only were the Community’s policies that much more solidly established, but Britain seemed also to have accepted that the onus of adaptation lay with the applicant and not with the existing member states”¹¹. This undermined France’s key argument that enlargement would destroy the Community. With the Five responding warmly to Brown’s speech, Paris faced an uphill struggle to prevent London from joining the Community without a divisive veto.

⁶ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, p.200

⁷ IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.281, in a survey on 4-8 August 1967, 18% approved of De Gaulle’s position on the Quebec problem, 45% disapproved, and 37% had no opinion. See also annex 4; Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.354; Many Ministers, including Pompidou and Couve, also disagreed with the General’s actions, see Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle: vol.3*, pp.338-339, 349

⁸ Alphand, *L’étonnement*, p.493

⁹ Parr, *Britain’s policy*, p.163

¹⁰ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.139

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.140

This was obvious during the EEC Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels on 10-11 July when the Six debated enlargement. French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville presented an inspired case against enlargement, trying to impress on his interlocutors the wide range of obstacles rather than focussing on a single specific reason. He highlighted first the consequences for the Community itself, as the addition of new members would create an organisation more akin to a wide Atlantic grouping, increasingly unmanageable, and would impede the developing détente with the Eastern bloc. To add strength to his argument, he also designated the specific problems of the British candidacy, that is to say the weakness of the sterling and the deficit of its balance of payments, as well as the incompatibility of British agricultural practices with the CAP¹². Despite Couve's great debating skills, it was clear from the vigorous refutations of his five counterparts that few of his points had really struck home; both sides wanted to prevail, but this July meeting was nevertheless largely devoid of outright confrontation; with the memory of the "empty chair" crisis of 1965-1966 still fresh in everyone's mind¹³. The only conclusion of this meeting was the decision to request by September a report from the Commission on the consequences of enlargement for the Community.

This request temporarily pushed the British question to the sidelines, as both sides hoped that positions might soften in the autumn by the time of the Commission's report¹⁴. On the surface, it also helped to temporarily soothe relations between France and the rest of the Western world, combining with certain seemingly positive developments within NATO. Indeed, August finally witnessed the signing of the Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreement, which regulated the future role of French troops in NATO's common defence, and France shifted to an annual authorisation of overflight of its territory for its fourteen allies, rather than the month-to-month regime imposed in May 1966. This timid thaw principally benefited the summer negotiation over the international monetary system. It allowed the talks to take place in a more serene environment, less affected by linkages with other problems within the Western world, and enabled Paris to

¹² FNSP: CM Carton 2: Speech to the European Communities, 10-11.07.67

¹³ Ludlow, European Community, p.141

¹⁴ Idem

focus on maintaining the unity of the Six over monetary affairs without having to worry about the divisive British factor.

France reaped instant gains from this calmer atmosphere, first at the meeting of the Six Financial Ministers in Brussels on 4 July, and more importantly at the G10 meeting in London on 17-18 July. In his analysis of the latter meeting, French Minister of Finance Michel Debré painted an optimistic picture to De Gaulle. Isolated the previous year at the G10 meeting of The Hague, Debré was convinced that France had this time held the Six to a common stance. He added that thanks to their cohesion, the Six had virtually obtained a veto over the future use of the Special Drawing Rights [SDR], as well as the guarantee that the latter would be subject to a real reconstitution, thus giving those drawing rights the characteristics of an international credit, rather than those of a new international currency as desired by the United States¹⁵.

Debré appeared optimistic, but not to the point that he ignored certain nuances between France and its Common Market allies. If all the EEC states wanted a greater say in the decision-making over the SDR, France seemed more adamant than its partners that this new asset should be credit-like, and not money-like¹⁶. This difference of opinion hardly deterred Debré from pushing ahead, quite the opposite. He realised that any agreement over the international monetary system would represent some sort of compromise, but this was fine as long as he perceived it as beneficial to France and strengthening the Six's position within the IMF at the expense of the Anglo-Saxon powers¹⁷. In addition, as Morse argues, an agreement was facilitated by two other factors: four years of debate and the reduction of available liquidity had convinced the French that the predicted disasters in the international monetary system were more imminent than they had thought, while the conflict between the US and France was partly eased thanks to great mediators¹⁸. The second G10 meeting in London on 26 August thus ended with an

¹⁵ FNSP: 4DE Carton 6: Telegram Debré to De Gaulle, 19.07.67; reconstitution referred to the fact that the drawing rights ought to carry a repayment obligation.

¹⁶ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.VIII: Document 136, 02.08.67

¹⁷ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Note by *Secrétariat Général de la Présidence*, 23.08.67

¹⁸ Morse, *Foreign Policy*, p.241

agreement on an outline of a plan that would be presented the following month at the annual IMF meeting in Rio. The plan spoke of the creation of a new facility, subject to reconstitution, which would require for its implementation an 85% majority of votes within the IMF - in effect giving the Six a collective veto as they represented 17% of the votes¹⁹.

Yet, it would be misleading to overstate the importance of this agreement and the general summer thaw. The London compromise remained very ambiguous and, as Solomon argued, hardly justified Debré's claim that it was "a success for the French thesis" and that "the question of creating new money was discarded"²⁰. Instead, during the debate over the nature of the SDR, Otmar Emminger, of the German *Bundesbank*, accurately defined the facility as a zebra: "one could regard it as a black animal with white stripe or as a white animal with black stripes"²¹. More importantly, the vigorous behind-the-scenes rivalry between Paris and Washington for Bonn's loyalty did not stop during the summer lull.

That West Germany would play a decisive role in the various Western negotiations of the time was painfully clear during Kiesinger's summer meetings with De Gaulle and US president Lyndon Johnson, and both presidents used similar techniques to swing Kiesinger to their cause. Johnson mentioned his confidence in De Gaulle, but added he could not understand why the French president sometimes used such a sharp language, while he personally refrained from negative statements about the General. De Gaulle, for his part, justified his sharp language towards the US as a way of opposing the pro-Atlanticist segments of public opinion. He pointed out that France had no aversion to the US, but felt the latter was enormous and could not stop being dominant²². Moreover, both Paris and Washington specifically pressured Bonn on the question of the international monetary system. US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler complained about French obstructionism in the negotiations, praised his own country's compromises, and invited Kiesinger to follow the American lead rather than stick with France.

¹⁹ For the text of the agreement, see DF: PEF 1966-1967: Communiqué after the London G10 meeting, 26.08.67

²⁰ Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.142

²¹ *Idem*

²² See FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 263, 15.08.67; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting, 13.07.67

De Gaulle, similarly, emphasised the need for the Six to act in common in the negotiations for the international monetary system if they wanted to defend their independence towards the US²³.

The West German leaders, always uneasy about having to choose between Paris and Washington, were also divided on certain questions, especially on how to successfully push Britain's candidacy to the EEC. If Kiesinger wanted to avoid confrontation with De Gaulle and refused to act like a "bulldozer", Brandt was blunter and warned his American counterpart Rusk that a French veto could have serious consequences for Franco-German relations²⁴. The issue of the rivalry was therefore still uncertain at this point, but both Paris and Washington had, or felt they had, means to influence their ally. The US could always rely on the fact that they guaranteed West Germany's security. On the other hand, and if we are to believe American sources, Couve after the Franco-German summit of July "had made it 'brutally clear' that Germany now had to choose between either forcing the British application for admission [to the EEC] or aligning themselves to De Gaulle's policy of détente"²⁵.

This last, however, produced mixed results during the summer, including the relations with the Soviet Union where very little came out of Pompidou's visit to Moscow between 4 and 8 July. It is true that on the Vietnam War, the final communiqué marked the first occasion when both countries joined together to call for an end to foreign intervention and bombing²⁶. It actually coincided with the regularisation of relations between Paris and Hanoi, with François de Quirielle being accredited as the general French representative in Hanoi rather than an interim representative²⁷. But on other topics, the harmony was less obvious, especially on the Middle East conflict. Brezhnev praised French policy, but did not hide his disappointment with its failure to convince many African states to vote for the same resolutions during the UN debates²⁸. Finally on the all-important question of Europe, Kosygin, besides the usual tribute to France's

²³ See FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XV: Document 227, 15.08.67; MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting, 13.07.67

²⁴ Compare FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 263, 15.08.67 and FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XV: Document 227, 15.08.67;

²⁵ LBJL: PP, NSF, SF, Box 48: CIA Memo, 01.08.67

²⁶ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2102: Stoessel to Rusk, 14.07.67

²⁷ De Quirielle, *A Hanoi*, p.195

²⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.388: Pompidou-Brezhnev meeting, 08.07.67

positive role in East-West relations, appeared very pessimistic as to the chances of progress for détente on the continent, and expressed strong mistrust towards Bonn's *Ostpolitik*²⁹. In a talk with Kiesinger a few days later, Pompidou could only regret the Soviet government's inability to appreciate West Germany's new overtures³⁰.

In contrast to the lukewarm Franco-Soviet relations, Bonn's *Ostpolitik* was going through a period of renewed hope. After a couple of months of stalling, the summer brought concrete results. As Brandt confided to Rusk, his trip to Romania had been a success, and he was equally optimistic about the exchange of trade missions recently negotiated between the Czechs and Germans by his personal representative Egon Bahr³¹. Paris fully welcomed Bonn's latest openings to Eastern Europe. Beside the belief that Bonn was following in France's footsteps, De Gaulle felt that Bonn's moves towards détente in Europe "can help give a reality to the Europe of the Six. It discovers itself through its relations with Eastern Europe"³². Moreover, those changes could not have happened at a better time, as De Gaulle prepared for his extremely important trip to Poland - originally planned for June but postponed to early September because of the Six Day War.

As significant as this trip was, France realised, however, its success would ultimately depend on West Germany's ability to normalise its relations with the states of the Eastern Bloc. France needed some flexibility from its ally, and De Gaulle did not hesitate to encourage Kiesinger to change his stance on the Oder-Neisse border, because of the massive effect on Poland that would ensue³³. Similarly, Bonn counted on the support of Paris in its quest to break the ice with Moscow and the satellite states. In the weeks preceding De Gaulle's visit, West German officials repeatedly lobbied the French government. Manfred Klaiber, West German Ambassador to Paris, asked the French president if he could mention the problem of Germany's

²⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.388: Pompidou-Kosygin meeting 1, 04.07.67

³⁰ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31: Pompidou-Kiesinger meeting, 12.07.67

³¹ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XV: Document 225, 15.08.67

³² Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, 09.08.67, p.263

³³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31: De Gaulle-Kiesinger meeting, 12.07.67

post-war borders “in a way that was not too ‘demonstrative’”³⁴. Limburg, a *chargé d'affaires* in the West German Embassy in Paris, reiterated the point in a meeting with Jacques de Beaumarchais, the *Directeur Politique* of the Quai d'Orsay. He also indicated that his government would be grateful if France could not only defend Bonn's *Ostpolitik* in front of the Poles, but also emphasise that West Germany sincerely wanted to improve relations with Warsaw³⁵.

Here lay both the crucial challenge and opportunity for France. On the positive side, the French government believed it possessed - with this visit to Poland - a trump card in its relations with Bonn, one with which it could possibly pressure its ally for cooperation in other political fields. On the other hand, the General only possessed a limited margin of action during his trip to Poland, as he sought to please all parties. In exchange for his support on the question of the post-war borders, he hoped that the Polish Communist leaders would show more flexibility on the German question and greater independence vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Naturally, for fear of antagonising Bonn, De Gaulle did not intend to become too close to the Poles, and so he categorically rejected Polish proposals to sign a Franco-Polish treaty³⁶; nor could he afford to push Warsaw too far on the path of independence, for fear of angering Moscow.

III. September-October: Times of Tension

As pointed out by Couve, going to Poland was part of the plan “to disengage Europe from the bloc system and to accentuate the opening of Eastern Europe, while still recognising the post-war borders”³⁷. Besides promoting French prestige and strengthening Franco-Polish relations, the trip mostly sought to provide additional impetus to the rapprochement between Western and Eastern Europe.

³⁴ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2500: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 4890-4893, 05.09.67

³⁵ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2500: Note of De Beaumarchais, 18.08.67

³⁶ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 182, Pologne: Note by Tricot, 23.08.67. Jan Druto, Polish Ambassador at Paris, first broached the subject of a treaty on 11.08.67 during a conversation with Bernard Tricot, the *Secrétaire Général de l'Élysée* [see MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.31]

³⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle: vol.3*, 06.09.67, p.293

Despite giving a warm reception to the General, Polish leaders, especially Secretary General of the Communist Party Wladislaw Gomulka, proved incredibly stubborn and inflexible on both European issues and Germany. If De Gaulle stated that security in Europe could only exist through détente and entente between states rather than through the futile opposition between two blocs, Gomulka firmly and publicly rejected this vision, presenting the alliance with the Soviet Union as the “cornerstone of Polish foreign policy”³⁸. Similarly in private talks, De Gaulle made his plea in favour of German reunification, calling the current situation abnormal and warning that European states would remain the pawns of superpower rivalries as long as they did not act in common. But, Gomulka proved again uncompromising and unresponsive. He pointed out that the Polish policy towards Germany was not only more dogmatic than the Soviet policy but also the only good policy. He added that France should not expect concessions from Poland on that subject³⁹.

Privately, the French president felt somewhat frustrated with the limited results of his visit. During the first Council of Ministers after his return, he poured scorn on a Polish government that “barely remembers Poland is in Europe”⁴⁰. Nonetheless, this did not prevent De Gaulle and his aides from considering the trip as a breakthrough. Taking the long-term view, they undoubtedly believed that France had connected with the Polish people, providing momentum for their struggle to liberalise their regime and gain more independence from Moscow⁴¹. As De Gaulle confided to Alain Peyrefitte, his then Minister for Education: “I know those regimes [in Eastern Europe] are totalitarian. But I am sowing grains which maybe, with others, will blossom in twenty or thirty years. I will not see them blossom. You might. The young Poles of today will rattle the Soviet rule. It is written on the walls”⁴². Thus, despite a certain setback in Poland, De Gaulle refused to give up on a policy to which he was greatly

³⁸ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: De Gaulle and Gomulka’s speeches to the Polish Diet, 11.09.67

³⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.388: De Gaulle-Gomulka meeting, 11.09.67

⁴⁰ Peyrefitte, *C’était De Gaulle: vol.3*, 13.09.67, p.298

⁴¹ Salgo, Laszlo, *DGESS V*, p.478

⁴² Peyrefitte, *C’était De Gaulle: vol.1*, 09.09.67, p.47

attached⁴³. For him, nothing could stop the inexorable march towards East-West détente in Europe.

That said, not all observers shared his optimism. *Le Monde* argued that while the trip had produced some interesting results, it had also underlined the limits of Gaullist policy. The Eastern Europe states applauded French policy when it weakened Western solidarity, but their leaders quickly ran away when asked to follow France's footsteps⁴⁴. This damning assessment would turn out to be all too accurate, and many authors have singled out the trip to Poland as a turning point in De Gaulle's attempts to foster East-West détente in Europe⁴⁵.

In the same way, there is no consensus when assessing to what extent De Gaulle's own actions in Poland were responsible for provoking the backlash against French policy. For Vaïsse, De Gaulle's speech to the Polish Diet was perhaps less blatant than the famous speeches in Quebec or Phnom Penh, but it was equally clear in its calls for Poland to adopt France's independent model; for Rey, this call for "revolt" undoubtedly worried the Soviet leaders⁴⁶. Thierry Wolton, though, offers a very different interpretation on the trip, describing it as an embarrassment for De Gaulle and his supporters. After the speeches of Phnom Penh and the Quebec scandal, "it was hard to find equivalents in the speeches in Poland which would credit the idea that De Gaulle maintained a good equilibrium between his policy towards the East and his policy towards the West". Roussel agrees, pointing out that De Gaulle showed at best a very moderate attitude towards the socialist world and lacked conviction when criticising the policy of blocs in the Polish Diet⁴⁷.

Yet, if both views are to a certain extent correct, they also ignore the central point. De Gaulle's calls for greater Polish independence from Moscow certainly remained fairly lacklustre and cryptic. On one occasion, for example, he invited Poland to "look a bit further, a bit bigger" and pointed out that "obstacles that seem insurmountable today, you [Poland] will overcome

⁴³ Rey, *La tentation*, p.61

⁴⁴ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2500: *Le Monde* article, 13.09.67

⁴⁵ See Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol.3*, p.541; or Durandin, *France contre l'Amérique*, p.101

⁴⁶ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.439; Rey, *La tentation*, p.61

⁴⁷ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.439; Roussel, *De Gaulle*, pp.843-844

without doubt. You know what I am referring too"⁴⁸. But, the master of the Élysée could neither afford nor did he want to cause the same shock as with the speeches in Phnom Penh and Quebec. De Gaulle went to Poland with the idea of furthering the cause of East-West détente in Europe. In order to do so, he needed to keep Poland, West Germany and the Soviet Union happy and on board, a feat only possible through nuance and a tight balancing act. The real problem for France, however, was that for all its clear strategy, it lacked persuasive tactics. If De Gaulle gave the Poles satisfaction on the question of post-war borders and shied away from major criticism of the Soviet Union, he only met in exchange with serious Polish inflexibility on the German question and thus had little to show for Bonn. After the trip to Poland, the challenge for France was both simple and daunting: what could France do to keep the momentum of détente going once the Eastern Bloc started to adopt a more rigid attitude?

Sadly for the General, the situation hardly improved in the following months, as France's policy of East-West détente in Europe faced ever growing difficulties. It was certainly not the case that the policy lost all its impetus straightaway. The process of consultation and mutual visits with the countries of the Eastern Bloc continued unabated for the rest of 1967. To mention a few examples, the Czech President Josef Lenart visited Paris in October 1967, and French Chief of Staff General Charles Ailleret visited Moscow the same month. Nevertheless, these regular contacts could not hide the fact that relations between France and the Eastern Bloc states were being played out in a far more tense and mistrustful atmosphere.

Both the growing rigidity and Soviet attempts to restore discipline within the Eastern Bloc played a central role in impeding France's policy. As some of the satellite states showed less flexibility, so the tone towards France became less lenient. In an article on 13 September *Prace*, the organ of the Czech syndicates, praised De Gaulle's visit to Poland, but also sent an explicit advice to the French President:

⁴⁸ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2500: De Gaulle speech in Westerplatte, 10.09.67; Note that the Polish Embassy in Paris complained about this speech, describing it as improper, according to Jarzabek, Wanda, "Rozmowa Charlesa de Gaulle'a z Władysławem Gomułką w czasie wizyty generała w Polsce we wrześniu 1967 r" ("The four eyes conversation between Charles de Gaulle and Władisław Gomułka during the General's visit to Poland, September 1967"), *Dzieje Najnowsze (The Journal)*, Vol.32/4 (2000), p.152;

The noble words of De Gaulle did not fool the sharp observer when it came to the little diplomatic subtleties by which he tried to tell his interlocutors about the need to express stronger national feelings. De Gaulle would obviously welcome what in the West they describe - in the relations between socialist states - as the 'policy of independence' towards the Soviet Union. It is also why there are some differences of opinions between France and Poland on the German problem⁴⁹.

Like Gomulka, the journal wanted to reaffirm the solidarity between the socialist states and the Soviet Union, and warn De Gaulle that they welcomed French policy only inasmuch as it did not attempt to threaten this link.

Moreover, France's détente policy further faltered as Franco-Soviet relations suffered from Moscow's hardening stance on European affairs and its mistrust of French intentions. Officially, the Soviets welcomed De Gaulle's trip to Poland, and Zorin was quick to point out to De Gaulle that "Moscow considers your trip to Poland as a major contribution to the developing normalisation of European relations"⁵⁰. Privately, they held a different view. The Soviet leaders were content with the Franco-Polish rapprochement, but were unhappy with the grandiose reception given to the General because they feared it could reinforce anticommunist movements in Poland. Despite Gomulka's inflexibility, they were also worried by French attempts to underline Poland's national differences vis-à-vis the Soviet Union⁵¹.

The Soviets were mistrustful, especially of West Germany, and far more interested in the status quo⁵². As such, during talks with their French counterparts, Soviet officials – as well as other Eastern European statesmen – mainly focused on the question of a European security conference and a possible Franco-Soviet pact. Any such conference would naturally confirm the status quo in Europe, and as a bonus the Soviets could exploit the conference in order to jeopardise Western solidarity. Zorin not so subtly suggested to De Gaulle that April 1969, in other words the date of the revision of the North Atlantic Treaty, could constitute a favourable period to consider the question of European security in a different manner than through military

⁴⁹ MAEF: Europe, Pologne 1966-1970, Vol.2500: Note of *Sous Direction Europe Orientale*, 18.10.67

⁵⁰ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.32: Zorin-De Gaulle meeting, 04.10.67

⁵¹ Vassilieva, Natalia, "L'URSS et le développement des relations de la France avec les pays d'Europe de l'Est (Pologne et Roumanie)", in Vaïsse, *De Gaulle*, pp.207-208

⁵² Couve, *Politique étrangère*, p.281

blocs⁵³. Similarly, the insistence with which Zorin pushed for a Franco-Soviet pact worried Alphand, leading him to think that Moscow was seeking nothing else apart from detaching France further from its Allies in the Western world⁵⁴. At the same time, the Soviets remained deaf to the French calls for greater flexibility on the issue of East-West détente in Europe. De Gaulle pleaded with Zorin for Moscow to try and improve its relations with Bonn, as it would have a vital impact in advancing the cause of détente, but such calls seemed to have little effect⁵⁵.

If the French government was not oblivious to the difficulties encountered by its policy of détente in late 1967, it did not appear unduly worried by the situation. Couve, for one, complained to Brandt about the rigidity of Soviet policy, and the general immobilism in both East-West affairs and within NATO. But, he added that immobilism was an easier position to adopt, at least in the short term⁵⁶. West German officials shared this outlook but not French optimism. After the minor successes of the summer, *Ostpolitik* appeared once again at a standstill in the face of the rigidity and inflexibility of some of the states of the Eastern Bloc, especially Poland and East Germany. During the meeting of West German representatives in Eastern Europe in Bonn on 4-5 December 1967, they agreed that except with Yugoslavia, West German diplomacy could expect no key development with the satellite states in 1968⁵⁷. This assessment did not escape Alphand who complained that: "Everything is at a dead end: West Germany is not accepting either the post-war borders or the existence of East Germany, the Soviets prefer the status quo, and Brandt still persists with the search for détente with Eastern Europe⁵⁸.

Such dejection was not without consequences for Franco-German relations. De Gaulle's declarations in Poland on the irreversible nature of the post-war borders had already created

⁵³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.32: Zorin-De Gaulle meeting, 04.10.67

⁵⁴ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2666: Alphand-Zorin meeting, 20.09.67

⁵⁵ See MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.32: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 04.10.67

⁵⁶ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.389: Couve-Brandt meeting, 17.10.67

⁵⁷ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1545: Seydoux to Couve, Telegram number 6543-6547, 09.12.67

⁵⁸ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 22.10.67, p.494

controversy in the West German press, and contributed to the relative loss of popularity of the French president in Germany⁵⁹. Furthermore, the problems also spread to *Ostpolitik* as a whole. With the latter's lack of progress, it was an easy step for many within Germany to question the usefulness of the Paris-Bonn link, considering how France's aid had not enabled the German government to achieve its aims, and then call for more support for British entry into the EEC⁶⁰.

Yet, it is easy to overstate this point. While favourable in principle to Britain joining the EEC, Kiesinger made it clear that he opposed the idea of forcing France on the issue of Britain. Stability in the Federal Republic's European and Atlantic bonds, as Ludlow mentioned, was a precondition for any new *Ostpolitik*⁶¹. The real danger was that with the stalling process of East-West détente, France risked losing its perceived trump card over Bonn, and so find itself in even less of a position to guarantee the latter's cooperation in other political domains, especially Western affairs. This was particularly problematic in a period when the crucial Western negotiations were fast approaching their climax.

The summer respite within the Western world came to a crashing end in September. This was evidently the case for NATO, rocked by increasing speculation as to whether France would continue its membership of the North Atlantic Treaty after 1969⁶². Paris' intentions were unclear, but there was no doubt about its animosity towards NATO. De Gaulle was already furious that he had not been consulted over the decision to restore an annual authorisation for over flights⁶³. But, Paris' hostility increasingly centred on the Harmel exercise.

Prior to the autumn of 1967, France had paid little attention to the Harmel discussions, and even late in July, officials noted the limited progress of the four sub-groups composing the report, as well as their very provisional conclusions⁶⁴. However, this changed from September onwards as the exercise reached its critical phase, and French dissatisfaction threatened to turn

⁵⁹ Seydoux, *Mission Diplomatique*, p.101

⁶⁰ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1608: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe Centrale*, 22.11.67

⁶¹ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.143

⁶² NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2102: Leddy to Rusk, 11.09.67

⁶³ De Gaulle, *LNC: XI*, De Gaulle to Pompidou, 15.09.67, p.134. According to Jean de la Grandville, then Director of the *Quai d'Orsay's Service des Pactes*, the French note of 31 August to the NATO embassies had not been properly cleared by the French government.

⁶⁴ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.276: Note 348 of French delegation to North Atlantic Council, 20.07.67

into all-out opposition⁶⁵. By early October, the French government had finally received all four reports drafted by the sub-groups, and woken up to the challenge of the Harmel exercise. Two of the reports in particular – from the second sub group on inter-allied relations headed by Paul-Henri Spaak and the fourth one on NATO's relations with the outside world headed by Professor Patijn – appeared as real pleas against French policy, and therefore totally unacceptable from Paris' point of view⁶⁶.

The friction in NATO coincided with the erosion of the fragile consensus over the international monetary system. True, there was still enough good will to produce a general agreement at the IMF's annual meeting in Rio: the Fund's Executive Directors were asked to submit a report by 31 March 1968 that proposed amendments for the activation of the SDR and new rules for the running of the IMF⁶⁷. Even Debré initially expressed satisfaction with the agreement, even if accompanied with several caveats. He warned his colleagues that the SDR could only be activated on certain preconditions, such as the reserve currency states eliminating their balance of payments deficits, and if the creation of the drawing rights took place in parallel with a reform of the IMF rules that gave the Six more weight⁶⁸. But the Rio accord was vague and did not mark the end of negotiations over the international monetary system.

The SDR could not become effective as long as there remained basic differences between France and others. As Solomon explains, "some of the semantic compromises in the [Rio] outline had to be unmasked if the new language was to be clear and operational"⁶⁹. Furthermore, Debré's optimism was slowly giving way to rising suspicion. Only a few days after the London meeting in late August, he was already writing to his American counterpart Fowler, complaining that some of his recent declarations went against the agreed compromise⁷⁰. His doubts only worsened after the Rio meeting. Initially pleased with the results of Rio, Debré quickly changed

⁶⁵ Bozo, Frédéric, "Détente versus Alliance: France, the United States and the politics of the Harmel Report, 1964-1968", *Contemporary European History*, Vol.7/3 (1998), p.352

⁶⁶ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.276: Note du *Service des Pactes*, 05.10.67

⁶⁷ For the agreement see DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Resolutions adopted in Rio, 29.09.67

⁶⁸ FNSP: 4DE Carton 73: Speech at the IMF Rio meeting, 26.09.67

⁶⁹ Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.143

⁷⁰ LBJL: Bator, SF, Box 10: Debré to Fowler, 07.09.67

his mind when his collaborators mentioned the ambiguity of the agreement and the Anglo-Saxons' desire to break the unity of Common Market Ministers⁷¹. In particular, there was great disappointment with Italian Finance Minister Emilio Colombo, who had tended to break with fellow Europeans and dismiss the link between the study on SDR and the one on the IMF's reform⁷².

The question of Six unity became even more urgent when the British question resurfaced through the Commission's Opinion of 29 September. As Parr explains, the Commission's Opinion largely supported the principle of enlargement and recommended the opening of negotiations, but it still raised doubts about the strength of the sterling⁷³. It seemed as if France had managed to "make explicit links between the balance of payments and the reserve role of sterling, so drawing a clear political picture of a country whose extra-European obligations would render a European role difficult". Moreover, the Opinion had also "pointed out that Britain's extra-European interests would make it difficult for the UK to side with the Six in IMF talks"⁷⁴. But, those arguments on sterling notwithstanding, the general tone of the Opinion truly emphasised how much the debate on enlargement had changed since 1961-63. If the Commission had been lukewarm towards the first British application and sympathetic to the French efforts to defend the Community, it had by 1967 completely changed its position and was now prepared "to use its *avis* as a means of putting further pressure on the French to allow talks with the British, Danes, Irish and Norwegians to begin"⁷⁵.

The uncomfortable reality was that in October 1967 France was battling simultaneously on three fronts, and on questions of some importance for the future of the Western world. This situation appeared in some ways similar to the one in late 1962, at the time of the first British application and Kennedy's "Great Partnership" proposal. There were, however, crucial differences in respect to France. If De Gaulle's domestic position had been strengthened in late

⁷¹ Debré, *Mémoires IV*, p.172

⁷² FNNSP: 4DE Carton 6: Debré to Burin des Rozières, 02.10.67

⁷³ Parr, *Britain's policy*, p.164

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.165

⁷⁵ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.142

1962 by victories in the referendum and legislative election, five years later he faced a significant public opposition to his policies.

Furthermore, France was also in a weaker position in the respective negotiations. Towards NATO, France realised that the Harmel exercise offered an opportunity for the US to both strengthen the unity of the Atlantic Alliance and to lead the process of détente, thereby undermining the French impact in the East-West dimension. Yet, because it took De Gaulle's ideas on détente, France would find itself in clear contradiction with its own policies should it distance itself from the conclusions of the analysis⁷⁶. Similarly, under strong Anglo-Saxon pressure in monetary affairs, Paris' Five partners in the Common Market were slowly accepting the idea that the SDR could become the outline of a real international currency detached from gold, as opposed to a system of international credit⁷⁷. As for the British question, Paris had rarely been isolated in the 1961-1963 talks and its arguments had often appeared as perfectly legitimate attempts to defend the Community. In the 1967 negotiations, however, it found itself far more isolated than it had ever been before January 1963, and the veneer of respectability seemed to be almost missing from its case against enlargement⁷⁸.

Finally, France had to confront the challenge of interdependence. If its goals in the various negotiations were quite clear, what tactic could it adopt to fulfill its objectives on all fronts, and still avoid some inherent contradictions? Indeed, France wanted to maintain the unity of the Six to push through a reform of the international monetary system, while also opposing the Harmel exercise and blocking British entry into the EEC, two goals inimical to the interests of its Common Market partners. Any success in their *Westpolitik* would require a remarkable juggling act from De Gaulle and his government.

In October, France still chose to avoid an all-out confrontation on the Harmel exercise, surely with an idea of maintaining cohesion between the six member states of the EEC. Instead,

⁷⁶ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.174

⁷⁷ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.225

⁷⁸ Ludlow, N. Piers, "A Short-term Defeat: The Community Institutions and the Second British Application to join the EEC", in Daddow, *Harold Wilson*, pp.139-140

it quickly adopted the carrot and stick approach so as to limit the impact of the exercise. On the one hand, during a meeting with Secretary General of NATO Manlio Brosio, De Gaulle sent a clear warning to his Allies. While reaffirming France's loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and its likely adherence to the Treaty after 1969, he stated that any attempts to "transform the Atlantic Alliance" or to turn the Atlantic Alliance into a political organisation designed "to control and direct East-West relations" - an oblique reference to the Harmel exercise - might force France to act otherwise⁷⁹. At the same time, France tried to coordinate its policy with West Germany and convince them that the Harmel exercise should not be too ambitious. Couve insisted to Brandt that it was a purely academic report, and as such should not attempt to define a common foreign policy for all NATO states⁸⁰.

The best tactic to block the British candidacy appeared far less obvious. As Parr explains, De Gaulle at this point preferred not to resort to a veto and on 5 October, he made the very unusual move of summoning Patrick Reilly, British Ambassador at Paris, for a private meeting. He "urged Reilly to convince the British to drop the whole venture [candidacy to the EEC], arguing that the negotiations could not work and so there was no point in embarking upon them"⁸¹. This uncertainty was even more in evidence during the fascinating top-level meeting that took place a few days later, involving only De Gaulle, Debré, Pompidou, Couve and French Permanent Representative to the EEC Jean-Marc Boegner. All participants agreed on the need to prevent Britain's membership and to avoid the opening of negotiations, but they could not agree on a definite tactic⁸². However, external circumstances were to come to the rescue.

Back in September, Debré had suggested closer ties between the policies towards the negotiations on the international monetary system and the ones towards Britain's candidacy. He believed that in view of the weakness of the sterling, Britain could not possibly ask for full membership to the EEC, and that the safeguard of its currency depended on a reform of both the

⁷⁹ LBJL: PP, NSF, AF, Box 36: Cleveland to Rusk, Telegram number 5, 15.10.67

⁸⁰ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.389: Couve-Brandt meeting, 17.10.67

⁸¹ Parr, *Britain's policy*, p.167

⁸² ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Conseil sur les Affaires Économiques et Financières, 16.10.67

IMF and the current international monetary practices⁸³. Similarly, De Gaulle believed that the sterling balances were a millstone around Britain's neck, and that the would-be EEC member state would not be able to distinguish between its international and national balance of payments. Once inside the EEC, this meant that they would surely resort to Article 108 of the Rome Treaty. Additionally, the General felt that the Americans were able to exert pressure on Britain because of the weakness of sterling, meaning it was yet again a Trojan horse⁸⁴. Thus, with the help of the Commission's Opinion and the autumn speculation over sterling, criticism of the British currency became the motto of French diplomacy⁸⁵.

This shift became very evident at the EEC Council of Ministers of 23-24 October. Compared to the impressive number of obstacles he listed at the July Council, Couve this time primarily focussed on Britain's economic problems, arguing that London needed to "completely transform its monetary situation and monetary system" and "turn the pound into a national currency"⁸⁶. Besides the fact this argument sought to "kill two birds with one stone", by vetoing British membership and calling for London to end sterling's role as a reserve currency, it presented an additional advantage as Couve explained during the French Council of Ministers of 25 October. France had presented the problem as a debate over whether Britain was in a state or not to join the Common Market. This placed the onus on Britain to prove itself, rather than leave the whole weight of the decision on France⁸⁷. Yet, Couve's optimism was not shared by all. For Alphand, the next crisis would occur when the other Common Market partners realised that France saw as "pointless the opening of any negotiations with Britain"⁸⁸.

IV. November-December: Denouement

⁸³ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Note of Debré, 14.09.67

⁸⁴ Schenk, "Sterling, International Monetary Reform", p.366; for Article 108, see chapter 5, footnote 29

⁸⁵ Bossuat, "Seconde candidature britannique", in Loth, *Crises and Compromises*, p.523

⁸⁶ FSNP: CM Carton 2: Speech to the European Communities, 23.10.67

⁸⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, p.273; this was a change from De Gaulle's position in May, see chapter 5, footnote 35

⁸⁸ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 22.10.67, p.494

Publicly and privately, France continued to portray enlargement as dangerous for the Community and repeated their two preconditions before any opening of talks with Britain: the Six would have to agree on the problems presented by London's membership, while Britain would need to put its economy back in order, implying an equilibrium in its balance of payments and a solution to its monetary difficulties⁸⁹. Couve continued to link the British membership with the monetary negotiations as he repeated the passage of the Commission's Opinion that stated "it is hard to imagine how, after a British entry, this currency [sterling] could continue to play a different role than the currencies of the other EEC states within the international monetary system"⁹⁰.

Despite all those efforts, Paris' case really failed to convince its Common Market partners as the Five largely resisted the French preconditions. They agreed that the reserve role of sterling could cause problems, but they did not believe that this should deter negotiations⁹¹. But more importantly, the British question had another very obvious impact on France as it undermined the other goals of its Western policy. In particular, London's second application seemed to distract French attention away from NATO, as the Harmel exercise approached its final stages⁹².

While the French government had settled on a relatively defensive tactic so as to limit its scope, other states – especially the US and Belgium – were equally very active behind-the-scenes and they sought to give a real value to the exercise on the future of the Alliance. Rusk, and his Belgian counterpart Pierre Harmel, realised that French obstruction created a dilemma: a report adjusted to French sensibilities could end up empty in content, while one which was too honest one could give De Gaulle a pretext for withdrawal from the Alliance⁹³. Nonetheless, they rapidly settled on a two-fold strategy to overcome this quandary. On the one hand, they would quietly

⁸⁹ MAEF: Direction Économique, Papiers Jean-Pierre Brunet 1966-1974, Vol.53: Brunet-Lahr meeting, 02.11.67

⁹⁰ FNSP: CM Carton 2: Speech to l'Assemblée Nationale, 07.11.67

⁹¹ Parr, *Britain's policy*, p.166

⁹² Ellison, James, "Dealing with De Gaulle: Anglo-American relations, NATO and the Second Application", in Daddow, *Harold Wilson and European Integration*, p.180

⁹³ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 267, 27.09.67

spread the word to other allies about their determination to see the exercise through, so as to build up the unity of the Fourteen in the face of French objections. On the other hand, they would also try to keep the French authorities on board by sounding them out quietly, and in a way that did not engage their prestige⁹⁴.

This strategy ultimately fulfilled its aim by isolating the French during the November meetings of the Special Group on the Future of the Alliance. Roger Seydoux, French Permanent Representative to NATO, vigorously defended his country's views in the first meeting on 7-8 November, denying that the organisation could act as an agent of détente and initially opposing the proposed procedural format for the report that would mark the end of the Harmel exercise⁹⁵. Confronted with a determined and united group of fourteen states he had, however, little choice in the end but agree to their favoured procedural approach: Brosio was instructed to draft a report that would be submitted at a second meeting scheduled on 22-23 November⁹⁶.

Seydoux was equally unsuccessful on the content of the report. Having managed to reject the previous seven drafts, he tried to remove from the eighth one all formulations that were incompatible with Gaullist views, especially in regards to harmonisation of policies between NATO states. Yet, his efforts were far from successful in the face of a hardened opposition from the Fourteen, even if they did their best not to completely alienate France⁹⁷. As the American Permanent Representative Harlan Cleveland summed up: “the broad consensus on key issues which began to take form in [the] subgroup sessions has begun to be converted into Alliance doctrine” and, “confronted by this momentum, France appears to have made [the] decision that it prefers the embarrassment of compromises to the risk of rejection”⁹⁸.

The determination and unity shown by the Fourteen, combined with public opinion, thus significantly reduced France's margin of action. It also convinced Paris that it should avoid a

⁹⁴ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 268, 04.10.67

⁹⁵ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.277: Seydoux to Couve, Telegrams number 459-462, 08.11.67

⁹⁶ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 275, 09.11.67

⁹⁷ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.277: Seydoux to Couve, Telegrams number 673-675, 24.11.67; Note Pierre Harmel also tried to appease the French directly, taking into account some of their comments, as he pointed out during an interview, Brussels, 02.04.04;

⁹⁸ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 277, 23.11.67

complete break with its NATO allies, at a time when it risked acute isolation from its Five Common Market partners over the possibility of a new veto of the British candidacy to the EEC⁹⁹. That said, the compromise on the Harmel report represented more of a tactical choice than an actual capitulation. Realising it could not gain full satisfaction on both fronts, France gave priority to the EEC over NATO. Apart from the fact the EEC offered a more promising ground for its goals, Paris believed that by accepting the Harmel report, it could avoid further antagonising its Five partners as it sought to block London's application to the European Community. Far from bowing down, the French government wanted to go on the offensive, and it was not long before it found an opening: on 18 November, Britain finally devalued the pound.

Without doubt, De Gaulle had always intended to prevent British membership into the European Community, but the devaluation of sterling provided a convenient excuse – much like the Nassau agreement in December 1962 – to deliver a swift veto. During his press conference on 27 November, the General stressed the incompatibility between the Common Market and the British economy, agriculture and restrictions on free movement of capital. He particularly emphasised the gap between the Common Market and “the state of the pound sterling as highlighted, once again, by its devaluation [...]”; with the state of the pound sterling also which, combined with its role as an international currency and the enormous external debts weighing on it, would not enable it right now to be part of the solid, connected, confident society where the franc, the mark, the lira, the florin and the Belgian franc are united”; at best De Gaulle would only offer association because accepting Britain into the EEC would lead to “the breaking up of a community which, was built and works according to rules that can not accept such a monumental exception”¹⁰⁰.

The devaluation of sterling also allowed the French authorities to challenge the international monetary system. In a matter of days, the speculators who had brought down one

⁹⁹ IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.79, in a survey on 25 September-2 October, only 12% were in favour of leaving the Atlantic Alliance, 54% wanted France to stay in the Alliance, and 34% had no opinion. Bozo, “Détente versus Alliance”, pp.354-355

¹⁰⁰ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, p.243

reserve currency began to turn their attention to the other one, the dollar. In the week between 20 and 27 November, the gold pool – the arrangement among eight countries, including US, to sell or buy gold in free market in order to keep it close to the official price of \$35 – lost an unprecedented \$641M¹⁰¹. Those questions became even more pronounced when it became public knowledge that France had secretly withdrawn from the gold pool¹⁰². While France had in fact left in June, Paul Fabra, a financial journalist from *Le Monde* with close ties to the Gaullist government, chose the week after the devaluation to announce that Paris had dropped out from the pool¹⁰³. Furthermore, during his press conference, the French president launched another scathing attack on the dollar, condemning the fact that the US balance of payments deficit favoured American investments abroad, and seemed to welcome the current difficulties of the reserve currencies: “it is possible that the current storm, for which France is not responsible, and which swept away the exchange rate of the pound and is now threatening the dollar’s rate, will lead in the end to the restoration of an international monetary system based on immutability, impartiality, and universality, which are the characteristics of gold”¹⁰⁴.

The veto against Britain and the denunciation of the international monetary system were the most significant elements, but certainly not the only important parts of De Gaulle’s very provocative press conference. The French president wanted to use the opportunity to settle some domestic scores. Besides explaining his attitude in Montreal, the General decided to address again the conflict in the Middle East. It has to be said that French policy had already shown signs of hardening in the autumn, and became more obviously sympathetic to the Arab states – as testified by the various visits of Saudi and Kuwaiti princes in this period¹⁰⁵; De Gaulle, though, went a step further in his press conference. Referring to the Jewish people as a “*peuple d’élite*,

¹⁰¹ See Roy, Raj, “The Battle for Bretton Woods: America, Britain and the International Financial Crisis of October 1967-March 1968”, *Cold War History*, 2/2 (2002), p.47; Kunz, “American Economic Consequences”, in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968, p.95

¹⁰² Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.114

¹⁰³ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.171; TNA: PREM 13/1856: Paris to FO, Telegram number 1161, 21.11.67

¹⁰⁴ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, p.231

¹⁰⁵ Roussel, *De Gaulle*, p.845

sûr de lui-même et dominateur”, he regretted the fact that since 1956 Israel had transformed itself into a belligerent country, determined at all costs to expand its territory¹⁰⁶.

Thus, like his press conference of 14 January 1963, the French President had hoped to turn the November 1967 speech into another spectacular knock out blow, and it did not fail to produce strong reactions. For example Rusk mentioned to Charles Lucet, French Ambassador in Washington, the great emotion that arose in American public opinion because of De Gaulle’s declarations on Israel, Quebec and the dollar, and confessed “never had US-French relations, according to him, reached such a cold and hostile point”¹⁰⁷. Yet, Paris pursued this offensive line in the aftermath of the press conference. In monetary matters, if we are to believe a CIA report of March 1968, France sought to further fan the speculative flames by leaking unsettling financial news to the press and by encouraging other countries, especially China, Algeria and other Communist states, to convert their dollars into gold¹⁰⁸. The situation was so tense that President Johnson went as far as to complain to Senator Mike Mansfield about “the desire of the French and Soviets ‘and all of our enemies’ to get US gold and bring the dollar down”¹⁰⁹.

At the same time, General Ailleret caused major uproar with an article in the December 1967 issue of *Revue de Défense Nationale*. Nicely timed with the Harmel report and adoption of flexible response by NATO, Ailleret’s article stated that the French *force de frappe* must not be “oriented in a direction, against an *a priori* enemy, but must be capable of intervening everywhere, or be *tous azimuts*”; a strategic doctrine that the US and others interpreted as a possible declaration of French military neutrality¹¹⁰. French Minister for armed forces Pierre Messmer, confessing that he had authorised the publication of the article – or in effect confirming De Gaulle’s hand in this – argued to American officials that the main purpose of Ailleret’s piece was to convince French public opinion about the value of an independent nuclear

¹⁰⁶ De Gaulle, *DM:V*, pp.232-233

¹⁰⁷ MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1964-1970, Vol.577: Lucet to Couve, Telegrams number 6405-6408, 07.12.67

¹⁰⁸ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 174: CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 20.03.68

¹⁰⁹ See footnote 6 of FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.VIII: Document 158, 15.12.67

¹¹⁰ Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.183-184

capability¹¹¹. But it is hard to disagree with Bozo's assessment that the *tous azimuts* doctrine mostly sought to highlight French difference within the Atlantic Alliance, and to transpose to the strategic field the refusal of the bloc logic¹¹². Finally, and certainly not the least important, France successfully ended the British application to join the European Community during the EEC Council of Ministers on 18-19 December. If the Five and the Commission had wanted to start negotiations with the candidates, France imposed its will because any decision on enlargement required unanimity¹¹³.

Like in January 1963, France took bold measures to proclaim its independence and Great Power status, and prevented Britain from joining the Common Market. That is, however, as far as the parallel goes between those two periods. The diplomatic offensive of November-December 1967 was, more than anything else, a sign of weakness and it largely failed. During the French Council of Ministers on 20 December, Couve might have gloated about the fact that the EEC meeting had ended in disagreement rather than the crisis wanted by Britain¹¹⁴. But, the reality is that the Five refused to let the question of enlargement die down as it had in 1963. The decision to keep the candidacies on the agenda "reflected the fact that peace was unlikely fully to return to the EEC until *la question anglaise* had been answered in a fashion acceptable to the applicants, to the Five and to the French"¹¹⁵.

Moreover, the tension with the Five undermined French goals in other domains, especially the monetary negotiations. Of course, the future of the international monetary system was still very uncertain in late 1967. After the collapse of sterling, the market began to stabilise, but it was still uneasy and the support for the gold pool was deteriorating, as the European members of the group made it clear that they would end their cooperation unless the US took

¹¹¹ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 1542: Wallner to Rusk, Telegram number 7724, 11.12.67

¹¹² Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, p.183

¹¹³ For the result of the meeting see DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Communiqué at end of EEC Council of Ministers, 19.12.67

¹¹⁴ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.3*, p.274

¹¹⁵ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.145

drastic measures to reduce its balance of payments deficit¹¹⁶. Yet, Paris had hardly benefited from the weaknesses of the reserve currencies, quite the opposite. By mid-December – according to the CIA report previously mentioned – “the French government had become concerned about the deepening [monetary] crisis and subsequently had generally refrained from unsettling actions”¹¹⁷. Moreover, its capacity to seriously damage the dollar was limited, considering that it no longer possessed a large dollar surplus in reserve¹¹⁸. Finally, while agreeing with Paris on core points, the Five moved closer and closer to the US interpretation of the London agreement of August, sometimes using as a pretext the anti-American presentation of some of France’s ideas¹¹⁹.

To make things worse, internal and external events combined to weaken France’s position even more. Domestically, the General’s press conference of 27 November, in particular the words on Israel, shocked French public opinion and did little to increase support for the president’s policy¹²⁰. In regards to international developments, Couve continued to publicly express little concern with the Harmel report and the stalling East-West détente in Europe¹²¹. Yet, there were undeniable signs that France was losing its margin of action and becoming increasingly trapped between both blocs. As Vaïsse and Bozo argue convincingly, the adoption of the Harmel report in December 1967, with its twin emphasis on defence and détente, represented a great victory for the US and its leadership. By “Atlanticising” détente, NATO said yes to détente and no to the dissolution of blocs, which was one of the central aims of De Gaulle’s policy¹²². The Harmel report effectively gave NATO a new impetus to take a more active role in the East-West rapprochement; it was hard to disagree with President Johnson’s

¹¹⁶ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, pp.172-173; Kunz, “American Economic Consequences”, in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968, p.96

¹¹⁷ LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 174: CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 20.03.68

¹¹⁸ TNA: FCO 33/44: Washington to FO, Telegram number 3891, 08.12.67

¹¹⁹ See ANF: 5AG1, Carton 33, Affaires Économiques: Note for Pompidou, 14.12.67; or Debré, *Mémoires IV*, p.172

¹²⁰ Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.640; according to Vaïsse again, on p.349, average approval for De Gaulle’s foreign policy dropped three points in the second semester of 1967, from 52.60% to 49.50%.

¹²¹ DF: PEF, 1966-1967: Couve Interview with French Television, 14.12.67

¹²² Bozo, *Deux Stratégies*, pp.176-177; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.395

assessment according to which NATO had successfully defeated the French challenge¹²³. Thus, France found itself surrounded by a NATO keen to act as an agent of détente and an Eastern bloc less willing to open up to the Western world. This morose context was not helped by the fact that some Soviet officials believed NATO saw the Harmel report as a licence to try to spark the “‘weakening’ and disintegration of the socialist community ...”¹²⁴.

V. Conclusion

Back in January 1967 Jean Dromer, one of De Gaulle’s influential economic advisors in the Élysée, had written an all-important note about the strategy France should adopt in the major negotiations of the Western world in the period ahead, that is to say the Kennedy Round, the British application to the EEC and the reform of the international monetary system. He essentially advocated that France should try to unite the Six along common positions in monetary affairs, thereby allowing Europe to show its independence vis-à-vis the Anglo-Saxons, and he warned that Paris should not let itself be cornered and forced into a political veto over the British question¹²⁵. By the end of the year, it was hard to deny that France had largely failed to achieve its objectives, as well as over NATO and East-West détente in Europe. Why did 1967 end up being such a disappointment for France after the highs of 1966?

Essentially, the French government had come up against the challenge of interdependence and failed to devise a suitable answer. Politically, it could not find a balance between its desire to pursue independent goals – such as vetoing Britain and maintaining sole leadership in the EEC – and its ambitions to unite Western Europe vis-à-vis the US. Equally, Paris lacked the influence to push the East-West rapprochement further once the Eastern Bloc became more wary. In the economic field, the French authorities realised that they could not

¹²³ MAEF: Amérique, États-Unis 1964-1970, Vol.577: Leprette to Couve, Telegram number 6703-6708, 20.12.67

¹²⁴ Newton, Russia, France, p.80

¹²⁵ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 29, Affaires Économiques Conseils Restreints: Note by Dromer, 07.01.67

unsettle the international monetary system without affecting their own economy. Finally, even if it was not completely buried, De Gaulle's grand design had been dealt a serious blow by the external developments in 1967. If in 1966 the General had hoped that a weakened NATO and a more welcoming Eastern Bloc – after France's withdrawal from the integrated military section of the organisation and his trip to Moscow – would help to overcome the Cold War in Europe, a year later a strengthened Atlantic Alliance and a wary Warsaw Pact showed no signs of withering away.

Chapter VII: The Fall, January-August 1968

I. Introduction

On 15 March 1968, journalist Pierre Viansson-Ponté wrote in *Le Monde*: “What characterises currently our public life is boredom. French people are bored. They are not involved in the great convulsions that are shaking the world ... None of this affects us”¹. Of course, the students and workers of France were soon to prove him very wrong, but many would have shared this view. At the start of the year, France still appeared as a haven of stability and prosperity. The economy was growing regularly, despite a slight slowdown in the previous year caused by the West German recession, and De Gaulle remained popular, in spite of some unwelcome outbursts on Quebec and Israel. No one could really anticipate the dramatic events of May 1968.

Instead, the real problem for France was how to turn around the situation in regards to its foreign policy. 1967, as seen in the previous chapter, had ended with a series of serious setbacks for the French authorities: not only were they incapable of preventing NATO from finding a renewed source of purpose, through the Harmel report which called for a twin emphasis on deterrence and détente, but the question of enlargement within the EEC had refused to disappear, even after the veto of Britain’s application. Moreover, even with the devaluation of the sterling in November and the ensuing gold run, France had not yet convinced its European partners that they should follow its proposals to reform the international monetary system. The challenge for this New Year was in fact both simple and difficult: could France prove more able to overcome the challenge of interdependence than it had been in the previous year?

¹ Viansson-Ponté, *République Gaullienne: vol.2*, p.388

II. A Changing International Environment

1968 was a year of great change and turmoil throughout the world, starting with the Vietnam War. North Vietnam's startling and spectacular Tet offensive, launched in late January, ultimately failed in its military objectives, but its political repercussions went far beyond the Indochinese peninsula. Besides crystallising domestic opposition to the conflict in the US, Hanoi's determination to continue fighting convinced American president Lyndon Johnson that his country could not win the war, despite the presence of more than a half million soldiers. On 31 March, during a televised speech, Johnson stunned the world when he announced not only a massive reduction in the bombing of North Vietnam and his desire to seek peace via negotiations with Hanoi, but also his decision not to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections.

If De Gaulle welcomed Johnson's speech as "an act of reason and political courage", France had also been waiting for such an opportunity to mediate, a fact officials were making clear both privately and publicly². On 28 February, the French government expressed its support for UN Secretary General U Thant's position, and claimed that the US should assume North Vietnam would deal in "good faith" if they halted their bombing³. At the same time, Quai officials were informing their American counterparts of North Vietnam's interest "in having Paris act as 'witness' to what it does in connection with the search for a negotiated solution", and Hanoi's desire – as North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong told the French general representative in Hanoi, François de Quirielle – to see France "becoming more active"⁴.

Additionally behind the scenes, and even before the Tet offensive according to Journoud, De Gaulle was using all the resources of informal diplomacy to make sure that Paris was an acceptable choice as a venue for peace talks for both South and North Vietnam⁵. Once Hanoi accepted Johnson's peace offers, France's efforts became more public. On 18 April, Couve

² De Gaulle, *LNC: XI*, Note for the Council of Ministers, 03.04.68, p.210

³ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam policy*, p.108

⁴ NARA: Files of Ambassador at Large Averell Harriman, 1967-1968, Box 2: Dean to Harriman, 09.02.68

⁵ Journoud, Pierre, "La France, les États-Unis et la Guerre du Vietnam: L'Année 1968", in Melandri and Ricard, *Relations Franco-Américaines*, pp.186-189

declared officially that his government would have no objection to Paris acting as a location for the negotiations, and by early May all participants had agreed on the French capital. For De Gaulle, this was a personal and symbolic victory, a sign that his views on the war were accepted throughout the world, and a way to strengthen French influence in South-East Asia⁶. It was also “a triumph of his policy of independence and neutrality” as “Paris had become a ‘neutral territory’”⁷.

The real relevance of the Paris peace talks, however, did not lie in the success of French diplomacy, but instead in its consequences for global politics. Despite largely stalling in 1968, the Paris negotiations nevertheless facilitated limited progress in superpower relations. Indeed, soon after his 31 March speech, Johnson began his “campaign for a symbolically impressive summit, centred on questions of arms control, but encompassing other key areas of policy”⁸. Throughout 1967, Johnson had repeatedly tried to convince the Soviet leaders to start Strategic Arms Limitation Talks [SALT]. Undeterred by initial failures, the US President refused to give up and was eventually rewarded for his efforts. In a letter dated 21 June 1968, Kosygin wrote that he hoped it would be possible “more concretely to exchange views”⁹. Quite likely, the timing of this breakthrough was linked not only to the start of peace talks in Paris, but also the fact that the Soviet Union was interested in a breathing spell because of the problems within the communist world – which will be mentioned in more detail below¹⁰.

On the back of the signing of the NPT on 1 July, the American push for SALT gathered momentum. US Secretary of State Dean Rusk informed the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, on 2 July that Johnson wanted a meeting with Kosygin, and on 25 July, Dobrynin handed Rusk a message from Kosygin “proposing that nuclear arms talks could start within a month or six weeks”; better still, in mid-August, Johnson finally received the long-

⁶ Ibid, p.189

⁷ Sullivan, *France’s Vietnam policy*, p.109

⁸ Dumbrell, *President Johnson*, p.53

⁹ Johnson, *Vantage Point*, pp.480-485

¹⁰ Wolfe, *Soviet Power*, p.270

awaited invitation to visit Moscow in October¹¹. For Schwartz, these were signs that by summer 1968, the atmosphere of East-West relations seemed to be changing in profound ways¹². This could easily appear as an overstated interpretation, especially considering the events in the following months. Eventually, the summit failed to materialise, “Moscow did not believe it could achieve any meaningful agreements with the outgoing president”, and probably preferred to “strengthen those political forces in the US opposed to arms spending”¹³. But, the modest changes introduced by Johnson did have a long-term importance, and helped to provide the foundations for Richard Nixon’s foreign policy, a means of reducing the costs of containment by easing Cold War tensions¹⁴.

These developments in superpower relations and over Vietnam had important implications for De Gaulle’s own grand design. In the previous few years, American troubles in Indochina had created an opportunity for France to establish a privileged dialogue with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. With this rapprochement, the General hoped to achieve his vision of a European détente, whereby the continent would eventually overcome its division into two antagonistic military blocs. At the same time, he hoped that, in exchange for the departure of American troops from Europe, the Soviets would both accept the reunification of Germany and loosen its control over the Eastern European states. Thus, this goal appeared in jeopardy once Moscow increasingly looked to Washington, rather than Europe, as its main interlocutor. France was facing serious competition on the détente stage.

Added to that, France faced an equally strong challenge from NATO. Overcoming France’s withdrawal had instilled a new sense of confidence within the organisation, and many agreed with the Secretary General, Manlio Brosio, that De Gaulle would not withdraw his country from the Alliance in 1969 when he would have the opportunity to do so¹⁵. Buoyed by the

¹¹ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp.182-183

¹² Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.210

¹³ Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p.182; Dumbrell, *President Johnson*, p.82

¹⁴ Herring, George, “Tet and the Crisis of Hegemony”, in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, *1968*, p.53

¹⁵ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 291, 22.02.68

strengthened cohesion and renewed sense of purpose provided by the Harmel report, NATO went about seeking a more active role in East-West relations.

In March, Brosio gave the NATO council a series of questions to be studied by the permanent representatives, and three of those – East-West relations, the situation in the Mediterranean, and a balanced reduction of forces – were investigated in depth¹⁶. Most member states seemed determined in fact to move away from the usual vague and sterile debates, and actually give a concrete follow up to the program of future tasks of the Atlantic Alliance as set out in the Harmel report¹⁷. This was not without its rewards for the Alliance: at the Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik in late June, the member states “issued a ‘signal’ to the USSR to encourage it to prepare for future discussions on the possibility of mutual force reductions in Europe”¹⁸. To sum up, Paris had to contend not only with an emerging superpower rapprochement, but also with a NATO keen to promote a model of bloc-to-bloc détente that was incompatible with its own East-West designs.

III. Dead end in the East ...

If strong competition from the US and NATO was not enough, France’s leverage in East-West relations was further reduced by the continuing rigidity of Soviet policy. Moscow remained inflexible and made few efforts to improve the situation in Europe, especially on the all-important question of its relations with Bonn. Showing no more signs of compromise in early 1968 than during the previous year, the Kremlin leaders submitted an official note condemning West Germany’s infringements in West Berlin, and again insisted on a long list of changes in Bonn’s policies before it could accept signing any renunciation of force agreement with the

¹⁶ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.277: Note du *Service des Pactes*, 20.06.68

¹⁷ See the example of Belgium in MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.277: Note du *Service des Pactes*, 04.05.68

¹⁸ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 316, 28.06.68

latter¹⁹. The uncomfortable reality was that in 1967-1968, Moscow was just not ready to do business with any government in Bonn²⁰.

This, of course, directly affected West Germany and its *Ostpolitik*. Apart from successfully establishing diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia on 31 January 1968, thanks in part to French help, Bonn could only expect modest results from its policy²¹. It also affected De Gaulle's own plans as he continually tried to convince both West Germany and the Soviet Union to adopt more forthcoming positions towards European détente. During the Franco-German summit in mid-February, and despite the fact he foresaw little possibility for progress in the East, the General urged Kiesinger to improve relations with the satellite states, especially Poland²². At the same time, he also literally pleaded with Zorin in the hope that his country would make a gesture towards West Germany²³. This was, however, to no avail, as Zorin stuck to well-known Soviet positions and ignored the call for help. The Kremlin leaders believed that the General was following his policies for his own reasons, and saw no motive to pay a political price to him on Germany at a time when the Grand Coalition government in West Germany was too divided to adopt a more flexible policy towards Eastern Europe.²⁴ The prospects for a serious triangular partnership between Paris, Bonn and Moscow – which De Gaulle deemed vital in his design to overcome the Cold War in Europe – seemed pretty bleak indeed in 1968.

To make matters worse, France's bilateral relations with the Soviet Union also suffered from Moscow's intransigence. French officials' frustrations with Soviet behaviour had already been building up for a long time, leading Jacques Andréani, a deputy director in the Quai in charge of the Soviet and East European desk, to complain to an American embassy officer: "since then [Kosygin's trip to Paris in December 1966], things had changed and 'for some time

¹⁹ For more details on Soviet criticisms of West German actions in Berlin and the preconditions for any agreement see MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2666: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe Orientale*, 05.02.68

²⁰ Garton, *In Europe's Name*, p.56

²¹ MAEF: Europe, Allemagne 1961-1970, Vol.1609: Brandt to Couve, 05.02.68. Before both states established diplomatic relations, the French embassy defended West Germany's interests in Yugoslavia.

²² McGhee, George, *At the Creation of a New Germany: From Adenauer to Brandt, An Ambassador's Account*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989), p.247

²³ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.391: De Gaulle-Zorin meeting, 20.02.68

²⁴ TNA: FCO 28/187: FO to Paris, 19.04.68; TNA: FCO 33/119: Paris to FO, 11.04.68

now we [France] and Russia have been playing hide and seek with each other'. He [Andréani] said Soviets kept saying 'it is time we took a new step forward', but they were extremely vague about what the step would be"²⁵. The fact that Moscow increasingly seemed interested solely in discussing measures that would perpetuate the status quo in Europe, in particular the project of a pan-European security conference, did nothing to improve the situation.

The Soviet Union perceived the European security conference as a means to obtain recognition of the political and territorial status quo, which had emerged after World War II, with the division of Germany as its cornerstone. This was hardly a novel proposal, but the Soviets started to push it far more actively in 1968, surely taking into account the fact that 1969 was approaching, which was to mark the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and the moment at which NATO members would be free to reconsider their membership of the Atlantic Alliance²⁶. For example, Gromyko, during a meeting with the French Ambassador in Moscow, Oliver Wormser, seemed very impatient and particularly determined to fix a place for the start of preparatory talks for the conference. While not quite pressuring his French interlocutor, Gromyko nonetheless tried to force his hand when he made it clear that he wanted "to put an end to the position that consists in saying that the conference has to be well prepared"²⁷.

The French, on the other hand, had no objections to discussing this topic with the Soviets, but could not imagine this conference occurring in the near future because of the many existing unresolved questions, including agreement on its agenda or the exact participants²⁸. These differences of perception emerged very clearly during the two specific meetings – between Couve and Zorin on 23 April, and the talk between the Quai's *Directeur Politique*, Jacques de Beaumarchais, with members of the Soviet embassy in Paris, Iouri Doubinin and Oberemko, on 8 May – held on the subject of the conference. While the Soviets wanted to quickly push ahead

²⁵ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2104: Wallner to State, Airgram number 1751, 22.03.68

²⁶ MAEF: Europe, Organismes Internationaux et Grandes Questions Internationales 1966-1970, Vol.2034: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe-Orientale*, 03.05.68

²⁷ MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2666: Wormser to Couve, Telegrams number 1243-1246, 03.04.68

²⁸ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.391: Frank-Beaumarchais meeting, 13.03.68

with preparatory work, the French believed instead that the conference should take place later on in the détente process, especially after relations between East and West Germany had improved significantly²⁹. The question of the European security conference might not seem vital in the bigger picture of Franco-Soviet relations, but it symbolised the essential gap between the goals of each of the two countries as far as East-West détente was concerned. If the French continued to hope for a rapprochement between the two parts of Germany, the Soviets now openly and unambiguously defended détente as a means to protect the status quo in Europe.

Indeed, this quest for the status quo went hand-in-hand with the Soviet leaders' growing focus on strengthening the Warsaw Pact, as confirmed by the theme developed by the commentaries of various Soviet newspapers: "France should not expect anything in return from the socialist states for having withdrawn from NATO, as it was a unilateral decision and in line with French national interest"³⁰. The obsession with bloc solidarity was naturally strengthened by the fact the masters of the Kremlin felt a "deep-rooted anxiety about the controllability of a sweeping European détente"³¹; and the events in Czechoslovakia in early 1968 only worsened those fears, pushing the Soviets to pay more and more attention to intra-bloc rather than inter-bloc developments.

If dogmatic Stalinism had survived for a long time in Czechoslovakia, pressures for change finally pushed through in the 1960s and led to a less centralised economy. Antonin Novotny, the hard-liner leader of the Czech communist party, opposed these changes and attempted a coup in December 1967 to roll back the reforms, but failed when the Soviets refused to support him. On 5 January 1968, Alexander Dubcek replaced Novotny as Secretary General of the Czech Communist Party, and quickly introduced what he called "socialism with a human face": an attempt to revitalise the country's polity and economy, which would gain public

²⁹ See MAEF: Europe, URSS 1966-1970, Vol.2666: Couve-Zorin meeting, 23.04.68; and MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.34: Note of *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, 08.05.68

³⁰ MAEF: Europe, Organismes Internationaux et Grandes Questions Internationales 1966-1970, Vol.2034: Note of *Sous-Direction Europe-Orientale*, 03.05.68

³¹ Newton, *Russia, France*, p.79

support and still remain within the perimeters of the post-1956 Soviet permissibility³². If Moscow had at first remained very patient with this tolerable effort for self-renewal, as well as the vast public debate authorised by Dubcek after he suspended censorship, by late April it had started to express its first major reservations³³.

In Paris, the reaction to changes in Prague alternated between optimism and anxiety. If De Gaulle welcomed Dubcek's election as "a victory for the supporters of liberalisation", he also worried about the chain impact of these events elsewhere in Eastern Europe³⁴. French officials realised what was at stake in Czechoslovakia. A victory for the more liberal socialists could lead to far-reaching changes in the rest of the Eastern Bloc³⁵. But at the same time, there was an acknowledgement that there was little France could do to influence events, and Couve made it clear that nothing should be done to encourage dissension in Eastern Europe³⁶. The ball was thus not in the French court, and all they could do was wait. The signs from Moscow were not so promising however. During a trip to the Soviet Union in late April, French Minister for armed forces, Pierre Messmer, heard the following ominous confession from Soviet Minister of Defence Marshal Andrei Gretchko: "We will not tolerate for long this Czech policy helped by the German *revanchards*. We will soon take the right dispositions to end this"³⁷.

The French government kept a close eye on Prague, but this did not mean it adopted a completely passive attitude towards relations with the other satellite states. Jenő Fock, the President of the Hungarian Council of Ministers, visited Paris in late March, and there was of course the small matter of De Gaulle's trip to Romania in mid-May. Despite his slightly disappointing experience in Poland in the autumn 1967, the General was too attached to his détente policy to miss out on the opportunity to go Bucharest; and as Charbonnel pointed out, he hoped the occasion could serve to give a "new momentum to the struggle of the peoples of

³² To read more about the background and the beginnings of the Prague Spring, see Kramer, Mark, "The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine", in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968; Rothschild and Wingfield, *Return to Diversity*, pp.166-170

³³ *Ibid*, p.170

³⁴ Lefort, *Souvenirs et secrets*, p.231

³⁵ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.391: Frank-Beaumarchais meeting, 13.03.68

³⁶ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.33: Couve-Stewart meeting, 26.04.68

³⁷ Messmer, Pierre, *Après Tant De Batailles: Mémoires*, (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1992), p.299

Eastern Europe for the liberalisation of their regimes and for greater independence vis-à-vis the Soviet Union”³⁸. In any case, the trip proved to be a popular triumph, and the French President used all opportunities, both privately and publicly, to hammer in his familiar message about détente. To the Great Romanian National Parliament on 15 May, he argued forcefully that Romania and France should cooperate amidst the vast movement to overcome the Cold War order, and end the sterile division of Europe, through détente, entente and cooperation. During his private conversations with Romanian President Nicola Ceaucescu, he warned his host that Moscow should not be allowed to develop a full grip on Eastern Europe, because this could lead to a parallel increase in US influence in the Western bloc. It was up to the satellite states to play a greater role for the sake of the continent’s equilibrium³⁹.

But once again, and even when preaching to the independent minded Romanians, the General could not quite escape the constraints imposed by a less favourable international environment. Even before his departure, the Romanian Ambassador in Paris emphasised to the French President the need not to say anything that would exacerbate Romanian relations with the Soviet Union⁴⁰. De Gaulle replied he would be prudent, and this became apparent in his speeches. According to Wolton, “in his speech to the Romanian parliament [he] denounced the division of Europe into two blocs. But he censured it after Ceaucescu asked him to do so. He removed the reference to hegemonies in the sentence ‘to end the system of two blocs based around 2 hegemonies’. The Romanian President clearly did not want to embarrass the Soviets”⁴¹. Indeed, caution pervaded the whole trip. As explained in an analysis by the American State Department, Soviet concern over Romanian politics restrained both De Gaulle and Ceaucescu from pressing nationalist themes too far. Instead, the two leaders often “pointedly balanced homages to the Soviets (“a pillar of the continent”) against the primary emphasis on bilateral friendship and foreign policy ‘parallelism’”. Additionally, the current strains in Soviet-Czech

³⁸ See Rey, *La tentation*, p.61; and Lefort, *Souvenirs et secrets*, p.248

³⁹ See De Gaulle, *DM: V*, Speech to the Great National Assembly of Romania, pp.281-282; and MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.34: De Gaulle-Ceaucescu meeting, 14.05.68

⁴⁰ TNA: FCO 33/46: Paris to FO, 30.05.68

⁴¹ Wolton, *France sous influence*, p.445

relations, prompting the arrival in Prague on 17 May of Kosygin and a Soviet military delegation, no doubt further inhibited De Gaulle and especially Ceaucescu⁴².

By May 1968, it was hard to avoid the conclusion that France's policy of détente was stuttering and had reached something of a dead end. Caught between NATO and the US, both of which were determined to play a more active détente role, and a rigid Soviet Union worried about the unrest in Czechoslovakia, France appeared increasingly powerless to influence the course of events in East-West relations. Even more worrying, France faced similar problem in its *Westpolitik*.

IV. ... And in the West

Indeed, the two previous chapters had described France's failure to overcome the challenge of interdependence during 1967 and the setbacks it suffered, especially during the second half, in its policy towards the Western world. NATO, through the Harmel report, had strengthened its political cohesion and successfully dealt with the difficulties posed by France's withdrawal. In the EEC, though it had eventually managed to veto the British candidacy, Paris had not convinced its five allies that its case against enlargement was reasonable. As for the international monetary system, its fate was still uncertain after the serious speculation in the gold market that had followed the devaluation of sterling. France's prospects of persuading its partners to reform the monetary system along the lines it wanted, however, were not promising. In 1968, France proved no more able to deal with the problem of interdependence than it had been in the previous year.

On New Year's Day, the US government announced a programme – including measures such as stringent capital and overseas lending controls – designed to correct its balance of payments deficit and end financial instability. Europeans in general favoured these provisions and the foreign exchange markets at first responded enthusiastically to the American program,

⁴² NARA: RG59, CFPPF, 1967-1969, Box 2091: Hughes to Rusk, Intelligence Note number 377, 21.05.68

leading to a drastic reduction of gold pool losses in January⁴³. The French, for their part, reacted more ambivalently. Alain Prate, an economic adviser of De Gaulle, argued that not only did the American programme validate the French criticism of the frailty of an international monetary system based on the American balance of payments deficit, but it also offered a great opportunity for the Six states of the EEC. If united, they could impose a new system, independent of the fluctuations of American policy, which would guarantee European expansion and allow the EEC a greater influence within the IMF. Prate, though, acknowledged this would be difficult. The fear of the economic consequences that could follow a dislocation of the international monetary system, were pushing Paris' partners towards unconditionally supporting the dollar⁴⁴.

This assessment was symptomatic of a wider pessimism about France's economy and status, which French Minister of Finances Michel Debré expressed all too clearly in a letter written to De Gaulle. Arguing that the expected growth rate of 5% for 1968 would just about cover national demands and individual aspirations, and that the drive towards industrial competitiveness was creating incompatibilities with a policy of full employment, Debré warned the General that France could expect a difficult year in 1968. He further added that America's New Year's Day programme – which in his view let the Europeans bear the burden of American fiscal irresponsibility – would hurt European expansion unless the Six coordinated their economic and monetary policy. Like Prate, however, and based on his own experience of the two previous years, Debré doubted that this would be feasible⁴⁵. As he told Kosygin a few days later, if several states supported France's position in theory, in practice it was isolated in the struggle to reform the international monetary system⁴⁶.

Despite this feeling of pessimism, French authorities persisted in their attempts to define a common European stand; and as De Gaulle pointed out on 4 January, this primarily meant

⁴³ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.178

⁴⁴ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 34, Affaires Économiques: Note by Prate, 03.01.68

⁴⁵ FNSP: 4DE Carton 7: Debré to De Gaulle, 06.01.68

⁴⁶ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 188, URSS: Debré-Kosygin meeting, 11.01.68. Debré actually implicitly suggested that a Soviet participation in the IMF could act as a counter-weight to American dominance within the organisation!

ensuring Franco-German solidarity⁴⁷. Back in 1967, Franco-German entente had been instrumental in establishing a common position in monetary affairs for the Six along the following lines: Special Drawing Rights [SDR] were international credit facilities, rather than new currency reserves, and their creation depended on several conditions, including a parallel reform of the IMF that was to give more influence to the Six, and a restored equilibrium in the American balance of payments. Continuous support from West Germany, according to the Quai's *Direction des Affaires Économiques et Financières*, would be decisive not only for the negotiations relative to the reform of the IMF, but also for the EEC's cohesion⁴⁸.

Restoring Franco-German entente appeared especially urgent considering the disturbing signs coming out of Bonn. Under pressure from the US because of its important dollar surplus, West Germany was moving closer to the American position on international monetary questions. Debré's counterpart, Karl Schiller, spoke in New Delhi in favour of an accelerated activation of the SDR, while the German authorities were now ready to accept the latter as new international reserves – not international credit – and to simply subordinate their introduction to an improvement in the American balance of payments deficit, rather than its complete removal⁴⁹. Conscious of the danger, Debré appealed directly to Schiller, reminding him of the many sacrifices France had made previously at London and Rio in summer 1967, and suggested a detailed discussion of the monetary question during their meeting at the Franco-German summit⁵⁰. During the meeting, Debré again warned Schiller that a premature use of the SDR would be dangerous for the future of the West's economy, and he organised closer cooperation between French and German experts before the important meeting in Rome of the Six Ministers of Finance, which was to take place later in the month⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*: vol.3, p.284

⁴⁸ MAEF: *Direction Économique, Coopération Économique 1967-1974*, Vol.884: Note of *Direction des Affaires Économiques et Financières*, 31.01.68

⁴⁹ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 34, *Affaires Économiques*: Note by Prate, 08.02.68

⁵⁰ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 48, *Affaires Économiques*: Debré to Schiller, 09.02.68

⁵¹ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 164, *Allemagne RFA*: Debré-Schiller meeting, 15.02.68

Yet, several developments combined to seriously undermine this attempt at establishing a common Franco-German position, and by extension a common EEC position. For a start, the “Brandt affair”, which erupted on 4 February, hardly helped: a German press agency reported that West Germany’s Foreign Minister, Willy Brandt, had publicly claimed that the Franco-German friendship was strong enough to overcome the rigid and anti-European conceptions of a head of state “thirsty for power”⁵². Despite the many complaints and denials, this incident left scars at the highest levels and De Gaulle certainly gave the impression that he would not forget easily⁵³. Alphand went as far as to claim that this episode marked the end of the “honeymoon” period with the Kiesinger government⁵⁴. But more importantly, the entente suffered from the fact that “the dispute between France and its partners over whether or not Britain and its fellow applicants should be allowed to join the EEC did not fade away and become an unthreatening background controversy. Instead, an intense but ill-tempered debate about enlargement went on amongst the Six for the whole of 1968 and the first half of 1969”⁵⁵.

Indeed, the British question in this period dominated not only the EEC debates, but also Franco-German relations. Bonn pushed Paris to be more flexible and offer London a perspective of entry into the EEC, if only to end the disarray amongst other members of the Community⁵⁶. If at first the French authorities preferred to delay and procrastinate in the hope that this issue would just disappear, it seems pretty clear that tactical considerations pushed them to slightly change their tune. Any hope of a Franco-German entente on monetary affairs might be helped by a gesture to Bonn on the British question. After prolonged discussions, the summit of 15-16 February ended in a common Franco-German communiqué. Both countries declared that they supported enlargement in principle, especially of Britain, and suggested commercial

⁵² Seydoux, *Mission Diplomatique*, p.105; see also Vaïsse, “De Gaulle et Brandt”, in Möller, and Vaïsse, *Brandt und Frankreich*, p.110

⁵³ MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.33: De Gaulle-Luebke meeting, 05.02.68. Certainly, De Gaulle was not prepared to forgive Willy Brandt easily. In this meeting, the General went on to say Brandt was a socialist, and that in his mind, no socialist could ever be a statesman!

⁵⁴ Alphand, *L'étonnement d'être*, 11.02.68, p.500

⁵⁵ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.146

⁵⁶ MAEF: Direction Économique, Papiers Jean-Pierre Brunet 1967-1974, Vol.53: Brunet-Lahr meeting, 16.01.68

arrangements with candidate states for the period before enlargement actually became feasible⁵⁷. According to Kiesinger, and undoubtedly as another gesture to the Germans, De Gaulle even apologised during the summit for the categorical language he customarily used towards the US, explaining it as being due to domestic reasons and to get support from the French Communists⁵⁸.

Yet, the prospects of communiqué soothing relations within the EEC disappeared very quickly during debates in late February and early March. The other member states were not convinced by the Franco-German plan, and French behaviour hardly helped either. As Ludlow argues, Couve's general lack of enthusiasm to conclude a deal with applicants made it very doubtful that France would be ready to go beyond a minimalist 'arrangement'⁵⁹. This unwillingness to try and seriously end the EEC stalemate did not help France's goals in the monetary sphere, at a time when it faced many difficult challenges.

During the Rome meeting of the Six Ministers of Finance on 26-27 February, except for the common desire to see a reform of the IMF that would give the EEC more influence, France failed to achieve a united stand amongst the Six, and worried about its partners' abilities to resist growing Anglo-Saxon pressures. Additionally, Paris had to contend with the fact that the IMF services, after the mandate given to them in Rio back in September 1967, had presented in January a draft proposal for the activation of SDR. Compared to the agreement of the previous autumn, the project contained important differences, which tended to transform the SDR into a new currency and undermine the reform of the IMF. Seriously concerned by these distortions to the Rio compromise, France called for a G10 meeting in Stockholm in late March to debate the proposal – hoping to bypass the IMF where the Anglo-Saxon influence was stronger – and requested an opt out clause in case it did not want to take part in the creation of SDR⁶⁰. Debré realised that the French government was in a tight spot, and seemed increasingly pessimistic as to the development of the monetary negotiations. He viewed the IMF project as completely

⁵⁷ For the summit conversations, see MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.391 and MAEF: SG, EM, Vol.33; For the communiqué, see for example NARA: RG59, CFPPF, 1967-1969, Box 2099: Wallner to Rusk, Telegram number 10469, 16.02.68

⁵⁸ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XIII: Document 292, 23.02.68

⁵⁹ Ludlow, *European Community*, p.150

⁶⁰ ANF: 5AG1, Carton 34, Affaires Économiques: Note by Prate, 27.02.68

unacceptable, but hoped that an independent stance, such as the threat of not signing any future agreement, would still offer France a chance to sway its European partners⁶¹.

Events in the following weeks, however, radically altered the nature of the struggle over the future of the international monetary system. After a calm period in January and February, speculative purchases picked up substantially in early March. Financial circles were worried about the long-term future of the existing gold price, and disturbed by the failure of the US to win the Vietnam War as shown by the recent Tet offensive. When Senator Jacob Javits' called in late February for a suspension of the gold pool, speculation assumed a torrential quality⁶². The massive losses, which climaxed at almost \$400 million on 14 March, caused the immediate closure of the London gold market, and led the US government to convene an emergency meeting in Washington with the Central Bank governors of the gold pool members⁶³. Confirming the French criticisms, the Bretton Woods system was once again in serious trouble. Yet, it was ironically the US government that proved better able to exploit this new crisis to their advantage, and "forge new and more flexible arrangements for the development of the international monetary system"⁶⁴.

The American authorities realised they needed dramatic action to end this state of panic, but they also understood that the pressures of the monetary crisis could facilitate international agreements and a quick transition to SDR⁶⁵. During the meeting with the central bank governors on 16-17 March, the US officials could rely on a major trump card: the possibility of suspending the convertibility of dollars into gold. The European governors, for their part, did not have clear aims and were mostly keen to end the general crisis atmosphere⁶⁶. In these conditions, the talks unsurprisingly proved a success for the American government. All the governors present accepted the US suggestion to implement the proposal made in November 1967 by Guido Carli,

⁶¹ See FNSP: 4DE Carton 7: Debré to Barre, 29.02.68 and Debré to Couve, 03.03.68

⁶² Roy, "Battle for Bretton Woods", p.51

⁶³ Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.117-118

⁶⁴ Roy, "Battle for Bretton Woods", p.56; Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.200

⁶⁵ LBJL: Bator, SF, Box 10: Eugene Rostow report, 13.03.68

⁶⁶ Solomon, *Monetary System*, p.120

the governor of the Italian Central Bank: the creation of a “a two-tiered gold market in which the US would only supply central banks with gold at \$35 an ounce, while on the private market gold would be allowed to float freely”⁶⁷. In addition, the gold pool was dissolved.

Given Washington’s strong pressure, and the limited choice between this two-tiered market and unilateral American action, the European central bankers had little choice but to cooperate. As Gavin points out, “a dollar float would have hurt their exports and helped US imports, and they would have had to run down their own gold supply to maintain the exchange rate of dollar”⁶⁸. Thus, while the US reaffirmed the dollar as a standard thanks to effective crisis decision-making, France in contrast found itself isolated from the process because it was no longer a member of the gold pool since June 1967, and effectively alone in its unwillingness to cooperate⁶⁹.

Indeed, Paris adopted a far less pro-active and determined approach in this period than Washington. Publicly, French officials appeared confident: In an interview, Debré was adamant that the current troubles could favour a monetary emancipation of Europe, while De Gaulle’s solemn declaration at the end of the Council of Ministers once again vigorously denounced the abuses of the current international monetary system, and called for a new mechanism based on gold⁷⁰. Privately, though, they expressed a very different state of mind. For a start, Debré did not really trust France’s European partners. As he told De Gaulle, “unity of Europe risks occurring only if we abandon our freedom. Given the attitude of our partners and, to say the word, subordination, we cannot accept this hypothesis. Our freedom is vital”⁷¹.

Moreover, France’s ability to successfully block any US-led reforms of the international monetary system was curtailed by various factors. Unlike in 1965, it was now limited by the small size of its dollar holdings, and the disappearance of its balance of payments surplus⁷². At

⁶⁷ Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson*, p.202

⁶⁸ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, pp.182-184

⁶⁹ Morse, *Foreign Policy*, p.243

⁷⁰ See FNSP: 4DE Carton 28: *Le Monde* article, 17.03.68 and DF: PEF 1968-1969: De Gaulle declaration, 20.03.68

⁷¹ FNSP: 4DE Carton 7: Debré to De Gaulle, 18.03.68

⁷² LBJL: PP, NSF, CO, Box 174: CIA Intelligence Memo, 20.03.68

the same time, the existence of significant divisions within the government over the best course to follow hardly helped either. In particular, if Debré received tacit support from De Gaulle, Pompidou wanted France to be closer to the US monetary theses⁷³. Finally, and most seriously, France also faced a very difficult dilemma: if Paris refused the American proposals, it would maintain its freedom of action, but it would not be able to oppose the creation of a large dollar zone. If it agreed to uphold European unity, it would have to pay an expensive price, in the shape of severe deterioration to the international monetary system and world inflation. De Gaulle's decision was not to accept the failure of talks, but to try and "push negotiations [at Stockholm] to their limit"⁷⁴.

This was to no avail, as the G10 meeting in Stockholm on 29-30 March ended in failure for France. As his European colleagues seemed keener to debate the activation of SDR as a new currency, rather than in-depth reforms of the international monetary system, Debré had little choice but to condemn the SDR and announce that his country would not sign the communiqué at the end of the meeting⁷⁵. In contrast, the US government was thrilled with this historic agreement, which reaffirmed the SDR plan, the \$35 price for gold, and the continuation of cooperation to maintain the stability of the international monetary system⁷⁶. The decisions in March 1968 proved only a temporary reprieve for the terminal case of Bretton Woods, which Richard Nixon would effectively put out of its misery three years later⁷⁷. Nonetheless, the price of rejecting them was too high for America's European allies, who feared the consequences if the Bretton Woods system broke down, and understood that the US remained the only country capable of holding it together⁷⁸. There was always the risk that failing to cooperate with US financial policies might trigger an US departure or emasculation of its commitment to NATO, which combined with economic factors. In the case of West Germany, for example, its

⁷³ See Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle*: vol.3, 20.03.68, pp.285-287 and Debré, *Mémoires IV*, p.174

⁷⁴ Prate, *Les Batailles*, p.226

⁷⁵ See ANF: 5AG1, Carton 35, Affaires Économiques: Note by Prate, 29.03.68 and FNSP: 4DE Vol.74 : Final Debré speech at the G10 Stockholm meeting, 30.03.68

⁷⁶ LBJL: PP, White House Central Files, CO, Box 30: Memo for Johnson, 30.03.68

⁷⁷ Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power*, p.185

⁷⁸ Kunz, "American Economic Consequences", in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, *1968*, pp.104-105

dependence on world trade – especially with the US – made it more likely to follow modern solutions like the SDR, rather than De Gaulle’s conservative ideas on gold⁷⁹.

Stockholm was clearly a painful blow for France, leading Debré to bitterly complain that “I was abandoned by our European partners” and that “the subordination to the US was total and humiliating”⁸⁰. Despite this setback, the French Minister continued to believe that the debate was not over, and he actually called for another meeting to discuss the monetary system⁸¹. This, as we will see in the next few pages, rapidly proved an illusion. Stockholm was to be in fact the “last fling of the French attempt to destroy the confidence in the dollar”⁸².

V. From Paris to Prague

As May 1968 started, prospects for French foreign policy were not particularly promising. A changing and less favourable international environment, coupled with the challenge of interdependence in both France’s *Westpolitik* and *Ostpolitik*, had translated into a loss of influence in external matters. Additionally, the economy was going through a relative slowdown. If the growth rate was still close to 5% per annum, France had in the previous year been affected by the West German crisis, leading the unemployment figure to jump to 226,000 by January 1968⁸³. But, these were worrying rather than dramatic signs, and France was – and appeared abroad as – stable and blessed with a strong currency. On 6 May, an article of *The Times* could still claim “France has never seemed so successful, so un-sheeplike, so prosperous – so different from the way she ought to be”⁸⁴. The dramatic events of the following weeks would, however, completely shatter this view.

Growing unrest within the student world in Paris – in part due to the inability of the university system to cope with the explosion of the number of enrolments in higher education

⁷⁹ Kunz, “American Economic Consequences”, in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968, p.108; TNA: PREM 13/2091: Bonn to FO, Telegram 480, 21.03.68

⁸⁰ Peyrefitte, C’était De Gaulle: vol.3, 03.04.68, p.287

⁸¹ DF: PEF, 1968-1969: Debré interview with ORTF, 01.04.68

⁸² Schwartz, Lyndon Johnson, p.204

⁸³ Lacouture, Jean, De Gaulle: vol. 3, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1986), p.666

⁸⁴ Brogan, Patrick, “France: stable, prosperous, and infuriating”, *The Times*, 06.05.68, p.9

since the start of the decade – seriously escalated in spring 1968⁸⁵. Repeated riots, the forced closure of *La Sorbonne*, and the setting up of barricades in the Latin Quarter finally led the police to intervene in high-handed fashion on the night of 10-11 May. This was a turning point. The “night of the barricades” and the images of police brutality crystallised public opinion in favour of the student movement, and against the state. On 13 May, trade unions entered the dispute and called for a general strike, which culminated in ten million people refusing to show up for work. France was suddenly in a state of paralysis, and verging dangerously towards complete chaos⁸⁶.

If foreign policy clearly did not cause the events of May 1968, there was not either a strict separation between the domestic and external spheres. For a start, as explained in the previous chapter, public opinion had strongly opposed De Gaulle’s positions on Quebec and against Israel, and this contributed to the erosion of the consensus around his person. Moreover, the thesis according to which the unrest and strikes were in part the consequences of the French President giving priority to international aims, in front of internal ones, is not implausible⁸⁷. As Patricia Dillon argues: “De Gaulle’s efforts to constitute enormous reserves for the reform of the International Monetary System led to major tensions. Austerity measures were needed to maintain the external surplus, at a time where workers were keen on redistribution, rather than austerity”⁸⁸. There was, in other words, a widening gap between the General’s aspirations for *grandeur* and those of his people, and this was particularly evident in the sharp drop, between 1965 and 1968, of the proportion of those who felt independence was possible for France: from

⁸⁵ For statistics on this explosion of the number of students, see the table in Suri, Jeremi, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.269

⁸⁶ There is of course a large and varied literature, including many memoirs, on the origins and events of May 1968, but the following can be of interest. For a chronicle of the events see Dansette, Adrien, *Mai 68*, (Paris: Plon, 1971); For a more analytical approach, Dreyfus-Armand, Geneviève (ed.), *Les Années 1968: Le temps de la contestation*, (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 2000) and Capdevielle Jacques and Mouriaux, René, *Mai 68: l’entre-deux de la modernité: histoire de trente ans*, (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1988); For a more international perspective of the protest movements, see Cauter, David, *Sixty-eight: the year of the barricades*, (London: Hamilton, 1988) and the excellent Suri, *Power and Protest*.

⁸⁷ IFOP, *De Gaulle*, pp.256-258, in August 1967, 22% thought that foreign policy was France’s most important problem. This number dropped to 15% in May 1968, and 9% in September 1968.

⁸⁸ Dillon, Patricia, *DGESS III*, p.137

46% to 34% in the political level, 41% to 26% in the economic sphere, and from 31% to 28% for the military⁸⁹.

If De Gaulle's priority to international designs played a part in the disruption that shook France, the impact of May 1968 on all levels of French foreign policy was far more significant. In a very basic way, *les évènements* and the need to restore stability afterwards forced the French government to turn inwards, effectively leaving foreign policy at a near standstill. De Gaulle's trip to Romania in the middle of the crisis was as such harshly interpreted by public opinion as a sign of lack of interest in events at home⁹⁰. It was only in the aftermath of the elections of 23-30 June, and the formation of a new government headed by Couve on 10 July, that France returned to the international scene.

Furthermore, the social disruptions rattled government unity, especially by breaking up the all-important De Gaulle-Pompidou tandem. True, there had been tensions between them before, and De Gaulle had actually planned to replace Pompidou with Couve after the March 1967 legislative elections. May 1968, however, left a scar between both leaders that would never really heal. The fundamental problem was that both men analysed the predicament very differently. Where De Gaulle saw a crisis of civilisation and a desire for increased participation amongst the people, Pompidou was convinced that France was devoid of fundamental problems, but victim of a certain boredom and taste for destruction⁹¹. Unsurprisingly, they also diverged in terms of their preferred solution: Pompidou thought new elections would be more appropriate, as opposed to the drastic referendum advocated by De Gaulle.

From that point on, the split between Prime Minister and President only widened and was translated into growing mistrust on both sides, even after the disorder had died down. Pompidou felt cheated by the way the General kept him in the dark about his secret trip to Baden-Baden on

⁸⁹ IFOP, *De Gaulle*, p.282

⁹⁰ Alphand, *L'étonnement*, 19.05.68, p.503

⁹¹ This divergence emerges clearly in the Council of Ministers of 23 May, see Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle: vol.3*, pp.533-540

29 May, and by the manner in which Couve came to replace him⁹². De Gaulle, for his part, increasingly held his Prime Minister responsible for the May troubles. He believed that Pompidou's appeasement policies towards both students and workers – agreeing to re-open the *Sorbonne* on 11 May after the “night of the barricades”, and signing the Grenelle Accords on 27 May, which raised minimum wages by 25% in one go – had helped to spread the disruptions and dealt a serious blow to France's economy⁹³.

Last, and certainly not the least, May 68 shook the very foundations of Gaullist foreign policy. Obviously, it had a brutal effect on the economy and finances, while the massive loss of monetary reserves left the franc in a position of grave weakness. The Grenelle Accords significantly raised wages, while the *Banque de France* was forced to sell gold, and to rely on its drawing rights at the IMF⁹⁴. The crisis also undermined another key pillar. As the new US Ambassador to Paris, Sargent Shriver, explained, many of De Gaulle's diplomatic successes were the result not so much of France's intrinsic power, “but of his unique personal authority and audacity, coupled with [the] image of French prosperity and stability”⁹⁵. Amidst the chaos in the streets of Paris, the General was for the first time utterly powerless to control the situation, and even his rhetorical powers, normally so trustworthy in times of need, seemed to abandon him; his crucial speech on 24 May, calling for a referendum, failed to calm the situation and actually led to further violence⁹⁶. The troubles demystified De Gaulle, destroyed his certain aura of infallibility, and raised questions about his ability to always be in control and rise to difficult challenges. Throughout May, he appeared more as an out of touch old man, instead of the usual towering and imposing figure that people were used to.

Of course, the French President eventually survived the unrest, thanks in part to another dramatic *coup de théâtre*. His sudden and unexpected departure from Paris on 29 May, in fact to

⁹² Pompidou, Georges, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), especially pp.188-204

⁹³ Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle: vol.3*, 14.06.68, p.578

⁹⁴ See FNSP: 4DE Carton 7: Debré to Foccart, 28.05.68; Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, p.196; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.406

⁹⁵ FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol.XII: Document 79, 28.05.68

⁹⁶ De Gaulle could only recognise the failure of his speech, saying “J'ai mis à côté de la plaque”, see Peyrefitte, *C'était De Gaulle: vol.3*, 24.05.68, p.543

visit General Massu in Baden-Baden, created a real wave of panic. The next day, taking advantage of his renewed position of strength, De Gaulle announced in a radio speech that he would not stand down, denounced the forces of totalitarian communism, and called for new legislative elections⁹⁷. The end of the unrest and the strong results of the Gaullist party – nearly 300 seats out of a total of 485 – in the elections of 23-30 June were great successes, but they were in many ways misleading. The damage had already been done, be it to France’s image and status abroad, to De Gaulle’s leadership, and his own self-confidence. The terrible days of May had taken their toll on the General, and he could never quite forgive himself for what he considered as crucial errors in judgement: abandoning leadership to Pompidou on 11 May, using the wrong tone for his speech on 24 May, and accepting on Pompidou’s request to call on 30 May for new elections instead of a referendum⁹⁸. Even the turnaround of 29-30 May left a bitter taste in De Gaulle’s mouth. Confiding to Debré, he was convinced that “*ils [French people] ont eu peur du vide*”⁹⁹.

Thus, the Gaullist regime had not crumbled, but at what cost for its ambitious foreign policy? The domestic disruptions, coupled with the previous difficulties in its *Westpolitik* and *Ostpolitik*, had effectively left the General’s grand design in pieces. In previous years, the French position on monetary matters, the British entry to the EEC, or even the Kennedy Round, had effectively been grounded in the fact that it ran an economically tight ship, and could thus afford to be critical of those who did not. Following *les évènements*, however, France suddenly found itself with the budget deficits and the weakened currencies for which it had criticised the Anglo-Saxon countries. As Pompidou summed up eloquently: “The France of General de Gaulle was brought back to its real dimensions ... No more war against the dollar. No more lessons given to the mighty of this world. No more leadership of Western Europe”¹⁰⁰. Moreover, As Couve pointed out to Debré, his successor at the Quai d’Orsay, “the stature of the General is no longer

⁹⁷ For the speech, see De Gaulle, *DM:V*, pp.292-293

⁹⁸ Guichard, Olivier, *Mon Général*, (Paris: B. Grasset, 1980), p.432

⁹⁹ Debré, *Mémoires IV*, p.217

¹⁰⁰ Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, p.196

what it was, and all the reports of our Ambassadors declare that our partners will not easily forget our internal difficulties”¹⁰¹.

That is not to say that France was incapable of having a foreign policy in the aftermath of May 1968. The official declaration of 31 July after the Council of Ministers, defending Biafra’s right to self-determination in the Nigerian civil war, showed De Gaulle was still able to provoke and surprise people¹⁰². Yet, it was hard to escape the fact that all the avenues for an ambitious action on the international scene were truly blocked for the French government: The EEC was still in a stalemate because of the question of enlargement; within NATO, France could do little more than criticise the Reykjavik ‘signal’ on mutual force reductions, and argue that it contributed to perpetuating the policy of blocs¹⁰³. Finally, relations with Washington had reached some sort of uncomfortable freeze. Paris could no longer condemn American policy in Vietnam since the latter had started peace talks, and it was in no position to challenge the dollar hegemony¹⁰⁴. The only possible field of action was the East-West rapprochement, but even that was fraught with problems.

For a start, despite Debré’s best attempts to convince people otherwise, there was a clear tension between claiming to fight totalitarian communism domestically, and pushing for cooperation with the Eastern bloc externally¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, the future of France’s policy of détente depended to a large extent on how events unfolded in Czechoslovakia, and once again the situation was far from promising. The Soviet leaders became very alarmed after Czech intellectuals issued on 27 June the “2,000 words” statement, which indicted twenty years of Communist party dictatorship and demanded accelerated reforms. Despite the pressures in July from all his Warsaw Pact partners – with the exception of Romania – to re-impose censorship

¹⁰¹ Debré, *Mémoires IV*, p.229

¹⁰² DF: PEF, 1968-1969: Declaration at end of Council of Ministers, 31.07.68. For more on French policy towards Biafra, see Foccart, Jacques, *Le Général en Mai: Journal de l’Elysée, Tome II 1968-1969*, (Paris: Fayard, 1998) or Wauthier, *Quatre Présidents*.

¹⁰³ MAEF: Pactes 1961-1970, Vol.272 bis: Seydoux to Debré, Telegram number 1025-1033, 05.07.68

¹⁰⁴ NARA: RG59, CFPF, 1967-1969, Box 2102: Shriver to Rusk, Telegram number 18471, 24.07.68; TNA: FCO 33/45: Paris to FO, Telegram number 719, 12.07.68

¹⁰⁵ DF: PEF, 1968-1969: Debré Interview with Paris-Presse-L’Intransigeant, 10-11.07.68

and curb the intellectuals, Dubcek refused to give in¹⁰⁶. In these conditions, and before proceeding with East-West normalisation, the Kremlin believed it had no choice “but to demonstrate to the world its incontrovertible resolve to maintain the neo-Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe”¹⁰⁷. During the night of 20-21 August, Warsaw Pact troops entered Czechoslovakia and put an end to the Prague spring.

This invasion was not just, as Debré claimed, a serious “*incident de parcours*”¹⁰⁸. While President Lyndon Johnson said goodbye to his summit in Moscow, De Gaulle said goodbye to his grand design to overcome the Cold War order. As Alphand summed up a few days later in his diary: “It is maybe indeed the end of a grand effort to reunite two worlds beyond ideology ... So the General’s disappointment must be very profound, after the unrest of May and June, and the blows to the country’s economy and finance, as well as to his morale”¹⁰⁹.

VI. Conclusion

General de Gaulle remained President for another eight months, only resigning on 28 April 1969, after 53% of the electorate had disavowed by referendum his proposal for a reform of the Senate and of the regions. However, his ambitious foreign policy agenda, or his quest to gain Great Power status for France and to overcome the Cold War order, had become a clear pipe dream by the time the Soviet troops entered Prague. The events in Paris and Prague painfully confirmed to the General, and to the rest of the world, the internal and external limits of his grand design.

May 68 not only shook France and its image abroad as prosperous and stable, but also De Gaulle’s own prestige. He could no longer count on his unique aura to pursue a dramatic foreign

¹⁰⁶ See especially Kramer, “Czechoslovak Crisis”, in Fink, Gassert, and Junker, 1968, pp.133-151; Rothschild and Wingfield, Return to Diversity, p.171

¹⁰⁷ Newton, Russia, France, p.80

¹⁰⁸ Debré, Mémoires IV, p.259

¹⁰⁹ Alphand, L'étonnement, 25.08.68, p.513

policy, nor did France have the available means either¹¹⁰. Following the unrest, domestic problems became the priority, including the weakening franc. The currency became involved in a major speculative crisis, which nearly resulted in devaluation in November, as France's total reserves dropped from \$6.9 billion in April to just under \$4 billion in November¹¹¹. At the same time, Moscow's policy was becoming more cautious, and increasingly interested in a dialogue with Washington.

Certainly, De Gaulle's foreign policy was in trouble well before August 1968. The rapprochement with the Eastern bloc had only produced limited results¹¹². France was isolated in the international monetary field. That said, even taking into account those difficulties, May 1968 and the crushing of the Prague spring were nonetheless particularly significant. They dramatically confirmed that the French people were simply not ready to make the needed sacrifices for De Gaulle's ambitious foreign policy agenda, while Kremlin leaders would not accept a loosening of their control over the states of Eastern Europe.

¹¹⁰ TNA: FCO 33/45: Paris to FO, Telegram number 719, 12.07.68

¹¹¹ Solomon, *Monetary System*, pp.151-155

¹¹² Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.443

Conclusion

On 9 September 1968, less than three weeks after the Soviet tanks had rolled into Prague, French President General Charles de Gaulle gave one of his regular press conferences. It was not, however, to be one of those memorable or shocking speeches, like that of January 1963 or even February 1965, to which the world had become accustomed. Instead, the whole performance was far more austere and reflective, as De Gaulle seemed to contemplate his legacy and achievements. Since 1958, he claimed, France had worked ceaselessly to end the division of Europe into two blocs. In that period, it had finalised reconciliation with West Germany, progressively withdrawn from NATO which subordinated Europe to the US, taken part in the EEC and prevented it from being absorbed into a larger Atlantic Community, and renewed relations with Eastern Europe. The events in Czechoslovakia were, thus, particularly worthy of condemnation because they were absurd in the context of détente, and simply the expression of Soviet hegemony in the Eastern Europe. Yet, the General ended on a slightly more positive note. In his view, the Czech attempt to obtain a beginning of liberation, and to refuse enslavement, confirmed that the French policy of détente was correct and in line with European realities. Unless a world conflict came to upset events, he concluded that the evolution towards a rapprochement between both sides of Europe was inevitable¹.

De Gaulle resigned a few months later, after the electorate rejected by referendum his proposals to reform the Senate and the regions. He left with the frustration of not having been able to see through to completion all his grand initiatives. Once out of office, he remained out of the public eye, and mostly focussed on writing his memoirs, which were supposed to cover his time as President between 1958 and 1969. By the time of his death in November 1970, he had only managed to complete the first of the three planned volumes, dealing with the 1958 to 1962 period, leaving a series of questions unanswered. In particular, there was still the all-important

¹ De Gaulle, DM: V, pp.333-335

issue of understanding what had been the ultimate intentions of French foreign policy between 1963 and 1968. To what extent was Paris, as the General implied in his September 1968 press conference, actually aiming to overcome the Cold War order? Alternatively, to what extent was French policy simply rhetoric, that is to say a skilful manipulation of bold stated goals to serve more narrow nationalist or domestic causes?

This dissertation has tried to argue that De Gaulle did possess a grand design which, despite its flaws and contradictions, was largely coherent and centred on two objectives. The first one revolved around recovering France's independence, especially in the field of defence, and striving to recapture its lost Great Power status. The pursuit of *grandeur*, of an ambitious diplomatic agenda, was both a means and an end. For the General, misquoting *Hamlet*, to be great meant being able to sustain a great quarrel². Only by striving for a higher goal, and being ready to make the necessary sacrifices, could France avoid decline, and overcome its traditional divisions. At the same time, *grandeur* also implied the determination to be an actor, not an object, a player, and not a stake³. De Gaulle was convinced that France needed to occupy the world stage, because its rightful status was to be a great power at the forefront of international affairs.

Of course, he remained enough of a realist to acknowledge that France could not really compete with the superpowers, especially in the military sphere. Yet, he also believed that it could compensate for some of its limitations through a creative and spectacular diplomacy. By relying on secrecy, surprise and a great sense of timing, such as with the recognition of Communist China or the withdrawal from NATO, the General could give more impact to his foreign policy initiatives. He could prove that France still mattered. Moreover, De Gaulle's desire to reclaim his country's Great Power status equally stemmed from his profound conviction that it was not only France's duty, but also in its nature, to serve the interests of mankind. As he told Peyrefitte, "France's authority is moral [...] Our country is different than others because of

² Quoted by Jackson, *De Gaulle*, p.138

³ D'Escricenne, *Le Général*, pp.218-219; Vaisse, *La grandeur*, pp.682-683

its disinterested and universal vocation [...] France has an eternal role. That is why it benefits from an immense credit. Because France was a pioneer of American independence, of the abolition of slavery, of the rights of people to dispose of their own fate. Because it is the champion of nations' independence against all hegemonies. Everyone realises that: France is the light of the world, its genius is to enlighten the universe"⁴.

Thus, De Gaulle's second objective revolved around transforming the international order and helping to overcome the status quo inherited from the Cold War, especially in Europe. He always believed that a multipolar world would be more stable than a system centred on the rivalry between the superpowers. When he came back to power in 1958, he already possessed, as Soutou argues, a long-term blueprint to reshape European security. This was not a rigid guide for policy, nor an agenda that the General could or wanted to pursue consistently. For example, between 1958 and 1962 or the period of tension over Berlin, he supported a firm stance against the Soviet Union, despite the fact that his design involved a rapprochement with Moscow in the long-term⁵. Similarly, after 1963, he adopted a relatively defensive attitude towards the plan of a Western European political cooperation, once he realised it was unlikely to happen in the short-term. He focussed instead on opposing any attempts to establish a wider Atlantic Community – noticeably by twice vetoing British applications to join the EEC, or by undermining the MLF – that in his view could jeopardise any future chances of developing a Western European union.

Nonetheless, De Gaulle always kept in mind his overarching aim, which meant that the various strands of his European policy were often closely connected. The most obvious example was, of course, the way in which Paris used the withdrawal from NATO to further the cause of East-West détente. In the same way, the challenge against the dollar was also tied to the growing criticism of American hegemony in other fields. In the long-run, as described in chapter four, the General envisaged a sort of pan-European security system, where American troops would eventually leave the continent. In return, the Soviet Union would abandon East Germany,

⁴ Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle: vol.1*, 13.02.63, p.283

⁵ Soutou, "De Gaulle's France", in Loth, *Europe, Cold War*, p.173

allowing German reunification and a real détente in Europe, along with independence for the satellite states. The two main pillars of the system would be France and the Soviet Union, as nuclear powers, but security would be guaranteed by an interlocking set of checks and balances. Paris and Moscow would contain Bonn, while a closer union between the states of Western Europe would contain Soviet power. The US would play its traditional role of underwriter and ultimate arbiter of the European order. This was a modernised version of the Concert of Nations of the 19th Century⁶.

The French President's grand design was essentially Euro-centric. It is true that Gaullist rhetoric called for a new model of relations between developed and developing states, and that Paris was against the idea of seeing the Third World become a new Cold War battlefield. Yet, it is also true that in practice, France's attitude towards the non-European world was at least as driven, if not more, by traditional Great Power interests and the need to spread influence, as was shown in chapter three. Additionally, with the exception of Vietnam, the importance of the Third World in De Gaulle's grand strategy declined steadily after 1964. Even in the case of Indochina, his policy increasingly became affected by his general outlook towards the US, once Washington stepped up its involvement in the war⁷.

The two main aims of the General's foreign policy, restoring French independence and overcoming the Cold War order, were not only very ambitious but also appeared as somehow incompatible. How could he simultaneously pursue a policy that vigorously defended French sovereignty, and pretend that it equally served the larger interests of the world? This contradiction was, however, more artificial than real. On the one hand, the pursuit of these twin objectives simply reflected De Gaulle's own political philosophy that stood at the confluence between two traditions, one liberal and revolutionary, the other realist and Machiavellian⁸. On the other hand, these two goals were inscribed in very different time frames. Restoring France's

⁶ Soutou, "La décision française", in Harder, *Von Truman bis Harmel*, pp.194-196;

⁷ Devillers, "L'Asie", in Institut, *De Gaulle et le Tiers Monde*, p.310

⁸ Charbonnel, *L'Aventure*, p.128

status was an immediate necessity, whereas transforming the international status quo would be a long-term development.

Moreover, the General never thought that France could single-handedly overcome the Cold War order. Rather, he was driven by the unshakeable conviction that the world was undergoing a significant and irreversible evolution, which was, for example, very clear in his attitude towards the process of East-West détente. As he explained to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, he essentially believed that the Cold War was an abnormal state of affairs, an aberration that would eventually give way to a more multipolar system. “It has never happened in modern times that one or two nations hold all the power. The US and the Soviet Union have all the means of power. All my life, I saw the power of Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, and Japan before. It created equilibrium. Today, all has changed. Yet, France cannot accept that all the power in the world is shared between two countries. Deep down, all countries agree with us”⁹. France could thus recapture its Great Power status if it embraced the profound changes in the international system. That was how De Gaulle effectively attempted to reconcile the two central pillars of his grand design.

However, the General’s vision for France and for the world never came to be. His country failed to establish itself as a global power, and while the Cold War order evolved and eventually came to an end, it did so in different ways to those he had anticipated. Why was he ultimately unsuccessful? This can be explained by a variety of reasons. Firstly, De Gaulle faced a series of structural obstacles. On the one hand, France was simply not strong enough to play the role that its President wanted. The economy performed well throughout the 1960s, but it nonetheless remained the Achilles heel of the General’s popularity. Between 1964 and 1969, when people were asked specifically about economic issues, the discontented always outnumbered the satisfied¹⁰. Public opinion generally supported the goals of French foreign policy, but this could not prevent the widening gap between the President and his citizens, which

⁹ MAEF: CM, CD, Vol.376: De Gaulle-Rockefeller meeting, 03.10.63

¹⁰ Jackson, *De Gaulle*, pp.118-119

was clearly highlighted by the events of May 1968. If De Gaulle aspired to *grandeur* and spoke of the need for sacrifices, the rest of the population wanted more liberty and a better redistribution of wealth.

On the other hand, the Cold War structure proved resilient and not so prone to fundamental change. The growing diffusiveness of the international order, combined with the desire of smaller states to gain more autonomy, was undoubtedly favouring the emergence of a more multipolar world – especially in the economic sphere – but not to the point of really undermining the predominance of the superpowers. Rather than threaten the equilibrium, the various crises of the 1960s, such as the Six Day War, actually strengthened and underlined the latent bipolarity of the international system¹¹. They convinced Moscow and Washington that they needed to cooperate more, if only to guarantee a certain predictability in East-West relations. At the same time, the difficulties of finding a workable alternative were often very apparent, as for example in the case of the international monetary system. As David Calleo argues, the American analysis was wrong but predominant, while the French one was correct but impractical. A gold standard, like any other plural but integrated system, ultimately relied on there being enough power dispersed throughout the system to force even the biggest state to obey the rules. This condition never prevailed¹².

Furthermore, De Gaulle's grand design also suffered from a series of flaws and contradictions¹³. As pointed out by many authors, he underestimated the role of ideology, in particular when it came to the communist bloc¹⁴. His plan for a new European security order effectively depended on the Soviet Union giving up its global ambitions, and accepting to play a more traditional balancing role on the continent. Yet, the Kremlin leaders were not prepared to follow that path. More generally, the General's blueprint for overcoming of the Cold War order was in many ways too complex. It could only succeed, as Hoffmann points out, through an

¹¹ Hoffmann, *Essais*, p.371; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.676

¹² Calleo, "Golden Rule", in Wahl and Paxton, *De Gaulle and the US*, pp.253-254

¹³ See for example Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, p.679 for a detailed listing of these contradictions

¹⁴ Lacouture, *De Gaulle: vol. 3*, p.556

extraordinary concordance of events and changes, whereby all states would realise that it was in their interest to follow the Gaullist vision¹⁵.

This is where the French President's diplomatic style posed a major problem. Apart from his tendency to over-estimate his country's power and genius, he was convinced that it could become a role-model for others. While his bold initiatives did win some praise, especially in the Third World, this did not necessarily translate into influence. More often than not, his unilateral and spectacular method of action irritated and offended partners. As Bruno Kreisky, Austrian Foreign Minister, summed up in February 1963, "A great country must have three characteristics. It must have a healthy economy: that is your [France's] case. It must have a clear policy: you are one of the rare ones in that situation. It must be appreciated by others: this condition is not fulfilled; the Anglo-Saxon countries hate you; how do you want to pursue a great foreign policy, in today's world, if the Anglo-Saxon countries hate you?"¹⁶

Paris' allies played a very significant role when it came to thwarting the General's plans. As the years went by, they simply became more adept at dealing with the Gaullist challenge. This was very obvious in 1967-1968, when a series of crucial negotiations for the future of the Western world – the second British application to join the EEC, the Harmel exercise for NATO, and the debates over the international monetary system – reached their conclusion. Facing a united and determined opposition, France was often isolated and unable to have a significant impact on debates. Thus, it accepted the Harmel report even though it felt uneasy with some of its conclusions. Had it rejected it, Paris would have found itself in contradiction with its commitment to East-West détente.

Similarly, taking advantage of the monetary crisis in March 1968, the US managed to impose a series of changes that safeguarded the dollar as the central pillar of the global monetary system, and only partially reformed the Bretton Woods arrangement. Again, France faced a choice between two evils. It could have cooperated with its European partners, but this would

¹⁵ Hoffmann, *Essais*, p.375

¹⁶ Quoted in Vaisse, *La grandeur*, p.680

have entailed accepting a flawed system. Instead, it preferred to maintain its freedom of action, in the hope that developments would turn in its favour and that other states would eventually accept the need to establish a new monetary mechanism. As for the EEC, while Paris successfully vetoed London's application to join the Common Market, this was at best a pyrrhic victory. The Five refused to let the British question die down, undermining in the process any chances that the European countries would be able to agree on a united position in other spheres. This was, in a nutshell, the challenge of interdependence that France was never able to overcome. How could it expect the other European Community states to follow its line on monetary matters, if it pursued goals towards NATO and the EEC that were inimical to their interests?

De Gaulle failed to achieve all the aims set out in his grand design, but it would be misleading to judge his impact by this sole yardstick. While his actions during his lifetime often proved divisive and controversial, there is far more consensus when it comes to assessing his legacy. The General successfully ended the violent and divisive Algerian War, and he crucially helped to restore a sense of pride to France after the difficult years of the Fourth Republic. He left behind a country that was in a much stronger position domestically, and with a more confident and assertive attitude externally. France was not quite the global power that De Gaulle wanted, but its voice was now listened to throughout the world. It is another tribute to his importance that his presidential successors, both on the right and the left of the political spectrum, generally remained loyal to the central tenets of his foreign policy, even if they did not quite replicate his distinctive style. The Gaullist myth has continually grown in the three decades after his death, and he is now a figure of almost universal admiration¹⁷. His election as the greatest Frenchman of all time in a recent poll can be seen as a further proof of this.

Moreover, De Gaulle had a very significant influence on the Western world, albeit for ambivalent reasons. Undoubtedly, during the 1960s, he seemed to dedicate a lot of his time

¹⁷ Jackson, De Gaulle, p.143

towards obstructing or wrecking initiatives. For example, he twice vetoed Britain's application to join the EEC, launched a campaign to undermine the MLF, and effectively gave up on the idea of European political cooperation. Similarly, his most famous and spectacular move, the withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure, was in part a negative reaction to his inability to reform the Atlantic Alliance. However, the French President could also have a claim as a protector of Western unity. This may sound surprising in view of the previous arguments, but it is less so when considering the actual impact of the General rather than his intentions. As Ludlow argues, the way in which he conducted policy and criticised the US unintentionally helped to minimise the European challenge to American leadership. It therefore becomes possible to portray the would-be challenger of the Atlantic status quo as someone who actually made a generalised crisis within the Atlantic Alliance less likely than it would otherwise have been¹⁸. Additionally the Western world was that much stronger for having dealt with the test posed by De Gaulle. He often alienated allies by his methods, but he also highlighted a series of important questions – in the economic, military and political spheres – that threatened to undermine the fabric of transatlantic relations.

Finally, the General left a lasting impression on the history of the Cold War. Although the conflict did not end in the way he had imagined, he nonetheless played an important role because of the fact that he outlined an alternative to the bipolar order. Through his trips to the Soviet Union, Poland and Romania, he helped the cause of the rapprochement between the two divided blocs in Europe, and imposed the principle that East-West détente should precede the reunification of Germany. De Gaulle's bold and pioneering policies inspired subsequent statesmen, even if they did not necessarily share the same objectives. This was the case, for example, for the *Ostpolitik* of West German chancellor Willy Brandt, or for US President Richard Nixon's attempts to normalise relations with Communist China. Furthermore, he acted as a symbolic role-model for the rest of the world by his nose-thumbing at the superpowers. As

¹⁸ Ludlow, N. Piers, "The Protector of Atlantic Unity: De Gaulle's unintentional boost to the Atlantic Alliance", unpublished paper presented to the LSE-Columbia workshop on transatlantic relations, April 2004

Gaddis argues, both China and France were in part able to do that because of the disappearance of fear. By the 1960s, they had become sufficiently strong within the framework of their respective alliances that they no longer suffered from the insecurities that had led them to seek alliances in the first place¹⁹. De Gaulle did therefore contribute to an important transformation in the nature of the Cold War and even, to an extent, hasten its demise. It did not end in exactly the manner in which he had predicted. Yet, in the aftermath of 1989 his vision of a world without blocs and of a Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals suddenly looked much less Quixotic than it had done two decades before.

¹⁹ Gaddis, The Cold War, p.143

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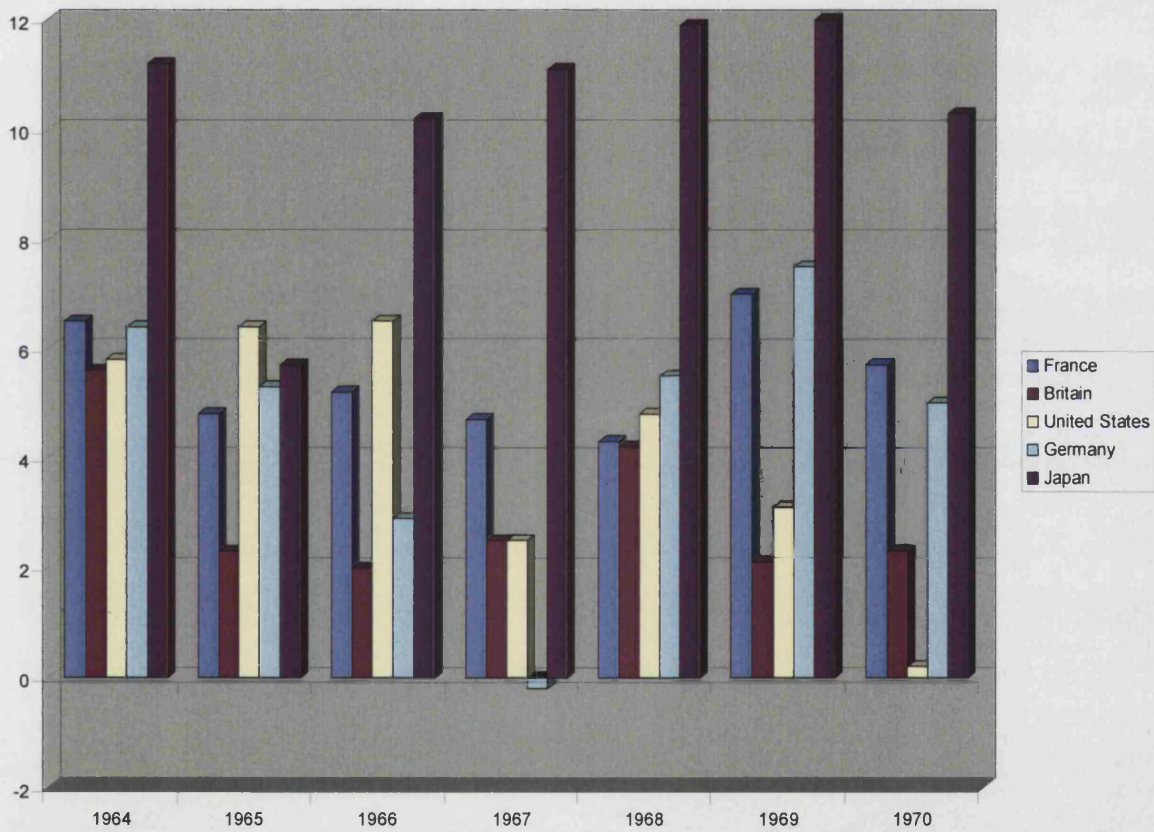
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Annex 1

Real GDP Growth in OECD countries, 1964-1970

Annual percentage change

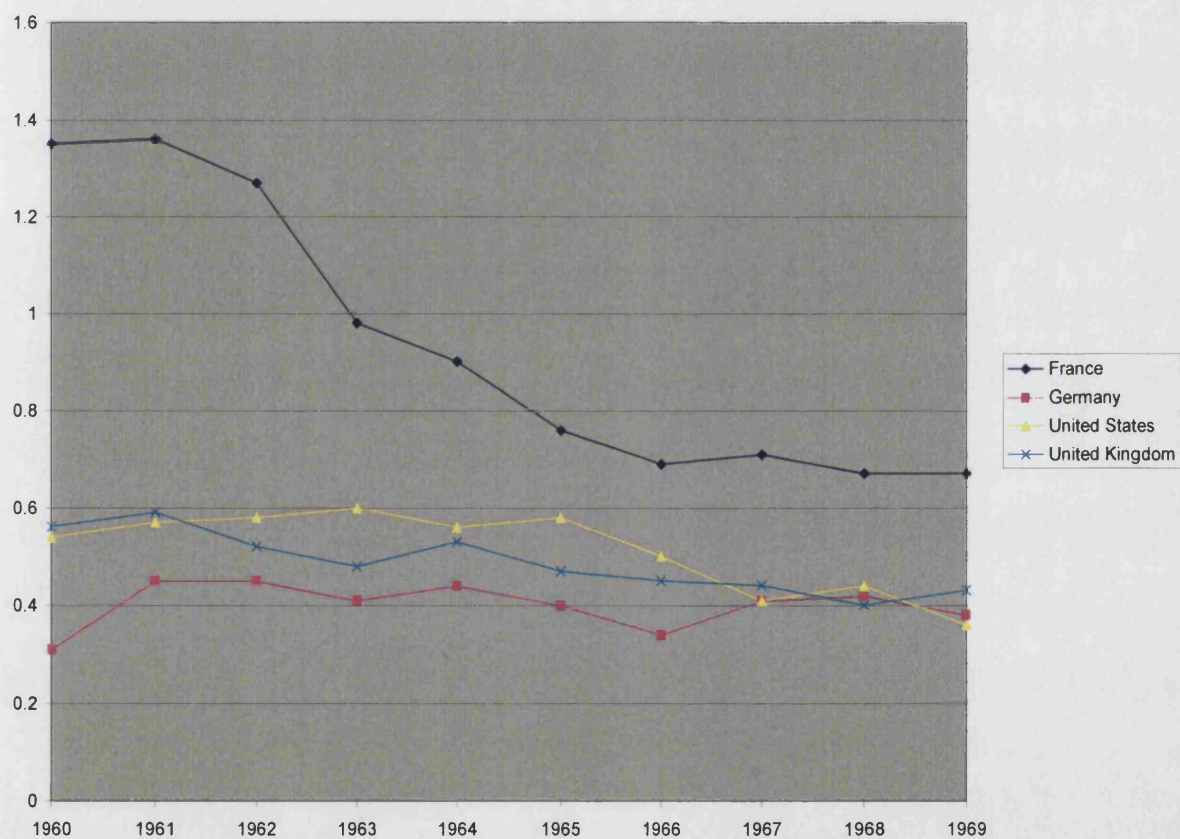


Source: OECD Economic Outlook Database

Annex 2

Net Official Development Assistance from Development Aid Committee Countries to Developing Countries, 1960-1969

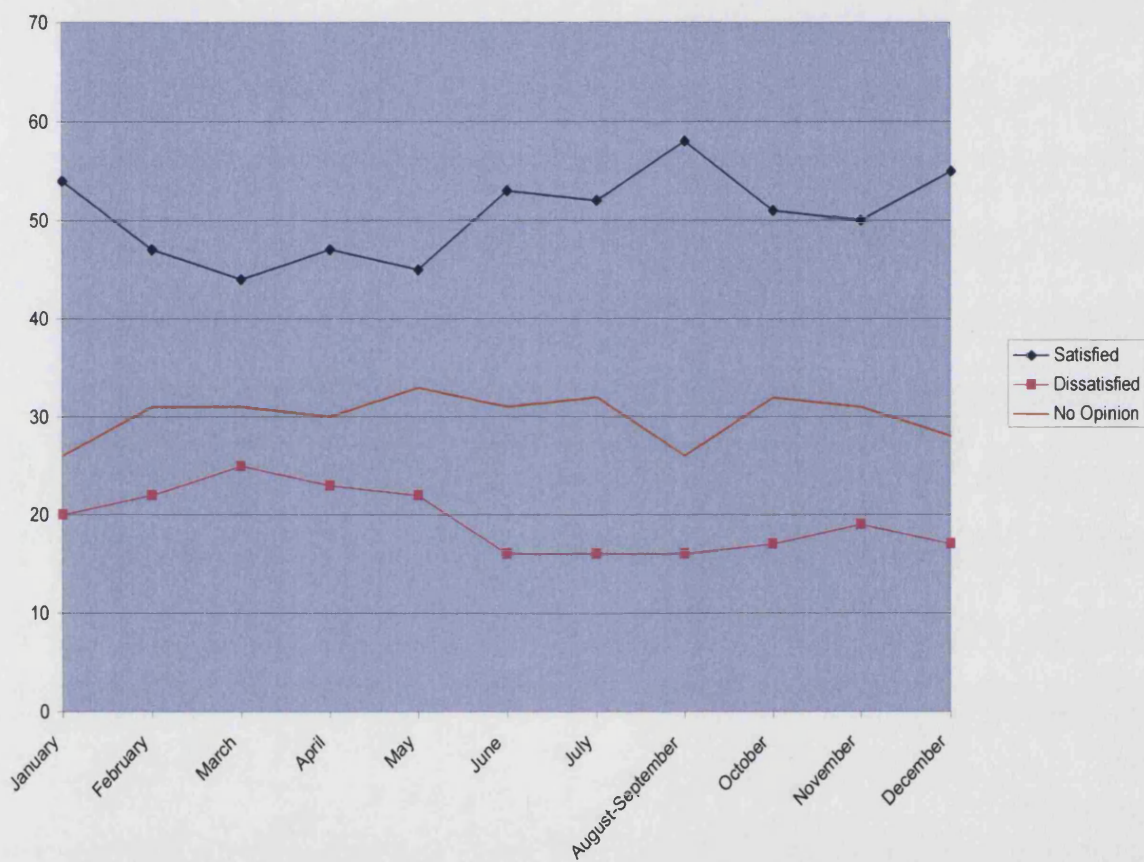
As percentage of Gross National Income



Source: OECD ODA statistics (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/idsonline>)

Annex 3

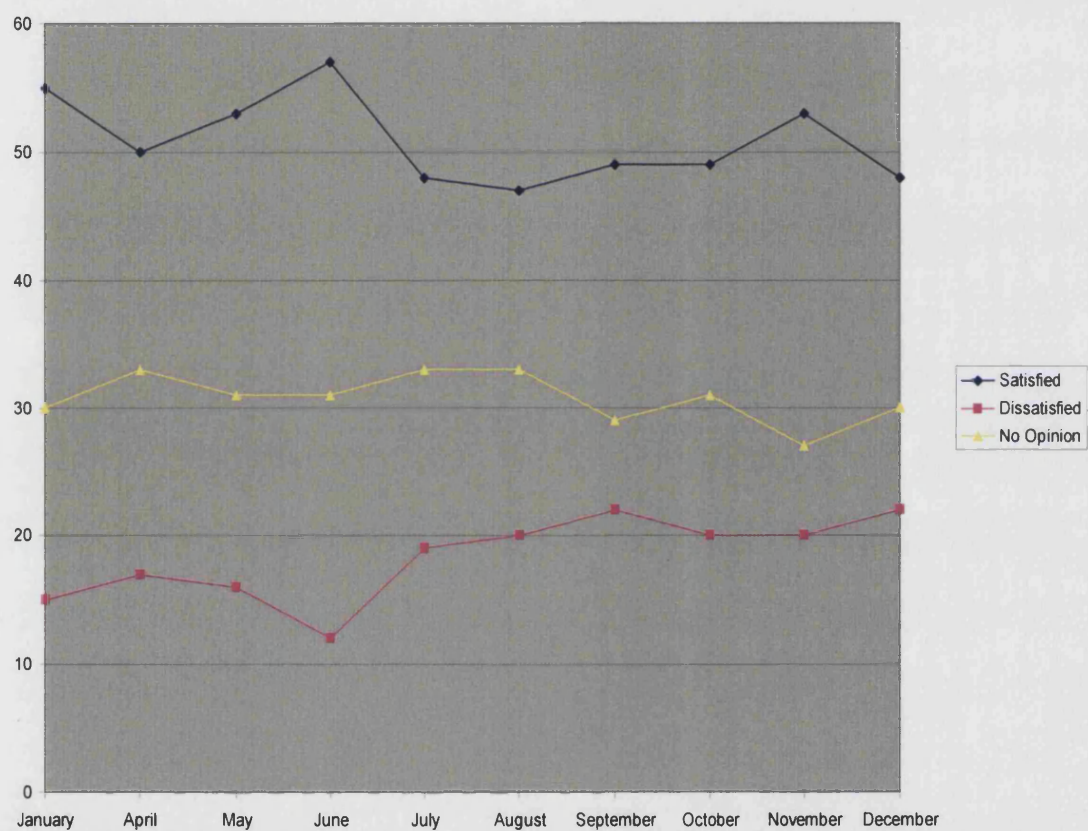
French Public Opinion and De Gaulle's Foreign Policy, 1966



Source: Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, *Les Français et de Gaulle*, (Paris: Plon, 1971), p.260

Annex 4

French Public Opinion and De Gaulle's Foreign Policy, 1967



Source: Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, *Les Français et de Gaulle*, (Paris: Plon, 1971), pp.260-261