

**Between Past and Future:  
Charles de Gaulle's Geopolitical Foresight  
and Its Implications for Modern Diplomacy**

by

Francis Fang  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2019

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

© Francis Fang, 2023

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Between Past and Future:  
Charles de Gaulle's Geopolitical Foresight  
and Its Implications for Modern Diplomacy

by

Francis Fang  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2019

**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Robert Alexander, Department of History  
Supervisor

Dr. Brian McKercher, Department of History  
Departmental Member

## **Abstract**

Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy, intricately woven with the concepts of national sovereignty, European unity, and balance of power, stands as a seminal study in the realm of international relations. This thesis delves into de Gaulle's geopolitical vision, where he sought European cooperation as a counterweight to superpower dominance, criticized U.S. military interventions such as the war in Vietnam, and aspired for an East-West *détente* to promote international peace. With the 21<sup>st</sup>-century's shifting geopolitical dynamics, this research draws parallels between his political realism and current global affairs, underscoring the enduring relevance of his vision. In an era marked by rising multipolarity, the reassertion of nation-states, and collective global challenges, de Gaulle's legacy sheds light on how to foster prudent strategic thinking as the world navigates through uncertain times. Through a detailed exploration of his diplomacy and its resonance in today's global landscape, this thesis aims to provide a rich understanding of the intersections between past foreign policy strategies and contemporary geopolitical trends.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Epigraph.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: De Gaulle and an Evolving International Order, 1945-1962.....	13
Chapter 2: De Gaulle and His Certain Idea of the World, 1963-1969.....	41
Chapter 3: De Gaulle and the Return of History – Part 1: The Great-Power Rivalry.....	73
Chapter 4: De Gaulle and the Return of History – Part 2: Europe at a Crossroad.....	104
Conclusion: Back to the Future.....	125
Bibliography.....	131

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to begin by expressing my profound gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Alexander, for his support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my academic journey. During my undergraduate years, his illuminating courses on French and European history kindled an intense passion within me for this field. In recent years, even as the world grappled with the challenges of the pandemic, and as I navigated my own personal highs and lows, Dr. Alexander remained a guide through it all. Despite my relocation from Victoria to Vancouver, our consistent email exchanges, bridging the distance and circumstance, have been instrumental in keeping the thesis on track and enriching it with depth and perspective.

I also reserve special gratitude for Dr. McKercher. His astute and incisive feedback has significantly elevated the quality of my thesis. More than once, he has challenged my assumptions and prodded me to delve deeper, to question more, and to strive for excellence in every facet of my work.

Outside of academia, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to all my friends. In Vancouver, Zeno and Parth have been invaluable companions. Our countless shared moments of joy have provided a delightful respite from my academic commitments. Our friendship stands as a pillar of strength in my life. To Lance, our profound conversations, reflections, and mutual emotional support have been instrumental in keeping me centred. In Victoria, my cherished memories with Adrian and Nikki, from Christmas dinners to movie nights, have been a beacon of comfort, especially in the darkest days of the pandemic. As for Farid in Paris, my gratitude extends for helping me hone my French over the years and for always lending a patient ear to my insights on French and global politics.

To my family, particularly my parents, words fall short in expressing my gratitude. Their love, devotion, and sacrifice for educating me have been the pillars upon which my aspirations were built. I am eternally grateful for their unwavering belief in me, the freedom they granted me to chase my dreams, and their endless encouragement in each challenging moment of my life.

Last but not least, I extend my gratitude to the University of Victoria for being a home that has nurtured my academic pursuits and broadened my horizons. A heartfelt thank you to all those who indirectly contributed to this work and provided me with the academic and personal support in pivotal moments of this journey.

Au fond, vous savez, mon seul rival international, c'est TinTin!  
Nous sommes les petits qui ne se laissent pas avoir par les grands.  
On ne s'en aperçoit pas à cause de ma taille.

- Charles de Gaulle

## **Introduction**

Charles de Gaulle, a towering figure in modern French history, played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of his nation and left an indelible mark on the global stage. Born in 1890, his life and career were shaped by the turbulent times in which he lived, with the devastation of two world wars and the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War. As a military leader, writer, and statesman, he emerged as a transformative figure, steering France through challenging times and redefining its role in the world. During his presidency from 1958 to 1969, de Gaulle pursued a bold and independent foreign policy by placing a strong emphasis on the multipolarity of nation-states, thereby challenging the bipolar international order of his time defined by the ideological rivalry between communism and liberalism. His policies encompassed a diverse range of issues, notably defence of French strategic independence, advocacy for an autonomous Europe as a “third pole” on the world stage, and the pursuit of *détente* with the Communist bloc. De Gaulle’s unwavering commitment to national interest over ideology and his pragmatic approach to diplomacy earned him both praise and criticism. Regardless of divergent interpretations of his foreign policy, his influence on France and the world remains undeniable. Beyond the period of his presidency, de Gaulle’s realist insights, such as his understanding of geopolitical complexities, his emphasis on the autonomy of nation-states, and his vision of a balanced multipolar world, continue to resonate in the contemporary global landscape and provide a valuable framework for navigating the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Introduction to de Gaulle’s Foreign Policy**

When de Gaulle returned to the presidency in 1958, he had in mind a clear set of political ideas shaped by his interpretation of successive world events since the beginning of the Cold

War. In 1947, in the early stages of East-West tensions, de Gaulle had publicly warned against the Soviet Union's growing influence across the Eurasian continent and the threat it posed to Western societies. Nevertheless, nearly a decade later, he had changed his perspective toward Soviet communism by considering the Cold War as essentially an abnormal and transient period in history, stemming from the specific conditions of the Second World War. He blamed the wartime deal between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets at the Yalta Conference for dividing post-war Europe into two opposing camps, without the consultation of European nations.<sup>1</sup> From 1958 onwards, de Gaulle embarked on a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at restoring France's status as an independent power, and at bringing about a stronger Western Europe that could stand on equal footing with the United States. By the early 1960s, his belief in the ephemeral nature of the Cold War was further enhanced by the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Concluding that neither Washington nor Moscow really wanted a nuclear confrontation, de Gaulle further questioned the rigidity of the bipolar international order and considered leading France to take more active initiatives in global affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1963 and 1969, de Gaulle pursued a grand geopolitical agenda on the world stage. He rejected any form of "subordination" of France to the Anglo-American powers through his veto against Britain's request to join the European Economic Community [EEC] and his refusal to integrate French nuclear power into the U.S.-led Multilateral Force [MLF]. Meanwhile, de Gaulle called for closer Franco-German cooperation and cultivated a cordial partnership with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. He envisioned a resurgent Europe as a "third force" that could counterbalance the prevailing bipolar division and foster a new power

---

<sup>1</sup> Garret Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 8-11.

equilibrium on the world stage.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the United States' intervention in the Vietnam War, de Gaulle believed that the Americans were not engaged in a battle against communist revolutionaries but rather in a conflict with Vietnamese patriots fighting for national independence, an insight that again underscored his emphasis on national interest over ideology.<sup>4</sup> The pinnacle of de Gaulle's pursuit of autonomy came in early 1966, when he announced France's withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]'s military command. This bold move showcased his disapproval of Washington's domination over global affairs through excessive military intervention, particularly in light of the ongoing Vietnam War. Moreover, he aimed to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with the Communist bloc, embracing the possibility of a peaceful East-West coexistence while upholding France's sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Overall, de Gaulle's initiatives were driven by his unwavering determination to restore France's strategic independence and transcend the ideological rivalry of his time. He sought to challenge the prevailing U.S.-Soviet bipolar governing structure and to foster the emergence of a more diverse and balanced world order reflecting the multipolarity of nation-states. Through his diplomatic endeavours, de Gaulle skillfully positioned France as a bridge between the West and the East, establishing his nation as an independent actor in a world of evolving geopolitical dynamics.

### **Scholarly interpretation**

The vast number of biographies, memoirs, and other scholarly works on de Gaulle, which has reached over three thousand volumes, testifies to enduring fascination with the man who

---

<sup>3</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 172-173.

<sup>4</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 211-212.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 133.

dominated French politics in the post-WWII decades. Most scholars of de Gaulle's foreign policy agree on the nature of his ideology, which defines nation-states as the permanent units on the global stage. This key political tenet profoundly shaped de Gaulle's idea of international order, which rested on three key elements: balance, leadership, and struggle. De Gaulle viewed the Cold War as an anomalous and ephemeral state of affairs that resulted from the particular circumstances of WWII. According to him, the bipolar international system was essentially an aberration and was inherently dangerous, since all states within this order were constantly threatened by the possibility of superpower showdown and nuclear confrontation. Based on the principle of balance of power, de Gaulle was convinced of the necessity of visionary leadership exercised by a strong state to achieve success on the global stage. It is not surprising that the concept of struggle was fundamental to his vision of history as a kind of Bergsonian competition, wherein various states strove to flourish, driven by the same logic of concern over security and accumulation of power.<sup>6</sup>

While scholars tend to agree on the nature of de Gaulle's ideology, they diverge in their interpretations of the ultimate goals of his foreign policy. Given the massive size of the existing literature on this topic, rather than delve into extensive historiographical debates, this section will simply point to works that are representative of differing approaches to Gaullist foreign policy, and draw attention to interpretations that relate most directly to this thesis. First, a small number of scholars have dismissed the idea that de Gaulle possessed any sort of grand geopolitical vision or guiding principle. Instead, they argue that de Gaulle's foreign policy was primarily driven by domestic political concerns. For example, in *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*, and in the journal article "Charles de Gaulle and Europe :

---

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 39-51.

The New Revisionism”, Andrew Moravcsik argues that rather than attempting to achieve any geopolitical objective, de Gaulle’s push for Franco-German cooperation and his veto over British membership in the EEC were primarily driven by his wish to safeguard commercial benefits for French agriculture and industry.<sup>7</sup> According to Moravcsik, the chief incentive behind de Gaulle’s foreign policy toward his Western allies was the improvement, “within France’s aggregate economic and fiscal means”, “of the welfare of powerful French industrial and agricultural constituencies”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the EEC was essentially an instrument for France to benefit by expanding industrial trade in Europe. Meanwhile, the Anglo-American powers’ historical trading relations had posed a threat to the ongoing effort of the Six<sup>9</sup> to engage in profitable economic cooperation; hence the need to oppose the “hegemony” of Washington and London. As Moravcsik writes, de Gaulle essentially “sought to generate electoral support, promote industrial modernization, prevent disruptive strikes and protests through guarantees of economic welfare for farmers, and avoid massive government deficits”.<sup>10</sup> In brief, this model of interpretation emphasizes the significance of political economy and frames de Gaulle’s foreign policy as driven by pressure from powerful domestic groups and constituencies concerned about their social welfare.<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, a second group of scholars acknowledges that de Gaulle did possess some kind of geopolitical vision, but they tend to define his diplomatic acts as essentially negative,

---

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 177.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, “Charles de Gaulle and Europe: The New Revisionism,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no.1 (winter 2012): 56.

<sup>9</sup> The Six refers to the six founding member states of the European Economic Community, namely France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

<sup>10</sup> Moravcsik, “Charles de Gaulle and Europe,” 57.

<sup>11</sup> See also Ann-Christina Knudsen, *Farmers on Welfare: The Making of Europe’s Common Agricultural Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 13; Gene Grossman and Elhanan Helpman, *Interest Groups and Trade Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Laurent Warlouzet, “The Deadlock: The Choice of the CAP by de Gaulle and Its Impact on French EEC Policy (1958-69),” in Kiran Patel, ed., *Fertile Ground for Europe? The History of European Integration and the Common Agricultural Policy since 1945* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2009), 98-118.

based on selfish, narrow, and even irresponsible national aims. In *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*, John Newhouse criticizes de Gaulle for deploying his strength solely to promote irrelevant claims to greatness, especially evident in his ill-considered and dangerous attack on NATO's principle of military integration.<sup>12</sup> Another historian, Éric Roussel, adopts a similar position. In *Charles de Gaulle*, a detailed biography published in 2002, Roussel considers de Gaulle's diplomacy as resting on three distinctly nationalist goals: restoring France's historical status as a great power, constructing a Europe centered on French power, and opposing as much as possible the hegemonic power of the United States.<sup>13</sup> In sum, this model of interpretation tends to portray de Gaulle's foreign policy toward his Western allies, especially the United States, as a relationship between a benevolent hegemon, dedicated to the defence of European security and liberty, and a defiant and difficult client that resented taking orders and consistently questioned the credibility of transatlantic schemes.<sup>14</sup>

A third group of scholars has endorsed de Gaulle's diplomacy as one reflecting a genuine vision of the nature of the international order. His decisions were driven by a combination of geopolitical and ideological considerations that shaped French military, nuclear, and alliance policies.<sup>15</sup> In *Éssai sur la France : Déclin ou Renouveau?*, Stanley Hoffmann writes that de

---

<sup>12</sup> John Newhouse, *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 248.

<sup>13</sup> Éric Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 738.

<sup>14</sup> For more examples, see Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 246-249; Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111-141; James Ellison, "Separated by the Atlantic: the British and de Gaulle, 1958-1967," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17: 4 (2006), 853-870; and Christian Nuenlist, "Dealing with the Devil: NATO and Gaullist France, 1958-66," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9.3 (2011): 220-231.

<sup>15</sup> See Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance, 1958-1969* (Lanham : Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992); Régis Debray, *Charles de Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation* (London: Verso Books, 1994); Catherine Durandin, *La France contre l'Amérique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994); Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1993); Stanley Hoffmann, *Éssai sur la France: Déclin ou Revouveau?* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974); Julian Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de*

Gaule endeavoured to pursue a sort of “global revisionism” – not only did he wish to recover France’s lost international prestige, but he also aspired to overcome the superpower dominance of the Cold War and push forward a multipolar world that would acknowledge complexity and respond to the needs of each individual nation-state.<sup>16</sup> In *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance, 1958-1969*, Frédéric Bozo argues that the “existential” crisis within the Western alliance in the 1960s above all echoed the “ongoing transformations of the power relations that underpinned the international system”.<sup>17</sup> With Europe’s economic recovery from the devastation of WWII and the decreasing possibility of a Soviet military threat, de Gaulle was merely the advocate of a foreign policy that would adapt to this “new reality.” As Bozo writes, the objective of de Gaulle “was not so much to weaken NATO as to transform the Western group of nations, if not somehow to *reinforce* transatlantic ties”. Meanwhile, American policymakers were stuck in their preconception of de Gaulle as an irksome French nationalist with anachronistic ideas of greatness. Bozo attributes this American attitude to Washington’s single-minded focus on dominating the transatlantic alliance and a combination of “hubris and blinding parochialism”.<sup>18</sup> Another noteworthy work that presents de Gaulle’s diplomacy as being based on geopolitical foresight is Graham O’Dwyer’s *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference*. This book emphasizes how de Gaulle’s existentialist view of history enabled him to distinguish “nations” from transient ideologies and to interpret the nature of the Cold War differently from his Anglo-American counterparts. While Washington considered the world as divided into two opposing blocs and

---

*Gaule* (London: Allen Lane, 2018); and Graham O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference* (Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Hoffmann, *Essais sur la France*, 321.

<sup>17</sup> Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, ix-xvii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-xvi.

strove to contain the “evil spirit” of communism, de Gaulle still saw a world of nation-states driven by the same logic of concern over security and accumulation of power – all under the cloak of ideologies ranging from liberalism to communism.

According to O’Dwyer, de Gaulle was unfortunate to be in power at a time when the world, preoccupied with bipolar division and ideological rivalry, was incompatible with his existentialist view of the “presence of the past”.<sup>19</sup> Contrarily, our current international system is starting to resemble that of the pre-1939 world with the return of rivalry among multiple great powers, a world which de Gaulle would probably have readily recognized as “natural.” In sum, while the first two groups of scholars depict de Gaulle as primarily nationalistic, and interpret his diplomacy as merely a reaction to domestic or external pressures, the third group endorses his foreign policy as driven by a genuine grand geopolitical vision and a prescient idea of the future of international order. While all three models of interpretation contribute to our understanding of de Gaulle’s diplomatic approach, the third holds the most relevance for the purpose of this thesis.

### **Objectives of the Thesis**

While there exists a rich body of literature on French foreign policy under de Gaulle, this thesis carves out a unique niche by offering a fresh perspective that connects historical events to contemporary global dynamics. Through an integrative analysis that interweaves the fields of history, political science, and international studies, the thesis does not simply rehash existing historical narratives but recontextualizes de Gaulle’s foreign policy against the backdrop of emerging geopolitical challenges in the present day. By drawing parallels between the French president’s diplomatic strategies and contemporary debates on nation-states, multipolarity, and

---

<sup>19</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 166-167.

great-power rivalry, the thesis effectively bridges past, present, and future, underlining the enduring significance of his diplomatic legacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In doing so, it delineates a visionary statesman whose foreign policy was driven not just by immediate geopolitical concerns, but also by long-term historical considerations.

When de Gaulle was in power in the 1960s, Paris and Washington diverged on a wide range of global issues, which reflected their fundamental disagreement on the nature of international relations. According to historian Sebastian Reyn's research, "the Atlantic Community," or slight variations of the term, was *the* most widely used expression for describing transatlantic partnership in American political discourse from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. As Reyn points out, this use of language implies that in the eyes of American policymakers, transatlantic organizations such as NATO were more than a temporary expression of Western strategic solidarity in the Cold War. Rather, "it had unmistakable *ideological* and *cultural* connotations", symbolizing a world characterized by growing international cooperation.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, while de Gaulle acknowledged cultural affinities across the Atlantic, he maintained that there could be no bonds that would attach Europe to the United States *permanently*, and that the military alliance served as no more than a provisional expedient against Cold War threats. It is perhaps not surprising that many American policymakers considered de Gaulle, with his emphasis on strong leadership, national interest, and multipolarity, as inherently obstructive to historical progress. His foreign policy seemed to fail to catch up with changes in the modern world.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War ushered in a new form of international order. In the early 1990s, a sense of optimism prevailed in the West, as many old

---

<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Reyn, *Atlantis Lost : The American Experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 17-18.

adversaries of the Cold War suddenly shared common values, particularly an aspiration for economic or political integration. The United States was confidently leading the world into what was envisioned to be a new era of peace, prosperity, and liberty. As the political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously put in his “end of history” thesis: “there are no serious ideological competitors left to liberal democracy.”<sup>21</sup> Traditional geopolitics, it seemed, had given way to a new form of international order driven by global convergence, rather than great-power rivalry. Nevertheless, only a generation later, such hope has been dashed by the new global reality: in large parts of the world, the weight of nation-states stays as strong as ever, with countries such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, Iran, and others struggling for spheres of influence and regional pre-eminence. Meanwhile, the traditional U.S. vision of liberal internationalism has been eroded successively by the Iraq war, the global financial crisis of 2008, and the presidency of Donald Trump, which have made American values seem less appealing and successful. In summarizing the ideological combat between communism, fascism, and liberalism over the past century, Yuval Noah Harari writes in his 2018 work, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, “In 1938 humans were offered three global stories to choose from, in 1968 just two, and in 1998 a single story seemed to prevail. In 2018 we are down to zero... To be suddenly left without any story is terrifying. Nothing makes any sense.”<sup>22</sup> This situation seems to validate de Gaulle’s idea that nation-states, rather than ideologies, are the ultimate actors driving international relations.

Given the growing geopolitical complexities of our era, this thesis offers a comprehensive examination of de Gaulle’s foreign policy, shedding new light on how his focus on political reality over ideology remains relevant as we navigate the global dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Divided into four main chapters, each segment builds upon the other, forming a cohesive

---

<sup>21</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 211.

<sup>22</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018), 5-6.

narrative that illustrates de Gaulle's remarkable approach to diplomacy and argues that it has enduring significance in the present day. In setting the historical background, the first chapter will underline how the evolving international context in the years 1945-1962, including the rise of a bipolar world order defined by ideological rivalry, the gradual shift in global power balance, and the easing of tensions following the Cuban Missile Crisis, shaped de Gaulle's belief in the transient nature of the Cold War and paved the way for his pursuit of an independent foreign policy. The second chapter will dive into de Gaulle's diplomatic initiatives between 1963 and 1969. His focus on nation-states as the foundation of international relations and his advocacy for a multipolar order, rather than a simplistic dichotomy between ideologies, constituted the defining feature of his foreign policy, as evident in his dealing with issues concerning European cooperation, the Vietnam War, and East-West *détente*. Lastly, the third and fourth chapters will take a forward-looking approach, connecting de Gaulle's realist insights to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitical landscape. By analyzing contemporary power dynamics, notably the national ambitions of China and Russia, the changing global role of the United States, and the growing strategic dilemma faced by Europe, these two chapters draw parallels to de Gaulle's historical experiences, highlighting how his emphases on political realism, multipolarity, and peaceful coexistence continue to resonate in our increasingly intricate yet interconnected world.

This thesis draws upon a diverse array of sources to ensure a holistic and well-rounded examination of the subject. The primary sources consist of archival documents, such as official government records, diplomatic correspondences, and minutes of meetings. A notable example is *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences of General Charles de Gaulle, May 10, 1958 – January 31, 1964*, which sheds light on the policies and strategies under de Gaulle's administration. Moreover, personal diaries, letters, and memoirs, epitomized by de Gaulle's

*Memoirs of Hope* and complemented by accounts from other statesmen, offer an intimate glimpse into the perspectives and reflections of various central figures. Additionally, speeches, interviews, and other media reports provide a snapshot of the historical events as they unfolded. As for secondary sources, such as scholarly books, articles, and journals, it is noteworthy that the thesis draws upon the contributions of both historians and political scientists. Historians, with their profound grasp on specifics, timeframes, and contextual details, enrich our understanding of the when and why of past events by presenting a narrative grounded in detailed chronology and nuance. On the other hand, political scientists often frame these narratives within broader, theoretical frameworks, illuminating the overarching patterns and geopolitical trends. The interplay between these varied sources and academic disciplines has profoundly enhanced the depth, scope, and richness of this thesis.

Ultimately, one can say that the thesis aligns with the third model of scholarly interpretation, which analyzes de Gaulle's foreign policy through the lens of his grand geopolitical vision and foresight. In an innovative manner, the thesis contributes to the existing literature by bridging historical analysis with recent developments in global politics, in an effort to underline that de Gaulle was prescient in his discernment regarding the resurgence of great-power rivalry, or to put it another way, the return of history. In a world where geopolitical dynamics are rapidly evolving and the tides of history continue to shape our shared future, the enduring relevance of de Gaulle's realist insights serves as an invaluable asset in guiding informed strategic thinking, fostering stability and cooperation, and nurturing a more equitable international order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Chapter 1

### **De Gaulle and an Evolving International Order, 1945-1962**

In the years following the end of the Second World War, France increasingly found itself caught in the middle of an emerging bipolar international order driven by super-power competition between Washington and Moscow. In the face of Soviet strategic challenges, it seemed logical that a war-torn France, like other Western European nations, could not do without the United States' military protection through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], a transatlantic military alliance established in April 1949 for defence against the Eastern bloc. Nevertheless, with a succession of international crises (notably the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria and the Suez Crisis), many Fourth Republic officials began to question the wisdom of further French participation in the military alliance and felt frustrated with their submission to American hegemony. Against this background, General Charles de Gaulle, France's wartime national hero, returned to power in 1958, and he was determined to implement an independent foreign policy and restore a sense of pride to his nation. Following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the easing of U.S.-Soviet confrontation seemed to signify a diminishing possibility of Soviet aggression toward Western Europe. Accordingly, de Gaulle concluded that the initially rigid bipolar world order centered on superpower rivalry was becoming more fluid, and he was ready to lead France to take more active initiatives in global affairs. This chapter aims to analyze how the evolving international context between 1945 and 1962 shaped de Gaulle's determination to escape superpower hegemony and laid the groundwork for his bold diplomatic agenda designed to overcome the bipolar order after 1963.

## The Rise of a Bipolar World Order, 1945-1955

In September 1945, when the Second World War officially ended, France was a devastated European power that had endured four years of wartime suffering. In June 1940, the French had witnessed one of the most humiliating moments in the nation's history when the government led by Marshal Philippe Pétain signed an armistice with Adolf Hitler's Germany after six weeks of fighting. Despite the endeavours of internal resistance movements and the combat of Free France (1940-1944) led by de Gaulle, France was not liberated from the darkness of occupation by the Allies until 1944. Along with the Big Three allied powers (the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) and the Republic of China, France was admitted as a permanent member of the Security Council of the newly established United Nations [UN].<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Big Three dominated the secret talks concerning post-war European settlement at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 and again at the Potsdam Conference five months later. At the insistence of de Gaulle, head of the Provisional Government of the French Republic until January 1946, France was eventually granted a small portion of the occupation zone in defeated Germany, which consisted of solely the Saar Protectorate and pieces of the Rhineland and Baden-Wurttemberg that the Americans and British did not want.<sup>2</sup>

The Second World War had drastically transformed the global distribution of power, with the United States and the Soviet Union emerging as the two dominant countries on earth. Immediately following the War, the United States possessed half of the world's manufacturing capacity and the greatest naval and air forces, despite a quick demobilization of the army. It was also the only country in the world in possession of atomic bombs. With national power and

---

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Lynne Pearson, "The French Empire Goes to San Francisco: The Founding of the United Nations and the Limits of Colonial Reform," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 38:2 (2020): 42.; Julian Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 356-358;

<sup>2</sup> Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6-7.

universalist aspirations flowing together in a seamless web, most U.S. policymakers believed that a global economic reconstruction would be indispensable to enduring American prosperity, and that the United State alone was capable of ushering in a future of international cooperation, growing affluence, and expanding democracy.<sup>3</sup> As President Harry S. Truman privately stated, “We are faced with the most terrible responsibility that any nation ever faced. From Darius I’s Persia, Alexander’s Greece, Hadrian’s Rome, Victoria’s Britain, no nation or group of nations has had our responsibilities.” Thus, it was time for Washington to “save the world from totalitarianism” in the face of communist expansion.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the Soviet Union, the only major power that could rival the United States to a certain extent, also envisioned a new world order corresponding to its own interests. Having forcefully lifted a vast, backward, and semi-feudal society to modernity, and having notably contributed to the defeat of Hitler’s Germany, the Soviet Union enjoyed considerable prestige among some left-wing Europeans, such as French communists, as well as colonized peoples in the Third World struggling for national independence. With a vivid memory of catastrophic invasions from Germany twice over the past thirty years, the Soviet government was determined to consolidate its sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, in an effort to ensure its post-war national security.<sup>5</sup>

It seems inevitable that the United States and the Soviet Union, whose wartime alliance was born out of necessity rather than shared history, values, and long-term interests, were destined to come into conflict once their common foes were defeated. When the war was ending and in line with the Yalta Conference decisions of February 1945, the Soviet Premier Joseph

---

<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History, Volume 2: From 1865* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 908.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Millis, ed., *The Forestal Diaries* (New York: Viking, 1951), 281.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 160.

Stalin began to install pro-communist regimes in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to prevent democratic elections there, which could create independent and potentially hostile governments on his western frontier.<sup>6</sup> In March 1946, the former wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill ominously warned an American audience that an “Iron Curtain” had fallen across Europe, turning the democratic West and the communist East into two antagonistic blocs.<sup>7</sup> In February 1947, London invited Washington to take over its traditional role of protecting Greece and Turkey against communist forces there; in response, Truman proposed what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine to the U.S. Congress in March, a policy aimed at providing immediate economic assistance to Greece and Turkey in the form of US\$400 million while pledging American support for other nations against Soviet communism.<sup>8</sup> In July 1947, an article entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” based on the “long telegram” written by the senior American diplomat George Kennan one year earlier, appeared in *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym “X.”<sup>9</sup> The essay constituted a systematic articulation of the Truman administration’s strategic thinking regarding relations with the Soviet Union, as the author laid out policy of “firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.”<sup>10</sup> In April 1948, this policy of containment took an economic form with the implementation of the Marshall Plan, aimed at supporting the recovery and stabilization of war-torn European nations, thereby providing a bulwark against the encroachment of Soviet influence.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union*, 163-164.

<sup>7</sup> Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 909-910.

<sup>8</sup> Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Brian J.C. McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship since 1941* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 47-48.

<sup>10</sup> George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947).

<sup>11</sup> McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship*, 48.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the war, de Gaulle increasingly felt uncomfortable with the new political climate in France. In the election for a Constituent Assembly held in October 1945, three parties dominated the field: the Communists (*Parti communiste français*, or PCF), the Christian Democrats (*Mouvement républicain populaire*, or MRP), and the Socialists (*Section française de l'internationale ouvrière*, or SFIO). With the restoration of a popularly elected assembly, the politicians wanted an executive of the old parliamentary style, which would be strictly dependent on the legislature. De Gaulle, head of the provisional government, was thus forced to take account of the three parties' electoral strengths when forming his new government.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, an authoritarian by temperament, de Gaulle always distrusted parliamentary politics, which, according to him, was the culprit of debilitating divisions among the French over the past 150 years. Instead, he believed in the necessity of a strong presidential regime that would rise above political parties and appeal to the entire nation, or to put it another way, a form of "republican monarchy." Dissatisfied with parliamentary constraints, de Gaulle resigned from office in January 1946 and retired to his private countryside home at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, and he would not return to power until 1958. In October 1946, a new constitution inaugurated the Fourth Republic (1946-1958) under a parliamentary regime controlled by a series of coalitions.<sup>13</sup> Lacking a strong executive independent of party politics that de Gaulle had desired, "almost overnight the Third Republic atmosphere of intrigue and behind-the-scenes maneuvering resumed its previous way".<sup>14</sup>

Starting in the late 1940s, the Cold War tensions escalated across Europe and the globe, with the Berlin Blockade being one of the most threatening international crises that testified to

---

<sup>12</sup> James Wilkinson and H. Stuart Hughes, *Contemporary Europe: A History* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 379.

<sup>13</sup> Gildea, *France since 1945*, 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkinson and Hughes, *Contemporary Europe*, 379.

the intensity of super-power rivalry. Following the end of the war, the four victorious powers, namely the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, had each acquired an occupation zone both in defeated Germany and in Berlin, the capital city located inside the Soviet-controlled part of Germany. In March 1948, the three Western powers introduced a new currency in their occupied zones of Germany and Berlin to curb the inflation caused by excessive printing of money by the Soviets in all of Germany.<sup>15</sup> Fearing an enduring American military engagement in Europe and seeking to tilt the balance of power toward its favour, Moscow cut off all ground and water traffic from the American, British, and French zones to Berlin on 24 June, in hopes of forcing the West to abandon the city. Immediately, the Western allies coordinated an airlift supplying food, fuel, and other supplies to Western Berliners. Eventually, Moscow gave in and lifted the blockade in May 1949 (although the airlift continued until August 1949).<sup>16</sup> In the aftermath of the crisis, two separate German states emerged – the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in May 1949 and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in October 1949.<sup>17</sup> The Berlin Blockade seemed to have demonstrated to Western leaders that the containment policy worked. To add a military dimension to containment, the United States, along with ten Western European nations and Canada, in April 1949 established NATO, an alliance of collective defence against aggression from the Soviet bloc. In the face of Soviet strategic threats, France had no alternative but to be part of the alliance, grateful to accept American soldiers and military facilities on French soil.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship*, 49.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 7-24.

<sup>17</sup> McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Jenny Raflik, "The Fourth Republic and NATO, 1946-1958: Alliance Partnership or Idiosyncratic Nationalism?," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9:3 (2011): 211.

A few months after the creation of NATO, the Soviet Union successfully detonated an atomic bomb, breaking Washington's monopoly on the weapon. Later that year, the Chinese Communist Party led by Mao Zedong emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War and established the People's Republic of China [PRC] on the mainland in October 1949. Meanwhile, the previous government led by Chiang Kai-Shek's Chinese Nationalist Party fled to the island of Taiwan and retained its rule there. Upon the PRC's establishment, the Chinese communist leaders immediately won Moscow's diplomatic recognition and firmly aligned themselves with the Eastern bloc in the emerging Cold War – a severe blow to the American containment policy in East Asia.<sup>19</sup> In the wake of escalating East-West rivalries across the globe, Truman signed the National Security Council Paper NSC-68 in April 1950, a top-secret report that laid the basis of American foreign policy for the ensuing two decades. It defined the Cold War as a striking competition between “the idea of freedom” and the “idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin”. According to the report, the United States should vigorously embark on a global crusade against communism by significantly increasing American military spending on both its conventional forces and nuclear arsenal.<sup>20</sup> In May 1955, the new president Dwight D. Eisenhower pressed West Germany to join NATO, in order to arm the country and help it meet potential Soviet offensives. In response, Moscow formalized the establishment of its own military alliance by signing the Warsaw Pact with its Eastern European satellite states.<sup>21</sup> As a result, by the year 1955, a bipolar international order driven by the super-power rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union had fully emerged as a defining feature in international relations.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lorenz M Lüthi. “Rearranging International Relations? How Mao’s China and de Gaulle’s France Recognized Each Other in 1963-1964.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16:1 (2014): 118.

<sup>20</sup> Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 914.

<sup>21</sup> McWilliams, *The World since 1945*, 87.

## France as a Reluctant Cold Warrior, 1945-1958

With the emergence of a bipolar world order and the threats posed by the all-powerful Soviet Union, whose influence expanded throughout the Eurasian continent, a dominant view among the French political class, especially among the Christian Democrats, was that France could not do without the United States for military protection.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, accepting American leadership under the current circumstances did not mean that those same French leaders had given up their convictions about France's own responsibilities in global affairs and aspirations to restore France to the status of a great European power, if not a world power. The result was a kind of ambivalent attitude toward the super-power rivalry: on one hand, all political parties, from the Left (except the Communists, who denounced American imperialism while portraying Moscow as a peaceable world leader) to the Right, had identified the seriousness of Soviet threats under the Cold War; on the other, there existed in many quarters fear about the loss of national independence and submission to American hegemony.<sup>23</sup> "An alliance with the West? Yes. But an alliance with the East as well", Georges Bidault had stated back in late 1944; he was a founder of the MRP and was Foreign Minister under the Provisional Government at the time.<sup>24</sup> *Le Monde*, a newspaper created at the time of Liberation and independent of political parties, also suggested that an autonomous European bloc should become a third force in Cold War politics and maintain equal distances from both Washington and Moscow.<sup>25</sup> Like de Gaulle, many French intellectuals, such as the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, were convinced of France's special responsibility for humanity at a time when the Americans (and

---

<sup>22</sup> Gildea, *France since 1945*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 28; Gildea, *France since 1945*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> John W. Young, *France, the Cold War, and the Western Alliance, 1944-1949: French Foreign Policy and Post-War Europe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Gildea, *France since 1945*, 9.

later the Soviets) were asserting their global dominance by amassing atomic bombs. Although “our country has lost much of its power”, Sartre declared in October 1945, “France is our concrete situation... our only chance... And if we decide to take our chance on life... we have to take our chance on France and commit ourselves to finding a place for France in this tough world, this humanity in danger of death.”<sup>26</sup>

In the early days of the Cold War, France, like other Western European countries, was so exhausted and weakened that it desperately needed help from the United States in economic reconstruction. In 1945, French industrial production was only 38 percent of its pre-war level, and 74 departments had been wrecked by the War, in contrast to 13 departments in 1918. Under the Blum-Byrnes agreements of May 1946, the French secured economic aid of \$650 million from the United States, on the conditions that France must modernize its economy based upon the U.S. model and conform to American rules in its foreign trade.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the accords dictated that French cinemas could only show French-produced films for no more than thirteen weeks a year. With increasing Hollywood imports from the United States, the market share of French films plummeted: by early 1948, around 80 percent of the workforce in the French film industry was unemployed, and half of French studios were closed. With the introduction of the Marshall Plan in 1948, the United States demanded even firmer obligations in exchange for financial aid, including an American access to strategic materials from French colonies and a removal of all trade barriers to U.S. investments and exports. “Will France become an American colony?” questioned a book in 1948, warning against the invasion of American consumer

---

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *In These Times*, 30 April-6 May 1980.

<sup>27</sup> Gildea, *France since 1945*, 9-10.

products, such as American cigarettes, chewing gum, Coco-Cola, and Western and gangster movies, into French society and culture.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Fourth Republic has often been considered as a weak regime due to its unstable parliamentary politics and mishandling of the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, one should not dismiss the pivotal role that the regime had played in reviving French prominence in post-war European politics by pushing Western Europe toward greater integration in the 1950s. Like de Gaulle, who was then temporarily out of power, many French officials of the Fourth Republic shared an ambitious goal of building a united Europe under French leadership.<sup>29</sup> The notion of French *grandeur*, therefore, should not be interpreted as a purely Gaullist invention. In April 1951, under the initiative of French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg signed a treaty to establish the European Coal and Steel Community [ECSC], which facilitated closer economic cooperation by eliminating all transnational coal and steel tariffs. Son of a Lorrainer, Schumann hoped that such a European solution would make future wars between France and Germany “not only unthinkable but materially impossible”.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the choice of coal and steel was deliberate because they were the vital sources of military reconstruction at the time. The French initiative was thus partly driven by the strategy of containing Germany’s potential military revival within a French-led Western Europe. In March 1957, the same six countries went on to sign the Treaty of Rome and established the European Economic Community [EEC], or Common Market, with the goals of further reducing all tariffs and encouraging free movement of capital and labour.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 50.

<sup>30</sup> “The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950,” *The European Union*, accessed March 1, 2021, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en).

<sup>31</sup> Kiran Klaus Patel, “Provincializing European Union: Co-operation and Integration in Europe in a Historical Perspective,” *Contemporary European History* 22 (2013): 3.

Through European integration, the French not only skillfully asserted control over the pace and method of German recovery, but also satisfied their own post-war economic demand for a greater European single market.

In contrast to its notable contribution to European integration, the Fourth Republic had played a surprisingly marginal role in the Atlantic alliance that was meant to defend Europe militarily. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the French immediately became involved in overseas colonial wars, which drastically diminished their military commitment to Europe. Following the 1940 fiasco and France's subsequent four years of suffering, the Fourth Republic leaders were determined to preserve the French empire by fighting against communist-backed *guerres révolutionnaires*, in an effort to reclaim their lost international prestige. The two most noteworthy colonial conflicts were the disastrous Indochina War (1946-1954), which began just one year after the end of WWII, and the divisive Algerian War (1954-1962), which broke out just weeks after nine years of fighting in Indochina and even led to the downfall of the regime in 1958.<sup>32</sup> The colonial conflicts made the French military forces largely incompatible with those of the Western allies throughout the 1950s: while Western Europe under NATO was depending on heavy arms, such as artillery and tanks, in the event of Soviet military aggression, French troops were tasked with fighting against relatively untrained guerrillas, tracking down rebels in the countryside or on the mountains, and conducting psychological warfare.<sup>33</sup> It is apparent that a government determined to assert its global interests by endlessly pouring money and human resources into overseas wars was certainly ill placed to fulfill its military role in the European theatre. In August 1954, the French National Assembly rejected the plan for a European Defence Community [EDC] proposed by the French Premier René Pleven in 1950, which would have put

---

<sup>32</sup> Raflik, "The Fourth Republic and NATO," 215-216.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France*, 27.

French military under the command of a supranational authority within a pan-European army.<sup>34</sup> Thus, throughout the 1950s, French armed forces were strikingly marginal to the Atlantic alliance's integrated strategy for European defence. De Gaulle's later foreign policies in the 1960s, such as his pursuit of French independence and the rejection of NATO's integrated command structure, were, in fact, not so sudden a break with the past as many have caricatured, since minimal French military engagement in the alliance was already taking shape under the Fourth Republic. As has been observed, not without some justification, "rather than saying de Gaulle tore down the French pillar from the NATO temple, it might be more accurate to say he refused to erect one that had never been there in the first place."<sup>35</sup>

In the final years of the Fourth Republic, the French officials' bitter experience in the 1956 Suez Crisis fueled their doubts about France's share of the costs and benefits of the American-dominated alliance, which foreshadowed de Gaulle's departure from NATO later on. In July 1956, the Egyptian nationalist leader Gamal Abdel Nasser seized possession of the Suez Canal, jointly owned by its British and French shareholders. Haunted by the ill-fated appeasement policy toward Nazi Germany two decades ago, and knowing that Nasser had been offering moral and material aid to the Algerian rebels, the Socialist Premier Guy Mollet considered it imperative that France take military actions to topple Nasser and contain the spread of radical nationalism in the Arab world.<sup>36</sup> In late July, the French began to prepare a joint expedition with the Israelis, who were concerned about their own regional security. Three months later, the British joined them by signing a secret agreement at Sèvres; without consultation with Washington, the joint

---

<sup>34</sup> Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945*, 81-82.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Harold Callender, "Britain, France Reaffirm Solidarity on Suez Crisis." *The Globe and Mail*, Sep 28, 1956. <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/historical-newspapers/britain-france-reaffirm-solidarity-on-suez-crisis/docview/1289436514/se-2?accountid=14846>.

intervention began a week later.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, U.S officials, particularly Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, held a different perspective. Given the upcoming presidential election in early November, they hoped to keep the United States' global image intact and safeguard the interests of American oil companies in the Middle East.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Washington led the opposition to the combined Anglo-French-Israeli invasion in the UN and threatened to cripple the finances of London and Paris through a devaluation of the pound and the franc.<sup>39</sup> Despite the American objection, French politicians (except the Communists) were united in their endorsement of the Suez intervention to avert the prospect of another defeat. Yet, the French armed forces, which had agreed to integrate with those of Britain and be put under London's command, could not continue the expedition once the British chose to retreat under Washington's pressure, regardless of the fact that the joint forces had come close to reclaiming the Suez Canal.<sup>40</sup>

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, France and Britain drew different lessons from that debacle, which would have profound impact on their respective foreign policies. Feeling betrayed by the Anglo-American allies, many French officials concluded that allied military integration could potentially hamper French interests, and that France could count on neither the United States nor Britain as a sincere ally.<sup>41</sup> Such blame of Washington and London was unfair as it overlooked France's own culpability in the origin of the crisis. Nonetheless, what intensified French resentment was the United States' subsequent decision in 1957 to ignore French objection and sell small arms to Tunisia, which was aiding the insurrection forces in Algeria at the time.

---

<sup>37</sup> McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973), 374-378.

<sup>40</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Vaisse, "Post-Suez France," in W. Roger Louis and Roger Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 336.

Fearing that American weapons would go to Algerian rebels, a French official bitterly protested to the Americans, “Your bullets are being used to kill our boys.” In the face of French discontent, Eisenhower commented, “if the French suddenly drop out of NATO we are out of Europe.” Unconcerned, Dulles breezily assured the president in a telephone conversation: the French “would get over it since they needed our help.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the British had resolved to move closer to the United States following the Suez Crisis. In return, Eisenhower agreed to share nuclear development secrets with London in 1957. “There is an extremely close relationship” with the British, Dulles confided to American diplomats, and he asked them to keep it silent, in case the French and others “would want to be in on it”.<sup>43</sup> The United States’ preferential treatment of Britain convinced French officials of their country’s marginalized position in the Atlantic alliance, and of the necessity to acquire a national nuclear arsenal if France was to adopt an independent foreign policy.

De Gaulle watched closely the unfolding of the Suez Crisis and drew the same conclusion that the Alliance’s integrated command structure was incompatible with France’s strategic interests. “I refuse to admit,” he confided to his son-in-law, Alain de Boissieu, “that France’s defence depends on a foreign general who himself depends totally on the President of the United States.”<sup>44</sup> By the time the Fourth Republic was brought down by the divisive Algerian War in 1958, France had been exhausted by two debilitating colonial conflicts, had struggled to align itself with American interests, and had been snubbed by its close allies within the Western alliance. The United States, on the other hand, had responded to perceived French weakness by prioritizing its relations with Britain, pushing West Germany’s integration and rearmament

---

<sup>42</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>44</sup> Alain de Boissieu, *Pour servir le Général* (Paris: Plon, 1982), 238.

within NATO, and undertaking its own military commitment in the southern half of Vietnam after the French retreat (which paved the way for what would soon become one of the most catastrophic American military interventions). In the year 1958, France still belonged to the American-dominated alliance, but on a dependant, marginalized, and vulnerable status. De Gaulle considered the situation unacceptable.

### **De Gaulle's Initial Endeavours in Revising the Alliance**

In the heat of the Algerian War in 1958, de Gaulle returned to power from his twelve-year retirement from politics, and he was determined to implement a foreign policy of *grandeur* to restore a sense of pride to his nation. On 1 June 1958, the French National Assembly invited him to form an emergency government to avert the prospect of a civil war, in the aftermath of the 13 May insurrection led by French army officials and right-wing extremists in Algeria. These disgruntled individuals, frustrated by the indecisive colonial war, had seized control of the Algerian administration, thereby posing a direct challenge to the legal government in Paris. De Gaulle promised to resolve the Algerian issue – on what conditions he deliberately did not specify – and to prepare a new constitution for an upcoming Fifth Republic.<sup>45</sup> Consciously aware of the association between domestic and foreign affairs, de Gaulle considered it crucial to consolidate his power and unite the French people through a glorious foreign policy, one that would appeal to the entire nation and inspire his people to move forward together, especially after their bitter defeat of 1940 and the frustrating colonial conflicts since 1944. In his pursuit of French *grandeur* on the world stage, de Gaulle had in mind a clear set of diplomatic goals: defending French independence within the Western alliance; promoting an autonomous Western

---

<sup>45</sup> Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 473-476.

Europe led by a Franco-German axis; and revising transatlantic relations by putting an assertive Western Europe on an equal footing with the United States. Still smarting from the bitter memories of the Second World War, de Gaulle dreamed of a Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals,” with the loathed Yalta division dissolved, and with France again a major actor in European diplomacy.<sup>46</sup>

The United States’ continuous ill-treatment of France and insensitivity to French national interests deepened de Gaulle’s determination to evade the American protectorate. On the first official meeting between de Gaulle and Dulles on 5 July 1958 in Paris, Dulles first expressed his respect for the French leader, well known for his ambitious agenda to revive France as a great power, by offering the flattering remark that “the spirit of France is the spirit of Western civilization.” Nonetheless, Dulles soon moved on to insist that the United States would retain ultimate control over the strategic defence of the West; thus, France should not develop its own atomic capacity, since Washington had pledged to defend Western Europe and NATO with America’s nuclear arsenal.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, just two days before this meeting, the U.S. Congress had amended the Atomic Energy Act to authorize nuclear aid to Britain, but not to France or any other continental ally. Angered with Washington’s preferential treatment of London, de Gaulle affirmed that France would continue developing a national nuclear arsenal on its own, and he rejected Dulles’ proposal to deploy American warheads on French territory unless France held ultimate control over the use of them.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 166-172, 229

<sup>47</sup> Richard Challener, “Dulles and De Gaulle,” in Robert O. Paxton and Nicholas Wahl, *De Gaulle and the United States: A Centennial reappraisal* (Oxford; Providence, R.I. : Berg, 1994), 152-153.

<sup>48</sup> Challener, “Dulles and De Gaulle,” in Paxton and Nicholas, *De Gaulle and the United States*, 155.

Dulles went on to inform de Gaulle that the United States was planning a military intervention in Lebanon to safeguard the pro-Western government there against the threats of Arab nationalist insurgents inspired by Nasser. Moreover, Eisenhower had considered it “a great mistake” if the French participated in the military expedition – he did not wish to taint the United States’ military mission in the Middle East with an association with France, defamed as the colonial oppressor in Algeria. However, according to the Tripartite Agreement of 1950 (following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War), France was indeed, along with the United States and Britain, responsible for supervising the stability and peace in the Middle East.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, under the Eisenhower Doctrine enunciated in January 1957, Eisenhower had indicated that any Middle Eastern country could request economic and military aid from Washington “against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.”<sup>50</sup> Given the geopolitical importance of the Middle East in Washington’s Cold War strategy, Dulles insisted that France stay away from Lebanon. He also pressed de Gaulle to mitigate his aspiration for France to become a strong, independent power, which would undermine the solidarity of the Atlantic alliance.<sup>51</sup>

Despite its exclusion from the Lebanese affair, France was still subjected, along with the Anglo-American powers, to the pressure exerted by the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who warned that such a military intervention could lead to Soviet nuclear attacks against Western powers. Knowing that Moscow was probably bluffing, Dulles proposed another American military mission in East Asia only a few weeks later, in response to communist China’s assaults on the offshore islands of Quemoy and Ma-tsu held by the Nationalist government in Taiwan.

---

<sup>49</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 122.

<sup>50</sup> Peter L. Hahn, “Securing the Middle East: The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36:1 (March 2006), 38-47.

<sup>51</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 122.

Khrushchev again warned that any American military retaliation against Beijing would count as an assault on the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> The crises in Lebanon and China further fed de Gaulle's resentment at being dictated to by Washington: far-off regional clashes, in which the French had no say or little interest, could still potentially drag them into an unwanted international conflict due to their close ties to the American-led alliance. Indeed, many French politicians, despite their ideological divergences, shared a common bitterness over the Atlantic alliance and the U.S.-Soviet superpower hegemony. "What kind of government does Dulles think we have had during the last twelve years?" grumbled a top French diplomat named Jean Laloy back in May 1958. He added, "Does he think we have been satellites? Does Dulles think I have been working for *him*? I have been working for France and for the cause of the whole Western world."<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Pierre Courtade, a prominent communist leader, also vented his discontent with the Soviets: "We are not going to follow them forever. We represent the left. We are French. We will not be their slaves".<sup>54</sup> Aware of these discontents across political parties, de Gaulle considered that it was time to take an early step toward his diplomatic goal of French independence.

In his endeavour to restore France as a great power, de Gaulle first concentrated his diplomatic attention on Germany. Despite the sufferings and humiliations inflicted on France because of Germany's ambitions since 1870, de Gaulle considered it wise to reverse the course of history by seeking a rapprochement between the two nations. According to him, France should develop a network of preferential relations with Germany and help the defeated country to integrate into an organized system of cooperation between European states, which would gradually lead the two peoples toward mutual understanding and ensure long-term security on

---

<sup>52</sup> Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, 272-279.

<sup>53</sup> Cyrus L. Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 482.

<sup>54</sup> Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants*, 483.

the continent.<sup>55</sup> “How could a real and lasting peace be built on foundations that were unacceptable to this great people?” explained de Gaulle concerning Germany’s importance to the future of Europe. He continued: “How could a genuine union of the continent be established without Germany being part of it? How could the age-old threat of ruin and death be finally dispelled on either side of the Rhine as long as the old enmity remained?”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, geo-strategically, a close Franco-German alliance could potentially form the cornerstone of a revived Europe that would be strong enough to play a more independent role in international politics.<sup>57</sup> At first glance, de Gaulle’s European scheme seemed contradictory to the reality that postwar West Germany was a key member of NATO and played a vital strategic role in the U.S.-led military alliance against Moscow. Yet, despite his rhetoric, it is important to point out that de Gaulle had never denied the significance of U.S. military engagement in post-WWII Europe: in a letter sent to Washington in January 1951, in fact, he had endorsed the idea of a German contribution to NATO.<sup>58</sup> As long as the Soviet menace remained, de Gaulle had considered Washington’s nuclear guarantee and troop presence as indispensable to the continent’s peace and stability (but less so to that of France).<sup>59</sup> Given his inclination to think in long-term historical perspectives, what de Gaulle truly envisioned was that a stronger Europe based upon Franco-German cooperation could someday take over the responsibilities currently shouldered by the United States – should new geopolitical realities arise in a distant future.<sup>60</sup>

On 14 and 15 September 1958, de Gaulle and his wife welcomed Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of West Germany since 1949, at their private countryside home at Colombey-les-

---

<sup>55</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 172-173.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>57</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 123.

<sup>58</sup> Jasmine Aimaq, *For Europe or Empire? French Colonial Ambitions and the European Army Plan* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996), 190.

<sup>59</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 178.

<sup>60</sup> Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945*, 116.

Deux-Églises. With the atmosphere of a family house, de Gaulle hoped to set the scene for what he considered as the “historical encounter” between the two leading statesmen representing France and Germany in a special way.<sup>61</sup> Both de Gaulle and Adenauer came from the border region over which the two peoples had clashed since ancient times, and both men shared a Roman Catholic background and a sentiment of dignity for their respective nations. De Gaulle also saw in Adenauer a man of enormous integrity, particularly for his staunch opposition to Hitler and the Nazi Party before and during the Second World War, and for his efforts in safeguarding the stability and progress of the fragile Federal Republic in a Europe threatened by superpower showdown.<sup>62</sup> As de Gaulle described Adenauer in his memoirs, “this Rhinelander was imbued with a sense of the complementary nature of the Gauls and the Teutons which once fertilized the presence of the Roman Empire on the Rhine, brought success to the Franks and glory to Charlemagne... and in spite of the fierce struggles in which the two peoples were locked, continued to seek a path gropingly through the darkness”.<sup>63</sup>

During their meeting, the two men discussed Europe at length and agreed that France and West Germany, along with other member states of the EEC, should seek greater cooperation in joint actions facing all the political problems of the day. De Gaulle assured the Chancellor that France would help Germany restore the trust of other nations, contribute to its security against Soviet communist threats, and acknowledge Germany’s right to an eventual reunification.<sup>64</sup> On the issue of the Atlantic alliance, Adenauer informed de Gaulle of his preference for the U.S. military forces to stay in Europe and safeguard the security of the German people. As the leader

---

<sup>61</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 174.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel J. Mahoney, “Friendship and the Solitude of Greatness: The Case of Charles de Gaulle,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 46:2 (2017): 91.

<sup>63</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 173-174.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

of a defeated, divided, and threatened country in the Cold War, Adenauer considered American backing as of paramount importance to the survival of the Federal Republic and feared, above all, the prospect of American military disengagement.<sup>65</sup> De Gaulle confided to the Chancellor that he fully understood Germany's perspective under the current circumstances. "How could she do otherwise?" de Gaulle later explained in his memoirs, "in this age of atomic weapons, as long as she was threatened by the Soviets, it was obvious that Germany needed the protection of the United States".<sup>66</sup> At the end of their meeting, regardless of the divergence in transatlantic affairs, both men agreed to establish a Franco-German partnership that would go beyond the level of cooperating within inter-governmental organizations such as the EEC. From then until Adenauer's retirement from office in 1963, the two men nurtured a genuine friendship on both personal and official levels: they corresponded on more than forty occasions and met with each other fifteen times, either in France or in West Germany; they spent over a hundred hours in conversations, either in private, in the company of their family members, or with government officials in attendance.<sup>67</sup>

On 25 September 1958, ten days after his first meeting with the West German Chancellor, de Gaulle detonated another diplomatic bomb with memoranda presented to Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Alluding to the crises in Lebanon and China, de Gaulle argued that France lacked a proportionate share in the Western alliance's decision making in dealing with military interventions; meanwhile, France was still subjected to the potential risks of relentless military adventures initiated by the allies, particularly the United States, which held a monopoly over the use of the West's nuclear weapons. Accordingly, de Gaulle proposed that

---

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Vaisse, "La réconciliation franco-allemande : le dialogue de Gaulle-Adenauer," *Politique étrangère* 58:4 (Hiver 93/94): 968.

<sup>66</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Mahoney, "Friendship and the Solitude of Greatness," 91.

“an organization comprising the United States, Great Britain, and France should be created and function on a world-wide political and strategic level.” Such a tripartite directorate, as he suggested, “would make joint decisions in all political and military questions affecting global security... especially as regards the use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>68</sup> To underline his seriousness regarding the triumvirate proposal, he warned that France’s further engagement in NATO was contingent on the formation of the three-power directorate. In the meantime, de Gaulle consolidated his domestic support with his smashing 4 to 1 victory in the 28 September 1958 referendum on the constitution he had drafted for the Fifth Republic, which would bestow strong presidential powers denied him in 1946. In November, the *Union pour la Nouvelle République*, a newly established Gaullist party, won first place in the parliamentary elections for a National Assembly, and de Gaulle was elected the first president of the Fifth Republic a month later.<sup>69</sup> With his grip on power within France strengthened, de Gaulle was now in a more advantageous position to continue his push for a revision of transatlantic relations within the alliance.

Despite the ongoing Algerian War that absorbed France’s diplomatic attention until early 1962, de Gaulle reiterated, on several occasions, his proposal for a prominent French role in governing the Western alliance. Although Washington officials generally favoured de Gaulle’s goal of restoring France as a strong and stable power, they preferred that a more capable France still follow the United States’ lead and disliked de Gaulle’s request for Washington to share power in the management of the alliance. Shortly after receiving de Gaulle’s September 1958 memorandum, Eisenhower instructed Dulles to create a middle-level committee with French and British officials for “discussing” but “not... carrying into effect de Gaulle’s plan.” Throughout

---

<sup>68</sup> De Gaulle letter in Alfred Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945* (New York: Continuum Pub. Co., 1980), 187.

<sup>69</sup> Wilkinson and Hughes, *Contemporary Europe*, 457.

the remaining years of the Eisenhower administration, the tripartite discussions progressed at a snail's pace: while the French put a strong emphasis on geostrategic and military matters, the Americans avoided these subjects by talking about political issues; the French advocated shared decision making among the three Western powers, yet the Americans always refused to make such a commitment. Despite their efforts to mediate, the British generally ended up siding with the Americans. With the ongoing Anglo-American "special relationship," the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission decided in early 1959 that the United States would not sell its nuclear-powered submarines to any NATO ally – with the exception of Britain, which again clearly indicated Washington's preference for London, rather than Paris, as its close partner in overseeing the Atlantic alliance.<sup>70</sup>

Snubbed by the Eisenhower administration, de Gaulle withdrew the French Mediterranean fleet from NATO's integrated military command in March 1959, under the pretext that the alliance did not cover the southern Mediterranean and thus was unable to safeguard French interests in North Africa.<sup>71</sup> In February 1960, France shocked the world by successfully conducting a nuclear explosion during a test in the Algerian Sahara. Later that year, the French government drafted a five-year plan for further developing a fully functional nuclear deterrent.<sup>72</sup> Shortly after John F. Kennedy's inauguration as the new U.S. President in January 1961, de Gaulle again brought up the directorate proposal. Nevertheless, in a speech in Philadelphia in July 1962, Kennedy outlined his vision of a grand Atlantic Community that would bring Western Europe even further under American guidance "in all economic, political and diplomatic

---

<sup>70</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 123-126; McKercher, *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship*, 76-77.

<sup>71</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 203.

<sup>72</sup> Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 575.

areas”.<sup>73</sup> Observing that the Kennedy administration was even less inclined to share power, de Gaulle had given up on the tripartite issue by late 1962. Indeed, both Eisenhower and Kennedy had worried that if France was granted senior rank within the alliance, other continental allies still in the lower ranks, especially West Germany and Italy, would be restive. Thus, they considered it necessary to keep the allies on a par with each other - equally deferential to Washington’s strategic leadership.<sup>74</sup> Denied an executive position in the Atlantic alliance, de Gaulle resolved to go back to his old diplomatic goal of French independence.

### **The Intensification and Relaxation of East-West Conflicts**

Between 1958 and 1962, a number of international conflicts also provoked the French president’s firm determination to pursue his diplomatic grand design. One of such conflicts was a renewed crisis in Berlin. In November 1958, in a failed attempt to stem a growing tide of East German residents fleeing to West Germany through the open border between East and West Berlin, Khrushchev issued the Western powers an ultimatum demanding a withdrawal of American, British, and French forces from Berlin within six months. If carried out, the Western powers would then have had to negotiate their legal rights to stay in Berlin with the government of East Germany, which the West had refused to recognize in deference to the Federal Republic’s claim to be the only legitimate German government. Nevertheless, the Western allies reaffirmed their commitment to West Berlin, and Moscow backed down in May 1959.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> “Excerpt of President Kennedy at Independence Hall, 4 July 1962,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-at-independence-hall>.

<sup>74</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 127.

<sup>75</sup> Wilkinson and Hughes, *Contemporary Europe*, 478.

In August 1961, the East German authorities reheated the crisis by erecting a wall separating East and West Berlin. In response, Kennedy publicly declared that Washington would never abandon West Berlin. Privately, however, concerned about the prospect of a nuclear war, Kennedy was pondering over negotiating with the Soviets and recognizing the legal status of the East German government. He did little to stop the construction of the Berlin Wall, which would stand as a tangible symbol of the division of Germany and Europe until 1989.<sup>76</sup> Adenauer, the aging chancellor yearning for reunification of his nation, opposed such concessions as a betrayal of German rights. Calculating that the Soviets would not dare to go to war, de Gaulle supported Adenauer's objection to compromise and argued that the West should simply assert its rights in Berlin. By doing so, he also wanted to demonstrate to Adenauer that it was France, rather than the United States or Britain, that was standing as a firm ally of the Germans.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, by late August, Kennedy had decided to dismiss the resistance of de Gaulle and Adenauer to negotiations. They "must come along or stay behind," Kennedy informed his Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "We cannot accept a veto from any other power."<sup>78</sup> Kennedy's "appeasement" policy in Berlin not only fueled Adenauer's concern over the credibility of Washington's security guarantee for West Germany<sup>79</sup> but also deepened de Gaulle's mounting disapproval of American dominance within the Atlantic alliance.

Another international crisis that aggravated de Gaulle's restiveness with the United States and prompted him to strive for French independence with renewed vigour was the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which marked the climax of East-West confrontations of this stage of the Cold War. Emboldened by American recognition of the Berlin Wall and seeking an opportunity to alter

---

<sup>76</sup> John P. McKay et al., *A History of Western Society, Volume C* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014), 955.

<sup>77</sup> Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 583.

<sup>78</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 128.

<sup>79</sup> Vaisse, "La réconciliation franco-allemande," 966.

the balance of military power in his favour, Khrushchev secretly authorized the building of Soviet missile sites in communist Cuba, from which they could target the U.S. mainland with nuclear weapons. In October, when an American spy plane detected the missile sites under construction, Kennedy urgently enforced a naval blockade of Cuba and initiated an intense process of behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Soviets.<sup>80</sup> Although de Gaulle declared his full support for Kennedy in the face of the Soviet threat, what particularly irritated him was that Washington consulted none of the NATO allies about a decision that could potentially trigger a nuclear war on a global scale and touch upon Europe's vital interests of national survival. When the former Secretary of State Dean Acheson visited France at the request of Kennedy, de Gaulle greeted him with the straightforward question: "In order to get our roles clear... have you come... to inform me of some decision taken by your President – or have you come to consult me about a decision which he should take?" "I have come to inform you," the American statesman frankly responded. Knowing that argument would be fruitless, de Gaulle dropped the issue.<sup>81</sup> Excluded from decision-making about the West's collective security in such an emergency, the European allies had essentially descended to the status of "protectorate nations", as the French intellectual Raymond Aron remarked.<sup>82</sup>

After thirteen days of intense political and military standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union, during which the world was seemingly on the verge of a full-scale nuclear war, the two sides eventually decided to settle the issue through mutual compromise. Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles; in exchange, Kennedy promised that he would not invade Cuba and secretly agreed to withdraw U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey capable of reaching the Soviet

---

<sup>80</sup> McWilliams, *The World since 1945*, 100-103.

<sup>81</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 128.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

Union. The Cuban Missile Crisis seemed to have profoundly lessened the passion of both Washington and Moscow for constant confrontations since the beginning of the Cold War. In June 1963, Kennedy called for greater U.S.-Soviet cooperation in a speech at the American University. Two months later, the two superpowers signed the partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to prohibit further aboveground nuclear tests, which relieved Cold War tensions and paved the way for a future East-West *détente* that would last until the latter half of the 1970s.<sup>83</sup> The events would also have an enduring impact on de Gaulle's strategic thinking concerning French foreign policy. In the aftermath of the crisis, de Gaulle drew a lesson that the United States would not risk a nuclear war to defend its allies, which reinforced his doubts about American dependability. Moreover, the crisis convinced him that neither superpower wanted war, which implied a decreasing possibility of Soviet military aggression toward Western Europe.<sup>84</sup> Accordingly, de Gaulle concluded that France now had even less reason to adhere to the U.S.-dominated military alliance and should move toward greater independence.

Besides a more favourable international environment after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the year 1962 also marked a significant turning point for de Gaulle from a domestic perspective. In March, with the signing of the *Évian Accords*, de Gaulle finally ended the divisive and bloody Algerian War, removing the major obstacle to French diplomacy for the past eight years.<sup>85</sup> Despite the terrorist acts conducted by nationalist diehards at home who were angered at the prospect of Algerian independence, much of the opposition faded away once the colonial conflict was over. This was evident in de Gaulle's success in the October referendum later that year, which modified the constitution and ensured that the head of state would be chosen through

---

<sup>83</sup> McWilliams, *The World since 1945*, 103-104.

<sup>84</sup> Maurice Vaisse, " 'Une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps': la France et la crise de Cuba," in *L'Europe et la Crise de Cuba*, ed. Maurice Vaisse (Paris: A. Colin, 1993), 104-105.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 543-545.

universal suffrage. A month later, the triumph of the Gaullist party *L'Union pour la Nouvelle République* in the parliamentary election further consolidated de Gaulle's domestic support and freed him from electoral constraints for the next three years.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, by the end of 1962, de Gaulle was in a much more advantageous position to pursue his ambitious agenda on the global stage.

Indeed, at this point, with the remarkable progress of Franco-German rapprochement, the dazzling economic recovery of Western Europe, and the relaxation of super-power confrontations, the goal of a stronger Europe no longer appeared to be a mere fiction. All those signs suggested to de Gaulle that the initially rigid bipolar international order driven by super-power rivalry was becoming more fluid, enabling France to take more active initiatives in global affairs, and that a *détente* between the West and the East would be, sooner or later, inevitable.<sup>87</sup> It was time to put France at the forefront of that nascent change through a glittering foreign policy.

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 561-563.

<sup>87</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 200-202.

## Chapter 2

### De Gaulle and His Certain Idea of the World, 1963-1969

In the years 1963-1969, Charles de Gaulle carried out a grand geopolitical agenda designed to promote his nation's global influence and facilitate the end of the bipolar world division. At the core of his foreign policy was his emphasis on nation-states as the foundation of all international relations (including those of the Cold War), rather than ideological rivalry between communism and liberalism. As an advocate of balance of power, de Gaulle considered that a true global equilibrium necessitated the participation of all nation-states in foreign affairs, not just two opposing superpowers. This guiding principle had a significant impact on his diplomatic conduct, particularly in relation to issues such as European integration, the Vietnam War, and East-West *détente*. On the future of Europe, de Gaulle underlined the need for various states to cooperate and advance their tangible national interests together. Regarding the Vietnam War, he believed that the Americans were not fighting against communist revolutionaries, but rather Vietnamese patriots battling for national independence.<sup>1</sup> As to relations with the Soviets, he again prioritized national interest over ideology and viewed peace with Moscow as necessary in ensuring Europe's long-term stability. At the end of his presidency, de Gaulle had achieved mixed results in his overall foreign policy. On one hand, he had re-established France as an independent actor in international diplomacy, and improved Franco-German relations had paved the way for further European integration; on the other, despite his prediction about an imminent end of the Cold War given the ongoing *détente*, the bipolar structure based upon U.S.-Soviet rivalry had proved more enduring than he had expected. Nevertheless, there are reasons to argue that de Gaulle's idea was in line with a broader trend in international relations theory: given his

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 211-212.

emphasis on the multipolarity of nation-states, his foreign policy seemed to foreshadow a gradual erosion of superpower monopoly and an emergence of a more diverse, multipolar international order.

### **De Gaulle's Concept of the Cold War**

To understand better de Gaulle's foreign policy during the years 1963-1969, it is important first to examine the intellectual basis that shaped his mental map of Cold War affairs and guided his conduct in foreign policy. The French president's political philosophy was, largely, close to the "realist" school of thought in international relations theory.<sup>2</sup> According to de Gaulle, nation-states were and would remain the permanent units in the international system, with each built upon concrete history, culture, and tradition and driven by the same logic of concern over security and accumulation of power. History, as he considered it, was essentially a tragic development, with forces of conflict and war perpetually shaping human societies. In such a tough environment where one's power determined one's influence, international relations essentially reflected the eternal struggle driven by diverging interests of national security.<sup>3</sup> According to de Gaulle, the bipolar world order during the Cold War was an inherently precarious system, since "a simplistic division of the world into two blocs invariably led to opposition and conflict."<sup>4</sup> Convinced of the necessity of balance of power, he sought to promote a more balanced and multipolar international order responsive to the needs of individual nation-

---

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal?: France since the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 189.

<sup>3</sup> Dana Allin, "De Gaulle and American Power," in Benjamin Rowland, ed., *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas* (Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2011), 102.; David Calleo, "De Gaulle and the Monetary System: The Golden Rule," in Nicholas Wahl and Robert Paxton, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States, 1930-1970: a centennial reappraisal* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 239.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969* (Paris : Fayard, 1998), 39-40.

states, which, according to him, would lead to equilibrium and bring about the end goal of peace and stability.<sup>5</sup>

With his emphasis on nation-states in international affairs, de Gaulle downplayed the significance of communism, which he deemed as “temporary and mortal”,<sup>6</sup> and considered the Cold War international order as merely a transient state of affairs that lacked any grounding in historical reality. Rather than viewing the world solely from the angle of ideological rivalry, the French president deemed ideologies, ranging from Roosevelt’s liberalism to Stalin’s communism, as essentially a “cloak” for national interests: “the banner of ideology in reality covers only ambitions. And I believe it has been this since the world was born.”<sup>7</sup> With his understanding of historical *longue durée*, de Gaulle did not regard communism and the Soviet Union with the same degree of concern as the Americans did: despite the onset of the Cold War, Moscow’s foreign policy was still driven more by the national interests of Russia than the communist ideology.<sup>8</sup> Under the ideological clouds and shadows temporarily cast upon the Eastern bloc, the nation-states and their individualities still existed – that is, the Russians should be regarded *as* Russian, the Chinese should be treated *as* Chinese, and the Eastern Europeans should be seen *as* Hungarians, Poles, or Romanians, rather than simply communists. Those nations would endure through time, while the communist ideological chimera would not.<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of de Gaulle, the bipolar division of the world represented nothing more than an ephemeral

---

<sup>5</sup> Vaisse, *La grandeur*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> As de Gaulle claimed in February 1951; cited by Paul-Marie de la Gorce, *La France contre les Empires* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1969), 210.

<sup>7</sup> *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences of General Charles de Gaulle, May 10, 1958 – January 31, 1964* (New York: French Embassy, 1964), 237.

<sup>8</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 208-209.

<sup>9</sup> Graham O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference* (Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 45.

phenomenon in human history that resulted from the particular circumstances of the Second World War; it could and should be overcome.

Beneath the surface of Franco-American divergence in transatlantic affairs in the 1960s lay contrasting worldviews about the nature of the international order. Interpreting the post-WWII world and every local situation in it through an either-or lens of superpower showdown, Washington officials had embraced an alarmist view of the Soviet communist threat, had implemented a massive military buildup, and had vigorously pressed forward U.S. military involvement in significant parts of the world, in an effort to contain Moscow's spheres of influence.<sup>10</sup> De Gaulle, on the other hand, found it difficult to align with the United States' post-WWII grand strategy based upon ideological rivalry. Convinced of the necessity of balance of power, he considered that the end goal of peace required the independent participation of all countries in world affairs, rather than the arrangements made by two rival hegemons.<sup>11</sup> This is why he refused to devise a foreign policy through the prism of East-West confrontation and considered the formation of a strong, autonomous Europe as crucial to facilitating a new global equilibrium. In his view, cultural and historical affinity between both sides of the Atlantic indeed existed, and the presence of Soviet menace certainly justified transatlantic solidarity under the given geopolitical circumstances. Nevertheless, these facts should not exempt France and Europe from eventually taking more direct responsibility for their own security, given the ephemeral nature of the bipolar world order and the possibility of change to the Cold War international system.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48-53.

<sup>11</sup> Vaisse, *La grandeur*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Sebastian Reyn, *Atlantis Lost: The American Experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 19.

Meanwhile, within the Western alliance, the remarkable recovery of Western Europe had raised several challenges for the transatlantic partnership that initially rested on the United States' economic and military superiority, which suggested to de Gaulle that the balance of power was gradually tipping away from both superpowers. Economically, by the early 1960s, Western Europe's economic and productivity growth rates, especially in the Common Market countries (France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg), were outpacing those of the United States.<sup>13</sup> The combined economic weight of Western Europe was still lower than that of the United States. Nevertheless, this rapid economic recovery had generated mixed reactions in Washington: although U.S. officials generally welcomed the prospect of European resurgence after the devastation of WWII, there also existed concern that the Common Market might raise protectionist barriers and evolve into an autonomous European bloc, undermining Washington's strategic leadership within the Alliance.<sup>14</sup> Militarily, the United States under Kennedy had shifted NATO's defense strategy from massive retaliation to flexible response in 1961, which implied the adoption of a wide range of diplomatic, political, economic, and military means in response to Soviet threats, rather than solely relying on nuclear deterrence as security guarantee for the European allies.<sup>15</sup> In the eyes of de Gaulle, this strategic shift, along with the Americans' late war entries in 1917 and 1941 – only after having been attacked themselves, appeared to be a warning that the United States' military commitment to Europe

---

<sup>13</sup> Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 129.

<sup>14</sup> See Jeffrey Giauque, *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).

<sup>15</sup> Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), xii.

could no longer be considered unconditional, raising his doubt about Washington's long-term dependability.<sup>16</sup>

In the early 1960s, de Gaulle also calculated that the Cold War international system was about to experience a structural shift. In 1947, he had publicly warned against the communist threats to a war-beaten Western Europe posed by the Soviet Union, with its influence expanding throughout the Eurasian continent. Yet by the early 1960s, with Western Europe's stunning economic recovery, de Gaulle believed that this situation had made it virtually impossible for communist ideology to take root without the catalyst of some form of "national calamity". Accordingly, it now seemed increasingly unlikely that Moscow would undertake to conquer and dominate Western Europe. "As for imposing the totalitarian yoke on three hundred million recalcitrant foreigners," he explained in his memoirs, "what would be the point of trying, when it was difficult enough to hold down a third as many people in the satellite countries?"<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as illustrated in the previous chapter, de Gaulle concluded that neither superpower really wanted a nuclear war, and if one did not resort to war, an East-West *détente* should eventually arise. Indeed, following the Crisis, both Washington and Moscow realized that "the constant state of confrontation had been in part responsible for the nuclear showdown", and the two sides soon engaged in a constructive dialogue to relieve Cold War tensions.<sup>18</sup> This further suggested to de Gaulle that the Atlantic alliance, initially designed as a check on perceived Soviet threats, had become less relevant in an evolving geopolitical context.

---

<sup>16</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages, vol. 2, Dans l'attente* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 307; De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 201.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne C. McWilliams and Harry Piotrowski. *The World Since 1945: A History of International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014), 103.

Moreover, globally, due to a growing divergence of national interests between the Soviet Union and China, the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split by the early 1960s convinced de Gaulle that the communist alliance would not escape a fundamental change. In 1958, Beijing rejected Moscow's proposal for constructing joint military facilities on Chinese soil, since it would infringe on China's national integrity and sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> In 1960, Sino-Soviet differences first became public when Khrushchev recalled all Soviet technicians working in China and significantly curtailed the scale of Soviet industrial and military aid.<sup>20</sup> In 1962, Beijing criticized Moscow for "adventurism" in the Cuban Missile Crisis; subsequently, the two sides mobilized their propaganda machines and engaged in "highly emotional and confrontational" polemics, accusing each other of deviating from true proletarian communism.<sup>21</sup> Maurice Couve de Murville, the French Foreign Minister, observed that relations between Moscow and Beijing were "near the breaking point".<sup>22</sup> As de Gaulle predicted, with China's growing independent stance, the Soviets would have gradually to shift their attention from Europe to Asia to counter China's national ambitions. Meanwhile, with the rising revolutionary forces in the post-colonial world, it seemed probable that other nations in the Third World, such as Vietnam, would be the new battlegrounds for spheres of influence between Washington and Moscow. Accordingly, de Gaulle concluded that the risk of major war in Europe had drastically diminished by the 1960s, and the Cold War international system was about to shift fundamentally from a Eurocentric model toward a global one.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Chen Jian. *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 73-75.

<sup>20</sup> Chen, *Mao's China*, 82-84.

<sup>21</sup> Qiang Zhai. "Seeking a Multipolar World: China and de Gaulle's France," in *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969*, edited by Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Garret Martin (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 190.

<sup>22</sup> Garret Martin. "Playing the China Card? Revisiting France's Recognition of Communist China, 1963-1964." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:1 (2008), 64.

<sup>23</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 201.

## De Gaulle and European Integration

The year 1963 marked a new beginning in de Gaulle's pursuit of a bold diplomatic agenda on the global stage. Convinced that the Cold War would not last forever, and that the communist alliance would eventually disintegrate, the French president calculated that the time was ripe for a geopolitical grand design of overcoming the bipolar international order. On one hand, he strove to bring a resurgent and autonomous Western Europe on to an equal footing with the United States; on the other, he envisaged eventually reaching out to the communist bloc to facilitate an East-West détente.<sup>24</sup> Since French relations with Moscow remained poor in the early 1960s, de Gaulle intended to concentrate first on his foreign policy toward the Western allies. Indeed, since his return to power in 1958, the assertive French president had consistently challenged U.S. leadership within the Atlantic alliance, which was evident in his endeavours in seeking a close Franco-German partnership as the cornerstone of a new Europe, along with his demand for an executive position for France in the management of the alliance. In 1963, with his domestic position secured, de Gaulle was about to launch an even fiercer attack against what he considered Washington's hegemony over European affairs, posing a challenge that would go to the very heart of the American idea of its post-WWII global role.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the Kennedy administration had drafted a set of political, economic, and military policies towards Western Europe, also known as the Grand Design, in an effort to shape the future developments of European integration. To maintain Washington's strategic control over the continent, the Grand Designers pushed hard for Britain's admission to the EEC, since the country could potentially serve as Washington's "ear and spokesperson" within the bloc due

---

<sup>24</sup> Garret Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 9-10; De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 201-202.

<sup>25</sup> Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, xiii.

to its special relationship with the United States.<sup>26</sup> With London's tradition of global commerce, Kennedy and his advisors hoped that the British would tilt the EEC toward a low-tariff group open to international trade and American business, rather than evolving into an autonomous Western European bloc in competition with the United States. Moreover, as the Kennedy administration calculated, an enlarged EEC with British membership would be more capable of containing a revived West Germany and less likely to fall under de Gaulle's dominance, ensuring that the process of European integration would develop along lines consistent with Washington's strategic interests.<sup>27</sup> In military matters, the Grand Designers had conceived the Multilateral Force [MLF] as a fleet of warships, each equipped with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles and operated under NATO command. With each participating country holding a veto over the weapon's use, the MLF would work as an instrument that gave the European allies "a finger near but not on the nuclear button", creating an impression that each member-state would actively participate in Europe's nuclear defence while, in reality, consolidating Washington's control over the continent.<sup>28</sup>

14 January 1963 marked a defining moment of de Gaulle's foreign policy toward the Anglo-American allies. During a press conference on that day, he demonstrated a fierce determination to defend his nation's independence by giving the "twin blows" to Kennedy's Grand Design – vetoing Britain's August 1961 application to join the EEC and rejecting Washington's proposal to integrate the French nuclear arsenal into the MLF. On Britain's EEC membership, de Gaulle explained that Britain's economic structure was fundamentally different from those of the continental states: "England is, in effect, insular, maritime, linked through its

---

<sup>26</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 129.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 11-12.

trade, markets, and food supply to very diverse and often very distant countries. Its activities are essentially industrial and commercial, and only slightly agricultural. It has ... very marked and original customs and traditions.”<sup>29</sup> Given London’s tradition of free trade, de Gaulle doubted that the British would truly align themselves with the continent to the point of accepting and implementing all the agreements and economic regulations established among the Six. Moreover, viewing Britain as an American “trojan horse,” he feared that its entry into the EEC would bring about the emergence of a “colossal Atlantic Community under American dependence and leadership”, undermining the cohesion and distinctive European character of the EEC.<sup>30</sup> De Gaulle’s assessment of Britain as some sort of American satellite was not entirely accurate though: besides the pressure from the Kennedy administration, Macmillan also personally supported the EEC membership as a strategy for Britain to gain economic benefits, balance both French and German influences on the continent, secure its mediating position between the United States and Western Europe, and reclaim its lost international prestige as a declining imperial power.<sup>31</sup> As a result, by vetoing the EEC application, de Gaulle impeded not only Washington’s geostrategic design for Europe, but also London’s national and international aspirations.

Moving on to the nuclear issue, de Gaulle affirmed at the press conference that the French *force de frappe* would remain the symbol of an independent French defence policy and would not be absorbed into the proposed Multilateral Force.<sup>32</sup> Given that the two superpowers were amassing ballistic missiles and megatons at the time, many Americans considered the relatively primitive French nuclear force as more a source of ridicule than a significant guarantor

---

<sup>29</sup> *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences*, 213.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-216.

<sup>31</sup> Chris Gifford, *The Making of Eurosceptic Britain: Identity and Economy in a Post-Imperial State* (London: Routledge, 2014), 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences*, 216-219.

of national security for France.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, according to the French theory of “proportional deterrence,” it was sufficient for France to acquire a nuclear force just capable enough to assure that an aggression from the Eastern bloc would be offset by severe damage inflicted by French bombings. Simply put, “capturing or destroying Paris was not worth the cost of Moscow”.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the French nuclear arsenal was primarily defensive in nature, functioning as a deterrent to potential threats to vital French interests.

Besides the immediate issue concerning national security in the Cold War, de Gaulle also looked ahead and pondered over the possibility that the French *force de frappe* could potentially form the basis of a genuinely European military defence in a multipolar future. Although French nuclear power was relatively weak in the 1960s, “to limit one’s consideration of the *force de frappe* to the decade in which it was created is to neglect the prospects for change and to ignore the significance de Gaulle accorded to circumstance and opportunity”.<sup>35</sup> Considering the U.S. nuclear umbrella over the continent as resulting from the particular circumstances of the Cold War, de Gaulle doubted that the Europeans could unconditionally count on the American security guarantee forever, an opinion heavily influenced by his reading of Washington’s late entries into both world wars.<sup>36</sup> Given the unpredictability of future changes to the global geopolitical landscape, de Gaulle envisaged that France, in possession of a solid atomic power, could possibly become a key contributor to European collective defence in a more multipolar future. Similarly, Georges Pompidou, the French Prime Minister under de Gaulle’s government, also hinted at an envisioned European role for the *force de frappe*. In a speech at the National

---

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Varat, “Point of Departure: A Reassessment of Charles de Gaulle and the Paris Summit of May 1960.” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19:1 (2008): 108.

<sup>34</sup> Wilfried Kohl, *French Nuclear Diplomacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 150-153; Varat, “Point of Departure,” 109.

<sup>35</sup> Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 44.

<sup>36</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 214.

Assembly in 1964, he stated, “it must be observed that, by the very fact that France is in Europe, her strength works fully and automatically on behalf of Europe, whose defence is physically and geographically inseparable from her own, which is not the case for powers, even allied, outside of the Europe continent”.<sup>37</sup> Despite such European rhetoric, the French policymakers still primarily saw the *force de frappe* as an instrument for displaying France’s symbolic independent stance in the 1960s, and they did not allude extensively to its future European potential at a time when the American military guarantee was still solid.<sup>38</sup>

Eight days after the press conference, which poked a gaping hole in Kennedy’s Grand Design, de Gaulle went on to sign a Franco-German treaty with Adenauer on 22 January 1963. Three key features defined the treaty: it marked a historical act of reconciliation between the French and German nations; it advocated an intimate Franco-German cooperation in the domains of defence, foreign policy, and education;<sup>39</sup> and in a more implicit way, it hinted at the emergence of a Western Europe that would increasingly play an independent role on the world stage.<sup>40</sup> Both de Gaulle and Adenauer supported the treaty, though not for the same reasons. Given his attachment to the vital importance of U.S. military guarantee for West Germany, Adenauer hoped that his endorsement of Franco-German friendship, as evident in the treaty, could potentially restrain de Gaulle’s tendency to undermine further Western solidarity within the Atlantic alliance.<sup>41</sup> De Gaulle, on his part, sincerely wanted to implement all three aspects of the treaty. Once Paris and Bonn developed a close partnership, according to him, this would create a “powerful magnet” toward which other neighbouring states would “gravitate”, facilitating the

---

<sup>37</sup> *Le Monde*, December 4, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France*, 45-46.

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Maillard, *De Gaulle et le Problème Allemand: Les leçons d’un grand dessein* (Paris: Guibert, 2001), 187.

<sup>40</sup> Benedikt Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée: De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963–1969* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), 59.

<sup>41</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, *L’Alliance Incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands 1954–1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 253.

formation of a solidary Western European bloc.<sup>42</sup> As de Gaulle outlined in his memoirs, he considered a strong Western Europe as a key both to overcoming the Cold War bipolar division and to establishing a peaceful equilibrium on the global stage – that is, a more multipolar international order characterized by balance of power and free from superpower hegemony.<sup>43</sup>

Given his emphasis on nation-states as the primary actors in international relations, it is noteworthy to underline that de Gaulle’s emphasis on European unity should not be confused with the concept of “supranationalism,” which often entails the yielding of national sovereignty to a higher authority whose decision-making power reigns supreme over each member-state.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, de Gaulle’s approach to Europe should be defined more precisely as “intergovernmentalism,” which, quite simply, means that various nation-states closely cooperate without necessarily having to cede their sovereignty.<sup>45</sup> Deeply influenced by history, de Gaulle deemed that the European project would be effective only if it originated from the European states’ genuine desire to collaborate and promote their tangible common interests together.<sup>46</sup> Instead of being an artificially created and imposed concept, the very idea of Europe, according to him, must reflect the deeply rooted historical reality and distinct national traditions. He made this point when he stated: “Dante, Goethe, Chateaubriand belong to all Europe to the very extent that they were respectively and eminently Italian, German, and French. They would not have served Europe very well if they had been stateless, or if they have thought and written in some kind of integrated Esperanto or Volapuk.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, de Gaulle’s state-centric approach meant that his vision was a Europe of nations, or a “concert of European States,” as he defined it,

---

<sup>42</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 171-173; Martin, *General de Gaulle’s Cold War*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 172-173, 176.

<sup>44</sup> Alistair Jones, *Britain and the European Union* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 101-103; De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 182-183.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *Britain and the European Union*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 194.

<sup>47</sup> *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences*, 175.

whereby various national aspirations were to be reconciled and diverse national characters were to be celebrated as part of a broad European family.<sup>48</sup> Fostering intimate Franco-German relations thus constituted the first step toward the formation of a resurgent new Europe in de Gaulle's core strategy.

The signing of the Franco-German treaty between Paris and Bonn brought the Kennedy administration, which considered it as a "very unfriendly act",<sup>49</sup> into a state of panic. Such reaction was partly due to a fear over the combined economic strength of a Franco-German partnership. According to one cogent analysis, "possessing more dollars in reserves than other countries, France and West Germany could potentially expose the U.S.'s monetary weakness by running down the American gold supply, thus shaking confidence in the dollar."<sup>50</sup> Moreover, due to intelligence reports of a secret Franco-Soviet deal (later proven false), Kennedy and his advisors grew increasingly worried that de Gaulle would mold the EEC into an autarkic bloc through discriminatory tariffs and investment policies targeted against American business, undermining Washington's influence over European affairs. In an effort to defend his nation's "world leadership", Kennedy concluded that something must be done to alleviate the threat posed by the Franco-German treaty.<sup>51</sup>

Despite his disagreements with de Gaulle, Kennedy decided to avoid an open battle with the man who had contained French communists at home and had granted Algerian independence overseas. Instead, he chose to target West Germany, deemed as the lesser partner in the Franco-German partnership. In a letter sent to Adenauer on 1 February 1963, Kennedy warned that with

---

<sup>48</sup> O'Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 84-85.

<sup>49</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 94.

<sup>51</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 133.

the ongoing push for European autonomy, the United States could again return to isolationism, which implied that if Bonn ratified the treaty in its current form, it would throw the prospect of enduring U.S. military guarantee for West Germany into uncertainty.<sup>52</sup> Despite his support for Franco-German reconciliation, Adenauer, who had agreed to resign later that year, now possessed little leverage among the German political class. On 16 May, the Bundestag ratified the treaty with an additional preamble reaffirming West Germany's allegiance to the Atlantic Alliance and NATO, which essentially neutralized the nature of the initial Franco-German treaty.<sup>53</sup> One month later, Kennedy embarked on a successful tour of Europe (West Germany, Italy, Britain, and Ireland), which reached its climax in West Berlin when he declared to an enthusiastic crowd, "All free men, wherever they live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words '*Ich bin ein Berliner*'".<sup>54</sup> Kennedy's triumphant visit to Berlin again indicated that the West Germans still preferred the United States to France as their principal ally.

In autumn 1963, the shifts of political leadership in both Bonn and Washington – the pro-American Ludwig Erhard succeeding Adenauer and Lyndon Johnson replacing Kennedy following the latter's shocking assassination – further cast a shadow over the short-term prospect of Franco-German cooperation. With his utter faith in U.S. military protection, the new West German Chancellor steadfastly moved to consolidate relations with Washington and repeatedly affirmed that his government would shoulder the full offset for U.S. military forces deployed on German soil.<sup>55</sup> With no real affinity for France, Erhard never shared Adenauer's commitment to

---

<sup>52</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 374.

<sup>53</sup> Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée*, 50-54.

<sup>54</sup> "John F. Kennedy's Speech at the Berlin Wall," NBC News Learn, published on May 18, 2020, YouTube video, 4:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBQvKXIDiuc>.

<sup>55</sup> Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Troops, Monetary Policy, and West Germany's Relations with the United States and Britain, 1950-1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 62-66.

the progress of Franco-German reconciliation and found it difficult to connect with the strong-willed French president on a personal level.<sup>56</sup> If de Gaulle still hoped that the Germans would side with his country for a common European policy over the long term, he saw no such immediate likelihood as long as Erhard remained Chancellor of West Germany.

By the end of 1963, de Gaulle had achieved mixed results in the pursuit of his geopolitical grand design: he had safeguarded French leadership in European integration through his veto of Britain's entry to the Common Market and had retained the autonomous status of the French nuclear forces. Nevertheless, following the setback of the Franco-German treaty, de Gaulle suddenly possessed little room for another major diplomatic manoeuvre in Europe, since West Germany under Erhard had clearly embraced the United States, putting the brakes on the progress of Franco-German cooperation. With major European avenues blocked at the moment, de Gaulle soon shifted the focal point of his foreign policy toward the communist world as an alternative means to promote France's international prestige.<sup>57</sup>

## **The Vietnam War**

Since his return to power in 1958, de Gaulle's disagreements with the Americans had remained confined to issues of Germany, Europe, and military integration in NATO. With the escalation of tensions in Vietnam due to the United States' continual involvement, the Vietnam War soon became the most divisive issue further poisoning relations between Washington and Paris. Following the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the Geneva Accords of 1954 had temporarily divided Vietnam into northern and southern zones, with a plebiscite on unification

---

<sup>56</sup> Carine Germond, "A 'Cordial Potentiality'? De Gaulle and the Franco-German Partnership, 1963-1969," in *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969*, edited by Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Garret Martin (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 45.

<sup>57</sup> Martin, "Playing the China Card," 60-61.

scheduled for 1956.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the United States had soon financed the creation of a South Vietnamese state and increasingly dispatched financial and military aid to this pro-American regime, in an attempt to avert the prospect of Vietnamese unification under communist rule. This strategy not only had triggered fierce protests by disappointed communist revolutionaries from the north, but also had alienated the vast majority of small peasants in predominantly agricultural South Vietnam, who had been promised land reforms by the northern leader, Ho Chi Minh. In December 1960, various opposition groups had formed the National Liberation Front and launched a full-scale guerrilla war against the southern regime.<sup>59</sup> Viewing the situation through the either-or lens of ideological rivalry, successive U.S. administrations interpreted Vietnam's struggle for national independence, led by home-grown communists who enjoyed widespread support across the nation, as another test of "containment" – whether the United States could defend the "freedom" of South Vietnam against the "communist aggression".<sup>60</sup> Following the assassination of Kennedy, Johnson publicly declared his commitment to the American war effort in Vietnam. "I am not going to be the president," he proclaimed, "who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."<sup>61</sup>

In the eyes of de Gaulle, the Vietnamese issue exposed what was fundamentally flawed in the United States' Cold War foreign policy: a wrongheaded insistence on regarding every local conflict as a combat with the Soviet Union, a readiness to resort to military forces to crush small nations' struggle for independence, and a tendency toward relentless foreign interventions in the name of anti-communism while underestimating the significance of revolutionary nationalism in

---

<sup>58</sup> John L. Harper, "The Road to Phnom Penh: De Gaulle, the Americans, and Vietnam, 1944-1966," In Benjamin M. Rowland, ed., *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 57.

<sup>59</sup> Harper, "The Road to Phnom Penh," 58-59.

<sup>60</sup> Eric Foner. *Give Me Liberty!: An American History, Volume 2: From 1865* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), 1005-1006.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Dallek. *Flawed Giant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 99.

the Third World.<sup>62</sup> Applying the lessons learned by the French experiences in Indochina and Algeria, de Gaulle doubted that military force could simply resolve the current Vietnamese issue. As he considered it, the Americans were not really fighting against communists; they were essentially launching a war against a determined people yearning for independent nationhood. In 1961, he had warned Kennedy that further American involvement would prove to be catastrophic: “you will find... that intervention in this area will be an endless entanglement. Once a nation has been aroused, no foreign power, however strong, can impose its will upon it... That is why the more you become involved out there against communism, the more the communists will appear as the champions of national independence”.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, both Kennedy and Johnson officials remained deaf to de Gaulle’s warning as they saw no equation between the French wars and their own: France had been a colonial power, while the United States simply wanted to defeat communism before getting out. As the national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, reassured Johnson, belief in American failure was “a comforting conclusion for a Frenchman.”<sup>64</sup>

In an effort to find a potential ally for France’s Vietnam policy, de Gaulle announced his decision to establish formal diplomatic relations with Beijing at a press conference on 31 January 1964. Although the previous Fourth Republic had not recognized the PRC largely due to the latter’s support for communist insurgents in the Indochina War, de Gaulle had always kept an eye on the Chinese question and had frequently discussed the prospect of eventually reaching out to Beijing with his close collaborators. As Étienne Manac’h, the director of the Asian Department at the *Quai d’Orsay*, described, de Gaulle was “passionately interested in all things Chinese and

---

<sup>62</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle le souverain, 1959-1970* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), 430-434.

was always questioning visitors from Asia about the evolution of Chinese affairs”.<sup>65</sup> Since its 1949 victory in the Chinese civil war, the communist regime had been the *de facto* authority in mainland China. With the onset of the Sino-Soviet Split due to growing conflicts of national interests between Moscow and Beijing, de Gaulle considered that nationalism had largely displaced ideological rivalry between liberalism and communism as the driving force in geopolitics. He thus deemed absurd the American policy of trying to isolate the world’s most populous nation.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, a closer cooperation with China, itself at odds with both superpowers, suited de Gaulle’s pursuit of French influence on the world stage, since it would remind all countries that France was still capable of taking independent diplomatic actions.<sup>67</sup> Due to China’s geostrategic significance in the Far East, de Gaulle calculated that the Asian giant could be crucial to any political solution or negotiated arrangement for Vietnam.<sup>68</sup> With newly-established diplomatic relations with Beijing, along with France’s historical connections to Vietnam and the United States, de Gaulle hoped that Paris would play a unique mediating role in finding a lasting solution to the Vietnamese question.

Indeed, “though estranged, Vietnam remained, in Paris’s eye, a French offspring. Even the communists acknowledged cultural and sentimental ties to France, and economic and personal ties continued to hold.”<sup>69</sup> On Vietnam, de Gaulle had publicly declared that the nation should settle the conflicts and achieve national unification free from foreign intrusion; in essence, he was proposing a return to the 1954 Geneva settlement that had designated a neutralized, unified Vietnam, in contrast to Washington’s scheme of further American military

---

<sup>65</sup> Martin, “Play the China Card,” 55.

<sup>66</sup> Lorenz M Lüthi. “Rearranging International Relations? How Mao’s China and de Gaulle’s France Recognized Each Other in 1963-1964.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16:1 (2014): 119.

<sup>67</sup> Martin, “Play the China Card,” 61-62.

<sup>68</sup> *Major Address, Statements, and Press Conferences*, 257.

<sup>69</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 140.

engagement.<sup>70</sup> In June 1964, Johnson asked for de Gaulle's pledge of support "as a friend and ally as ... in the Cuba crisis of 1962" should war break out in Vietnam.<sup>71</sup> Wary of the danger of military escalation, de Gaulle refused such a promise and again advocated reconvening the Geneva Conference of 1954 that had outlined the principle of Vietnamese self-determination. "On Southeast Asia, there is no common ground" with Paris, a White House official bitterly concluded.<sup>72</sup>

In early 1965, right after Johnson's election as President in his own right, the National Security Council proposed that the United States launch air strikes against North Vietnam and dispatch large numbers of ground troops to the south. On 6 February, seizing the pretext of a Viet Cong<sup>73</sup> attack against an American air base in South Vietnam, Johnson put the plan into effect. Concerned that the French might alert the Northern Vietnamese, Washington ostensibly gave less notice to Paris than it did to other European allies.<sup>74</sup> Two months later, Johnson launched another military adventure by sending the Marines to prevent the left-wing but non-communist Juan Bosch, an elected president of the Dominican Republic, from retaking power after having been ousted by a military coup in 1963. Fearing that the communists would prevail over a new Bosch government, Johnson hoped that this military intervention would prevent the creation of "another Cuba".<sup>75</sup> The relentless American military actions enraged a wide spectrum of French people and seemed to confirm de Gaulle's thesis that the United States had become too powerful and too careless. As the U.S. Embassy in Paris observed, even those usually pro-American French officials and journalists were opposed vehemently to U.S. foreign policy: if the Vietnamese

---

<sup>70</sup> Harper, "The Road to Phnom Penh," 60.

<sup>71</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 141.

<sup>72</sup> Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1978), 93.

<sup>73</sup> Note that the Viet Cong was the armed communist organization in South Vietnam fighting under the direction of North Vietnam.

<sup>74</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 141.

<sup>75</sup> Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 1007-1008.

conflict was already “hard enough to swallow”, the Latin American intervention was “too much”.<sup>76</sup> When U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited France, de Gaulle remarked that America’s “present position was particularly distressing”, given the country’s self-proclaimed role as a defender of human rights. The vast majority of the French people shared this opinion, even including those who were anti-de Gaulle and pro-American. According to a 1965 survey, the French opposed military escalation in North Vietnam by a tally of 81% to 8%, and they loathed the overall American foreign policy in Vietnam by a margin of 71% to 8%.<sup>77</sup>

As the Vietnam War went on, the American war operations became increasingly brutal and ruthless. The planes dropped more bombs on North and South Vietnam than both the Allied and Axis powers had used during the Second World War and often did not distinguish between Vietnamese fighters and civilians: they “spread chemicals that destroyed forests to deprive the Viet Cong of hiding places and dropped incendiary bombs filled with napalm, a gelatinous form of gasoline that clings to the skin of anyone exposed to it as it burns.”<sup>78</sup> Over the course of the conflict, despite de Gaulle’s repeated calls for a permanent halt of bombing, the French government neither exerted significant impact on the American war conduct nor offered substantial assistance to the Viet Cong, besides verbal encouragement. Nevertheless, the war boosted de Gaulle’s foreign policy: brought into French households through television, the Vietnam War provided “graphic proof” of his ideas that the United States had become overweening in its use of military force, and that French military ties with the hegemon could be dangerous as they could potentially drag France into an unwanted international conflict.<sup>79</sup> The war also seemed to validate de Gaulle’s theory that nationalism had re-emerged as the driving

---

<sup>76</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 142.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>78</sup> Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 1008.

<sup>79</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 256.

force in world politics. Blinded by anti-communism, Washington had failed to recognize the complex struggle for independent nationhood by a backward yet determined people; instead, it had simply defined its military mission in Vietnam as another test of communist “containment.” Many French anti-war protestors romanticized the Vietnamese combatants as courageous defenders of human liberty, regardless of the fact that they were communists. As Charles Bohlen, the American Ambassador to France, remarked, “Vietnam... runs like an endless thread throughout all French thinking on world affairs.”<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile, the Johnson administration regarded transatlantic relations through the lens of Vietnam. During a NATO meeting in late 1965, Rusk, still the U.S. Secretary of State, and Harlan Cleveland, the American Ambassador to NATO, warned the representatives of European allies that Washington would “judge its bilateral relations” based upon how they joined the Americans in the “peacekeeping business”. As Cleveland stated, the United States needed to “convert” the allies from “affluent protectorates” to “active participants in policing world order” – that would be an “uphill missionary work,” he commented.<sup>81</sup> In the meantime, de Gaulle secured his domestic position by winning the presidential election of 1965. As the Americans plunged deeper into the chaos of Vietnam, de Gaulle was ready to distance his nation further from the United States.

### ***A D tente with the East***

Since his return to power in 1958, de Gaulle had gradually disengaged French armed forces from the integrated command structure of NATO. In early 1966, as the freshly re-elected president, he calculated that the timing was right to take the final step toward restoring his

---

<sup>80</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 143-144.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

country's military independence. On 7 March 1966, in a letter to Johnson, de Gaulle demanded that NATO headquarters and foreign troops leave French territory within a year: France would "recover the entire exercise of its sovereignty on its territory, ... terminate its participation in the integrated NATO commands, and no longer place its forces at NATO's disposal."<sup>82</sup> The timing of the letter, five weeks after Washington ended a truce on bombing North Vietnam, was not coincidental and rather was carefully conceived to underline de Gaulle's criticism of the overall U.S. foreign policy. Couve de Murville later confirmed that the international context, especially the military escalation in Vietnam, had a significant impact on de Gaulle's decision on NATO membership: "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."<sup>83</sup> At a time when the Americans got further entangled in a brutal war against a determined people battling for national independence, de Gaulle calculated that the withdrawal could add more weight to his questioning of the wisdom of U.S. strategic leadership, and to the thesis that NATO had become less relevant in an evolving international context, where Asia was displacing Europe as the focal point of Cold War geopolitics. Although de Gaulle pulled France out of NATO, it is noteworthy to point out that he did not necessarily oppose certain degrees of military collaboration with the West. In the event of an actual unprovoked aggression from the communist bloc, France would still most likely fight with other Western allies – without subjugating its national military to the NATO command.<sup>84</sup>

Though frustrated by de Gaulle's decision, the Johnson administration reacted to the 7 March letter with calculated moderation. This was due to Washington's intent to build a "golden

---

<sup>82</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets: Tome X* (Paris: Plon, 1980), 261-262.

<sup>83</sup> Maurice Couve de Murville, *Le Monde en Face: Entretiens avec Maurice Delarue* (Paris: Plon, 1989), 40.

<sup>84</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 202.

bridge” for a potential return of France and prevent future historians from “unfairly” blaming the Americans for “splitting Europe”.<sup>85</sup> Guided by his key consultant Francis Bator, Johnson responded to de Gaulle’s message with a carefully worded letter concluding with a grammatically dangling statement: “As our old friend and ally, her place will await France whenever she decides to resume her leading role (in NATO).”<sup>86</sup> Upon closer examination of the syntax, it was not France, but the *place* of France, that constituted the United States’ “old friend and ally,” a place currently abandoned due to France’s departure from the alliance. Johnson’s letter purposefully “feminized France as a nation led astray by de Gaulle’s seductive promises of *grandeur*”. It implied that France’s legitimate interests rested in a particular *place*, “namely with the dependable man at home, who loyally waited for her to take up her ‘leading role’ in NATO – which he dominated”.<sup>87</sup> Despite such carefully crafted rhetoric, Johnson had no choice but to evacuate American forces from French territory: within a year, about 30 military posts, 26,000 military personnel, and 37,000 dependents left, the majority of them redeployed to Belgium and West Germany.<sup>88</sup>

De Gaulle’s decision on NATO membership was also closely linked to his key objective of easing the bipolar division by seeking peace with the East. Indeed, following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a U.S.-Soviet *détente* was already underway: as mentioned in the previous chapter, in his June 1963 speech at the American University, Kennedy had stated the importance of greater cooperation with the Soviets, underlining the two countries’ common interest in avoiding nuclear destruction and preserving world peace.<sup>89</sup> Shortly thereafter, Washington and

---

<sup>85</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 145.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>88</sup> Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 277.

<sup>89</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Commencement Address at American University, Washington, D.C., June 10, 1963,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-university-19630610>.

Moscow had established an emergency hot line, designated to facilitate communication between the two sides, and had agreed to a limited nuclear test ban.<sup>90</sup> Even in the heat of the Vietnam War, the Johnson administration was still talking to the Soviets.<sup>91</sup> Given the improving U.S.-Soviet relations, coupled with the re-emergence of nationalism as a deciding factor in global politics, de Gaulle deemed that the bipolar world order driven by superpower showdown and ideological rivalry no longer reflected the new international context. Couve de Murville subscribed to this viewpoint when he commented in a radio interview, "... 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 1949)."<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, de Gaulle regarded reaching out to the East as a key step toward a gradual end of the Cold War, which would loosen both superpowers' grip on their respective allies and allow culture and commerce to flow more freely. Thus, his resolve to withdraw France from NATO and facilitate the ongoing East-West *détente* were not two separate foreign policies; they were essentially "two sides of the same coin", with a common goal of easing the world's bipolar division since the end of WWII.<sup>93</sup>

De Gaulle's emphasis on political reality over ideology could be best illustrated by his endeavour to improve French relations with the Soviet Union, which he still preferred to call "Russia." In June 1966, during an official visit to Moscow, de Gaulle went out of his way to underline Russia's historical role in Europe and the possibility of further inter-state cooperation.<sup>94</sup> As the first Western leader to give a political speech that was broadcast live on

---

<sup>90</sup> "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/nuclear-test-ban-treaty>.

<sup>91</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with ORTF Radio, 23 April 1966, Documentation Française [DF], La Politique Étrangère de la France [PEF], Textes et Documents 1966–1967.

<sup>93</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 133.

<sup>94</sup> Catherine Durandin, *La France contre l'Amérique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France), 98-99.

Soviet television, therefore uncensored, de Gaulle declared to a Soviet audience, “my visit to your country is a visit of eternal France to eternal Russia.”<sup>95</sup> In a meeting with Soviet leaders, he again referred to a “political and affectionate reality as old as our two countries (France and Russia), which is linked to their history and geography.”<sup>96</sup> Ideological divergence, as de Gaulle considered, should not prevent mutual understanding and cooperation if that suited national policies of both parties. In order to foster a meaningful rapprochement with the Eastern Bloc, he was aware that Moscow’s agreement was the key to any concrete progress in East-West cooperation.<sup>97</sup> Despite his aspiration for *détente*, de Gaulle never intended to switch sides by joining Moscow’s bloc against Washington. Rather, due to the United States’ overweening ambitions around the globe, he calculated that the Soviet Union had, to a certain extent, downgraded to the status of a regional power, thus more suitable as a fallback ally of France. “We oppose any hegemony, American or Russian,” he clarified.<sup>98</sup> Convinced that the Cold War would not last forever, de Gaulle always envisioned a Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals”, where France and Russia would be two main pillars in a Europe-wide security system. Under an interlocking set of checks and balances, a Franco-Russian partnership would curb German ambitions, while a united Western Europe would also balance Russian power in the East. This pan-European strategy essentially equated to a modernized version of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Concert of Europe.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Alfred Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1980), 212.

<sup>96</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages, vol. 5, Vers le terme 1966-1969* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 41–43.

<sup>97</sup> Maurice Couve de Murville, *Une politique étrangère (1958-1969)* (Paris: Plon, 1971), 442.

<sup>98</sup> Cyrus L. Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries, 1963-1972* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 306.

<sup>99</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, “La décision française de quitter le commandement intégré de l’OTAN (1966),” in Hans-Joachim Harder, ed., *Von Truman bis Harmel: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Spannungsfeld von NATO und europäischer Integration* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2000), 194-196.

During the years 1967-1968, de Gaulle again became diplomatically active around the world. Convinced that the United States' client Israel had become so powerful as to overturn the geopolitical balance in the Middle East, he took sides with the Arabs and voted with the Soviets at the UN during the Six Day War of 1967.<sup>100</sup> In the same year, he vetoed Britain's request to join the EEC for the second time.<sup>101</sup> In Canada, he sympathized with rising French Canadian nationalism and encouraged the independence of francophone Québec.<sup>102</sup> In Poland and Romania, he again advocated an East-West rapprochement and encouraged the satellite states in Eastern Europe to recover their independent nationhood.<sup>103</sup> In late 1964, de Gaulle had stated that, "externally (the Eastern bloc) is changing toward peace and *détente* and internally it is changing toward liberty." His analysis would prove correct a quarter century later with the end of the Cold War, but this sense of optimism seemed a bit premature during his time.<sup>104</sup> Following the Prague Spring liberation reforms, the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 clearly demonstrated that Moscow was not yet willing to engage fully in an East-West *détente* – if that meant loosening its control over the Eastern bloc. With the Soviet Union keeping its satellite states in check, this implied that the division of Europe would not end in the immediate future, and that the bipolar nature of the Cold War was more resilient than de Gaulle had anticipated.<sup>105</sup>

Another major crisis that significantly tarnished the allure of de Gaulle's leadership was the May 1968 civil unrest in France. It initially started on 22 March with a series of far-left student revolts against overcrowded university facilities, antiquated curricula, and other

---

<sup>100</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 147-148.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>102</sup> "Vive le Québec libre Charles de Gaulle," *Radio Canada International*, published on June 21, 2017, YouTube video, 8:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwRYadgGxRM>.

<sup>103</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 157-159.

<sup>104</sup> Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity*, 145.

<sup>105</sup> Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe*, 137.

traditional elements in contemporary French society. The student rebellion was later joined by a general strike that involved more than ten million industrial workers beginning on 13 May. For much of May, Paris was engulfed in a forceful showdown between the protestors and the police, and the French economy ground to a halt.<sup>106</sup> On 29-30 May, after paying a secret visit to his army commanders to assure their support in the case of a civil war, de Gaulle delivered a dramatic speech to the nation through television, summoned loyal citizens to rally behind him, and announced that he would dissolve the National Assembly and call for new elections. In response, a massive demonstration of de Gaulle supporters surged up the Right Bank, with elegantly dressed people marching on the *Champs-Élysées* while shouting “France back to work! Clean out the Sorbonne! We are the majority!”<sup>107</sup> By early June, student revolt was subsiding, and workers were pacified by a generous pay rise. Shortly thereafter, the Gaullists won a resounding victory in the parliamentary election of 23 June, which again indicated that many had grown tired of the relentless strikes, barricades, and civil disorder. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of economic and social devastation at home, de Gaulle could no longer afford a foreign policy based on French *grandeur*.<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, domestic crisis and renewed distrust of the Soviets pushed de Gaulle to improve relations with Washington, a development stimulated by the 1968 election of Richard Nixon as the new U.S. President. Advocates of political realism in foreign policy, both Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, admired de Gaulle for his personality and leadership;<sup>109</sup> they were less concerned about asserting American dominance over European

---

<sup>106</sup> James Wilkinson and H. Stuart Hughes, *Contemporary Europe: A History* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 512.

<sup>107</sup> David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 248.

<sup>108</sup> Wilkinson and Hughes, *Contemporary Europe*, 513-514.

<sup>109</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 163; Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe*, 137.

integration than their predecessors; they were also more willing to offer technical assistance to the French nuclear deterrent, the *force de frappe*.<sup>110</sup> All this benefited a rapprochement between Paris and Washington, since “American leadership has at last recognized that friendship doesn’t necessarily mean alignment”, as the French Foreign Minister, Michel Debré, remarked shortly after Nixon took office.<sup>111</sup> In February 1969, Nixon embarked on a visit to Europe, which he later recalled, “The high point of this trip personally and substantively was my series of meetings with de Gaulle.”<sup>112</sup> During their conversations, de Gaulle endorsed Nixon’s intention to continue the policy of *détente* with Moscow and emphasized the need to engage with communist China, which Washington still had not yet recognized since the PRC’s foundation in 1949.<sup>113</sup> On the issue of Vietnam, due to France’s diplomatic ties with Hanoi and Beijing, Nixon underlined Paris as “the best place to open secret channels of communication between us and them.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, since 1968, the French capital had already been playing a mediating role by holding secret talks between the United States and North Vietnam about a ceasefire and a political solution.<sup>115</sup> Notwithstanding the prospect of warmer Franco-American relations under the Nixon administration, de Gaulle, already 78 years old at this point, could not simply return to his pursuit of a geopolitical grand design due to his declining physical health. In April 1969, after losing a national referendum on his proposals for constitutional reform, he resigned from the presidency and retired to his private countryside home at Colombey-les-Deux-Églises, before passing away there in November 1970.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe*, 137.

<sup>111</sup> Sulzberger, *An Age of Mediocrity*, 502.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 370-371.

<sup>113</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 108.

<sup>114</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 370.

<sup>115</sup> Martin, “Play the China Card,” 79.

<sup>116</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 164.

## Assessment of de Gaulle's Foreign Policy

Since 1958, de Gaulle had arduously pursued an ambitious agenda on the global stage, a strategy which was partly due to his conviction that a glorious foreign policy would inspire his people to overcome their past debilitating divisions and move forward together. One key objective of his geopolitical grand design had been the restoration of French strategic independence, which was evident in his push for the formation of a strong Western European bloc and the withdrawal of French membership from NATO's military command. Another key objective of de Gaulle's foreign policy sought to overcome the bipolar international order driven by superpower rivalry. Viewing nation-states as the only true reality in global affairs, he deemed the Cold War as merely a transient state of affairs and believed that a multipolar order characterized by balance of power would be more stable and secure than a world divided by superpower showdown. This objective could be best illustrated when he used the French withdrawal from NATO to advance the cause of East-West *détente*. From a long-term perspective, de Gaulle hoped that his diplomacy would facilitate the emergence of a more multipolar future, and he envisioned a pan-European continental bloc free of bipolar division, where France would again act as a main pillar in a Europe-wide security system.<sup>117</sup>

For most of his presidency, de Gaulle had been supported by a wide spectrum of French people for his endeavours to restore the country's independent status and international prestige. However, by 1968, the glamour of his foreign policy had largely faded, as it increasingly became apparent that his bold diplomatic initiatives could not conceal the fact that France was ultimately a middle-rank power with moderate means. Domestically, the pursuit of overseas glory had piled up immense gold reserves while intensifying economic issues such as low wages and inadequate

---

<sup>117</sup> Roy C. Macridis, *De Gaulle: Implacable Ally* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 165.

social services, something dramatically highlighted in the events of May 1968.<sup>118</sup> Globally, although the growing diffusion of the bipolar world order in the 1960s certainly favoured an East-West *détente* and even foreshadowed an emerging multipolarity, it had not reached a point where radical and fundamental changes to the international system would soon take place. De Gaulle's geopolitical visions of overcoming the bipolar division and establishing a Europe-wide security system essentially depended on Moscow giving up its grip on the communist bloc and returning to a traditional balancing role on the continent, which the Soviet leaders were clearly unwilling to accept, as evident in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. If de Gaulle had achieved a certain degree of success in his defence of French independence throughout his presidency, it could be argued that his push for a revision of the bipolar world division had been largely unsuccessful, since the Cold War structure based on superpower rivalry turned out to be more enduring and less prone to rapid transformation than he had assumed.

Nevertheless, the legacy of de Gaulle's foreign policy should not be reduced to this sole fact. Following the national humiliation of 1940 and the debilitating colonial conflicts after 1944, de Gaulle had replaced the political turmoil of the Fourth Republic with the stability of a strong presidential regime and had successfully ended the bloody and divisive Algerian War with adept maneuvering. With his implementation of a glorious foreign policy, he had restored a sense of pride to the French people after decades of national frustration and had left behind a country that showed a far more confident attitude on the global stage. France did not exactly become the great power that de Gaulle had longed for, but he certainly elevated the country's global influence. Although his diplomatic ambitions were stymied by the late 1960s, the Czech aspiration for national liberation, despite its downfall due to the Warsaw Pact intervention, had confirmed that

---

<sup>118</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 158.

de Gaulle's emphasis on national reality over communist ideology was indeed in line with the nascent changes in the Cold War international system. Moreover, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, his vision of a world free from bipolar division suddenly appeared much less quixotic than it had two decades ago. "The facts may prove me wrong," de Gaulle once stated to Antoine Pinay, his finance minister, "but history will prove me right."<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Curtis Cate, "Charles de Gaulle: The Last Romantic," *The Atlantic* (November 1960).

## Chapter 3

### De Gaulle and the Return of History – Part 1: The Great-Power Rivalry

In a 1987 press interview, French President François Mitterrand, a former socialist opponent of Charles de Gaulle, described the latter as the last great statesman of the nineteenth century – that is, a personality along the lines of a Bismarck or a Metternich.<sup>1</sup> De Gaulle was, according to Mitterrand, an archaic and backward-looking figure, who was out of phase with modern times. With his obsession about France, Europe, and the idea of nation-states, de Gaulle appeared as little more than a stubborn nationalist and threatening obstructionist to historical progress, whose foreign policy seemed to resurrect ghosts from the past. Yet, there exists an alternative way of interpreting de Gaulle’s ideas whereby he was not so antiquated but really was a statesman with foresight beyond many of his contemporaries. As the French philosopher Régis Debray writes, “the course of things may have played one of its habitual low tricks on us. Consider the possibility that de Gaulle was really the first great man of the twenty-first century, and that it was Mitterrand who is the last one of the nineteenth. Perhaps we all saw the realist as an illusionist and thought him anachronistic when he really was awkward for other reasons.”<sup>2</sup> This is a point of view worthy of consideration, given that de Gaulle’s foreign policy, with all his emphasis on the weight of nation-states and political realities, would probably have been more “at home” in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century international system characterized by the return of great-power rivalry.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Interview de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, dans ‘L’Express’ du 4 septembre 1987, sur le général de Gaulle,” *l’Élysée*, September 4, 1987. <https://www.elysee.fr/francois-mitterrand/1987/09/04/interview-de-m-francois-mitterrand-president-de-la-republique-dans-lexpress-du-4-septembre-1987-sur-le-general-de-gaulle>.

<sup>2</sup> Régis Debray, *Charles de Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation* (London: Verso Books, 1994), 87.

While the preceding chapters have developed a framework through which to rationalize de Gaulle's diplomacy in light of his political realism, the upcoming two chapters, united by a common theme of the enduring resonance of de Gaulle's ideas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, take a forward-looking approach by connecting the historical narratives to the contemporary geopolitical landscape. As the first part of this study, this chapter focuses on the resurgence of great-power competition over the past three decades, examining the shifting power configurations involving Russia and China and the evolving international role of the United States. Building upon this approach, the subsequent chapter turns the spotlight toward Europe, delving into the continent's growing strategic challenges and underlining the relevance of de Gaulle's advocacy for strategic autonomy in a changing world order. Considering that international relations are an intricate and ever-evolving field, these two chapters do not aim to undertake the hazardous task of making definitive predictions about the future. Rather, in linking the aforementioned case studies to de Gaulle's historical experiences, the chapters highlight that while the future cannot be foreseen with absolute certainty, the French president's realist insights on multipolarity, national interests, and political realities offer valuable guidance for fostering prudent strategic thinking and navigation of the geopolitical complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, positioning him as a visionary statesman ahead of his time.

### **A New World Order?**

In the early 1990s, a sense of optimism appeared universal across Western societies. With the collapse of the Soviet empire and the disintegration of the communist bloc, many Western leaders were convinced about the advent of a new international order, with national boundaries

blurring, cultures intermingling, and free commerce among nations prospering.<sup>3</sup> Russia withdrew troops from its former satellite states, adopted a liberal model of political economy, and sought closer alliance with the West. China, despite the 1989 political crackdown at the Tiananmen Square, appeared committed to further integration with the global capitalist economy, which, as many Westerners hoped, would inevitably lead to the country's political liberalization. The dissolution of the communist alliance seemingly did not end just one geostrategic clash but *all* geostrategic clashes that had permeated throughout human history. Such determinism in the early post-Cold War years gave new life to the old Enlightenment faith in the inevitability of human progress – a belief shattered by the atrocities of the two world wars but now revived by the end of the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> With the triumph of democratic liberalism in the ideological competition, many Westerners believed that all other nations would surely choose that path by liberalizing, first economically then politically, to remain competitive and prosperous in a globalized economy. Thus, the great task for the West was simply to construct an international system of laws and institutions, integrate the former adversaries into the liberal world order, and let the ineluctable forces of human progress work their magic. Simply put, it would be “a world quite different from the one we've known.”<sup>5</sup>

The world suddenly appeared to be different chiefly because Russia had changed. In the last years of the Cold War, without abandoning communist control altogether, the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on a far-reaching political reform by transferring the locus of power from the Communist Party to the federal government and republics. In a speech at the UN in 1988, the Soviet leader declared his plan to withdraw unilaterally some 500,000 soldiers

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> George H.W. Bush, “Toward a New World Order,” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 1:3 (1990): 91.

from the former satellite states. By the following year, virtually all regimes in Eastern Europe had shaken off Soviet tutelage and declared their independence from Moscow's control.<sup>6</sup> Under Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev's successor, Russia appeared fully committed to an alliance with the democratic West. Rather than defining its national interests in traditional geostrategic terms, Moscow prioritized economic integration with the rest of the world, favoured major arms control agreements with Washington, and sought closer cooperation with Europe, a foreign policy shift largely driven by Russia's declining economy that needed a massive reform.<sup>7</sup> With its embrace of "universal values", as Gorbachev put it, a democratizing Russia needed not to fear the United States or its expanding alliance of democratic powers.<sup>8</sup> If Russia could relinquish its role as a superpower, renounce its regional hegemony in Eastern Europe, and more importantly, abandon the traditional great-power politics in favour of global convergence, so might the rest of the world.

Meanwhile, the United States regarded the fall of the Soviet Union as a heaven-sent opportunity to fulfill a long-held dream of global leadership and was ready to lead the world into what was envisioned to be a new era of peace, prosperity, and liberty. In the early days of the Cold War, Acheson had described the United States as the "locomotive at the head of mankind."<sup>9</sup> With the collapse of communism, it would now become the "Indispensable Nation" in a new world order, since the United States alone possessed the necessary means and power to usher in a future of growing affluence and international cooperation.<sup>10</sup> As the scholar and journalist Martin Walker wrote in 1996, "The age of geopolitics has given way to an age of what might be called

---

<sup>6</sup> James Wilkinson and H. Stuart Hughes, *Contemporary Europe: A History* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 552-553.

<sup>7</sup> Dmitri V. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 70.

<sup>8</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 264.

<sup>9</sup> James Chace, "1945, Year Zero," *World Policy Journal* 12:4 (Winter, 1995/1996): 63.

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 372.

geo-economics... The new virility symbols are exports and productivity and growth rates and the great international encounters are the trade pacts of the economic superpowers.”<sup>11</sup> International competition might endure, but it would be peaceful commercial competition. According to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment view, free flow of commerce would pacify and perhaps eliminate the human instinct for conflict, or what the ancient Greeks called *thumos*, an atavistic passion in defence of one’s clan, tribe, city, or nation. “Where there is commerce, there are soft manners and morals”, wrote the philosopher Montesquieu.<sup>12</sup> With the fall of communism, this old Enlightenment vision suddenly appeared achievable, as the interests of the world’s major powers were seemingly moving toward convergence. In a world of increasingly commercial and liberal nations, it was envisioned that citizens around the globe would pursue comfort and affluence, either at home or abroad, and forsake the tribal hatreds and struggles for glory and dominance. As U.S. President George H.W. Bush proclaimed in a public speech in 1991, it would be a new era where “the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony,” where “the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle,” and where nations “recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice.”<sup>13</sup>

The United States’ vision of a new world order, in essence, rested on a unique set of geopolitical circumstances: the temporary pause in great-power rivalry. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the United States, for a moment, suddenly stood as the only superpower capable of shaping international development in accordance with its own strategic interests. Throughout the 1990s, Russia was weak, its economy and military in sharp decline, and its domestic politics in turmoil. China, in the aftermath of the 1989 incident, was diplomatically isolated, its economic

---

<sup>11</sup> Martin Walker, “The Clinton Doctrine,” *The New Yorker* (October 7, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas L. Pangle and Peter J. Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 159-160.

<sup>13</sup> Bush, “Toward a New World Order”.

potential uncertain, and its military unprepared for modern warfare. Europe, the traditional arena of great-power rivalry, was turning away from power politics by polishing its supranational institutions of the European Union [EU].<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, one can say that the world of the 1990s was not experiencing a fundamental shift from traditional geopolitics, but merely a pause in the eternal struggle among nation-states. Every international “order,” according to de Gaulle, is merely a reflection of the interests and values of the world’s strongest powers at a particular time.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the bipolar world order driven by the U.S.-Soviet superpower rivalry during the Cold War never truly constituted a “break” from traditional geopolitics. By the same logic, the post-1989 liberal ideal of a “new world order,” envisaged at a time when the United States temporarily stood as the only superpower capable of shaping global affairs, would probably appear to be, in the eyes of de Gaulle, as little more than a fanciful daydream. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the hopeful vision of a “new world order” was shattered almost as soon as it was conceived, with great powers, one by one, re-entering the field of international rivalry.

### **The Geopolitical Comeback**

If Russia was where history had most strikingly ended three decades before, it could be argued that today, it is exactly in Russia that history has most strikingly returned. With his emphasis on national reality over ideology in international relations, de Gaulle frequently referred to “Russia,” rather than “the Soviet Union,” in his political memoirs, despite the ongoing Cold War in his time.<sup>16</sup> “Russia,” de Gaulle once said, “will absorb communism as a blotter absorbs ink”, which suggested that no ideology, ranging from communism to democratic

---

<sup>14</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Graham O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference* (Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 175.

<sup>16</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 209.

liberalism, could indefinitely subdue the existence of a Russian national reality.<sup>17</sup> With hindsight, it could be said that despite a brief moment of ideological convergence with the liberal West in the 1990s, Russia has restored its traditional great-power ambitions – in other words, Russia has become Russia again. After Vladimir Putin took power in 2000, Russia’s economy rapidly recovered, after shrinking throughout most of the 1990s. Much of this growth could be attributed to its possession of abundant natural resources, notably oil and gas, which have allowed Russia to enjoy a considerable trade surplus, pay off almost all of its foreign debts, and hold one of the largest hard currency reserves in the world.<sup>18</sup> With the centralization of power in his hands, Putin turned away from the integrationist foreign policy of his predecessors and instead launched a concerted effort to strengthen Russia’s military. Over the past two decades, Russia not only has modernized its nuclear arsenal, which remains the largest stockpile of nuclear warheads in the world today, but also has developed new jet fighters, submarines, aircraft, and long-range, missile-carrying bombers.<sup>19</sup> With its abundant natural resources, formidable nuclear arsenal, extensive landmass across Eurasia, and UN Security Council veto, Russia remains a force to be reckoned with on almost every international issue. It is no longer a superpower, but it still ranks among the strongest powers on the world stage against the dismissive views held by many in the West.

At the peak of Soviet power, behind the communist rhetoric of Stalin and Khrushchev and the symbolic representation of the Hammer and Sickle, de Gaulle still saw Moscow as primarily driven by the national interests of Russia, rather than communist ideology.<sup>20</sup> When

---

<sup>17</sup> Julian Jackson, *Charles de Gaulle* (London: Haus Publishing, 2003), 95.

<sup>18</sup> Ivo H. Daalder, “Responding to Russia’s Resurgence: Not Quiet on the Eastern Front,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 6 (November/December 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> André Malraux, *Felled Oaks: Conversation with De Gaulle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 100.

Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he embittered much of the West but struck a chord with many ordinary Russians. This does not necessarily suggest that the Russians desire a restoration of Soviet communism; rather, they yearn for the days when Soviet Russia stood as a global power capable of defending its own national interests and respected by the world.<sup>21</sup> Today, many Russians no longer consider the integrationist policy in the 1990s as an act of enlightened statesmanship. The withdrawal of troops from the former Soviet republics, the loss of Warsaw Pact allies to the U.S.-led military alliance, and acceptance of American influence in Central and Eastern Europe – all those accommodating policies represent nothing but a reminder of Russia’s diminished international stature in the post-Cold War era.<sup>22</sup> In a certain way, de Gaulle’s emphasis on the primacy of national interest over ideological or political affiliation foreshadowed contemporary Russian foreign policy: rather than converging with the liberal West, Moscow’s increasingly authoritarian leadership under Putin has opted for the defence of Russia’s geostrategic interests and the pursuit of a special Russian greatness on the global stage. As Putin addressed his fellow citizens in 2008, to safeguard a “vast territory” and maintain “a major place in world affairs” necessitated “enormous sacrifices and privations on the part of our people.”<sup>23</sup> This grand objective, of course, would inevitably prompt the Kremlin to pay special attention to geographic regions considered as vital to Russia’s national security – namely, the “near abroad.”

In a conversation with Eisenhower in 1961, de Gaulle asked the American president, given the Russians’ devastating experiences in the two world wars, “do you believe that a Peter

---

<sup>21</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson and Theodore P. Garber, “Failing the Stalin Test,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Daalder, “Responding to Russia’s Resurgence.”

<sup>23</sup> James Kirchick, *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 22.

the Great would have settled the matter of frontiers and territories any differently from Stalin?”<sup>24</sup> This again reflects de Gaulle’s belief that Russia’s foreign policy, like that of any other nation, is shaped by its historical experience and driven by the same logic of concern over national security. Given its unique geographic circumstances, the great challenge for Russia stems from the centuries-old struggle of having to safeguard an immense, multiethnic, yet sparsely populated country on a landmass lacking effective natural barriers, a landmass that lies beside either powerful neighbours or unstable regions. Historically, the Russian Empire handled this predicament by preventing the formation of a coalition of rival powers while creating buffer zones on its borders.<sup>25</sup> During the Cold War, the Soviet Union utilized the Warsaw Pact as a counterbalance to Washington-led NATO. It is in this context that after the fall of the Soviet empire, the expansion of NATO into Russia’s doorstep came to be viewed as a geostrategic threat to Moscow’s security interests in the eyes of Putin.<sup>26</sup> At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO allies nominated Ukraine and Georgia for future membership in the military alliance, which made Moscow nervous about its declining influence in its “near abroad.”<sup>27</sup> In the years 2013-2014, partly due to the United States’ diplomatic support,<sup>28</sup> a domestic revolt in Ukraine ultimately toppled President Viktor Yanukovich, who had favoured closer economic ties with Russia over the EU.<sup>29</sup> Those anti-Russian protestors, known as Euromaidans, opposed what they

---

<sup>24</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 212.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Graham, “Let Russia be Russia: The Case for a More Pragmatic Approach to Moscow,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 6 (November/December 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations,” report by the European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007, 15

<sup>27</sup> “Bucharest Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008,” *NATO*, April 3 2008.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm).; Stephen M. Walt, “Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, January 19, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/19/ukraine-russia-nato-crisis-liberal-illusions/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call,” *BBC*, February 7, 2014.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>

<sup>29</sup> Walt, “Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis.”

saw as the government's massive corruption and abuse of power, which was indeed justified (though political corruption has been an enduring Ukrainian problem, including in recent years).<sup>30</sup> In response, Moscow seized Crimea, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet since 1783, and backed Russian-speaking separatist movements in eastern Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion into Ukraine. A new great-power rivalry between the West and a resurgent Russia, which is determined to assert its strategic interests in its traditional sphere of influence, has now returned with a vengeance.

Besides Russia, the rise of China offers another example of geopolitical comeback in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte once allegedly said, "When China awakes, the world will shake", a statement that has become famous in modern-day China, though Napoleon himself might never have uttered such words.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, in a January 1964 press conference that marked the establishment of diplomatic relations between Paris and Beijing, de Gaulle did pronounce a comprehensive view on China's global importance, "A fact of considerable significance is at work and is reshaping the world: China's very deep transformation puts her in a position to have a global leading role."<sup>33</sup> By recognizing the Beijing regime, a key target of the American "containment" policy in the Cold War, de Gaulle entered the Asian scene like a diplomatic icebreaker, nearly ten years ahead of the advent of the Nixon Doctrine and the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s.<sup>34</sup> At a time when both France and China were at loggerheads with their superpower allies, as evident in deteriorating Franco-

---

<sup>30</sup> "CPI 2022 - Corruption Perceptions Index," *Transparency International*, January 31, 2023.

<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

<sup>31</sup> Graham, "Let Russia be Russia."

<sup>32</sup> Lanxin Xiang, "De Gaulle and the 'Eternal China'," in *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas*, edited by Benjamin M. Rowland (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 71.

<sup>33</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences of General Charles de Gaulle, May 19, 1958-January 31, 1964* (New York: French Embassy Press, 1964), 257.

<sup>34</sup> Xiang, "De Gaulle and the 'Eternal China'," 71. Note also that Britain had established relations with the PRC in January 1950, but only at the level of *chargé d'affaires*.

American relations and the Sino-Soviet Split in the 1960s, de Gaulle expected that his bold diplomatic initiative would help counter the U.S.-Soviet domination and eventually give rise to a more multipolar international order.

In explaining his 1964 decision to forge diplomatic ties with Beijing, de Gaulle underlined his conviction that despite the communist ideology, China as a nation still existed. With his belief in nations built upon historical *longue durée*, rather than transient ideology, de Gaulle differentiated “China” from “communism” and interpreted the idiosyncrasies of the country’s national character through an acute cultural lens. As he stated in the 1964 press conference, China, at its core, is a civilization, a “very unique and profound civilization” built by a people of “patience, pride, and industriousness.”<sup>35</sup> Historically, prior to roughly the sixteenth century, ancient China had been a leading civilization for more than a millennium, both spiritually and geopolitically the Middle or Central Kingdom, as the Chinese call it. Partly due to this innate sense of superiority, or even arrogance, the Emperor’s court increasingly turned inward looking and intolerant of socio-economic progress that could potentially overturn the traditional social order. In the early nineteenth century, with the arrival of advanced European colonial powers (and the United States and Japan later), China found itself painfully fallen from a glorious height and “thrown out to the margins” of a suddenly Eurocentric world order, thus beginning what the Chinese consider as the Century of Humiliation in their collective memory.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, today, newly gained national prowess has given the Chinese a renewed sense of pride and has revived sentiments of what the Americans would traditionally call “manifest destiny,” a belief that China’s ancient greatness should be and will be restored to the world

---

<sup>35</sup> De Gaulle, *Major Addresses*, 256.

<sup>36</sup> Zhimin Chen, “Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 42 (February 2005), 36-37.

stage.<sup>37</sup> As de Gaulle believed, every nation is a reverberation of its past and a reflection of its history in the modern form. This perspective aligns with modern China's approach to national identity and governance, as the regime frequently draws on historical experiences of foreign invasion and national struggle to legitimize its centralized rule, positioning itself as the defender of China's historical heritage.<sup>38</sup> In foreign policy, Chinese leaders increasingly envision a dawning era of restored Chinese pre-eminence in East Asia and look back to the nation's history for guidance about the future. In 2017, for example, Beijing launched an international development project, the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI], aiming at building infrastructure and facilitating interregional connectivity across Eurasia. This ambitious project, which evokes references to the ancient Silk Road, reflects China's aspiration to reclaim its historical role as a centre of global trade and connectivity.<sup>39</sup> After more than a century of national humiliation, the modern Chinese state has returned to the global stage both as the inheritor of an ancient civilization and a leading participant in the contemporary great-power system, which resonates with de Gaulle's notion of nation-states based upon historical continuity as opposed to transient ideology.

In the 1960s, despite China's internal political instability, as evident in the catastrophic Cultural Revolution launched by Mao in 1966, de Gaulle remained firm in his belief that China as a nation was destined to rise to global prominence one day or another. As he wrote in his memoirs, "China, endowed with such reserves of manpower and resources, that limitless possibilities are open to her for the future."<sup>40</sup> Looking back, it could be said that de Gaulle was

---

<sup>37</sup> Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy, Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corp., 2000), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* (New York: Public Affairs, 2020), 135-137.

<sup>39</sup> Mahbubani, *Has China Won?*, 211-212.

<sup>40</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 165.

farsighted for his prediction about the rise of China that would gradually transform the world's distribution of power. In 1978, the new national leader, Deng Xiaoping, announced the Reform and Opening-Up policy, a ground-breaking reform program that introduced business-friendly policies aiming at boosting foreign investment.<sup>41</sup> Within merely a few decades, the country has developed a massive export-oriented manufacturing sector and has experienced a rapid capital accumulation, emerging as a dominant powerhouse in the global economy. While growing into an economic giant, China has also transformed its once technologically backward military into one with sophisticated capabilities.<sup>42</sup> Like Russia and the United States (the latter exemplified in its 19<sup>th</sup>-century Monroe Doctrine), China considers geographic regions close to its doorstep as vital to its national security. Accordingly, the country has steadily modernized its naval and air forces, has constructed and militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea, and has secured its access to several military bases across Asia.<sup>43</sup> While China's military advancements are notable, it is equally important to assess them within the proper context of the country's rapid economic growth. For decades, Beijing has maintained military spending at approximately 1.8-2% of its GDP, a ratio still considerably less than that of Washington.<sup>44</sup> While the United States has built up an extensive global network of about 800 military bases in at least 50 countries,<sup>45</sup> China currently has five overseas military bases, a number lower than India's six.<sup>46</sup> Beijing reiterates a "no-first-use" nuclear policy and asserts that its military modernization is primarily

---

<sup>41</sup> Marilyn Grell-Brisk, "China and Global Economic Stratification in an Interdependent World," *Palgrave Communications* 3:17087 (2017):7.

<sup>42</sup> Grell-Brisk, "China and Global Economic Stratification," 8.

<sup>43</sup> Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, "Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020).

<sup>44</sup> "Military expenditure (% of GDP) – China," *World Bank Open Data*, n.d. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=CN>.

<sup>45</sup> David Vine, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> David Vine, Patterson Deppen, and Leah Bolger, "Drawdown: Improving U.S. and Global Security Through Military Base Closures Abroad," *Quincy Brief*, no. 16 (September 2021), 5.

focused on China's immediate geographical sphere, aiming to defend the nation's territorial integrity and safeguard its extensive coastline.<sup>47</sup> As a proponent of political realism, de Gaulle considered that international relations essentially reflect the eternal struggle of diverging interests among nation-states, with state actions often driven by their surrounding security environment.<sup>48</sup> This realist insight aligns with contemporary China's pursuit of strategic interests, which continue to shape the evolving dynamics of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century international order.

Some Western analysts might have doubts about transparency regarding China's military spending and strategy. They insist that nationalism and military power are a perilous combination that should not be revived in a postmodern age. Do not the Chinese understand that in a modern, interconnected world, an increasingly rich country like China can rely on international waterways for its foreign trade, and its military buildup is therefore unnecessary? The Chinese policymakers and thinkers, on the other hand, do not believe any of this, and not without justification. Like all rising powers before it, such as the United States, Germany, and Japan in the late nineteenth century, China fears that the rest of the world might encircle and conspire against it, preventing the country from fulfilling its true potential and destiny.<sup>49</sup> Chinese leaders know all about the United States' "Indispensable Nation" theory. They are aware that Washington's "new world order" essentially means a dominant United States as the world's leading superpower, with countries including China, Russia, and others in distinctly second-rate positions. Even before some world opinion began to criticize American hubris and hegemonism, Chinese observers had long considered that the United States was "trying to preserve its status as the world's sole superpower" and would never "allow any country the chance to pose a challenge

---

<sup>47</sup> Mahhubani, *Has China Won?*, 89-91.

<sup>48</sup> Dana Allin, "De Gaulle and American Power," in Benjamin Rowland, ed., *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas* (Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2011), 102-103.

<sup>49</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 31.

to it.”<sup>50</sup> While the West might insist that China adopt a more “responsible” way of rising as a great power by favouring global convergence over geopolitical rivalry, Beijing might well ask whether the West, and particularly the United States, would ever act on its own advice and renounce power politics, and whether the world really is as liberal internationalists have envisioned it.<sup>51</sup> To become a great power, China believes that one must be independent and self-reliant. Although the geopolitical context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century differs drastically from that of de Gaulle’s era, his foreign policy, particularly his emphasis on national sovereignty, provides a valuable framework for decoding China’s obsession with strategic independence.<sup>52</sup> Just as de Gaulle asserted France’s national interests, China seeks to enhance its own economic and military capabilities in pursuit of great-power status, thereby exercising greater autonomy in charting its own future. Interpreting Chinese foreign policy through de Gaulle’s lens, one can see that national sovereignty is a guiding principle for nations seeking to shape their own destiny in a complex world.

Another noteworthy aspect of China’s rise is its remarkable strides in technological advancement. Over the past decade, the country has demonstrated its determination to climb up the global value chains by moving beyond simply manufacturing for foreign companies to producing its own cutting-edge technologies, as outlined in its “Made in China 2025” strategy initially adopted in 2015.<sup>53</sup> Through direct subsidies to private companies and support for public-private partnerships, the government has poured billions of dollars into technological training and research, in an effort for China to become self-sufficient in strategic industries. So far, the

---

<sup>50</sup> Andrew J. Nathan and Bruce Gilley, *China’s New Rulers: The Secret Files* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002), 208.

<sup>51</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 33-34.

<sup>52</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 157-158.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Schmidt, “Innovation Power: Why Technology Will Define the Future of Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 2 (March/April 2023).

country has made rapid progress in various fields, such as 5G telecommunication, digital mobile payment, EV batteries, solar energy, and synthetic biology, and it is actively catching up with the United States in other critical sectors including quantum computing and advanced semiconductors.<sup>54</sup> In October 2022, Washington announced a sweeping set of export restrictions, barring American companies producing advanced computer chips from selling them to China, in an attempt to prevent what it sees as the latter's "intellectual property theft" and ensure that the United States remains the global leader in technological innovation. Yet, as Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google and Chairman of the U.S. Department of Defence's Innovation Board, points out recently in *Foreign Affairs*, it is Chinese companies that now "control 85 percent of the processing of the rare-earth minerals that go into these chips and other critical electronics."<sup>55</sup> As he further illustrates, although some of China's recent high-tech advances were driven by its access to Western technologies, "much of it traces back to innovative, rather than derivative, effort to adapt and implement new technology."<sup>56</sup> At present, China already leads the world in a few critical sectors but still lags behind the United States in others. With the intensification of U.S.-Chinese competition in technology, de Gaulle's understanding of nation-states, strategic interests, and the pursuit of geopolitical advantages again offers informative insights into the dynamics at play in this contemporary rivalry. Both Washington and Beijing recognize the significance of high-tech development in shaping the balance of power, since technological superiority can give one a vital advantage in obtaining economic, military, and geopolitical leverage on the global stage.<sup>57</sup> As both countries aim to establish themselves as forerunners in

---

<sup>54</sup> Dan Wang, "China's Hidden Tech Revolution: How Beijing Threatens U.S. Dominance," *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 2 (March/April 2023).

<sup>55</sup> Schmidt, "Innovation Power."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Schmidt, "To Compete with China on Tech, America Needs to Fix Its Immigration System: Washington Must Make It Easier to Recruit and Retain Top Talent," *Foreign Affairs*, May 16, 2023.

emerging industries, de Gaulle's ideas based upon political realism help illuminate the motivations, strategies, and tensions in the ongoing U.S.-Chinese rivalry.

Of course, China and Russia are not the only great powers that mark the geopolitical comeback. Other powers, such as India, Brazil, and Iran, to name a few, also remind us of the weight of national ambitions and power politics in significant parts of the world. With his emphasis on nation-states as the permanent units in the international system, de Gaulle asserted that national reality would always prevail over transient ideology. Despite a brief, exciting moment of global convergence following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the growing ambitions of the world's great powers show that the nature of international politics indeed has not been altered by the liberal ideal of a "new world order," and that the 21<sup>st</sup> century might not be destined to become a postmodern paradise after all.

### **The United States and the World**

And what about the United States? With the fall of communism, did the United States soften its attitude toward military methods and relax its grip on global dominance? After the collapse of the Soviet Union, did the United States, suddenly free from major geostrategic rivals, choose to renounce power politics, pull back armed military forces from its extended global involvement, and deploy them only for vital security purposes? With a belief in the righteousness of its universal mission, did the United States strive to live in harmony with the rest of the world, respecting international laws and institutions that cultivate peace and constrain further wars?<sup>58</sup>

The answer to these questions is no. After the Cold War ended, the United States adopted a grand

---

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/eric-schmidt-compete-china-tech-america-needs-fix-its-immigration-system#:~:text=To%20be%20able%20to%20compete,language%20models%20to%20quantum%20computers>.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen Wertheim, "The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn't Dominate the World," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020).

global strategy of “liberal hegemony,” which refers to the country’s commitment to utilizing its preeminent power to promote ideologies of democracy, free markets, and human rights on the world stage. Yet, despite their divergence over whether and how to advance liberal values, American policymakers have converged on the post-Cold War defence strategy outlined under the Bush administration in 1992: the United States must maintain a military predominance so overwhelming that it would “prevent the re-emergence of a new rival”; it should exert a strong leadership in defending the liberal international order that would “convince potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role.”<sup>59</sup> Over the past three decades, inspired by belief in their nation’s global significance and universal values, Washington has favoured a “preponderance of power” over a balance of power with other nation-states, pressing forward U.S. power and influence in ever-widening arcs of the globe in defence of the nation’s interests, values, and grand ambitions.<sup>60</sup>

Back in the early 1960s, in warning the United States about getting embroiled in Vietnam, de Gaulle expressed his doubt that the issue could simply be solved by armed forces and foresaw that further military intervention would turn out to be an endless entanglement. “I predict that you will sink step by step into a bottomless military and political quagmire, however much you spend in men and money”, as he said to Kennedy.<sup>61</sup> De Gaulle cautioned against the dangers of unchecked military involvement abroad, highlighting the risks of protracted conflicts with limited chances of success. By advocating a more measured approach, he emphasized the need to consider the long-term implications of military actions, especially in complex and

---

<sup>59</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, “Excerpts From Pentagon’s Plan: ‘Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival,’” *The New York Times*, March 8, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/excerpts-from-pentagon-s-plan-prevent-the-re-emergence-of-a-new-rival.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 211-212.

culturally distinct regions – a lesson that France had learned from its own “forever wars” in Indochina and Algeria.<sup>62</sup> Looking back, de Gaulle’s words were a prophetic warning to say the least, as his insights are particularly relevant when examining the United States’ foreign interventions over the past three decades. By pursuing armed dominance rather than merely defence, the post-Cold War grand strategy has again plunged the United States into seemingly endless conflicts, as evidenced by the wars launched in Afghanistan in 2001, in Iraq in 2003, and in Libya in 2011, often with limited success and unintended consequences. At best, these were “mistaken priorities”; at worst, they have brought the United States into a downward spiral by creating more enemies and antagonists abroad, which consequently has made the strategy of primacy riskier to pursue.<sup>63</sup>

In the 1990s, unchecked by major geostrategic rivals, the United States was able to simultaneously decrease its defence spending while expanding NATO, participate in the military intervention in the former Yugoslavia, and send tens of thousands of troops to the Middle East. Nevertheless, the project of global primacy soon generated blowback: resenting the presence of American military personnel in Saudi Arabia, the Al-Qaeda terrorist group, led by a wealthy Saudi man, Osama bin Laden, declared war on the United States in 1996. The rise of Islamic terrorism and the 9/11 attacks soon shaped Washington’s overly militarized reaction and galvanized the country into further foreign wars.<sup>64</sup> Some of these interventions were more justifiable than others: the Afghanistan War, for instance, occurred after Al-Qaeda used the country as the base for launching the 9/11 attacks. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, however, was

---

<sup>62</sup> Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992), 140.

<sup>63</sup> Wertheim, “The Price of Primacy.”

<sup>64</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “The Self-Destruction of American Power: Washington Squandered the Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).

unjustified either in terms of respect for international law or of rational calculation of Washington's national interests.<sup>65</sup> Again, de Gaulle's warning on the Vietnam War sheds light on the subsequent failures of the Iraq War. As in Vietnam, American military and political strategies proved miscalculated and inadequate to the task, and public support faded once it was increasingly evident that Washington became bogged down in an endless entanglement.<sup>66</sup> The Iraq War once more revealed the limitations of military engagement and the complexities of intervening in a culturally distinct region without a clear and achievable strategy. The parallels between de Gaulle's emphasis on strategic restraint and the failures of Washington's foreign wars underscore the vital importance of prudence, thoughtful planning, and rational assessment of long-term consequences in international affairs.

By the time of the 2008 presidential election, a new "realism" had come into vogue: the idea that the world was simply unmanageable, that the United States lacked sufficient means and power to shape it effectively, and that instead of solving issues, Washington's excessive, interventionist role had largely proved counterproductive. Critics of U.S. foreign policy argued that the country should stop its hubristic attempt to shape the world in its own image, with reckless efforts into "nation building" and "democratic promotion" in countries where no social foundation for Western democracy existed. In trying to achieve too much, as the critics suggested, the United States' post-Cold War foreign policy had damaged American interests abroad and had alienated a large segment of average Americans at home.<sup>67</sup> The 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama marked a turning point on this matter. In a way that resonated de Gaulle's advocacy for a balanced approach in foreign policy, Obama shared the new "realist"

---

<sup>65</sup> Mahbubani, *Has China Won?*, 110.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 98.

<sup>67</sup> Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back*, 104.

orthodoxy that the United States' overstretched global involvement had become unsustainable, and he set out to readjust the country to a more modest global role while seeking accommodation with old adversaries. Wary of getting entangled in prolonged military conflicts, Obama kept his campaign promise by announcing the full withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011.<sup>68</sup> Regarding Russia, he sought to "reset" relations with the country, aiming for improved cooperation on issues like nuclear disarmament and counterterrorism. When Moscow seized Crimea in 2014, Obama responded by economic sanctions only and even refused to send defensive weapons to Ukraine, partly because the latter traditionally belonged to Russia's sphere of influence.<sup>69</sup> In an interview with *The Atlantic* in April 2016, Obama had harsh words for European allies, criticizing them for acting as "free riders".<sup>70</sup> As his administration suggested, although Washington could offer assistance, Europe ultimately should solve its own problems and take its own share of responsibility on the world stage.<sup>71</sup> Despite the mishandling of conflicts such as the Libyan crisis, one can say that overall, the echo of de Gaulle's strategic prudence could be discerned in many aspects of Obama's foreign policy, which was marked by a more cautious and pragmatic approach compared to those of his predecessors. Both de Gaulle and Obama recognized the importance of avoiding unilateral military dominance, emphasized burden sharing among allies, and prioritized diplomatic engagement in addressing global challenges. Their approaches shed light on the significance of measured decision-making in foreign policy that strikes a balance between national interests and international stability.

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. president talks through his hardest decisions about America's role in the world," *The Atlantic* (April 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-first Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 63.

If there was still doubt about the domestic call for restraint in foreign affairs, the 2016 election of President Donald Trump decidedly ended it. Rather than just calling for retrenchment, Trump and his supporters went much further than Obama and explicitly repudiated the United States' responsibility of defending the liberal international order. Adopting "America First" as his official foreign policy doctrine, Trump demanded "wins" on trade deals, not just over strategic rivals like China, but also over traditional allies in Europe and North America.<sup>72</sup> Convinced that the U.S.-led Western alliance had imposed excessive burdens on his country, Trump believed that as the leading power of the world, the United States would be better off in direct competition with everyone else, free from obligations to subsidize supposed allies miles away, who also competed with Washington in global trade.<sup>73</sup> During his four-year presidency, Trump repeatedly denounced the values of the liberal world order, withdrew from a multitude of international agreements, endorsed a breakup of the EU, and privately discussed the possibility of pulling the United States out of NATO.<sup>74</sup> While one cannot definitively know how de Gaulle might have assessed Trump's foreign policy, one can speculate, based on the French president's guiding principles, that he would likely have viewed it critically. Although both de Gaulle and Trump remained skeptical about NATO and believed in the right of nations to pursue their independent interests, the former envisioned a more balanced, inclusive global governing structure reflecting the multipolarity of nation-states,<sup>75</sup> as opposed to the latter's excessive unilateralism aimed to assert enduring American hegemony. As a proponent of balance of power, de Gaulle actively sought to maintain relations with all major powers of his time and advocated constructive

---

<sup>72</sup> Chad P. Bown and Douglas A. Irwin, "Trump's Assault on the Global Trading System," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (September/October 2019).

<sup>73</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, "The Most Extraordinary Op-ed of 2017," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends: The Unravelling of American Power," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (July/August 2020).

<sup>75</sup> Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969* (Paris : Fayard, 1998), 51.

dialogues even with ideological adversaries.<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, one can guess that he might have been critical of Trump's confrontational rhetoric and the lack of a nuanced diplomatic strategy in dealing with China on issues such as perceived trade imbalances. As a champion of European unity and believer in the significance of strong regional cooperation,<sup>77</sup> de Gaulle would also likely have questioned Trump's often divisive rhetoric concerning Europe. With Trump's clear preference for zero-sum politics, coupled with his impulsive decision-making and unpredictable temperament, doubts about the enduring strengths of U.S. global leadership reverberated across the world during his four-year presidency.

De Gaulle's skepticism about the long-term credibility of the United States' security guarantee was a significant factor that shaped his attachment to the building of an independent Europe capable of defending its own interests. "For the moment there is no alternative to U.S. omnipotence," he acknowledged in the early 1960s.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, he also considered Washington's strategic commitment to Europe as a product of the particular circumstances in the Cold War, and he expected that it might not last indefinitely with the rise of new global reality in the future.<sup>79</sup> In light of Trump's foreign policy, it is fair to say that de Gaulle's skepticism was validated, since the mere fact that the American people had chosen someone with neither prior government nor foreign policy experience as their head of state reflected the potential volatility and unpredictability of the United States' international role. Some observers believed that Washington could still fix this by restoring the classical foreign policy doctrine that once guided the construction of the liberal world order. That is, if a future president could reclaim the United

---

<sup>76</sup> Maurice Couve de Murville, *Une politique étrangère (1958-1969)* (Paris: Plon, 1971), 442.

<sup>77</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 194.

<sup>78</sup> Garret Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books), 55.

<sup>79</sup> Hervé Alphand, *L'étonnement d'être : journal, 1939-1973* (Paris : Fayard, 1977), Diary entry 26 August 1963, 407.

States' international responsibilities by reassuring support for America's long-standing allies and ending the attacks on the world trading system, then Trump's presidency would go down in history as a momentary aberration rather than a significant watershed in the unraveling of U.S. global leadership.<sup>80</sup> At the Munich Security Conference of 2019, Joe Biden, the former Vice President who later won the 2020 presidential election, declared a reassuring message to an audience of European diplomats concerned about American retreat: "We will be back."<sup>81</sup> Wait out Trump's tenure, Biden seemed to be suggesting, and eventually Washington would return to the post-Cold War strategy of sustaining a stable U.S.-led international order.

However, this time really is different. Any president after Trump would likely try to restore a certain degree of sanity to U.S. foreign policy; yet, in all likelihood, it might not solve the problem at its root. Looking back, one can argue that Trump was as much a beneficiary of Washington's intensely polarized political climate as an incarnation of the country's increasing socio-economic disparity after decades of neoliberal globalization.<sup>82</sup> With the end of the Cold War, free from major geopolitical rivals, the United States exerted global influence so untrammelled that many came to believe in the permanent triumph of liberal internationalism. Nevertheless, the redistribution of global economic power, particularly with the rise of China, has significantly transformed the geopolitical landscape today.<sup>83</sup> According to the database from the International Monetary Fund [IMF], before 2000, the United States was the preeminent trading partner for over 80% of countries; by 2018, that number had dropped sharply to 30%, with over two-thirds of countries trading more with China than with the United States.<sup>84</sup> Over the

---

<sup>80</sup> Cooley and Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends."

<sup>81</sup> Alina Polyakova and Benjamin Haddad, "Europe Alone: What Comes After the Transatlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).

<sup>82</sup> Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> Cooley and Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends."

<sup>84</sup> Roland Rajah and Alyssa Leng, "Chart of the week: Global trade through a US-China lens," *The Lowy Institute*, December 18, 2019. <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/chart-week-global-trade-through-us-china-lens>.

past decade, China has been actively providing development financing to countries around the world, particularly in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Through establishing new embassies and consulates, financing infrastructure projects, and exchanging high-level trade delegations, China has made its way to become a preeminent economic partner for much of the global South, in an effort to access key raw materials and expand its overseas markets.<sup>85</sup> As de Gaulle considered it, any ideology, ranging from communism to liberalism, is essentially a “cloak” for national ambitions and the will to power in the international system.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, any world “order” is largely a reflection of the wishes and interests of the most influential players within the international system at a given time. Applying de Gaulle’s concept to the contemporary geopolitical context, one can observe that the liberal international order, with military alliances like NATO and economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, has largely been a Western or American creation. China, on the other hand, seeks to reshape elements of the international system to align better with its own strategic interests, as evident in the establishment of Beijing-led institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [AIIB], a multilateral development institution with 106 participating states.<sup>87</sup> With China’s growing geopolitical clout, developing countries, and even some developed ones, can now seek viable alternatives in securing economic, military, and diplomatic aid, undermining Washington’s credibility in setting the agenda and rules of the U.S.-led international order.

Faced with this new geopolitical reality, how should the United States manage its rising competition with China while charting a peaceful and prosperous path for the future? If de Gaulle were alive today, one could hypothesize, based on the French president’s historical

---

<sup>85</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, “Asia’s Third Way: How ASEAN Survives – and Thrives – Amid Great-Power Competition,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 2 (March/April 2023).

<sup>86</sup> Jackson, *Charles de Gaulle*, 94.

<sup>87</sup> Mahbubani, *Has China Won?*, 51.

experiences and realist insights, that he would likely have given the following three suggestions to policymakers in the White House. The first is to avoid carving the world up in ideological terms by framing the global issue simply as “democracy versus autocracy,” as the Biden administration often claims in public.<sup>88</sup> In reality, the world exhibits a diverse range of political regimes, such as democracies, meritocracies, authoritarian regimes, monarchies, and communist states. Even within democracies, there are distinct variants across different countries and regions. For example, India, “the world’s largest democracy,” as the West calls it, has never framed itself as engaged in an “ideological struggle” with China; instead, it is pursuing a strategy of balancing act, trying to keep all its options open for maximum flexibility.<sup>89</sup> It is true that due to its concern about Beijing’s growing influence across the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi has deepened military cooperation with Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra through its participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (commonly known as the Quad). Nevertheless, New Delhi also participates in Beijing-led institutions, such as the AIIB and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and routinely attends formal summits of the multilateral forum known as BRICS, which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.<sup>90</sup> According to Ashley J. Tellis, an Indo-American senior researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, although India values cooperation with the United States for tangible benefits such as economic and military aid, New Delhi harbours little allegiance in preserving the U.S.-led liberal international order. Thus, Washington should not expect New Delhi to automatically support any American confrontation

---

<sup>88</sup> Walter Russell Mead, “The Cost of Biden’s ‘Democracy’ Fixation,” *The Wallstreet Journal*, April 3, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cost-of-bidens-democracy-fixation-autocracy-summit-freedom-house-ideology-foreign-policy-middle-east-86638fc5>.

<sup>89</sup> Mahbubani, “Asia’s Third Way.”

<sup>90</sup> Nirupama Rao, “The Upside of Rivalry: India’s Great-Power Opportunity,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).

with China that does not substantively impact Indian interests.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, Nirupama Rao, a former Indian Foreign Secretary and ambassador to both Washington and Beijing, recently writes in *Foreign Affairs*, “India has the right to work with everyone... U.S. policymakers should not mistake India’s Quad involvement for an alliance; New Delhi will not act as a balancer for Washington against Beijing. Instead, India is playing both sides in the U.S.-China rivalry.”<sup>92</sup> As de Gaulle had recognized during the Cold War, reducing complex geopolitical dynamics to a sheer ideological dichotomy would risk oversimplifying the intricacies of world affairs shaped by a variety of national and geopolitical interests at play. With its rhetoric of “democracy versus autocracy,” the United States has done itself a big disfavor by framing the world in strictly binary terms, while countries in the global South, where the vast majority of the world’s population reside, hold a different perspective on global affairs.

The second suggestion that de Gaulle might have given to Washington in dealing with China is to minimize the risks associated with military engagement. As the French president had warned in the Cold War, reckless military interventions could often lead to unforeseen consequences and long-term instability.<sup>93</sup> Throughout his presidency, de Gaulle had advocated for engaging in diplomatic initiatives and fostering dialogue with one’s ideological adversaries, an approach that sheds light on how Washington could conceive a more thoughtful strategy in managing relations with Beijing in the present day. According to Kishore Mahbubani, a Singaporean geopolitical analyst and former president of the UN Security Council, most countries in the global South are primarily concerned about concrete issues such as their environmental vulnerability, their need for better infrastructure, education, and health care, and

---

<sup>91</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, “America’s Bad Bet on India: New Delhi Won’t Side With Washington Against Beijing,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/americas-bad-bet-india-modi>.

<sup>92</sup> Rao, “The Upside of Rivalry.”

<sup>93</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 140.

their access to foreign investment and advanced technology.<sup>94</sup> They are wary of getting dragged into a costly military crisis between Washington and Beijing that would pose a threat to tackling the above-mentioned matters. They also see hypocrisy and double standards in Washington's narrative of its rivalry with Beijing as "democracy against autocracy" or "good versus evil," since the United States itself has always selectively backed non-democratic regimes across the world when it serves American interests.<sup>95</sup> As China expands its trade and investment, an increasing number of developing countries are adopting a pragmatic approach in balancing both Beijing's and Washington's concerns. Southeast Asia serves as a prime example. Countries like Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines have navigated the complex dynamic of their territorial disputes in the South China Sea by reaching security agreements with the United States. Yet, they have also simultaneously deepened their economic ties with China over the past decade. In fact, Southeast Asia as a whole is perhaps the most receptive to China's BRI program, as all countries in the region have been actively participating in the extensive infrastructure-building initiative led by Beijing.<sup>96</sup> As a result, various Southeast Asian countries now boast sleek new airports and bullet trains linking their major cities, facilitating a new wave of trade and business opportunities. Although Washington still has much to offer in terms of weapon sales or military cooperation, the problem is that "the optics in the region become the U.S. coming to the table with guns and ammunition and China dealing with the bread and butter issues of trade and economics," remarked Paul Haenle, an American political advisor with expertise in Chinese politics.<sup>97</sup> Given the fact that economic development is the first priority for most countries in the

---

<sup>94</sup> Mahbubani, "Asia's Third Way."

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Huong Le Thu, "How to Survive a Great-Power Competition: Southeast Asia's Precarious Balancing Act," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).

<sup>97</sup> Demetri Sevastopulo, "America's lopsided China strategy: military aid but not enough trade," *The Financial Times*, April 25, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/82c13d3b-5b05-4fd4-91be-373ba075db4f>.

global South, it would be a strategic mistake for the United States to be associated with guns whereas China is associated with butter. In this context, de Gaulle's warning on excessive military engagement holds relevance in contemporary American foreign policy toward China, as it serves as a reminder to policymakers in the White House to assess carefully the long-term consequences and costs of military means, emphasizing the need to balance military assertiveness with diplomatic engagement to manage China's rise in the present day.

Thirdly, given de Gaulle's belief in the necessity of seeking common ground with one's adversary to ease geopolitical tensions and promote international peace,<sup>98</sup> one can speculate that he would likely have advocated that the United States establish channels of communication with China at various levels to identify shared interests and possibly facilitate inter-state cooperation on important global issues. Considering the current antagonistic state of U.S.-Chinese relations, where Washington repeatedly accuses Beijing of spying on American society, and Beijing seems increasingly convinced that Washington is bent on obstructing China's development through trade war and military encirclement,<sup>99</sup> the idea of greater cooperation between the two sides appears unrealistic at first sight. Nevertheless, as de Gaulle probably would have suggested, given the United States' pursuit of *détente* with its ideological adversaries in the heat of the Cold War, there is no reason why it cannot resuscitate that old culture of pragmatism in navigating 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitical challenges. Compared to the Cold War era, when Washington and Moscow were largely locked in two contrasting economic systems, contemporary China and the United States both compete and co-exist within a single global trading system, which is marked by profound economic interdependence through supply chains of a density and intricacy never

---

<sup>98</sup> Couve de Murville, *Une politique étrangère*, 442-443.

<sup>99</sup> Le Thu, "How to Survive a Great-Power Competition."

before seen in history.<sup>100</sup> Even if policymakers in the White House are uncomfortable with Beijing's growing economic prowess, they should at least recognize privately that China's economic and technological advances could be an asset in tackling common global challenges, such as climate change, food insecurity, and poverty. Today, China already leads the world in the production and consumption of renewable energy, as it manufactures more solar panels, wind turbines, and electric car batteries than any other country.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Beijing has been investing heavily in major solar and wind projects across the globe, such as Latin America's largest solar plant in Jujuy, Argentina.<sup>102</sup> Simply put, there could be no tangible progress in addressing climate change without involving China and its global economic partners. As de Gaulle had remarked on his intention to engage with Beijing, "The interest of the world, one day or the other, will be to talk to the Chinese, to trade with them, to enable them to come out of their fortress. The policy of the *cordon sanitaire* only ever produced one result, to make the surrounded country even more dangerous. We must not let the Chinese 'stew in their juices.' If not, they might end up becoming venomous."<sup>103</sup> If American officials could reflect on de Gaulle's insight on China, they would see that instead of simply trying to isolate and counter Beijing, a more prudent long-term strategy involves identifying common global challenges where both sides could collaborate. In doing so, the United States could seek to use its diplomatic engagement to influence Chinese foreign policy in a way that aligns better with

---

<sup>100</sup> Bilahari Kausikan, "Navigating the New Age of Great-Power Competition: Statecraft in the Shadow of the U.S.-Chinese Rivalry," *Foreign Affairs*, April 11, 2023. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X\\_f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72IBoCJfYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X_f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72IBoCJfYQAvD_BwE).

<sup>101</sup> Mahbubani, "Asia's Third Way"; Agnes Chang and Keith Bradsher, "Can the World Make an Electric Car Battery Without China?", *The New York Times*, May 16, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/05/16/business/china-ev-battery.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Mahbubani, "Asia's Third Way."

<sup>103</sup> Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle : vol. 1* (Paris : Edition de Fallois : Fayard, 1997), Meeting on 3 June 1962, 314.

American interests while fostering greater international stability, particularly regarding issues such as the concern over a potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, by embracing a pragmatic, positive-sum approach that transcends political difference, the United States could seize an opportunity to shape a peaceful path forward through its cooperation with all nations worldwide, including China. In contrast, if Washington remains fixated on its geopolitical domination by calling on countries to shun China, it will likely only diminish its own stature and risk losing trust in much of the global South, where countries are becoming more nuanced in their political judgement and more autonomous in their decision-making.<sup>105</sup> The simple reality is that we no longer live in the unipolar era of the 1990s. As some observers have argued, the very foundations upon which the U.S.-led international order was once built should no longer be taken for granted today: “think of the current moment as a game of Jenga in which multiple pieces have been removed but the tower still stands... like a Jenga tower, the order will continue to stand upright – right until the moment it collapses.”<sup>106</sup> This is not to suggest that the United States will face an inevitable decline: after all, that Jenga tower is still there, and the current world order still looks a lot more American than Chinese or Russian in character. The issue is that under closer examination, the tower is already lacking several key components and teetering ever so slightly. Given the growing geopolitical complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the time is ripe for an honest assessment of the future of the Atlantic alliance, a pivotal foundation that has undergirded the U.S.-led international order.

---

<sup>104</sup> Christopher K. Johnson, “Why China Will Play It Safe: Xi Would Prefer Détente – Not War – With America,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 14, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/why-china-will-play-it-safe>.

<sup>105</sup> Matias Spektor, “In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).

<sup>106</sup> Daniel W. Drezner, “This Time Is Different: Why U.S. Foreign Policy Will Never Recover,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 3 (May/June 2019).

## Chapter 4

### De Gaulle and the Return of History – Part 2: Europe at a Crossroad

While the previous chapter has underscored the renewed relevance of de Gaulle's realist insights given the resurgence of great-power rivalry, this chapter shifts focus toward Europe, a region central to his strategic vision. De Gaulle viewed Europe as an entity bound by a rich shared history and a common destiny. Amid the turbulent times of the Cold War, he urged the continent to foster inter-state cooperation and find its strategic footing in a world of superpower competition. At the heart of de Gaulle's conception of Europe were profound questions concerning sovereignty, collective security, and the notion of strategic autonomy.<sup>1</sup> These ideas, intricately linked to his emphasis on the multipolarity of nation-states, form the foundational pillars of analysis in this chapter. Building on the examination of great-power rivalry from the preceding chapter, this part of our study delves deep into the growing strategic challenges faced by the EU in the present day, reaffirming the importance of understanding the past to navigating the present and the future. In an era marked by changing dynamics in the international system, de Gaulle's vision of Europe again serves as a historical guide, illuminating a viable path forward for the continent through the uncertain times.

#### Europe in an Evolving World

During de Gaulle's presidency, Europe remained the centrepiece of his foreign policy. His idea of a sort of "Europe of nations" highlighted his desire to see greater intergovernmental cooperation among European nations, which would advance their common interests while

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 171, 199-201.

respecting their individual national sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> He envisioned that a stronger Europe, culturally diverse yet strategically united, would be capable of safeguarding its collective interests, act as an equal partner to the United States, and bring about the emergence of a more multipolar international order wherein Europe could play a balancing role *vis-à-vis* other world powers. In essence, de Gaulle's idea of Europe as a main actor in the global security system was based on the "realist" school of thought in international relations theory.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, following the end of the Cold War, the Europeans put their faith in the "new world order." They turned over much of their political and economic sovereignty to the supranational institutions in Brussels, assuming that a productive and colossal European economy would compete as an equal with world powers such as the United States and China. They also slashed their defence spending and slowed down the process of military modernization, calculating that hard power was out and soft power was in. With Russia on its knees after the disintegration of the Soviet empire, the EU, coupled with the appeal of U.S. security guarantee, possessed a magnetic force so powerful that it pulled former Warsaw Pact nations, led by Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, into its integrated structure one after another. In a global ocean of instability, many Europeans believed that the supranational EU would lead the world into a postmodern age, and that in a world modelled after the EU, Europe would be strong and prosperous.<sup>4</sup>

For a while, this seemed a good bet. Nevertheless, over the recent decade, there has been a continental-wide populist backlash against the EU's unwieldy governing structure. In outlining his vision of the future of Europe, de Gaulle had emphasized that cooperation should be a gradual, organic process based on the wills and interests of the nations involved, not something

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences of General Charles de Gaulle, May 19, 1958-January 31, 1964* (New York: French Embassy Press, 1964), 175.

<sup>3</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 172-175.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 21-22.

rushed or enforced from above.<sup>5</sup> He cautioned that an overly rapid pace of integration could lead to dilution of national identities and cultures, creating new tensions and conflicts. “Arbitrary centralization always provoked an upsurge of violent nationalism by way of reaction,” he noted in his memoirs.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, right-wing populist parties, disgruntled by what they see as EU overreach, have made significant gains in large parts of Europe. Much of this frustration stemmed from the 2008-2010 euro crisis and global recession. Some was also a response to the influx of refugees and immigrants from war and revolution in North Africa and the Middle East after 2010.<sup>7</sup> When people believe that their cultural identity and way of life are endangered, they increasingly turn to tribalism and look to their own nation for protection. The issue at stake today is not simply about whether it was new refugees or second- or third-generation immigrants who conducted deadly terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere. What matters is the perception, widespread among many Europeans today, that the EU’s bureaucracy and cosmopolitan elite have been unable to protect their livelihood, safety, and, most importantly, cultural identity.<sup>8</sup> In France, although Emmanuel Macron defeated far-right Marine Le Pen twice in the presidential elections of 2017 and 2022, the very fact that there were widespread sighs of relief over these two results has proved just how far populist nationalist parties have made their way to the heart of Europe.<sup>9</sup> In Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* [AFD] gained 92 and 83 seats respectively in the 2017 and 2021 parliamentary elections, rising to a notable position in German politics. One AfD leader, complaining about the floods of “culturally alien peoples”, blamed it on

---

<sup>5</sup> De Gaulle, *Major Addresses*, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *War Memoirs: The Call to Honour, 1940-1942* (London: Collins, 1955), 171.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Maria Castellà Andreu and Marco Antonio Simonelli, *Populism and Contemporary Democracy in Europe: Old Problems and New Challenges* (Barcelona: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022), 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Andreu and Simonelli, *Populism and Contemporary Democracy*, 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Bernard, “Les scénarios de l’élection de Trump et du Brexit présentent de troublantes similitudes avec le duel Macron-Le Pen,” *Le Monde*, April 22, 2022. [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/22/les-scenarios-de-l-election-de-trump-et-du-brexit-presentent-de-troublantes-similitudes-avec-le-duel-macron-le-pen\\_6123324\\_6059010.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/22/les-scenarios-de-l-election-de-trump-et-du-brexit-presentent-de-troublantes-similitudes-avec-le-duel-macron-le-pen_6123324_6059010.html)

the “pigs” within the post-WWII German political elite, who were “nothing other than puppets of the victor powers of the Second World War”.<sup>10</sup> The Europe of today might still seem a far cry from that of the 1930s; however, one does not know how far. The debate about the speed and nature of European integration, along with the balance between national sovereignty and supranational governance, continues to this day.

Besides the rise of nationalistic tensions across Europe, another critical issue that the EU has been facing is the resurgence of the centuries-old competition between Russia and its neighbouring states. With his existential view of the “presence of the past,” de Gaulle considered national character as a product of the enduring historical, and no ideology could forever subjugate the existence of national reality since history could not be wiped out.<sup>11</sup> When the EU took in the former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltics, it gained not just new Eastern member-states but also a new Eastern problem, or rather the very old Eastern problem: by ingesting Poland, for example, the EU also ingested the country’s historical enmity and fear of Russia. With Russia under Putin seeking to recover its great-power status, especially a predominance in its traditional sphere of influence, the enlargement of the EU has embroiled the continent in a most unwanted position of geopolitical confrontation.<sup>12</sup> Along the Euro-Russian fault line, perhaps no other state has loomed larger in Russia’s consciousness than Ukraine, endowed with immense fertile lands and economic potential and strategically positioned between Russia and the EU.<sup>13</sup> Ukraine also occupies a significant place in Russia’s historical narrative: both countries share an entangled history going back more than a millennium, when the Slavs used the name

---

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, “It’s the Kultur, Stupid,” *New York Review of Books*, December 7, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Graham O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference* (Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 32-33; André Malraux, *Felled Oaks: Conversation with De Gaulle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 67.

<sup>12</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Graham, “Let Russia be Russia: The Case for a More Pragmatic Approach to Moscow,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 6 (November/December 2019).

*Rus* to describe their settlements and established the first Slavic state, the *Kievan Rus*, centred around the location of present-day Kyiv in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century. This is one reason why in the eyes of many “Russians” today, the idea of a Western-oriented Ukraine seems unacceptable: Ukraine, as they consider it, is their historic heartland.<sup>14</sup> Under this context, a crisis over Ukraine, which wants to join both the EU and NATO, would almost certainly provoke fierce reactions from Moscow, which perceives Ukraine’s geopolitical alignment as vital to its national interests and security concern.<sup>15</sup> Examining the issue through de Gaulle’s insight on nation-states built upon historical *longue durée*, one can observe the deeply rooted historical and cultural factors contributing to the complexities of this conflict. In de Gaulle’s worldview, the shadow of history would always linger and continue to shape a nation’s character and drive the nation’s will,<sup>16</sup> an idea that sheds light on why nations may have certain geopolitical sensitivities or pursue specific strategic objectives. A 21<sup>st</sup>-century EU, with its postmodern, supranational governing structure, now confronts a Russia that very much resembles a traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century power playing the old geopolitical games at its doorstep.

Confronted with destabilizing forces on its periphery, it is not hard to imagine that a Europe lacking a common vision on security might soon serve as an arena, rather than a participant, in an age of great-power rivalry. For a long time, Europe remained passive under the umbrella of the U.S. security guarantee, and this worked when the United States possessed unparalleled strengths in a unipolar, liberal international order dominated by itself, and when the world was seemingly moving toward global convergence following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

---

<sup>14</sup> Serhii Ploky, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16-17; Graham, “Let Russia be Russia.”

<sup>15</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, January 19, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/19/ukraine-russia-nato-crisis-liberal-illusions/>

<sup>16</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 108-109.

Nevertheless, as power politics returns vigorously, and as the relative decline of Washington's global supremacy becomes increasingly evident, the EU, with its once noble ambition to lead the world into a postmodern era, finds itself again struggling with traditional geopolitical challenges that it had never anticipated just one generation ago.<sup>17</sup> Faced with this changing global landscape, de Gaulle's call for a strong, autonomous Europe gained renewed relevance. During the Cold War, he had underlined the importance for European nations to deepen inter-state cooperation, develop an independent strategic vision, and take greater responsibility for their collective security. This set of ideas was rooted in his understanding of the inherent complexity of power dynamics in international relations, as he recognized that the world order was constantly evolving with power shifting and traditional alliances tested.<sup>18</sup> In referring to Trump's presidency, the former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, had stated at a campaign rally in May 2017, "The times in which we could completely depend on others are on the way out... We Europeans must really take our destiny into our own hands".<sup>19</sup> As of 2023, Trump is no longer in power; nevertheless, given the United States' increasing political polarization and partisan divisions, no one can definitely guarantee that Washington's commitment to Europe will remain firm and stable forever.

If de Gaulle were alive, what advice might he have given to European leaders on how to translate the idea of European collective security into practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? As he had asserted throughout his presidency, for European cooperation to be truly effective, it must emanate from the genuine desires, aspirations, and collective consciousness of European states to

---

<sup>17</sup> Alina Polyakova and Benjamin Haddad, "Europe Alone: What Comes After the Transatlantic Alliance," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).

<sup>18</sup> De Gaulle, *Major Addresses*, 256-257; Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, vol. 2, *Dans l'attente* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 307;

<sup>19</sup> "Merkel: Europe 'can no longer rely on allies' after Trump and Brexit," *BBC*, May 28, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40078183>.

advance their tangible national interests together.<sup>20</sup> Moving beyond arbitrary bureaucratic centralization and abstract ideological unity, de Gaulle believed that a sustainable, efficient European project must be grounded on political reality, “What are the realities of Europe? What are the pillars on which it can be built? The States are, in truth, certainly very different from one another, each of which has its own spirit, its own history, its own language, its own misfortunes, glories and ambitions; but these States are the only entities that have the right to order and the authority to act.”<sup>21</sup> With his belief in nation-states as the foundation of all international relations, de Gaulle thus envisioned a union of sovereign nations working toward their common security and prosperity – “a concert of European states”, as he called it.<sup>22</sup> While awaiting to comprehend Europe’s geopolitical concerns and tackle them collectively, de Gaulle did recognize that it is viable to install some pan-European institutions, which, according to him, do have their technical value in facilitating regular, organized consultation and cooperation among member-states. Nevertheless, de Gaulle also underlined that, ultimately, states act with decisive efficiency and authority. Regarding the EEC of his time, as he explained, it was the states that envisioned and created it, furnished it with funds, provided it with staff members, and gave it reality and efficiency.<sup>23</sup> “As long as nothing serious happens, they (institutions) function without much difficulty, but as soon as a tragic situation appears, a major problem to be solved, it can then be seen that one ‘High Authority’ or another has no authority over the various national categories and that only the States have it,” as he pointed out.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in the eyes of de Gaulle, the key to successful European cooperation lies in striking a delicate balance between fostering

---

<sup>20</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> De Gaulle, *Major Addresses*, 92-93.

<sup>22</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 84-85.

<sup>23</sup> De Gaulle, *Major Addresses*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

intergovernmental collaboration in tackling common challenges, on one hand, and acknowledging the unique strengths of each state, on the other.

For now, the idea of European strategic autonomy, often invoked by Macron, still largely remains just that – an idea. With growing security issues including the refugee crisis, terrorist attacks, and the conflict in Ukraine, the EU’s foreign service outlined the goal of a stronger Europe capable of defending itself and protecting its core interests in its 2016 EU Global Strategy.<sup>25</sup> In the same year, 22 out of then 28 EU member-states augmented their defence spending, reversing the trend toward continuous decrease since the 1990s. To build an integrated and efficient European defence industry, the bloc created the European Defence Fund in 2017, which aimed at financing intergovernmental defence programs, and established the Permanent Structured Cooperation, a series of projects designated to coordinate efforts on cybersecurity and energy security.<sup>26</sup> That being said, the EU still had a long way to go before achieving true strategic autonomy in security, since internal foreign policy divergences still existed, and some member-states, notably Germany, still lagged behind in defence spending. Moreover, the goal of a stronger Europe cannot be achieved by military means alone, since economic prowess plays an equally vital role. Although Europe has long been considered a powerhouse in sectors such as luxury goods, aerospace, and automotives, it is fair to argue that, currently, the continent lags behind both the United States and China in emerging high-tech industries, which could put it at a disadvantage regarding long-term economic growth and competitiveness. While the United States and China have been engaging actively in technological innovation, Europe has been relatively slow in embracing digital transformation and automation, and it faces multifaceted

---

<sup>25</sup> “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe,” *European Union Global Strategy*, June 2016. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> “A European Defence Fund: €5.5 billion per year to boost Europe's defence capabilities,” *European Commission*, June 7, 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_17\\_1508](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_1508).

challenges in attracting venture capital investment in innovative start-ups.<sup>27</sup> In applying de Gaulle's vision of European cooperation to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century context, it becomes evident that besides military collaboration, European states also need to address the continent's fragmented tech ecosystem and foster intergovernmental cooperation in developing cutting-edge technologies, in an effort to buttress their collective security backed by renewed military and economic strengths.

### **The Return of War in Europe**

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, marking the outbreak of the first major war on European soil since WWII. In this context, de Gaulle's emphasis on the need for a comprehensive pan-European security framework becomes imperatively relevant. At the peak of Soviet power during the Cold War, when Moscow's influence stretched across the Eurasian continent, he regarded the formation of a strong Western European bloc centred on Franco-German partnership as the key to creating a new East-West equilibrium in Europe. A genuine pan-European security system, as de Gaulle considered, could not be established without the active participation of Germany.<sup>28</sup> Three days after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, in a speech delivered to the Bundestag, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared a *zeitenwende*, or "turning point," in German foreign policy, announcing that Germany would invest a 100-billion-euro fund to modernize its military forces after decades of cautious defence spending.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, so far, the ongoing war in Ukraine has underlined

---

<sup>27</sup> Christine Ockrent, "Europe, Chine, États-Unis face au contrôle de l'intelligence artificielle," May 13, 2023, in *Affaires étrangères*, produced by Radio France, podcast, MP3 audio, 59:00, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/affaires-etrangeres/europe-chine-etats-unis-face-au-contrôle-de-l-intelligence-artificielle-4793533>.

<sup>28</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 172.

<sup>29</sup> "Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin," *Federal Government of Germany*, February 27, 2022.

to what extent Germany depends on the United States: not only did Berlin reaffirm its commitment to NATO by purchasing American F-35 fighter jets, but it also decided to construct liquified natural gas terminals, enabling Germany to buy gas from the United States rather than Russia in the future. In the face of Russian antagonism, Washington hopes that the situation in Ukraine will bring about a renewal, or even an expansion, of the United States' democratic alliances that have upheld the U.S.-led international order, further binding Europe to the United States while putting Russia in check.<sup>30</sup> According to the *National Defence Strategy* released by the White House in October 2022, "We are leading a united, principled, and resolute response to Russia's invasion and we have rallied the world to support the Ukrainian people as they bravely defend their country."<sup>31</sup> In the eyes of many Western observers, Washington's response to the war constitutes a significant foreign policy victory and a clear sign that U.S. foreign policy is on the right track.

Take a step back from that mood of triumphalism, however, and that rosy vision becomes less clear. One year on, it is fair to say that although the West's core coalition in support of Ukraine remains solid, it has largely failed to win over the rest of the world. It is true that at the beginning of the war, the West took pride in the fact that 141 countries supported a UN resolution demanding an unconditional Russian withdrawal, as opposed to 47 abstentions and 5 rejections. Nevertheless, most non-Western countries that initially condemned Russia have not

---

<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

<sup>30</sup> Kevin Liptak, "Biden arrives in Europe to keep allies united against Russia as a grinding war in Ukraine takes its toll," *CNN*, June 25, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/25/politics/what-to-watch-from-biden-at-the-g7-and-nato/index.html>

<sup>31</sup> "2022 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America," *U.S. Department of Defence*, October 27, 2022. <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

followed up with sanctions; instead, they have increasingly shifted toward a neutral stance.<sup>32</sup> This trend is evident across Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, where even countries with strong ties to Europe and the United States now consider the war as primarily a problem for the West, rather than a global threat. They often position themselves as neutral bystanders, aiming to preserve maximum options in their foreign policies.<sup>33</sup> For example, Turkey, despite its selling of weapons to Ukraine, has also significantly increased its flow of goods to Russia, in defiance of the West's economic sanctions aiming at undermining Moscow's ability to sustain the war. "We have always maintained a policy of balance between Ukraine and Russia," stated the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, six months after Turkey sided with the United States in opposing Moscow's invasion.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, with the retreat of Western capital and investment, Russia is actively seeking to trade more with the global South and reorient its natural gas pipeline infrastructure toward Asia, enabling a dramatic boost in oil and gas exports to markets such as China and India. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, those "neutral" countries (either officially or unofficially) now encompass roughly two-thirds of the world's population. They do not represent some form of autocratic alliance, though. They include several notable democracies, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa.<sup>35</sup> This fact again validates de Gaulle's theory that national interests, rather than rigid adherence to ideology, are the decisive factor in international relations.

---

<sup>32</sup> Josh Holder, Lauren Leatherby, Anton Troianovski, and Weiyi Cai, "The West Tried to Isolate Russia. It Didn't Work," *The New York Times*, February 24, 2023. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/23/world/russia-ukraine-geopolitics.html?\\_ga=2.186613673.1452981931.1689200214-947409819.1689200214](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/23/world/russia-ukraine-geopolitics.html?_ga=2.186613673.1452981931.1689200214-947409819.1689200214).

<sup>33</sup> Matias Spektor, "In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).

<sup>34</sup> Holder, Leatherby, Troianovski, and Cai, "The West Tried to Isolate Russia."

<sup>35</sup> David Miliband, "The World Beyond Ukraine: The Survival of the West and the Demands of the Rest," *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 3 (May/June 2023).

The West might easily criticize this rationale for neutrality as an implicit defence of Russia or an excuse to justify territorial aggression. Russia's attack against Ukraine is without doubt a violation of the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and of international humanitarian law.<sup>36</sup> Across the global South, leaders know that Moscow's war conduct has been violent and ruthless, and their position as neutral bystanders does not necessarily mean that they endorse the Russian aggression.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, they remain sceptical about Washington's narrative of its support for Ukraine as championing a "world of democracy." For decades, countries in the global South have witnessed powerful Western countries repeatedly trampling on their own "rules-based" international order in pursuit of self-serving geopolitical agendas.<sup>38</sup> Critics point to the United States' past record of reckless military adventures, such as wars in Vietnam and Iraq, to argue that hypocrisy, rather than principle, is driving U.S. foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Many also see that the Western media exhibit far more compassion for the victims of the Ukrainian war than for the victims of other wars. According to UN reports, compared with 81 million people in humanitarian need a decade ago, there are around 350 million globally today, including those caught in crises in Ethiopia, Syria, and Yemen. As of 2023, more than 600 million Africans still lack access to electricity.<sup>40</sup> Over the past three decades, a period that the West considers as one of relative peace and prosperity, countless individuals in the global South have been enduring the grim reality of poverty, brutality, or war on a daily basis.<sup>41</sup> Alienated and

---

<sup>36</sup> Bilahari Kausikan, "Navigating the New Age of Great-Power Competition: Statecraft in the Shadow of the U.S.-Chinese Rivalry," *Foreign Affairs*, April 11, 2023. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X\\_f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72IBoCJfYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OIBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X_f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72IBoCJfYQAvD_BwE).

<sup>37</sup> Nirupama Rao, "The Upside of Rivalry: India's Great-Power Opportunity," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).

<sup>38</sup> Rao, "The Upside of Rivalry."

<sup>39</sup> Spektor, "In Defense of the Fence Sitters."

<sup>40</sup> Miliband, "The World Beyond Ukraine."

<sup>41</sup> Kausikan, "Navigating the New Age of Great-Power Competition."

resentful, numerous developing countries increasingly feel reluctant to take a side in the ongoing Ukrainian war, as they consider the prolonged conflict, along with the United States' rivalry with China, as distracting from pressing issues central to their daily life, such as food insecurity, social inequality, and climate vulnerability. In a way that resonates with de Gaulle's vision of a balanced international order characterized by the coexistence of multipolar centres of power, many countries in the global South now do not consider a total Russian defeat as desirable, since a broken Russia would create a massive power vacuum potentially destabilizing regions far beyond Europe.<sup>42</sup> As one notable Chinese foreign policy strategist points out, "the United States is not declining, but it is only good at talking to Western countries. The big difference between now and the Cold War is that then the West was very effective at mobilizing developing countries against the Soviet Union in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa."<sup>43</sup> At the Munich Security Conference of February 2023, Macron stated in front of a group of Western leaders and diplomats, "I am struck by how we have lost the trust of the global South."<sup>44</sup> He is correct.

According to some analysts, while Western military support for Ukraine remains solid, the ongoing war represents, in essence, a second-order issue in Washington's grand global strategy.<sup>45</sup> The war poses no existential threat to the United States itself, which is located thousands of miles away from the battlefield. Washington has made clear that it would refrain from direct involvement in the fighting, and Biden has so far resisted the pressure to supply Ukraine with long-range ammunition capable of reaching Russian territory, which could lead to a broader military escalation and potentially a disastrous nuclear showdown between NATO allies

---

<sup>42</sup> Spektor, "In Defense of the Fence Sitters."

<sup>43</sup> Mark Leonard, "China is Ready for a World of Disorder: America Is Not," *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 4 (July/August 2023).

<sup>44</sup> Miliband, "The World Beyond Ukraine."

<sup>45</sup> Kausikan, "Navigating the New Age of Great-Power Competition"; Miliband, "The World Beyond Ukraine."

and Russia.<sup>46</sup> In the eyes of American policymakers, their first-order concern is China, which remains “the most consequential strategic competitor” for the United States in the decades to come, as stated in the *National Defence Strategy*.<sup>47</sup> This implies that the war might not stop Washington’s long-term pivot to Asia, a foreign policy shift that first occurred during Obama’s presidency.<sup>48</sup> As China continues to ascend toward superpower status, and as the United States’ global supremacy relatively declines, some observers predict that Washington might be increasingly compelled to concentrate its finite resources on the Asia-Pacific region to assert its interests *vis-à-vis* a rising China, a long-term trend unlikely to reverse with the Ukrainian crisis.<sup>49</sup>

### **What Comes After?**

In the near future, Europe will likely face some serious geopolitical quandaries. For example, after the war in Ukraine is over, ideally with negotiated peace terms, should the EU continue to shut off all relations with Russia or reinstate a constructive dialogue, at least on a limited scale? Is it possible for European states to find a balance between the United States and China? And should Europe strive for greater autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world or keep relying on the United States’ security guarantee regardless of Washington’s partisan divisions?<sup>50</sup> So far, the situation in Ukraine has propelled Europe to stand more firmly with the United States and has given rise to levels of cooperation not seen since the end of the Cold War.

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “2022 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America,” *U.S. Department of Defence*, October 27, 2022. <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Leonard, “The Real End of Pax Americana: Germany and Japan Are Changing – and So Is the Postwar Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2022-06-13/real-end-pax-americana>.

<sup>49</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro and Derek Scissors, “China Hasn’t Reached the Peak of Its Power: Why Beijing Can Afford to Bide Its Time,” *Foreign Affairs* 101, vol. 4 (July/August 2022); Leonard, “The Real End of Pax Americana.”

<sup>50</sup> Radek Sikorski, “Europe’s Real Test Is Yet to Come: Will the Continent Ever Get Serious About Its Own Security?,” *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 4 (July/August 2023).

In the heat of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the world was seemingly on the verge of a full-scale nuclear war, de Gaulle also declared his unconditional support for Washington.

According to him, the ongoing Soviet menace justified solidarity between the United States and the European allies.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, he believed that it should not exempt Europe from being prepared to take charge of its own fate: France “should maintain an alliance with America in which, in the North Atlantic, both are interested so long as the Soviet threat remains”; but eventually “Europe must assume its share of responsibility... A European Europe means that it exists by itself for itself, in other words in the midst of the world it has its own policy.”<sup>52</sup>

In June 2023, The European Council on Foreign Relations [ECFR], a pan-European think tank, published an extensive opinion poll, which offers some valuable insights into European citizens’ perspectives on their place in the world today and their vision for Europe’s future strategic relationships with other major powers. The poll was conducted across 11 EU countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden – with a margin of error of up to two percentage points.<sup>53</sup> According to the finding, almost two-thirds of respondents currently consider Russia as a “rival” or “adversary” in the context of the Ukrainian war; nevertheless, 50% or more also express the desire for the EU to restore at least a certain level of diplomatic ties with Moscow if the war concludes with negotiated peace.<sup>54</sup> On the question of China, surprisingly, the prevailing view in 7 out of 11 countries surveyed is that China remains Europe’s “necessary partner,” despite the ongoing war

---

<sup>51</sup> Garret Martin, *General de Gaulle’s Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books), 19.

<sup>52</sup> Roy C. Macridis, *De Gaulle: Implacable Ally* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 165.

<sup>53</sup> Jana Puglierin, Pawel Zerka, “Maintenir les États-Unis à proximité, la Chine à distance et la Russie affaiblie : Comment les Européens évoluent dans un monde compétitif,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, June 7, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Steven Erlanger, “Europeans Now See Russia as an Adversary, but Not China,” *The New York Times*, June 7, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/07/world/europe/europe-russia-china-poll.html#:~:text=At%20the%20same%20time%2C%20Russia,posed%20in%20a%202021%20poll.>

and Moscow's ever closer relations with Beijing. The poll also indicates that majorities in all 11 countries prefer to remain neutral if there were to be a military confrontation between Washington and Beijing.<sup>55</sup> In terms of the United States, a significant majority of 75% of participants view it as either an "ally" or a "necessary partner." Nevertheless, looking forward, 74% agree that Europe's reliance on the United States will not be sustainable in the long run, whereas less than 10% believe that Washington will always protect Europe, underlining the imperative for European states to strengthen their collective defence capabilities.<sup>56</sup> The findings of ECFR's latest poll reveal that in various ways, many European citizens seem to implicitly concur that the global geopolitical landscape is inevitably moving toward a period of multipolar competition and cooperation. Accordingly, Europe as a whole needs to conceive a more balanced approach to foreign policy in adapting to this reality, aligning with de Gaulle's vision of a stronger Europe capable of safeguarding its own security and navigating its own fate in a complex world.

Fulfilling the potential of an integrated Franco-German cooperation as the nucleus of a resurgent Europe remained the cornerstone of de Gaulle's geopolitical vision, which, as he anticipated, would empower the continent to better balance Russian influence in the East and give rise to a new power equilibrium on the world stage. As he told his confidant, Alain Peyrefitte, "it is important for (West) Germany to understand that its destiny is Europe, and Europe is mainly its union with France."<sup>57</sup> According to Mark Leonard, director of the ECFR, the majority of Germans today have doubts about their long-term dependability on the United States

---

<sup>55</sup> Jakob Hanke Vela and Nicolas Camus, "Most Europeans agree with Macron on China and US, report shows," *Politico*, June 7, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/74-percent-of-europeans-agree-with-french-president-emmanuel-macron-on-china-us-defense-report-shows/>; Fareed Zakaria, "The rest of the world doesn't see China the same way we do," *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/06/09/europe-asia-china-policy-trade/>;

<sup>56</sup> Vela and Camus, "Most Europeans agree with Macron."

<sup>57</sup> Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle : vol. 2* (Paris: Edition de Fallois : Fayard, 1997), Meeting on 25 June 1963, 26.

for national security. As he notes, a mid-2022 poll indicates that 56% of German respondents expect that China will supersede the United States as the world's most powerful country within a decade, and that 60% believe that Germany cannot permanently rely on the United States and therefore should commit to European defence.<sup>58</sup> As of 2023, no one can say with absolute certainty whether China will surpass the United States within a specific timeframe, given the intricate nature of global politics and the interplay of unpredictable variables. What matters is that with the return of power politics, the Europeans are awakening to the importance of taking more direct responsibility for their fate in an age of geopolitical uncertainty. "Germans are fortunate to have Biden in the White House, but Germany needs to have a plan B in case there are big changes to American politics," Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German ambassador to the United States, told Leonard. Ischinger also believes that Germany should now look into the possibility of seeking a nuclear guarantee from France, an idea that would have been unthinkable not so long ago.<sup>59</sup> As de Gaulle considered it, states are the ultimate actors capable of acting efficiently in pursuing their collective goals in international cooperation. In the past, a key barrier to the formation of a common European defence industry was internal foreign policy divergences; yet, unexpectedly Russia's war has brought European states closer together. "If this convergence holds, one could see a real European strategic alignment, backed eventually by a European armaments industry and even conceivably by a more common European nuclear deterrent (or at least a willingness by France to share its deterrent)", writes Leonard.<sup>60</sup>

For all the talk about the possibility of European "strategic autonomy," ultimately it is up to the Europeans to decide whether they are willing to take their fate into their own hands in a

---

<sup>58</sup> Leonard, "The Real End of Pax Americana."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

world of increasing uncertainty. Meanwhile, American policymakers have a similar choice to make: faced with growing geopolitical challenges around the globe, do they wish to uphold a fragile, divided continent that largely relies on Washington for defence? Or would they rather have a stronger Europe as an equal partner capable of protecting its own collective security? Above all, both European and American leaders should adjust their expectations to a realistic level: getting Europe to do more in self-defence is a noble goal, but it could take years, or even decades, to get there.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, the project of European military investment is not aimed at geopolitical domination; instead, its primary objectives should be to safeguard interests vital to Europe's future and to maintain a secure environment conducive to the prosperity and well-being of European nations. In the short term, a more independent Europe could mean headaches for the United States, since the two sides' strategic interests might not always align, but it is the price one pays for competent, serious allies. As de Gaulle once said, a nation "can help another, but it cannot identify itself with another."<sup>62</sup> If European states could take more direct responsibilities for themselves, the transatlantic alliance would not disintegrate but morph into a more cooperative relationship defined by shared leadership. As de Gaulle probably would have suggested, rather than giving in to nostalgia, leaders on both sides of the Atlantic should now start an honest examination of the new global reality – the first step toward the construction of a more cooperative, mature, and forward-looking transatlantic partnership.

### **De Gaulle and the Return of History: A Conclusion**

With his conviction that national realities would always linger and prevail over transient ideologies, de Gaulle asserted that lasting international orders could not be built upon ideas and

---

<sup>61</sup> Polyakova and Haddad, "Europe Alone."

<sup>62</sup> O'Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 81.

institutions alone. The great misconception of the present era has been the belief that the advent of a liberal international order must be the natural end of human evolution, an attractive vision born in the Enlightenment worldview on the inevitability of social progress. Under this logic, liberal democracy triumphed over fascism in the Second World War, followed by another victory over communism in the Cold War, simply because at the end of the day, liberalism offers *the* correct answer to historical advancement.<sup>63</sup> With hindsight, this narrative has proved to be a myth because there is no end of the day. This is not to deny the innate virtue in liberal democracy, which appeals to a powerful and noble human instinct: the aspiration for freedom of thought and personal autonomy. But the rise of the liberal international order was not the inevitable unfolding of anything. Viewed from de Gaulle's lens of nation-states as the primary actors in the global arena, one can argue that this order was largely the product of a unique set of geopolitical circumstances contingent on particular historical developments: with the end of the Cold War, the United States stood alone as the only superpower, which overwhelmingly tilted the balance of power toward those countries in favour of liberal ideas.<sup>64</sup>

Today, a new configuration of global power is taking shape, with the re-emergence of great powers outside the West's sphere of influence. In various ways, de Gaulle's realist insights and foreign policies continue to resonate in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitical context, positioning him as a visionary statesman ahead of his time. His belief in the multipolarity of nation-states remains relevant as one witnesses the changing dynamics of global power configuration over the past three decades, as evident in Russia's reassertion of power, China's rise as a global player, and various non-Western nations' aspiration for autonomy. Meanwhile, just as de Gaulle warned

---

<sup>63</sup> Kagan, *The Return of History*, 102-103.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends: The Unravelling of American Power," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (July/August 2020).

against the dangers of unchecked military intervention, the United States has encountered challenges similar to the Vietnam War in its post-Cold War military adventures, leading to a reassessment of its interventionist approach and a renewed focus on diplomacy and multilateral cooperation. Also, in the context of rising competition between Washington and Beijing, de Gaulle's advocacy for East-West *détente* again provides valuable insights into how to seek shared interests and cultivate peaceful coexistence with one's strategic rival in an increasingly complex yet interconnected world. Moreover, as Europe grapples with shifts in the global power balance, uncertainties in transatlantic relations, and emerging security threats, de Gaulle's call for European nations to forge their own path and take more responsibility for their collective defence foreshadows the ongoing debate on bolstering Europe's role in international affairs. All these examples effectively highlight the enduring significance of de Gaulle's ideas in shaping prudent and efficient foreign policies in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Seen from this angle, one can say that his forward-thinking perspectives and actions set him apart as a statesman who had anticipated and addressed future challenges before they fully emerged.

Given the return of great-power rivalry in the present day, it is not hard to imagine a future when China, Russia, Europe, the United States, and other emerging regional powers such as India and Brazil, for example, each might bring forth its own set of rules in a multipolar world. With his existential view of historical *longue durée*, de Gaulle seems to have suggested to us that, although the settings and main actors might change, the essence of global geopolitics has remained unchanged throughout history. In many ways, de Gaulle taught us that our present and our future are inseparable from our past; hence, one could not simply construct an artificial "new world order" in a historical vacuum. This principle was present in his foreign policy, which aimed at engaging with the eternal, the political realities, rather than transient ideologies. Given

his emphasis on the multipolarity of nation-states and the significance of *détente*, perhaps de Gaulle would also have indicated that the defining struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not about an ideological combat of “democracy versus autocracy.” Rather, it would be about how nations around the globe, while acknowledging the unique identity, characteristics, and strength of one another, could actively seek mutual understanding and foster inter-state cooperation, in an effort to build a shared future for humanity.

## Conclusion: Back to the Future

The French philosopher and writer Albert Camus once remarked that the cities of Europe are burdened with the weight of history: “they are too full of the din of the past.”<sup>1</sup> For the existentialists, that is, the conventional existentialists who explore issues regarding human individuals, history is an ineluctable force that shapes the human being’s essence and drives the human will. For a “national existentialist” like de Gaulle, history exerts the same enduring and haunting effect that forges the essence of nations, which “remain themselves with their own characteristics, their collective temperament, their soul. They live as long as the olive tree.”<sup>2</sup> Or, as Kissinger summarizes, “for nations, history plays the role that character confers on human beings.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, in the eyes of de Gaulle, France existed as a national individual with an identity shaped by the depth of its past. As he saw it, nations are both historical and contemporary entities whose very existence is a reverberation of their own past, and no ideological force can forever subjugate them.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the only authentic actors within any international order, according to de Gaulle, are nation-states.

It was under this logic that, despite the communist shadows in the Cold War, de Gaulle saw beyond such ideological illusion and developed a foreign policy that corresponded with political realities: Russia, China, and Vietnam, for example, still appeared to him as individual nations built upon concrete history, culture, language, and tradition. They were driven by the same logic of concern over security, rather than simply by communist ideology.<sup>5</sup> With his belief

---

<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, ‘The minotaur or the Stop in Oran’, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin, 1975), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Julian Jackson, *Charles de Gaulle* (London: Haus Publishing, 2003), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London: Penguin, 2014), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Graham O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference* (Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 60.

<sup>5</sup> O’Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 184.

in the significance of nation-states, de Gaulle deemed the communist alliance as an international chimera that lacked any tangible grounding in history, and he saw the Cold War as nothing more than a temporary state of affairs. As he considered it, a true global equilibrium necessitated the participation of all nation-states and should not depend exclusively on decisions made by two opposing superpowers.<sup>6</sup> This is precisely why de Gaulle refused to conduct French foreign policy through the prism of East-West conflict. On one hand, he strived to recover France's stature as an independent power and to put forward a strong, united Europe as an equal to the United States; on the other, he strove to foster a meaningful rapprochement with the communist bloc and to bring about the prospect of an East-West *détente*. His foreign policies toward both the West and the East were, in essence, two sides of the same coin, with the common goal of overcoming the Cold War bipolar division based on ideological rivalry, thereby giving rise to a more balanced multipolar order that would again respond to the diversity of nation-states.<sup>7</sup>

Given his conviction of the enduring power of national history, culture, and aspiration, it would be fair to argue that “novelty” represented an abstract concept for de Gaulle. According to him, throughout history, the concern over security and the accumulation of influence have always been the main factors driving the evolving dynamics in global affairs. Thus, the Cold War international system, despite its ideological forces and communist rhetoric, was not truly a “break” from the past, except that great-power rivalry was limited to two superpowers only. Likewise, in the post-Cold War era, the United States' wish to usher in a “new world order” would probably appear as another passing cloud in the eyes of de Gaulle. Interpreting it through his lens of nation-states as the enduring entities on the world stage, one could say that the post-

---

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Garret Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 5-6.

1989 international order is not some sort of inevitable end point of historical evolution; rather it is an artificial creation made possible by a temporary pause in great-power rivalry. Today, with the rising influence of nation-states outside the Western orbit, a different configuration of power is again increasingly producing a new kind of international order that resembles an old one, wherein great powers strive to safeguard their national security and compete for spheres of influence and regional pre-eminence.<sup>8</sup>

While various world leaders seem to agree that the post-Cold War order defined by liberal internationalism is coming to an end, for better or worse, they are placing their bets on very different successors to that order. In the eyes of American policymakers, the geopolitical comeback necessitates revitalizing U.S.-led alliances and institutions from the Cold War era that had contributed to Washington's victory against the Soviet Union. This perhaps entails updating the rules of the U.S.-led liberal international order, incorporating new participants into its democratic alliances, and strategically isolating Washington's competitors, as evident in the Biden administration's public discourse on "democracy versus autocracy." In contrast, various nations outside the West seem convinced that the world is inevitably moving toward a multipolar future. Given the continual economic and demographic shifts to the global South, where countries aspire for greater autonomy and exhibit more nuanced political judgement, some observers argue that Washington's current strategy will not prove sustainable in the long run if it merely attempts to resurrect a vanished world order, particularly Cold War-style blocs based on ideological rivalry. Such an approach clashes with the aspirations of numerous developing nations worldwide, since many hold painful memories of the Cold War era, during which their

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 9-10.

sovereignty was constantly squeezed by superpower showdowns.<sup>9</sup> With his realist insights, notably his emphasis on national interest over ideology, perhaps de Gaulle might have suggested to contemporary Western policymakers that, to succeed in an evolving world driven by a range of complex geopolitical dynamics, the West should learn to move beyond the Cold War myopia that often narrows the spectrum of international relations to a strict binary between friendship and total rivalry. As the rest of the world rises, and as Western superiority comparatively wanes, this basic geopolitical reality requires a more subtle, sophisticated strategy of engaging with the world. Such a strategy should be based on prioritization of objectives, not total dominance; on reasonable trade-offs, not intransigence; on the integration of military and economic strength with diplomacy, not reckless force; and on peaceful coexistence with peoples and cultures that the West can neither change nor neglect, not ideological rigidity.<sup>10</sup>

Given his existential concept that the essence of world order has somehow remained unchanged throughout history, we come to see de Gaulle's worldview as distinctly pessimistic in nature, in contrast to our modern assumption of the inevitability of progress.<sup>11</sup> Historians have often depicted the history of Western societies as a linear advancement based on a carefully selected set of facts, jumping from Athenian democracy to the birth of Christianity, from the Renaissance to the Reformation, from the Scientific Revolution to the Age of Enlightenment, and from the Industrial Revolution to the "death of God." Yet this grand narrative of successive golden ages downplays the grim reality that recorded human history going back thousands of

---

<sup>9</sup> Mark Leonard, "China is Ready for a World of Disorder: America Is Not," *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 4 (July/August 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Justin Winokur, "The Cold War Trap: How the Memory of America's Era of Dominance Stunts U.S. Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 13, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/cold-war-trap-america-foreign-policy#:~:text=Cold%20War%20history%20has%20become,even%20how%20they%20analyze%20problems.>

<sup>11</sup> O'Dwyer, *Charles de Gaulle*, 190.

years has always been rife with wars, tyrannies, and brutalities.<sup>12</sup> To name a few examples, how do the First World War, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the nuclear warfare of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fit into the tale of historical progress? After all, it was exactly our scientific breakthroughs that produced the greatest destruction in the history of mankind, and the leading actors in the above-mentioned horrors were exactly the world's most advanced, civilized, and allegedly enlightened nations.<sup>13</sup> History has taught us that socio-economic progress and the expansion of knowledge, although capable of raising our material living standards, have resulted in no fundamental change to human behaviour and instead have often produced the worst forms of evil. Today, humanity confronts an array of common global challenges, such as climate change, infectious diseases, nuclear proliferation, and unregulated development in artificial intelligence, a technology that holds the theoretical risk of surpassing human intelligence, leading to potential security threats if it becomes uncontrollable. These risky factors could conspire to threaten the future of humanity, either by a large-scale accident or by deliberate misuse.<sup>14</sup> With this daunting prospect in mind, we might well ask: has mankind *really* marched forward so far? Does history even have a purpose after all?

It would be delightful if, decades from now, future historians ridiculed or dismissed this essay's misplaced warning of doom, but that would require wisdom of the world leaders in managing the collision of old-fashioned power politics and the above-mentioned emerging global challenges.<sup>15</sup> Despite his understanding of geopolitics as pessimistic in nature, de Gaulle was convinced that political differences should not impede inter-state cooperation if that suited the

---

<sup>12</sup> Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back*, 3-6.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 103-104.

<sup>14</sup> William Macaskill, "The Beginning of History: Surviving the Era of Catastrophic Risk." *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5 (September/October 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Haass, "The Dangerous Decade: A Foreign Policy for a World in Crisis." *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5 (September/October 2022).

interests of both parties. That was why, despite his opposition to communism, he called for dialogue with countries behind the Iron Curtain many times during his presidency and refused to regard all international relations through the lens of ideological rivalry.<sup>16</sup> Today, in a world shaped by ever-evolving geopolitical dynamics, de Gaulle's ideas again shed light on the reality of our future: nation-states will remain as the primary actors in international relations, often with divergent interests and aspirations. Nevertheless, this situation also highlights the significance of constructive dialogue between them, in an effort to seek mutual understanding and avert geopolitical miscalculations that could provoke a global catastrophe. Moreover, deep inside, perhaps various world leaders may be aware that it is indeed in their interests to collaborate on a myriad of shared challenges central to the contemporary era, notably global warming, pandemics, nuclear proliferation, and technological regulation, which transcend national boundaries and require collective efforts. Amidst the convergence of traditional geopolitics and new global issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, de Gaulle's diplomatic legacy again reminds us of the vital importance for nation-states worldwide to transcend their ideological differences, foster cooperation on areas of common interest, and aim for a shared future for humanity. In explaining his diplomatic goal of overcoming the bipolar division of his time, de Gaulle once told his confidant, Alain Peyrefitte, that the universe should not "be divided into haves and have-nots" – ultimately "the whole world is part of a common civilization."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Martin, *General de Gaulle's Cold War*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle : vol. 2* (Paris : Edition de Fallois : Fayard, 1997), Meeting on 11 March 1964, 472.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

“A European Defence Fund: €5.5 billion per year to boost Europe's defence capabilities.”

*European Commission*, June 7, 2017.

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_17\\_1508](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_1508).

Alphand, Hervé. *L'étonnement d'être: journal, 1939-1973*. Paris : Fayard, 1977.

“Bucharest Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008.” *NATO*, April 3, 2008. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm).

Bush, George H.W. “Toward a New World Order.” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 1:3 (1990): 91.

Callender, Harold. "Britain, France Reaffirm Solidarity on Suez Crisis." *The Globe and Mail*, Sep 28, 1956. <https://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/historical-newspapers/britain-france-reaffirm-solidarity-on-suez-crisis/docview/1289436514/se-2?accountid=14846>.

Couve de Murville, Maurice. *Le Monde en Face: Entretiens avec Maurice Delarue*. Paris: Plon, 1989.

Couve de Murville, Maurice. *Une politique étrangère (1958-1969)*. Paris: Plon, 1971.

“CPI 2022 - Corruption Perceptions Index.” *Transparency International*, January 31, 2023. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

De Boissieu, Alain. *Pour servir le Général*. Paris: Plon, 1982.

De Gaulle, Charles. *Discours et messages, vol. 2, Dans l'attente*. Paris: Plon, 1970.

De Gaulle, Charles. *Discours et messages, vol. 5, Vers le terme 1966-1969*. Paris: Plon, 1970.

De Gaulle, Charles. *Lettres, Notes et Carnets: Tome X*. Paris: Plon, 1980.

De Gaulle, Charles. *Major Addresses, Statements and Press Conferences of General Charles de Gaulle, May 10, 1958 – January 31, 1964*. New York: French Embassy, 1964.

De Gaulle, Charles. *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavour*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.

De Gaulle, Charles. *War Memoirs: The Call to Honour, 1940-1942*. London: Collins, 1955.

- “Excerpt of President Kennedy at Independence Hall, 4 July 1962.” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, accessed March 1, 2021.  
<https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-at-independence-hall>.
- Gilley, Bruce, and Andrew J. Nathan. *China’s New Rulers: The Secret Files*. New York: New York Review Books, 2002.
- “Interview de M. François Mitterrand, Président de la République, dans ‘L’Express’ du 4 septembre 1987, sur le général de Gaulle.” *l’Élysée*, September 4, 1987.  
<https://www.elysee.fr/francois-mitterrand/1987/09/04/interview-de-m-francois-mitterrand-president-de-la-republique-dans-lexpress-du-4-septembre-1987-sur-le-general-de-gaulle>.
- “John F. Kennedy’s Speech at the Berlin Wall.” NBC News Learn, published on May 18, 2020, YouTube video, 4:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBQvKXIDIuc>.
- Kennan, George F. “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947).
- Kennedy, John F. “Commencement Address at American University, Washington, D.C., June 10, 1963.” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-university-19630610>.
- Kissinger, Henry. *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979.
- Leonard, Mark and Nicu Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations.” Report by the European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007.
- Malraux, André. *Felled Oaks: Conversation with De Gaulle*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.
- “Military expenditure (% of GDP) – China.” *World Bank Open Data*, n.d.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=CN>.
- Millis, Walter, ed. *The Forestal Diaries*. New York: Viking, 1951.
- Nixon, Richard. *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978.
- “Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/nuclear-test-ban-treaty>.

Peyrefitte, Alain. *C'était de Gaulle : vol. 1*. Paris: Edition de Fallois: Fayard, 1997.

Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle : vol. 2*. Paris: Edition de Fallois: Fayard, 1997.

“Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin.” *Federal Government of Germany*, February 27, 2022. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

Puglierin, Jana, and Pawel Zerka, “Maintenir les États-Unis à proximité, la Chine à distance et la Russie affaiblie : Comment les Européens évoluent dans un monde compétitif.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, June 7, 2023.

“The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950.” *The European Union*, accessed March 1, 2021, [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en).

“Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe.” *European Union Global Strategy*, June 2016. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf).

Sulzberger, Cyrus L. *An Age of Mediocrity: Memoirs and Diaries, 1963-1972*. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

Sulzberger, Cyrus L. *The Last of the Giants*. New York: Macmillan, 1970.

Tyler, Patrick E. “Excerpts From Pentagon’s Plan: ‘Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival.’” *The New York Times*, March 8, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/excerpts-from-pentagon-s-plan-prevent-the-re-emergence-of-a-new-rival.html>.

“Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call.” *BBC*, February 7, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>

“Vive le Québec libre Charles de Gaulle.” *Radio Canada International*, published on June 21, 2017, YouTube video, 8:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwRYadgGxRM>.

“2022 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America.” *U.S. Department of Defence*, October 27, 2022. <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

## Secondary Sources

- Ahrens Dorf, Peter J., and Thomas L. Pangle. *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999.
- Aimaq, Jasmine. *For Europe or Empire? French Colonial Ambitions and the European Army Plan*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
- Allin, Dana. "De Gaulle and American Power." In Benjamin Rowland, ed., *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas*, 36-51. Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Andreu, Joseph Maria Castellà, and Marco Antonio Simonelli, *Populism and Contemporary Democracy in Europe: Old Problems and New Challenges*. Barcelona: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022.
- Ash, Timothy Garton. "It's the Kultur, Stupid." *New York Review of Books*, December 7, 2017.
- Beisner, Robert L. *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Bernard, Philippe. "Les scénarios de l'élection de Trump et du Brexit présentent de troublantes similitudes avec le duel Macron-Le Pen." *Le Monde*, April 22, 2022.  
[https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/22/les-scenarios-de-l-election-de-trump-et-du-brexit-presentent-de-troublantes-similitudes-avec-le-duel-macron-le-pen\\_6123324\\_6059010.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/22/les-scenarios-de-l-election-de-trump-et-du-brexit-presentent-de-troublantes-similitudes-avec-le-duel-macron-le-pen_6123324_6059010.html)
- Bolger, Leah, David Vine and Patterson Deppen. "Drawdown: Improving U.S. and Global Security Through Military Base Closures Abroad." *Quincy Brief*, no. 16 (September 2021), 1-22.
- Bown, Chad P., and Douglas A. Irwin, "Trump's Assault on the Global Trading System." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (September/October 2019).
- Bozo, Frédéric, and Maurice Vaisse, eds. *L'Europe et la Crise de Cuba*. Paris: A. Colin, 1993.
- Bozo, Frédéric. *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001.
- Bradsher, Keith, and Agnes Chang. "Can the World Make an Electric Car Battery Without China?" *The New York Times*, May 16, 2023.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/05/16/business/china-ev-battery.html>.

- Cai, Weiyi, Josh Holder, Lauren Leatherby and Anton Troianovski. "The West Tried to Isolate Russia. It Didn't Work." *The New York Times*, February 24, 2023. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/23/world/russia-ukraine-geopolitics.html?\\_ga=2.186613673.1452981931.1689200214-947409819.1689200214](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/23/world/russia-ukraine-geopolitics.html?_ga=2.186613673.1452981931.1689200214-947409819.1689200214).
- Camus, Albert, and Justin O'Brian. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin, 1975.
- Camus, Nicolas, and Jakob Hanke Vela. "Most Europeans agree with Macron on China and US, report shows." *Politico*, June 7, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/74-percent-of-europeans-agree-with-french-president-emmanuel-macron-on-china-us-defense-report-shows/>;
- Cate, Curtis. "Charles de Gaulle: The Last Romantic." *The Atlantic* (November 1960).
- Caute, David. *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey Through 1968*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Chace, James. "1945, Year Zero." *World Policy Journal* 12:4 (Winter, 1995/1996): 61-69.
- Chen, Jian. *Mao's China and the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Chen, Zhimin. "Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy." *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 42 (February 2005), 35-53.
- Cooley, Alexander, and Daniel H. Nexon, "How Hegemony Ends: The Unravelling of American Power." *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (July/August 2020).
- Costigliola, Frank. *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992.
- Daalder, Ivo H. "Responding to Russia's Resurgence: Not Quiet on the Eastern Front." *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 6 (November/December 2017).
- Dallek, Robert. *Flawed Giant*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Debray, Régis. *Charles de Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation*. London: Verso Books, 1994.
- De la Gorce, Paul-Marie. *La France contre les Empires*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1969.
- Drezner, Daniel W. "The Most Extraordinary Op-ed of 2017." *The Washington Post*, June 1, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/06/01/the-most-extraordinary-op-ed-of-2017/>

- Drezner, Daniel W. "This Time Is Different: Why U.S. Foreign Policy Will Never Recover." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 3 (May/June 2019).
- Durandin, Catherine. *La France contre l'Amérique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994.
- Erlanger, Steven. "Europeans Now See Russia as an Adversary, but Not China." *The New York Times*, June 7, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/07/world/europe/europe-russia-china-poll.html#:~:text=At%20the%20same%20time%2C%20Russia,posed%20in%20a%202021%20poll>.
- Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty!: An American History, Volume 2: From 1865*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2017.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Avon Books, 1992.
- Garber, Theodore P., and Sarah E. Mendelson. "Failing the Stalin Test." *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006).
- Gavin, Francis. *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Giauque, 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.
- Gifford, Chris. *The Making of Eurosceptic Britain: Identity and Economy in a Post-Imperial State*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Gildea, Robert. *France since 1945*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. president talks through his hardest decisions about America's role in the world." *The Atlantic* (April 2016).
- Gordon, Philip H. *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Graham, Thomas. "Let Russia be Russia: The Case for a More Pragmatic Approach to Moscow." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 6 (November/December 2019).
- Grell-Brisk, Marilyn. "China and Global Economic Stratification in an Interdependent World."

- Palgrave Communications* 3:17087 (2017): 1-12.
- Grosser, Alfred. *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations since 1945*. New York: Continuum Pub. Co., 1980.
- Haass, Richard. "The Dangerous Decade: A Foreign Policy for a World in Crisis." *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5 (September/October 2022).
- Haddad, Benjamin, and Alina Polyakova. "Europe Alone: What Comes After the Transatlantic Alliance." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).
- Hahn, Peter L. "Securing the Middle East: The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36:1 (March 2006), 38-47.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018.
- Harrington, Daniel. *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012.
- Hoffmann, Stanley. *Decline or Renewal?: France since the 1930s*. New York: Viking Press, 1974.
- Hoopes, Townsend. *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*. Boston: Little Brown, 1973.
- Hughes, H. Stuart, and James Wilkinson. *Contemporary Europe: A History*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004.
- Jackson, Julian. *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle*. London: Allen Lane, 2018.
- Jackson, Julian. *Charles de Gaulle*. London: Haus Publishing, 2003.
- Johnson, Christopher K. "Why China Will Play It Safe: Xi Would Prefer Détente – Not War – With America." *Foreign Affairs*, November 14, 2022.  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/why-china-will-play-it-safe>.
- Jones, Alistair. *Britain and the European Union*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Kagan, Robert. *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.
- Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- Kausikan, Bilahari. "Navigating the New Age of Great-Power Competition: Statecraft in the

- Shadow of the U.S.-Chinese Rivalry.” *Foreign Affairs*, April 11, 2023.  
[https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OlBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X\\_\\_f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72lBoCJfYQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/china-great-power-competition-russia-guide?gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-7OlBhB8EiwAnoOEK2s5ku6aIMm3X__f6BqaHArJ8Bmlz-HBBkug820m3JRXkaprDM72lBoCJfYQAvD_BwE).
- Kenez, Peter. *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kirchick, James. *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.
- Kissinger, Henry. *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*. London: Penguin, 2014.
- Kohl, Wilfried. *French Nuclear Diplomacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Lacouture, Jean. *De Gaulle le souverain, 1959-1970*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986.
- Leng, Alyssa and Roland Rajah. “Chart of the week: Global trade through a US-China lens.” *The Lowy Institute*, December 18, 2019. <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chart-week-global-trade-through-us-china-lens>.
- Leonard, Mark. “China is Ready for a World of Disorder: America Is Not.” *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 4 (July/August 2023).
- Leonard, Mark. “The Real End of Pax Americana: Germany and Japan Are Changing – and So Is the Postwar Order.” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2022.  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2022-06-13/real-end-pax-americana>.
- Le Thu, Huong. “How to Survive a Great-Power Competition: Southeast Asia’s Precarious Balancing Act.” *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).
- Lind, Jennifer, and Daryl G. Press, “Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints.” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020).
- Liptak, Kevin. “Biden arrives in Europe to keep allies united against Russia as a grinding war in Ukraine takes its toll.” *CNN*, June 25, 2022.  
<https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/25/politics/what-to-watch-from-biden-at-the-g7-and-nato/index.html>

- Locher, Anna, Christian Nuenlist and Garret Martin, eds. *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Lundestad, Geir. *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Lüthi, Lorenz M. "Rearranging International Relations? How Mao's China and de Gaulle's France Recognized Each Other in 1963-1964." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16:1 (2014): 111-145.
- Macaskill, William. "The Beginning of History: Surviving the Era of Catastrophic Risk." *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 5 (September/October 2022).
- Macridis, Roy C. *De Gaulle: Implacable Ally*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Mahbubani, Kishore. "Asia's Third Way: How ASEAN Survives – and Thrives – Amid Great-Power Competition." *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 2 (March/April 2023).
- Mahbubani, Kishore. *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*. New York: Public Affairs, 2020.
- Mahoney, Daniel J. "Friendship and the Solitude of Greatness: The Case of Charles de Gaulle." *Perspectives on Political Science* 46:2 (2017): 87-92.
- Maillard, Pierre. *De Gaulle et le Problème Allemand: Les leçons d'un grand dessein*. Paris: Guibert, 2001.
- Martin, Garret. *General de Gaulle's Cold War: Challenging American Hegemony, 1963-1968*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011.
- Martin, Garret. "Playing the China Card? Revisiting France's Recognition of Communist China, 1963-1964." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:1 (2008), 52-80.
- Mastro, Oriana Skylar, and Derek Scissors, "China Hasn't Reached the Peak of Its Power: Why Beijing Can Afford to Bide Its Time." *Foreign Affairs* 101, vol. 4 (July/August 2022).
- McKay, John P., et al., *A History of Western Society, Volume C*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.
- McKercher, Brian J.C. *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship since 1941*. London; New York: Routledge, 2017.
- McWilliams, Wayne C. and Harry Piotrowski. *The World Since 1945: A History of International*

- Relations*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014.
- Mead, Walter Russell. "The Cost of Biden's 'Democracy' Fixation." *The Wallstreet Journal*, April 3, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cost-of-bidens-democracy-fixation-autocracy-summit-freedom-house-ideology-foreign-policy-middle-east-86638fc5>.
- "Merkel: Europe 'can no longer rely on allies' after Trump and Brexit." *BBC*, May 28, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40078183>.
- Miliband, David. "The World Beyond Ukraine: The Survival of the West and the Demands of the Rest." *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 3 (May/June 2023).
- Moravcsik, Andrew. "Charles de Gaulle and Europe: The New Revisionism." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no.1 (winter 2012): 56.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Newhouse, John. *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons*. New York: Viking Press, 1970.
- Ockrent, Christine. "Europe, Chine, États-Unis face au contrôle de l'intelligence artificielle." In *Affaires étrangères*, produced by *Radio France*, May 13, 2023, podcast, MP3 audio, 59:00 <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/affaires-etrangeres/europe-chine-etats-unis-face-au-controle-de-l-intelligence-artificielle-4793533>.
- O'Dwyer, Graham. *Charles de Gaulle, the International System, and the Existential Difference*. Abington, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.
- Patel, Kiran Klaus. "Provincializing European Union: Co-operation and Integration in Europe in a Historical Perspective." *Contemporary European History* 22 (2013): 649-673.
- Paxton, Robert, and Nicholas Wahl, eds. *De Gaulle and the United States, 1930-1970: a centennial reappraisal*. Oxford: Berg, 1994.
- Pearson, Jessica Lynne. "The French Empire Goes to San Francisco: The Founding of the United Nations and the Limits of Colonial Reform." *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 38:2 (2020): 35-55.
- Plokhyy, Serhii. *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Raflik, Jenny. "The Fourth Republic and NATO, 1946-1958: Alliance Partnership or

- Idiosyncratic Nationalism?" *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9:3 (2011): 207-219.
- Rao, Nirupama. "The Upside of Rivalry: India's Great-Power Opportunity." *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).
- Reyn, Sebastian. *Atlantis Lost: The American Experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011.
- Roussel, Éric. *Charles de Gaulle*. Paris: Gallimard, 2002.
- Rowland, Benjamin M., ed. *Charles de Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Schmidt, Eric. "Innovation Power: Why Technology Will Define the Future of Geopolitics." *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 2 (March/April 2023).
- Schmidt, Eric. "To Compete with China on Tech, America Needs to Fix Its Immigration System: Washington Must Make It Easier to Recruit and Retain Top Talent." *Foreign Affairs*, May 16, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/eric-schmidt-compete-china-tech-america-needs-fix-its-immigration-system#:~:text=To%20be%20able%20to%20compete,language%20models%20to%20quantum%20computers>.
- Schoenborn, Benedikt. *La mésentente apprivoisée: De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963–1969*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007.
- Sevastopulo, Demetri. "America's lopsided China strategy: military aid but not enough trade." *The Financial Times*, April 25, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/82c13d3b-5b05-4fd4-91be-373ba075db4f>.
- Sikorski, Radek. "Europe's Real Test Is Yet to Come: Will the Continent Ever Get Serious About Its Own Security?" *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 4 (July/August 2023).
- Soutou, Georges-Henri. *L'Alliance Incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands 1954–1996*. Paris: Fayard, 1996.
- Spektor, Matias. "In Defense of the Fence Sitters: What the West Gets Wrong About Hedging." *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 3 (May/June 2023).
- Sullivan, Marianna P. *France's Vietnam Policy*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Swaine, Michael D., and Ashley J. Tellis. *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy, Past, Present,*

- and Future*. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corp., 2000.
- Tellis, Ashley J. “America’s Bad Bet on India: New Delhi Won’t Side With Washington Against Beijing.” *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/americas-bad-bet-india-modi>.
- Trachtenberg, Marc. *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Trenin, Dmitri V. *Getting Russia Right*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007.
- Vaisse, Maurice. *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969*. Paris : Fayard, 1998.
- Vaisse, Maurice. “La réconciliation franco-allemande : le dialogue de Gaulle-Adenauer.” *Politique étrangère* 58:4 (Hiver 93/94): 963-972.
- Vaisse, Maurice. “Post-Suez France.” In W. Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences*, 335-340. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- Varat, Benjamin. “Point of Departure: A Reassessment of Charles de Gaulle and the Paris Summit of May 1960.” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19:1 (2008): 96-124.
- Vine, David. *The United States of War: A Global History of America’s Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020.
- Walker, Martin. “The Clinton Doctrine.” *The New Yorker* (October 7, 1996).
- Walt, Stephen M. “Liberal Illusions Caused the Ukraine Crisis.” *Foreign Policy*, January 19, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/19/ukraine-russia-nato-crisis-liberal-illusions/>.
- Wang, Dan. “China’s Hidden Tech Revolution: How Beijing Threatens U.S. Dominance.” *Foreign Affairs* 102, vol. 2 (March/April 2023).
- Wertheim, Stephen. “The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn’t Dominate the World.” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020).
- Winokur, Justin. “The Cold War Trap: How the Memory of America’s Era of Dominance Stunts U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Foreign Affairs*, July 13, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/cold-war-trap-america-foreign->

[policy#:~:text=Cold%20War%20history%20has%20become,even%20how%20they%20analyze%20problems.](#)

Wright, Thomas. *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-first Century and the Future of American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Young, John W. *France, the Cold War, and the Western Alliance, 1944-1949: French Foreign Policy and Post-War Europe*. London: Leicester University Press, 1990.

Zakaria, Fareed. "The rest of the world doesn't see China the same way we do." *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/06/09/europe-asia-china-policy-trade/>;

Zakaria, Fareed. "The Self-Destruction of American Power: Washington Squandered the Unipolar Moment." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 4 (July/August 2019).

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.