

Trial and Error: De Gaulle's Foreign Policy, 1958-1964

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ABSTRACT

Examining key events between 1958 and 1964, this report reassesses General Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy during his early years in power. De Gaulle returned to office as president aiming to restore France's *grandeur* after a humiliating Nazi occupation and subsequent troubles after 1945. Several historians have stressed that in doing so he pursued a consistent policy of pursuing French international autonomy during the Cold War, culminating in improved relations with the Soviet Union. This report argues that de Gaulle's foreign policy was in fact significantly characterized by a trial and error approach. He first attempted to reconfigure relations with the United States and Britain, and then sought to deepen relations with West Germany. De Gaulle's strong preference was towards the Western allies; it was only after these initiatives fell short that Franco-Soviet relations truly improved. The coherence of his foreign policy during this period should not be overstated.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to both of my grandfathers, Arthur and Fred, who never had the opportunity to receive a formal education, yet still understood the value of one. This is for all the long years spent at sea. You are remembered.

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List of Symbols, Nomenclature or Abbreviations

FLN – National Liberation Front; Algerian fighting force against French in Algeria

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany

GDR – German Democratic Republic, or East Germany

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

PCF – French Communist Party

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

“La France ne peut pas être la France sans la grandeur,” observed General Charles de Gaulle in his *Memoires de guerre*, written over the course of his twelve-year hiatus from the French Presidency. For de Gaulle, *grandeur* was the ability of a nation to outwardly project its power and influence around the globe, and to manipulate the international political system to one’s advantage. It may be said that *grandeur* denoted both a quality of a nation as well as a leader. In essence, it meant a nation’s ability to achieve its own goals within the international system.

France had lost its sense of *grandeur* when it was defeated and subsequently partly occupied by Nazi Germany. The unoccupied part of France, collaborationist Vichy France, also contributed to this loss, especially on the international stage. De Gaulle was determined to restore France’s standing both in the hearts of French people, as well as within the newly formed international system created by the budding Cold War. He ultimately sought to do so in a few ways, most notably through the rejection of American hegemony in Europe, attempting to establish new European security order, and overcoming Cold War boundaries. However, his path in pursuing these goals was complex; the coherence of his vision should not be overestimated. This report examines French foreign policy during the period 1958-64 to show the trajectory of de Gaulle’s foreign policy towards Western nations and how his efforts to reconfigure French relations with the United States and West Germany in particular failed. This led him to seek deeper, more stable relations with the Soviet Union as an alternative to a close partner in the west. This in turn implies that de Gaulle’s foreign policy was opportunistic in significant ways and was strongly pro-Western in his foreign policy orientation when

he took office in 1958. Though aggressive and uncompromising in his efforts to solidify France's status as a great power in the postwar era, he was forced to pursue this objective through trial and error, rather than a coherent strategic vision.

Historical context is essential to understanding the relationship between France and the Soviet Union. France and Russia had been foes in the age of Napoleon and more recently the Crimean War, but thereafter increasingly tended to regard each other as potential allies.¹ Central to this evolving relationship were mutual worries about a German threat which were exacerbated by the formation of the 1882 Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. This saw closer Franco-Russian ties both in terms of economics and foreign policy and gave birth to the Franco-Russian alliance which was formalized in 1894. The emergence of the First World War again saw close cooperation with Russia sending a contingent of troops to help fight in France. The alliance ended with the Russian Revolution, however, and thereafter contacts significantly diminished. Indeed, France pursued a staunch anti-Bolshevik policy, intervening in support of the Whites during the Russian Civil War, and supporting the Poles during the Polish-Soviet War in 1920 where de Gaulle, as part of the French Military Mission to Poland, earned the War Order of Virtuti Militari, Poland's highest military award.² De Gaulle's experiences during this period shaped his views of

¹ Angela Stent. 1989. "Franco-Soviet Relations from De Gaulle to Mitterrand". *French Politics and Society*. 7, no. 1: 14-27. 2.

² Jonathan Fenby. *The General: Charles De Gaulle and the France He Saved* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2010); In fact, there is a statue of de Gaulle in Warsaw, commemorating his efforts to fight for Poland.

Russia/the Soviet Union, and he proved able to see past the elements of the Soviet regime that were distasteful to him and eventually establish relations.³

While Franco-Soviet tensions were initially high, during the 1920s relations stabilized, and with the rise of a renewed German threat in the 1930s the potential for an alliance increased. Indeed, in 1935 the two countries signed the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which laid out the terms under which military assistance would be provided in the event of unprovoked aggression by another European state. It is important to emphasize at this point that fears of Nazi expansion were growing, and that the agreement also had support from Czechoslovakia. The treaty was worded so as to not disrupt the functionality of the League of Nations treaties, and was primarily designed to deal with the resurgence of a militarized Germany.⁴ However, the treaty was soon rendered ineffective by growing anti-Communist sentiment in France; moreover, various checks and balances written into the treaty, such as military action needing British and Italian approval made it largely symbolic. Whatever hopes existed for renewed Franco-Soviet cooperation were quashed by the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact of Non-Aggression and the subsequent German invasion of France in 1940. The Vichy regime, established after France's defeat, was intensely anti-Communist and pursued a policy of collaboration with Germany.

However, within elements of the French resistance, attitudes towards the Soviet Union began to shift, particularly after the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. The French Communist Party played an increasingly prominent role in the resistance to

³ Viatcheslav Chilov, "Les relations franco-germano-soviétiques et le général de Gaulle, 1945-1955," in Maurice Vaisse, and Philippe Oulmont. *De Gaulle Et La Russie*. (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2006), 97-100.

⁴ Nazi Germany announced rearmament in 1935. The treaty was ratified in 1936.

the German occupation, and the significance of the Soviet war effort in turning the tide against the Third Reich was increasingly acknowledged by a wider spectrum of French opinion. This was the case even within the Gaullist movement, despite the general's own generally conservative outlook. Indeed, in December 1944, Stalin and de Gaulle came together to sign a new Franco-Soviet treaty designed to bolster the French position politically and militarily, to guarantee post war boundaries (especially the western border of Germany), and to counteract current and future German aggression.⁵ The treaty was at once an economic, political, and military guarantee of mutual support. However, despite the treaty and overt well-wishing, Stalin's efforts to keep France out of the Yalta conference in 1945 had important consequences for trust between the two nations and was at the forefront of de Gaulle's apprehensions concerning the Soviet Union during the early years of the Cold War.⁶ His attitude towards the Soviets remained one of suspicion into the early 1960s, as we shall see.

Given de Gaulle's misgivings about the Soviet regime, how did he come to broaden and deepen relations with them? De Gaulle was a leader who, first and foremost, was a soldier at heart. As such, he was strategic in the sense that he knew what options were available to him (in this case, relations with the USA, the FRG, or the Soviet Union), and he was not shy of using up those options in his order of precedence. His decision to attempt to transcend the Cold War divide was multifaceted; it would ultimately challenge American hegemony on the European continent and help reestablish France's reputation as a great power. At the same time, de Gaulle kept his options open to

⁵ The Franco-Soviet Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Aid, <https://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10524/32777/17-Volume8.pdf>, October 1, 2019.

⁶ Fenby, *The General: Charles De Gaulle and the France he Saved*. 289-290.

the point where his diplomacy sometimes appeared to proceed by trial and error. This is evident from his unsuccessful attempts to deepen relations, toward the same ends, with both the Americans through NATO, and with the FRG through the Elysée Treaty.

De Gaulle's foreign policy has been the subject of considerable commentary. Early studies tended to emphasize the complexity and coherence of his foreign policy; though certainly willing to engage in criticism, contemporary studies emphasized that the French president had a broad strategic vision. Alfred Grosser's pioneering work *French Foreign Policy Under de Gaulle* illustrates these features to a considerable degree. Grosser claims that the Fifth Republic continued on the same foreign policy trajectory as its predecessor the Fourth Republic. De Gaulle, he contends, sought to re-establish France as a great power, recreate the Concert of Europe, and chart an independent course through the Cold War. However, Grosser finds that in key respects the general fell short. He attributes de Gaulle's foreign policy failures to an infatuation with countering the United States, especially in military affairs, thus creating bad policy in general, and by conflating prestige with actual influence; though France enjoyed renewed prestige when de Gaulle returned to the presidency, however its influence globally was lacking despite efforts to illustrate it was otherwise.⁷

Grosser's analysis of de Gaulle's policy revolves around the importance he ascribes to de Gaulle's political philosophy, that being that ideologies are temporary; the character of the state determines how a nation is judged. This basic principle that the

⁷ Alfred Grosser. *French Foreign Policy Under De Gaulle* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977) 100; considering how Grosser stresses France failures are the result of a preoccupation with countering America, the book is relatively void of Franco-American relations outside of NATO and nuclear weapons, leaving the reader with a hole in the historiography.

nation is greater than transitory ideologies ties in directly with his goal of reuniting Europe.⁸ For him, both Germany and Russia were in their own ways inherently part of the European continent and thus needed to be brought into the fold.⁹ Thus, Grosser identifies de Gaulle's European bent on reunifying the continent through the lens of his political philosophy.

Philip Cerny's *Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of de Gaulle's Foreign Policy* is another earlier influential work, which departs from Grosser's interpretation in important ways while still holding to the notion of a broader strategic vision. Examining why de Gaulle tried so desperately to alter the international system and the general course of international relations globally, Cerny ultimately concludes that his foreign policy was not designed to "[attain] glory and power for France for its own sake," but rather to create a new national consciousness.¹⁰ De Gaulle's policies had a profound impact domestically, and Cerny is the first to identify that *grandeur* was explicitly for this purpose, that is, to raise and homogenize the national identity and consciousness of France. The symbolic strategy of de Gaulle's foreign policy is successful in this scenario since it achieved its purpose of creating a new national consciousness in the context of a changing international system.¹¹ Cerny's work has been criticized for exaggerating de Gaulle's focus upon domestic politics, given the general's clear interest in foreign affairs and the

⁸ Ibid, 24-28.

⁹ Ibid, 120.

¹⁰ John T. S. Keeler. "The Politics of Grandeur Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy. by Philip G. Cerny. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980)." *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 1 (1981): 263–64. Indeed, this is a novel argument.

¹¹ Philip G. Cerny. *The Politics of Grandeur : Ideological Aspects of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 259.

fact that his policy of pursuing *grandeur* was clearly aimed at international as well as domestic affairs.¹² That is not suggest that de Gaulle disregarded domestic politics, since to achieve his foreign policy goals he required ongoing public support; otherwise *grandeur* would crumble in on itself. The question becomes whether de Gaulle's foreign policy resulted in calculated, planned domestic advances and support, or whether domestic support was simply a welcomed byproduct of de Gaulle's foreign policy.

Subsequent studies of de Gaulle's foreign policy have benefited from enhanced archival access and the passage of time, but the tendency to emphasize coherence and consistency remains. Maurice Vaïsse, in his influential 1998 study *La grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle 1958-1969*, claims that all of French foreign policy after de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 was geared to one principal thought: countering a resurgent, militarized Germany.¹³ He thus refused President John F. Kennedy's idea of a centralized nuclear system in the West, stating that "[t]o do away with nuclear weapons...is to restore German military power."¹⁴ The Soviets were also wary of Germany, which they saw as revanchist, further driving the two together out of necessity.¹⁵ The Franco-Soviet rapprochement which emerged from 1964 onwards was thus born out of convenience and a bilateral desire to alter the world order which, for Vaïsse, involved the subduing of West Germany, countering American hegemony in Western Europe, and achieving mutual arms reduction. Vaïsse, however, is critical of de Gaulle's performance within the European sphere of relations. He sees the general's

¹² Keeler, 4.

¹³ Charles G. Cogan. "Book Review: La Grandeur: Politique Étrangère Du Général De Gaulle, 1958-1969". *French Politics and Society*. 17, no. 1: 79-83. 79.

¹⁴ Maurice Vaïsse. *La grandeur politique étrangère du général de Gaulle* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) 381.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 426-7.

attempts to exploit the Franco-Soviet relationship as failures considering that they brought about little change within the system, and drastically underperformed within the context of European reconstruction.¹⁶ This argument is taken up in another of Vaïsse's works, *De Gaulle et la Russie*, which is a collection of essays, and states that while the USSR was essential to de Gaulle's European plan, he failed to achieve his goals in this regard even though he did improve relations with the Soviets.¹⁷ Less clear in Vaïsse's account, however, is why de Gaulle waited until after attempting to restructure the Atlantic Alliance, and then trying to court West Germany, to pursue more intensively Franco-Soviet cooperation – a policy which achieved only limited results.

While Vaïsse sees West Germany as the key, for Frédéric Bozo the focus is on the United States. In his books *Two Strategies for Europe* and *French Foreign Policy since 1945*, he presents de Gaulle's policies as heavily concentrated upon countering US hegemony, but also finds that the general's approach achieved more than the "narrow nationalist objectives that have long been attributed to it."¹⁸ Bozo offers historical context surrounding the international situation and international divide of the Cold War, and how France policy fits within it. With the advent of the Marshall Plan, French foreign policy became directly influenced by the actions and foreign policy of the United States.¹⁹ Acceptance of Marshall Plan aid in 1947-48 made France *ipso facto* part of the emerging Western bloc, which at the same time saw the emergence of a weak West Germany with

¹⁶ Robert Boyce. "La Grandeur: Politique Etrangere Du General de Gaulle 1958-1969 (Book Review)." *International Affairs* 76, no. 2 (April 2000): 398.

¹⁷ Maurice Vaïsse, ed. *De Gaulle Et La Russie*. Biblis, 16. Paris: CNRS éd, 2012.

¹⁸ Frédéric Bozo. *Two Strategies for Europe : De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. X

¹⁹ Frédéric Bozo. *French Foreign Policy Since 1945*. New York: Berghan, 2016, 14.

very close ties to the United States. France had to abandon its policy of subduing West Germany in favour of American wishes to resuscitate it, causing fears within France, suggesting its international fragility, and brewing resentment of American hegemony in Europe.²⁰ This eventually culminated in the outright rejection of an American presence in European affairs by Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France when he gave a speech in 1954 calling for increased Pan-European cooperation, which potentially opened the door to enhanced relations with the Soviet Union.²¹ De Gaulle eventually pursued this policy as well, all the while challenging the established international divide.²²

Independence from the United States was one of de Gaulle's main policy objectives, Bozo argues. He identifies three types of independence for France: military, strategic, and political, all of which were incompatible with the structure of NATO as then constituted.²³ To solve this problem, Bozo argues, de Gaulle employed his strategy of *grandeur* as part of his grand design to transform the international system and reassert French prestige. For Bozo, France reached the height of its power between 1965 and 1967, as the culmination of Gaullist policies. The country experienced an economic boom fed by increased trade with European partners including the Soviet Union; the French had secured the use of tactical nuclear weapons and had rid themselves of their "colonial burden" in Algeria. This period was the foundation of pursuing détente, challenging the bloc system, and ultimately leaving NATO's military command structure in 1966.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid, 15-17; 25.

²¹ Bozo, *French Foreign Policy*, 34.

²² Ibid, 33-34.

²³ Ibid, xi.

²⁴ Ibid, xi.

Bozo regards de Gaulle's foreign policy as largely successful. He states that there were crises within NATO long before de Gaulle returned to office, and that his policies simply acted as a catalyst for intensifying pre-existing tensions and issues.²⁵ Going one step further, Bozo argues that NATO was ultimately strengthened by de Gaulle's policies, and that NATO was in fact indebted to de Gaulle for the conception of détente.²⁶ This is perhaps the greatest defence of de Gaulle and his policies within the historiography.

Bozo does not say much directly about the establishment of Franco-Soviet relations. However, he reiterates a widely held view that France pursued relations with the Soviets to counteract a resurgent Germany under the guidance of America. Bozo thoroughly fleshes out French attempts to court the FRG through the Fouchet Plan in 1960, which culminated in the development of the Elysée Treaty, a bilateral friendship agreement between the FRG and France that opened new possibilities of cooperation between the two states in 1963.²⁷ Bozo interprets this as France attempting to counter American hegemony in Europe, and American influence over the FRG.²⁸ However, the treaty was stripped of any political significance with Adenauer leaving office, and by American pressure. Thus, stifled in its attempt to become the primary benefactor and interlocutor with the FRG, France turned to other possible relationships to counter American hegemony. This creates an impression of de Gaulle's foreign policy as less methodical, consistent, and successful.

Benjamin Varat reinforces some of these impressions in his article "Point of Departure: A Reassessment of Charles de Gaulle and the Paris Summit of May 1960."

²⁵ Ibid, xv.

²⁶ Bozo, *French Foreign Policy*, xvi.

²⁷ Ibid, 52-53.

²⁸ Ibid, 53.

Closely examining French policy during and after the failure of the 1960 summit, which was fatally undermined by US-Soviet tensions over the U2 affair, Varat makes a case that this event was a key turning point, especially where France's relations with its Western allies were concerned. In his view, up to 1960 French foreign policy in the Cold War was largely Atlanticist in nature, meaning that it favoured the United States and NATO. Varat argues that the failed Paris Summit in 1960 was the turning point in French policy from an Atlantic, NATO oriented policy towards a Eurocentric foreign policy. De Gaulle now concluded that it was increasingly necessary for Western Europe to adapt to shifting Cold War dynamics by reducing its military dependence on the United States.²⁹ Though it could be argued that there was always a Europeanist dimension to de Gaulle's foreign policy, Varat's article is important because it highlights the extent to which de Gaulle's approach could be modified in response to specific events.

The relative slowness with which de Gaulle pursued deeper relations with the Soviets, after the failure of efforts to reconfigure French relations within the Atlantic Alliance and then with West Germany, points to a more opportunistic foreign policy than is sometimes appreciated. It also indicates that de Gaulle's initial preference for a stronger Western alliance. Scholarship that concentrates more specifically on Franco-Soviet relations during this period notes that there were a variety of forces encouraging closer cooperation between the two states, but that consistent efforts in this direction were relatively slow to emerge. Angela Stent, in her 1989 report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research titled *Franco-Soviet Relations from de Gaulle to*

²⁹ Benjamin Varat. "Point of Departure: A Reassessment of Charles De Gaulle and the Paris Summit of May 1960." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 19, no. 1 (2008): 96–124. 96.

Mitterrand, analyzes the fundamental aspects of the relationship and demonstrates how it gradually emerged.³⁰ A relationship with the Soviet Union, she explains could help de Gaulle to realize his broader foreign policy vision since the Soviet Union was a super power, a European nation by default, and had the ability to effectively counter the presence of the United States in Europe. Stent sees Franco-Soviet relations as a bilateral effort to achieve changes within the European system and/or within the transatlantic system, albeit for radically different purposes.³¹ She notes that the absence of security or border concerns adds another layer of cohesion to the relationship.³²

The geo-strategic value of the relationship was important to both countries but for different reasons. France was important to the Soviets primarily because they played an integral role in containing West Germany. The Soviets sought to exploit this fear to hinder the emergence a strong Franco-German alliance.³³ Later, as France became regarded as an increasingly problematic member of the NATO community, the Soviets also tried to exploit this situation to weaken the organization from within in the mid-1960's. Lastly, the Communist Party of France (PCF) was of interest to the Kremlin as it gave a legitimate platform to Soviet style communism in the West.³⁴ Conversely, the Soviets were of a single use to the French, which was the "reestablishment of France's postwar global role," or *grandeur*, that being the stated objective of de Gaulle both immediately postwar, and upon his return to power in 1958.³⁵ This was achieved

³⁰ Stent, "Franco-Soviet Relations," 2.

³¹ *Ibid*, 2.

³² *Ibid*, 2.

³³ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

primarily through the French using the Soviets as an alternative bargaining partner instead of the United States or West Germany.³⁶ Thus the relationship was not only one of convenience, but also a multilateral game of chess where both France and the Soviets offer themselves as pawns for the other's foreign policy goals. Stent sums this notion up succinctly, stating "[t]he relationship is really concerned with the means toward broader multilateral ends."³⁷ However, it remains that stronger Franco-Soviet relations were pursued only gradually, after de Gaulle, while taking a firm public line against the Soviets during the Berlin and Cuban Missile Crises, failed to achieve his key goals for reforming the Western alliance.

Georges-Henri Soutou, in his article "De Gaulle's France and the Soviet Union from Conflict to Détente," looks broadly at Franco-Soviet relations from 1958-1967 to argue that de Gaulle had a clear vision and plan of establishing relations with the Soviet Union from the outset of his return to the presidency. He contends that de Gaulle pursued three tactical steps to implement his blueprint. First, he needed to shift NATO to be geared towards his own vision of it, namely as a European security apparatus. Second, he needed to establish a privileged relationship with West Germany as a way to contain it and thereby strengthen French leadership in Western Europe. The third and final step was to approach Moscow directly to finish off the plan and establish a new European order reminiscent of the Concert of Europe.³⁸ All of these steps were dependent on one principle, that the Soviets would begin to disengage from ideology-based policies and

³⁶ Ibid, 4.

³⁷ Ibid, 4.

³⁸ Georges-Henri Soutou, "De Gaulle's France and the Soviet Union from Conflict to Détente," in Wilfred Loth, *Europe, Cold War and Coexistence, 1955-1965*. London: Routledge, 2004: 170-187. 171.

return to a more pragmatic, European-focused foreign policy and security structure. For Soutou, then, de Gaulle's Soviet policy followed a grand design.

On the other hand, Soutou points out that the Franco- Soviet relationship only truly began to thaw in 1963 with increased trade between the two nations, and cabinet and personnel shifts within the Quai d'Orsay. These shifts reflected a more sympathetic French view towards the Soviets, which Soutou says translated into a shift in French public opinion as well.³⁹ This is what Soutou identifies as the culmination of de Gaulle's three step blueprint, where French policy shifted from Atlanticism to Europeanism in both substance and practice. He goes on to discuss the 1965-1967 period to discuss why de Gaulle's vision of a broader European security apparatus did not come to fruition.

Soutou's argument runs counter to the findings of this report. Although the steps to the blueprint presented by Soutou have some logical cohesion, the evidence points to the fact that de Gaulle remained strongly committed to the Western alliance – albeit a reshaped one – into the early 1960s; only after that did a profound shift in relations with the Soviets get underway. Other scholars such as Mark Trachtenberg and John Keiger all point to Franco-German relations as the basis of de Gaulle's foreign policy.⁴⁰ This report argues that although de Gaulle may have had preferences in terms of who he wanted to pursue relations with, he was not bound to any one particular foreign partner as is evident from his trial and error diplomacy.

Thomas Gomart, in his book *Double détente: les relations franco-soviétiques de 1958 à 1964*, provides the most detailed account of the early onset of détente between the

³⁹ Ibid, 175-176.

⁴⁰ Marc Trachtenberg. *A Constructed Peace : The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. Princeton Studies in International History and Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

French and Soviets prior to broader international détente taking effect in the second half of the 1960's. Gomart's thesis is that Franco-Soviet relations can be explained through three categories of actors: politico-diplomatic, carried out by states; intermediate actors, such as trade or labour organizations; and individual actors, such as journalists and workers.⁴¹ Through these categories of analysis, Gomart poses the question of whether Franco-Soviet relations were actually geared towards détente, or if they were in fact systematically confrontational.

Gomart defines two types of détente within this period. The first is *détente amorcée*, or active détente, and *détente grippée*, or seized détente.⁴² Through the three categories of actors, Gomart breaks down the varying stages of détente within 1958-1964 on micro and macro levels to show how Franco-Soviet relations alternated between cooperation and confrontation. Like Stent, he noted that the phenomena of relations with a nation with which there are no shared borders removed a layer of possible conflict in diplomatic relations, and as such leaves room to focus on global strategy.⁴³ The reason this same principle was not applicable to the United States was their super power status, their perceived/real aggression towards the Soviets, and their interest in pursuing a presence within Europe.

Gomart's writing is chronological in nature, however he blends in three overarching analytical questions within the narrative.⁴⁴ First, how do Franco-Soviet relations fit into the broader East-West conflict, and when do they begin to influence the

⁴¹ Thomas Gomart. *Double détente: les relations franco-soviétiques de 1958 à 1964*. Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, 2003, 10.

⁴² Ibid, 10.

⁴³ Gomart, *Double Détente*, 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 15.

discourse of the Cold War? Second, how does each nation fit into the geo-political strategy of the other? Gomart hesitates here where Stent does not, stating that it is difficult to situate France within the Soviet strategy because of the inherent complexities of interpreting Soviet aims and policy during this time.⁴⁵ He does agree with Stent, though, on the notion of the German question as central to the bilateral relationship and to the respective foreign policy aims of both France and the Soviet Union.⁴⁶ Third, and perhaps most unique about this work, Gomart examines the various actors who promoted détente between the French and the Soviets. Some of these actors include French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and French Communist Party head Maurice Thorez, as well as French journalists such as Pierre Courtade, Michel Tatu, and Boris Paternak. Gomart's account thus focuses on how various actors within the relationship, whether individuals or political parties, influenced the discourse of Cold War rhetoric, brought about détente, and enhanced Franco-Soviet relations.

Marie-Pierre Rey, in a contribution to a 2010 volume on de Gaulle's foreign policy, stresses the significant obstacles to Franco-Soviet rapprochement under de Gaulle, providing some valuable information on the Soviet perspective at the time of the general's return to power in 1958. In the eyes of some Soviet officials de Gaulle was a "pillar of French imperialism and [a] classic representative of the authoritarian right." In

⁴⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁶ "Theses.Fr – Thomas Gomart , Double Détente : Les Relations Franco-Soviétiques de 1958 à 1964." Accessed March 26, 2018. <http://www.theses.fr/2002PA010551>.

essence he was viewed as a capitalist, bourgeoisie dictator.⁴⁷ Others, notably Ambassador Vinogradov, believed that de Gaulle, as a result of his commitment to France's revival and independence, might be lured away from the Atlantic Alliance.⁴⁸ This view, as pointed out by Angela Stent, later gained credence when de Gaulle began disengaging France from NATO.⁴⁹ However, France's disengagement from NATO may also be interpreted as a specifically anti-American rather than an anti-Western action, with de Gaulle seeking to disrupt the American projection of power in Europe.

From the Soviet perspective, Premier Nikita Khrushchev's policy ambitions centered around the German question and the recognition of the emerging Cold War territorial and political status quo, namely legal recognition of the GDR as well as the solidification of the Warsaw Pact. Achieving recognition of the new status quo would drive a wedge between the United States and France, further fostering an independent France, and would put increased strain on the Atlantic Alliance relationship.⁵⁰ However, Rey sees the simultaneous Franco-German rapprochement as a hindrance to further Franco-Soviet relations and détente. France and West Germany together would be a strong partnership in terms of trade, diplomacy, economic cooperation, and social cohesion, and thus a threat to Soviet legitimacy in the West and to the status quo. In an attempt to sway de Gaulle, the Soviets used pan-Europeanism as bait to entice him and establish privileged relations with France in 1960-61, within the context of the UN

⁴⁷Marie-Pierre Rey, "De Gaulle, French Diplomacy, and Franco-Soviet Relations as seen from Moscow," in Nuenlist, Christian, Anna Locher, Garret Martin, eds. *Globalizing De Gaulle : International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2009: 22-46. 24.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 24. This idea of de Gaulle as a spoiler was promoted by Vinogradov.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 26.

⁵⁰ Rey, "De Gaulle as seen from Moscow," 25.

charter.⁵¹ However, de Gaulle's understanding of pan-Europeanism differed from the Soviets in this regard; if it were to be employed, it meant the Soviets would give the nations of the Warsaw Pact their independence. Such a view was incompatible with Soviet ambitions.

Despite Soviet advances and cultural and economic cooperation, France was still securely attached to the Western camp at this time. Rey sees the refusal to recognize the GDR and continued efforts to improve relations with the FRG into the early 1960s as a sign that Franco-German relations were more vital and more important to de Gaulle and France than Franco-Soviet relations were.⁵² Further compounding the Soviet predicament was France's nuclear program, which was expanding at a time when the Soviets were seeking international disarmament policies, albeit without international supervision.⁵³ Thus, Rey concludes, although during the early years of de Gaulle's time in office there were signs that France-Soviet relations could be deepened, there were few tangible achievements until 1964, which marked the beginning of a deeper rapprochement.⁵⁴

This historiographical survey points to many complex questions about de Gaulle's foreign policy, such as whether he had a grand design, his long term vision and attitude towards the United States, how he envisioned addressing "the German question," and which states he saw as essential to solving it, as well as his government's policies during specific incidents during the Cold War such as the Berlin and Cuban Missile Crises. This report questions the notion that de Gaulle had a master blueprint for his foreign policy objectives, and instead emphasizes how he tried various methods and tactics, with uneven

⁵¹ Ibid, 27.

⁵² Rey, "De Gaulle as seen from Moscow," 28.

⁵³ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 29.

results, to realize his ends. His vision and priorities about the best way to restore French *grandeur* emerged only gradually. Moreover, though he was willing to pursue multiple options, including reaching out to the USSR, de Gaulle's preference was to remain within the framework of the Western alliance – albeit one in which French influence was substantially enhanced. As many scholars have observed, he did lean towards West Germany, but this priority emerged only after Washington clearly rejected his proposals for remaking the Atlantic Alliance. The Soviets were de Gaulle's final choice, with attempted reforms to NATO and the Elysée Treaty with the FRG being tried beforehand.

Overall, despite de Gaulle's ambivalence towards the United States, and his willingness to talk about détente with the Soviets, he was firmly affixed in the Western camp from his return to office in 1958 until the mid-1960s. Publicly, he took a hardline approach with the USSR on several occasions between the close of the 1950s and early 1960s. This pattern of behaviour demonstrates that de Gaulle was actively seeking ways to progress in the Cold War system while still defending Western values and interests. This report will argue that, as he did not move towards establishing relations with the Soviets until other West-centric measures and efforts with the US and FRG proved largely unsuccessful, de Gaulle's foreign policy should be regarded as opportunistic rather than programmatic in significant ways, and at least in its early stages firmly rooted in the Western alliance. This argument will be developed in the chapters that follow, which examine the general's efforts to reform the Atlantic Alliance; his stance on the German question, both in terms of the fate of Berlin and more generally Franco-West German relations; and finally the beginnings of a significant French pivot towards the USSR. These events will be examined to help illustrate the roots of de Gaulle's foreign

policy with respect to the Soviets, how the Soviets dealt with de Gaulle, and how these events gave rise to Franco-Soviet rapprochement beginning in 1963-4.

Early Efforts to Reshape the Atlantic Alliance: 1958-1960

The French Fourth Republic had failed by 1958. Over its twelve-year existence, from 1946-1958, it was governed by 21 different administrations, all unable to effectively deal with decolonization in Indochina and Algeria, or achieve internal governmental stability, though degrees of success varied. De Gaulle was called upon after a long hiatus from government to oversee a transitional administration with the goal of creating a new constitution for the Fifth Republic. This was one of the conditions for de Gaulle's return to power. The new constitution gave the President many powers, including appointing their own prime minister, and also taking over some of the powers of the prime minister to ensure smooth governmental function. De Gaulle believed that his country could only be revitalized with a strong head of state. He was subsequently elected first President of the Fifth Republic later that year.⁵⁵

De Gaulle moved quickly on a number of fronts. Managing the conflict in Algeria occupied a great deal of his time, but he also had ambitions with respect to foreign policy. The Tripartite memo of September 1958, which proposed to restructure the NATO alliance by giving France a more prominent role, sheds important light on de Gaulle's geopolitical thinking at the start of his return to office. Broadly speaking, the memo illustrates how de Gaulle sought to revive France's standing within the Atlantic alliance as well as its general international prestige. Even as France continued to wage war in Algeria, early in his second tenure as president de Gaulle sought to reestablish France as a major power; indeed, *the* major European power. In doing so he offered a challenge to the status quo of the Atlantic alliance, but that does not mean that de Gaulle was simply

⁵⁵ Jonathan Fenby. *The General*, 20.

pursuing an anti-American agenda. He was first and foremost concerned with any state or person that held an extreme amount of power. In his logic, people or states who wield too much power eventually lose touch with reality and thus their own limitations.⁵⁶ This can be disastrous at the state level. Thus, it must be noted, de Gaulle's efforts to curb American power in the West and global influence were not borne out of deep-rooted anti-Americanism but rather a broader set of concerns about the international system and the role of the United States within it. By trying to limit American power through a restructuring of NATO, de Gaulle was pursuing his own vision of Europe, and of the international system. As Dana Allin puts: de Gaulle "favoured a multipolar balance."⁵⁷ This did not mean that he wished to see the Western alliance against the Soviets undermined: during the first Berlin Crisis of 1958, as this section will argue, de Gaulle advocated alliance solidarity while at the same time pursuing other foreign policy objectives, such as improving relations with West Germany. However, while he sought to sustain lines of communication with the Soviets during this period, détente was an aspiration that lay well down the road.

Even though he at first headed a transitional government in 1958 de Gaulle still enjoyed presidential powers, and soon made use of them to advance broad foreign policy goals. The Tripartite Memo, sent to US President Dwight Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan in September 1958, outlined his proposed plans and apprehensions about NATO. De Gaulle asserted that "Recent events in the Middle East and Taiwan (Formosa) helped show that NATO no longer responds to the necessary

⁵⁶ Dana Allin, "De Gaulle and American Power," in Rowland, Benjamin M. *Charles De Gaulle's Legacy of Ideas*. Lanham Md.: Lexington Books, 2011. 38.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 32.

conditions of security, where the Free World is concerned.”⁵⁸ He then presented four demands. First, NATO must recognize that the USA is no longer the only nuclear capable nation within the alliance, and therefore cannot be the sole decision maker in respect to defense policy.⁵⁹ Second, strategic and defense-oriented decisions ought to be made by the US, Britain, and France as a group, especially where nuclear arms were concerned. Third, the French government saw these propositions as necessary, and would consider using Article 12 of the NATO agreement to revise the Treaty if needed. Lastly, de Gaulle suggested that his propositions be discussed immediately between the three powers in Washington.⁶⁰

De Gaulle was asserting his foreign policy goals forcefully with the memo, most notably with his threat to use Article 12. It stipulates that any member of NATO, after 10 years, may enact the article to review the structure of NATO; “After the Treaty has been in force for ten years, or at any time thereafter, the Parties shall, if any of them so requests, consult together for the purpose of reviewing the Treaty, having regard for the factors then affecting peace and security in the North Atlantic area, including the development of universal as well as regional arrangements under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security.”⁶¹ The key features of the article are that any member can enact it, and that international and regional

⁵⁸ Documents Diplomatique Français, Tome 2, 1958. Doc 165, p 376; de Gaulle is referring to the Lebanon Crisis of 1958 and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis.

⁵⁹ Britain achieved nuclear capability in the early 1950’s, and France tested its first bomb in 1960. This is the reason de Gaulle thought the nuclear arsenal of France should be under sovereign control, along with a distrust towards American intervention.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 377.

⁶¹ The North Atlantic Treaty,” Accessed February 15th, 2019.
https://www.nato.int/cps/ie/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

developments, as well as the Charter of the UN, must be taken into account. It is presumed that de Gaulle would have used the wording about “international and regional developments” concerning the Soviet threat to support his propositions in the memo, most notably multilateral nuclear defense decisions.

Although the meeting that he proposed did not take place immediately, de Gaulle had sent a very strong message to his key allies: he believed France should play a central role in NATO decision making, especially where nuclear weapons were concerned. The memo marked a turning point in French foreign policy, as it indicated the kind of foreign policy that de Gaulle would pursue as head of the Fifth Republic. It also demonstrated de Gaulle’s motivation to alter the NATO Alliance in a way that provided for checks and balances against American hegemony in Europe, projected French power on an international stage, and allowed for broader consultation on the use of nuclear weapons in Europe, while preserving the Western Alliance. This last point is significant in respect to prospective relations with the USSR and ran counter to early Soviet hopes, as previously expressed by Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov, to the effect that de Gaulle could serve as a disruptor within the Western alliance, to the benefit of the Soviets.⁶²

The memo also points to the complexity of de Gaulle’s attitudes towards the United States, and the policies that he pursued towards it. On the one hand de Gaulle wished to rid France of its dependence on America and remove American influence over French policy, yet he believed that the Atlantic alliance would persist, formulating his own policies with the American reaction in mind. This interpretation does not go as far as that offered by Jeffrey Giaque in *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity*, which stresses a high

⁶² This point is discussed in the historiography under Angela Stent’s article.

level of Franco-American cooperation, with de Gaulle accepting the American presence in Europe. Instead, this report contends that de Gaulle was treading a middle path between rejecting American influence in Europe based on the bilateral division of the globe and utilizing that same influence to re-establish close relations with West Germany while maintaining the NATO system. Indeed, de Gaulle demonstrated he was unwilling to fragment the NATO alliance on various occasions during this period. Whether intentionally or not, he was sending signals to the Soviets that he would not jeopardize the Atlantic Alliance and the unity of the West to oust the Americans or to achieve his own policy goals.⁶³

Successive American administrations had to deal with de Gaulle. In his book *Atlantis Lost* Sebastian Reyn points out a problem with current studies on Franco-American relations under de Gaulle: many of them treat American policy towards de Gaulle as being static, when this is simply not the case. Various political philosophies were at play in the White House which bred various methods of dealing with de Gaulle, from Eisenhower's attempts to extend an olive branch concerning the Tripartite Memo and private concerns over de Gaulle's obsession with image, to de Gaulle and Kennedy's clash over the Common Market, to Johnson's outright ignorance of de Gaulle's experiences in Vietnam.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Americans had their hands full with de Gaulle during his presidency. However, American officials never hated nor admired de Gaulle wholeheartedly one way or the other, but blended a mix of curiosity and disdain for his

⁶³ Bozo, *French Foreign Policy*, 65-66. Bozo notes that although France is affixed to the West, it was at odds with other Western states over some issues such as nuclear weapons, NATO structure, and American presence in Europe.

⁶⁴ Sebastian Reyn. *Atlantis Lost : The American Experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969*. American Studies. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010. 17.

persona because of his fight to restore France's power, and to keep the limits of American power right where the Americans could see it.

What were the potential implications of the Tripartite Memo for France's relations with Western powers and the Soviets? De Gaulle was seeking to establish a new framework for French diplomacy within the Western system through forceful assertion. However, the memo did not sit well with members of NATO, most notably West Germany and Italy, and as such, required careful consideration on the part of Eisenhower so as not to anger any NATO member; As Eisenhower explained in his reply to de Gaulle, "We cannot afford to adopt any system which would give to our other allies, or other free world countries, the impression that basic decisions affecting their own vital interests are being made without their participation."⁶⁵ Eisenhower agreed in principle to talks, but was very clear in saying that it was talks only, and not a plan or motion to move forward with the Memo. This rejection of the memo was a blow to de Gaulle's plan to limit American power. The harsh reality for de Gaulle was that the Americans, both as a nation and as head of NATO, had no intentions of sharing their power or decision making capabilities with anyone in the West, save for perhaps consultations with Britain as part of the "Special Relationship." Preliminary talks were conducted in December of 1958 with ministers, but they were a far cry from what de Gaulle had envisioned. Lacking leadership figures and concrete ideas to expound, the talks were destined for stalemate.⁶⁶

The tone of the talks was also affected by the onset of the Berlin Crisis that fall, which was ignited by an ultimatum from Khrushchev to the Western powers on

⁶⁵ Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 47; this quote comes from a letter from Eisenhower to de Gaulle, dated October 20th, 1958; Eisenhower to de Gaulle, letter, 20 October 1958, France, vol. 1, IS, WHOSS, box 5, DDEL.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 47-49; Allin, "De Gaulle and American Power," 55-56.

November 27, 1958. The ultimatum stipulated Khrushchev's proposed reforms on the quadripartite division and management of Berlin. He wished to replace what he saw as an outdated occupation system with a peace treaty rendering Berlin a demilitarized free city that happened to be within the Soviet sphere of influence. Khrushchev gave the occupying powers six months to withdraw their military forces willingly; if they did not the Soviet Union would sign a unilateral peace treaty with East Germany that would end the Allied occupation of the city, thus staunching the flow of migrants from East to West. Vaisse theorizes that Khrushchev's ultimate objective was to gain international recognition of the GDR.⁶⁷

In his book *A Constructed Peace* Marc Trachtenberg notes that the Soviet ultimatum to the West was rooted in fear over a resurgent, revanchist, and nuclear capable West Germany.⁶⁸ The possibility of a nuclearized West Germany in the American camp, it was rationalized, could cause the global collapse of Communism considering nuclear weapons gave the FRG an offensive military capability.⁶⁹ Thus, for the Soviet Union, West German nuclearization and Western power were linked, and targeting Berlin was a way to counter it.

Considering that France retained occupation rights in West Berlin, a source of prestige in and of itself, de Gaulle saw the necessity of resisting pressure from Khrushchev. But there were also bigger issues at stake. If Berlin fell to the Soviets, it could negate any possibility of German unification, and would firmly attach the former capital to the GDR. If the West did not protect their interests in Berlin, they might also

⁶⁷ Maurice Vaisse, "De Gaulle's Handling of the Berlin and Cuba Crises," in Wilfred Loth, *Europe, Cold War and Coexistence, 1955-1965*. London: Routledge, 2004: 63-76. 63.

⁶⁸ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 251.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 252.

lose the trust and favour of Adenauer and the FRG, further deteriorating the global situation, and rendering de Gaulle's European vision even more unlikely. For these reasons de Gaulle saw any form of concessions over Berlin to be a danger to both France and Europe.⁷⁰ His position on Berlin was thus one of firmness and rigidity, as is seen in a conversation with Vinogradov in 1959 where he warns the Soviets that pursuing their goals in Berlin in such a way was bad for everyone.⁷¹ Moreover, he emphasized his support for the FRG, and tried to persuade the Soviets to embrace *rapprochement* and change their view of the FRG as a threat.⁷² These conversations highlight important aspects of de Gaulle's foreign policy where the Germans and the Soviets are concerned. He was posturing and showing solidarity with the FRG in the face of Soviet aggression, which was important for French independence, and was another strategy to lure the FRG away from the United States in light of the Elysée Treaty between the FRG and France. Although the treaty did not come until 1963, de Gaulle was aware it would be useful to cultivate good relations with the FRG in order to enhance French influence in Europe. France was trying to drive a wedge between the United States and the FRG to create a small bloc of resistance against the US within Europe, thereby forcing Bonn to choose between Washington and Paris.⁷³ This suggests that at this point, relations with the Germans were more important to de Gaulle than relations with the Soviets as they served as a direct line to countering America in Europe, and contributed towards forming his vision of a new Concert of Europe.

⁷⁰ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 64.

⁷¹ De Gaulle-Vinogradov conversation, 2 March 1959, DDF 1959, I, 120.

⁷² Vaisse, "De Gaulle's Handling of Berlin and Cuba," 64-5.

⁷³ Bozo, *French Foreign Policy*, 61.

Overall, then, Khrushchev's attempt to disrupt the Western camp by threatening to sign a Peace Treaty with East Germany (to entrench the territorial status quo) instead served to bring the Western nations closer together. West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and de Gaulle developed a close relationship during this period, France again demonstrated that it was firmly affixed to the Western camp, and consultations regarding European strategy increased between the Americans, the French, and the British.⁷⁴

The onset of the Berlin Crisis and the boost that it gave to Western unity also had a significant impact on Tripartite Memo talks. While de Gaulle remained tenacious about seeing the memo through the international situation had changed since it had been issued, and he recognized the need for Western cohesion and unity during this time. Indeed, he eventually sent a letter to Eisenhower outlining his views on the issue exactly. He saw the need for focus and amicability during the Berlin Crisis, and as a result, toned down his rhetoric and determination to reform NATO structures in favour of Western solidarity, demonstrating his preference for the West and his instinct to side with the Americans in times of international strife.⁷⁵ This is important because it shows that de Gaulle wished to progress rather than regress in France's relationship with the United States.

There was, however, a contrast between France's public response to the crisis and its actual strategic priorities. For instance, while German reunification was being discussed as a possible outcome to the crisis, the French government was in no particular rush to see Germany reunified and was in fact privately willing to lose Berlin instead of

⁷⁴ Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 51.

⁷⁵ Office of the Historian, De Gaulle to Eisenhower, letter, 6 October 1959, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, vol. 7, doc. 141, Accessed February 5th, 2019.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v07p2/d141>

using force to hold it.⁷⁶ While seek to display solidarity in 1958 France's primary goal was to keep West Germany in the Western camp regardless of Berlin. As such de Gaulle favoured a negotiated settlement rather than conflict, with the basic aim of preserving the status quo for the French. Further, the French sought to increase their standing and reputation among both East and West German officials.⁷⁷ It must also be noted that although the Americans and the French had achieved some consensus on what to do over Berlin, they differed on the larger issue of using force.⁷⁸

However, while de Gaulle had publicly stressed solidarity with his NATO allies during the Berlin Crisis, the latter also solidified his options concerning the need for a multilateral nuclear defense structure.⁷⁹ The crisis seemed to confirm de Gaulle's fears concerning an American response to a nuclear attack, namely, that it would be both unwise and improbable for the Americans to intervene in such an event. General Pierre Gallois, a key figure in shaping French nuclear policy, fleshed this idea out in his book *The Balance of Terror: Strategy for the Nuclear Age*:

A pact is exposed to too many dangers; under the pressure of circumstances [nuclear war], the obligations of a treaty may not be binding... Today some contest [the] advantage [of American nuclear intervention], pointing out that since the United States itself is vulnerable to Soviet ballistic missiles, the automatic nature of American intervention is less certain. If, therefore, America were to

⁷⁶ De Gaulle to Eisenhower, 271.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 272.

⁷⁸ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 273-274.

⁷⁹ This was a major point of discussion between de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, then chancellor of West Germany, and acted as proof of the need to adopt de Gaulle's tripartite memo; Charles De Gaulle, *Lettres, notes, et carnets: Juin 1958-Décembre 1960*, Paris: Club français des Bibliophiles, 1982. 109-110.

come to the support of a friendly nation, she would be placed in a difficult situation from a military point of view. She would either have to destroy her adversary's reprisal forces...or else suffer their terrible effects.⁸⁰

In essence, French officials and commentators worried that if a nuclear strike took place on a Western European target, the US would be hesitant to intervene. The credibility of nuclear deterrence depended on the perceived importance of the target to the US.⁸¹ Further, France did not want to be dragged into a crisis or conflict if it did not concern it. Moreover, if there were to be nuclear weapons on French soil, de Gaulle emphasized, they must be French missiles under French military command.⁸² De Gaulle was not interested in a multilateral nuclear force spearheaded by the US under the banner of NATO.

This is consistent with de Gaulle seeking out a unified force under the proposed tripartite decision-making organization of NATO. Indeed, he saw French national security and Western security as essential to the survival of the West: "either there is a West, with a common policy towards the rest of the world or else...But there will be no West."⁸³ This is to say that if there was not a common policy developed for dealing with the rest of the world, the West would collapse due to inconsistency and potentially contradictory agendas. This highlights de Gaulle's fatalistic attitude towards a lack of

⁸⁰ Pierre M. Gallois. *The Balance of Terror: Strategy for the Nuclear Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 139.

⁸¹ Allin, "De Gaulle and American Power," 41.

⁸² Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 38.

⁸³ Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 39.

cohesion in planning and cooperation. At the same time, de Gaulle's insistence on French influence continued.

France's emerging nuclear policy also supported a policy of national assertion, even as the country remained firmly within the Western camp at this stage of the Cold War. De Gaulle suggested that France possessing its own nuclear force acted as a further nuclear deterrent in the West against potential Soviet strikes. However, the US did not want an independent nuclear force within NATO since it added an extra layer of coordination and could be potentially unreliable in case of a nuclear event. Further than this, an independent nuclear force could well have given France the free hand it sought to pursue diplomatic and military relations with nations less aligned with the West, including the Soviets.⁸⁴ De Gaulle made some moves in this direction in the future, but at the end of the 1950s he was still emphasizing the need for a unified West at his point, albeit one in which the French had more of a say.

In retrospect, the Tripartite Memo was de Gaulle's first attempt at re-establishing French *grandeur* on an international scale. However, the Memo also shows that France was firmly affixed in the Western camp, despite de Gaulle's criticisms of the bloc system and the division of Europe. While de Gaulle sought to contest American hegemony, especially in Western Europe, he did threaten to leave NATO if he did not get what he wanted at this time, as is evident from his invocation of Article 12 in the Memo. The fate of the Memo also exposes American frustrations with de Gaulle, as is evident from Eisenhower's interpretation of the Memo and de Gaulle. Eisenhower thought de Gaulle

⁸⁴ Philip H. Gordon *France, Germany, and the Western Alliance*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

was “infatuated with prestige and that all he desired was achieving the status of which he was deprived in World War II.”⁸⁵ This is a rather scathing and disrespectful analysis of the Memo, and de Gaulle’s policy of restoring *grandeur* in general. On the other hand, considering the fact that Eisenhower would later extend multiple olive branches to try to appease or accommodate de Gaulle, including implementing an informal version of the Memo, and extending the “Special Relationship” the British enjoyed with America, it would seem that de Gaulle’s approach had made some impact on the US leadership.⁸⁶

Ultimately, however, de Gaulle was not granted the emendations to NATO that he sought. Though in the years that followed he continued to stress NATO solidarity during the U2 incident, the renewal of tensions over Berlin, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, he also began to look to West Germany as France’s new major diplomatic partner. He increasingly saw a partnership with the FRG as a way of curbing American influence and power in Europe and charting a new French path through the Cold War. As we shall see, it was only after it was clear that West Germany would not give him all of what he was seeking that de Gaulle initiated a more concerted effort at détente with the Soviets.

⁸⁵ Reyn, *Atlantis Lost*, 52.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 55-63; Eisenhower suggested multiple revisions of the Memo to try and accommodate de Gaulle’s wishes, however the General would accept nothing short of his proposal.

Paris Summit, Berlin Crisis, Cuba: 1960-1962

Between 1960 and 1962 the international system was rocked by a series of escalating crises. The Paris Summit of 1960 represented an attempt to build upon early efforts at détente but ended in failure as the U-2 incident undermined Soviet-American dialogue. Renewed tensions over Berlin in 1961, which eventually culminated in the building of the Wall, signaled the persistence of Cold War confrontation. Most dangerous of all, of course, was the Cuban Missile Crisis of the following year, which for a time threatened to trigger a thermonuclear exchange. De Gaulle hosted the Paris Summit, and played a key role in it; France was less visibly prominent but still significantly involved in the Berlin and Cuban crises. French conduct during these events was characterized by an ongoing commitment to the Atlantic alliance but also to concerns about American power and the configuration of NATO. De Gaulle thus kept his options open, increasingly regarding West Germany as France's primary partner. The overall stance towards the Soviets remained one of firmness, though continuing to remain open to dialogue. At the same time the American alliance was increasingly regarded as problematic, necessitating more autonomy and other options for France; but it would only be after the West German card was played out before the General heavily committed to pursuing East-West détente.

Building upon recent improvements in US-Soviet relations, the Paris summit of 1960 was intended to address several problems, including the still unresolved status of Berlin as well as arms reduction policies; for the Western powers progress on the former

was seen as a necessary precursor to moving ahead on the latter.⁸⁷ De Gaulle was in fact skeptical about how much the meeting would achieve, but agreed to participate anyway. He proposed a rough agenda for the West to adhere to: disarmament/force and arms reductions, Germany, non-interference, and the developing world.⁸⁸ He also linked progress on developments in Berlin to Khrushchev's intentions, essentially acknowledging the proverbial ball was in Khrushchev's court.⁸⁹ The main goal of the Western powers for the summit was to maintain their occupation rights within Berlin and prevent further deterioration of the European and international situation. Their overall position going into the summit was as follows: be reserved in respect to Berlin, maintain occupation rights, and discuss disarmament. Despite this plan, there was no Western strategy to ensure that the summit would succeed. In fact, each of the Western powers had their own priorities, contributing to the lack of a cohesive strategy.⁹⁰

Khrushchev and de Gaulle met in Paris in late March and early April of 1960. Interestingly, in a conversation about the worries of a militarized West Germany, de Gaulle rebuffed Khrushchev's anxieties, saying he accepted the reality of two Germanies, adding that "Western Germany's strength helped balance strategic power in Europe."⁹¹ Khrushchev expressed his motivations and intentions on signing a unilateral peace treaty with the GDR, a move he expected would nullify Western occupation rights. De Gaulle reaffirmed to Khrushchev that the French would not support such a decision, nor would

⁸⁷ Richard D. Williamson. *First Steps Toward Détente : American Diplomacy in the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1963*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012. 50. At the Summit the French also wanted to address the issue of nuclear delivery systems, but space precludes a discussion of that point.

⁸⁸ De Gaulle Letter to Eisenhower, October 26, 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. IX, doc. 36.

⁸⁹ Western heads meeting, December 21, 1959, Paris, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. IX, doc. 56.

⁹⁰ Williamson, *First Steps*, 53-54.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 56.

they recognize the validity of the GDR.⁹² This is significant for a few reasons. First, it again demonstrates de Gaulle's attachment to the Western camp despite his ambitions to be independent from the United States. Remaining firm on Berlin was not only a way to ensure a united front against the Soviet Union, but also a way to hold onto France's politically and symbolically important occupation rights in West Berlin. Second, it shows a shift in de Gaulle's thinking in respect to a conventionally armed Germany, as now he now conceded openly that an armed Germany was a stabilizing factor in Europe and the broader Cold War. It must be noted, however, that nuclear arms in West Germany were not under West German control. Third, de Gaulle's comments to Khrushchev highlight the increasing importance of West Germany to French foreign policy. De Gaulle remained firm on Berlin as a way to maintain budding friendly relations with the FRG as well as France's international standing. Evidently, de Gaulle was not tempted to diverge from the Western bloc at this time. It is true that during their discussions both de Gaulle and Khrushchev expressed a mutual interest in pursuing broader détente. However, French Minister of Foreign Affairs Maurice Couve de Murville was quick to reassure the Americans not to read too much into this, telling US Ambassador Amory Houghton, that although there was mutual Franco-Soviet interest in détente, fundamental differences regarding the resolution of the German question and interpretations of détente persisted between the two powers; "the French want a détente leaving the German situation in status quo...the Russians want a détente based on a settlement of the German question."⁹³ In essence there was little move towards Franco-Soviet actualized détente.

⁹² Williamson, *First Steps*, 56.

⁹³ Houghton to State Department re: de Gaulle – Khrushchev meetings March 29 and April 4, 1960, Paris, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, vol. IX, doc. 106.

On the whole, Western expectations of the Summit were low, and despite efforts to reaffirm the summit as a way of promoting disarmament the participants focused upon the status of Berlin, thus solidifying the interconnectedness of the two issues.⁹⁴ As is well known, of course, the summit ultimately achieved very little. It was doomed after United States Air Force pilot Gary Powers was shot down in a U-2 surveillance aircraft over a Soviet ICBM facility on May 1st, 1960. Khrushchev sought to use the incident to get out of a potentially embarrassing and therefore politically catastrophic defeat at the summit by blaming the United States. After Eisenhower refused to apologize for the transgression the summit was left in ruins, and Khrushchev left Paris. However, while the summit had collapsed, the situation did not deteriorate into war, showing that major powers were willing to negotiate towards future détente and were hesitant to use force rather than diplomacy.⁹⁵ The U-2 Affair is important to Franco-Soviet relations principally because, in spite of the mutual interest expressed between Khrushchev and de Gaulle regarding a broader East-West detente, the French leader made his attachment to the Western camp, and his commitment to keeping West Germany within the Western camp, abundantly clear.

This evidence supports the findings of Varat, who rejects the notion that de Gaulle was inherently anti-American. Instead, he contends, de Gaulle's foreign policy in relation to the United States was relatively flexible and well informed prior to the Summit.⁹⁶ Prior to the gathering, de Gaulle and Eisenhower found themselves on the same page when it came to how to approach Khrushchev. At a bilateral meeting in April they agreed that it

⁹⁴ Williamson, *First Steps*, 58-9.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 62; Vaisse, "De Gaulle's Handling of Cuba and Berlin," 65; Vaisse sees de Gaulle's position on Berlin as defend at all costs short of armed conflict.

⁹⁶ Williamson, *First Steps*, 97-98.

looked like Khrushchev wanted some form of genuine détente with the West, was interested in pursuing disarmament, and wished to solve the German problem. For Varat, this pre-summit meeting between de Gaulle and Eisenhower reveals two important points. First, it suggests that the two Western powers sought a unified approach going into the summit. This was important both from an alliance perspective and from a negotiating perspective in respect to the Soviets. Second, the meeting focused on issues relevant to the summit, not inter-alliance problems. This demonstrates that both de Gaulle and Eisenhower were willing to set aside current Franco-American disputes in favour of finding solutions to broader Cold War issues.⁹⁷

Varat sees the end of the summit as the definitive turning point in de Gaulle's policy making. In the wake of the summit, the general began developing policies to bring Western Europe out of the American shadow at a time when Cold War tensions were rising. De Gaulle was taking these steps due to France's newly acquired nuclear capabilities and a changing tide in the Cold War. French nuclear capabilities meant that, in the French analysis, war in Europe was "virtually impossible."⁹⁸ The French nuclear force would act as a "trip wire" for the American nuclear force. That is to say that if France launched nuclear weapons, so would the United States.⁹⁹ The rationale was that the United States, if faced with the choice of watching Germany and France fall to the Soviets or firing nuclear missiles, would opt to fire them. Adding to this, if France fired at the Soviets, the Soviets would respond by striking both France and the United States. In all, the United States had little choice but to engage itself if France fired nuclear

⁹⁷ Ibid, 101-102.

⁹⁸ Williamson, *First Steps*, 108.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 109.

missiles. As such, Varat sees the French force as the “perfect deterrent” since it made conventional warfare on the European continent nearly impossible.¹⁰⁰ With Europe safe from war, the Cold War began to shift an international dynamic where countries such as Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, and China figured into the equation much more heavily. These policies would become the foundation for the French departure from NATO later in the 1960s, demonstrating de Gaulle’s forward thinking in respect to France’s nuclear capability and military independence from the United States, as well as his European vision.

After the failure of the summit, Cold War tensions were high. Renewed pressure from the Soviets, themselves under pressure from the East Germans, to resolve the Berlin situation reignited an atmosphere of confrontation. In mid-August 1961, construction of the Berlin Wall began, effectively creating a microcosm of the larger East-West division of the Cold War. De Gaulle feared that negotiating too soon after the wall was erected would be a step towards losing Berlin and consequently Germany. If the FRG felt that it did not have Western support, it might begin to gravitate towards the East.¹⁰¹ The only play available to the West was to throw its support behind Adenauer and defend the Western half of Berlin. Thus, for de Gaulle Berlin was a secondary issue, one of the pieces of the larger German puzzle.¹⁰² He therefore articulated his policy on Berlin through the lens of maintaining a unified Western approach to the conflict. Western unity in the face of Soviet aggression was important to de Gaulle because it safeguarded French interests, showed the FRG that Paris would not tolerate such aggression towards other

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 110.

¹⁰¹ Vaisse, “De Gaulle’s Handling of Berlin and Cuba,” 66.

¹⁰² Ibid, 66.

European states, and preserved his image internationally and within Europe, an important aspect for regaining *grandeur* as well as for his vision of France leading a united Europe. De Gaulle's firmness towards the Soviets on Berlin resulted in him gaining the trust of Adenauer and the FRG. Despite his hardball tactics with the Soviets, however, de Gaulle also displayed some antagonistic attitudes towards the Americans, as he expressed some concerns about the potential unilateralism of US policy during the Berlin showdown.

These concerns intensified during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, though here again the French president's public stance was one of emphasizing Western solidarity and dealing with the Soviets firmly. The French and Americans were engaged in close information sharing through French contacts and officials within Cuba with connections to the anti-Castro movement.¹⁰³ These information channels proved valuable to the Americans, and were some of the first to report the Soviet build up in Cuba.¹⁰⁴ When Kennedy informed de Gaulle of his plan to use a naval blockade to stop Soviet shipments the general was very supportive of the idea, and to show his support refused to allow Soviet aircraft bound for Cuba to land in France.¹⁰⁵ De Gaulle reaffirmed his attachment to the West in a communique to Washington: "...reciprocal engagements of the Atlantic Alliance are and remain the basis of French policy."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, in a letter to Kennedy, de Gaulle again reaffirms his close attachment to the West, in the context of the Cuban and the threat of war: "France will be in the war side by side with the United States."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ These contacts included the French Ambassador to Havana Roger Robert du Gardier, and General de Rancourt of the French military; Vaisse, "De Gaulle's Handling of Berlin and Cuba," 67.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 68.

¹⁰⁶ De Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets, 1961-1963*, 270.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from de Gaulle to Kennedy, December 1st, 1962, *Lettres, Notes, et Carnets, 1961-1963*, 278-279.

Developments in Cuba confirmed to de Gaulle that the Soviets and Khrushchev were habitually belligerent, and he continued his policy of firmness and inflexibility left over from Berlin.¹⁰⁸

After the crisis subsided, however, de Gaulle wished to make it clear to the Americans that his support in this instance should not be regarded a “blank cheque” for support in future crises.¹⁰⁹ In fact, it reaffirmed his conviction that France needed its own nuclear force independent of NATO in the event of another problem that concerned primarily American interests. It seemed clear from events in Berlin and then Cuba that the Americans were not willing to wage nuclear war to save Europe. This furthered de Gaulle’s conviction about the need of an independent nuclear force on the European continent.

De Gaulle also took other lessons away from the Cuban Missile Crisis. For one, it intensified his drive towards securing a privileged partnership with West Germany. It may also have had implications on his attitudes towards Khrushchev and Soviet policy more generally. First, recent events demonstrated to de Gaulle that Khrushchev’s style of policy was one of opportunism and forcefulness. The Soviet leader did not get what he wanted out of Berlin, so he tried to increase pressure on America through Cuba to achieve concessions.¹¹⁰ Second, the confrontations confirmed to de Gaulle that neither superpower wanted to engage in a full scale nuclear conflict. If it was going to happen, it would have happened over Cuba.¹¹¹ Lastly, and most significantly for Franco-Soviet

¹⁰⁸ Vaisse, “De Gaulle’s Handling of Berlin and Cuba,” 69.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 69-70.

¹¹⁰ Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions, October 24 1962, Washington, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, vol. XV, doc. 141. Accessed April 18th, 2019. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v15/d141>

¹¹¹ Vaisse, “De Gaulle’s Handling of Berlin and Cuba,” 70.

relations, Khrushchev backed down when he was countered with the blockade and told no. This is important for de Gaulle. It meant that even if Khrushchev got hot headed at times, he could be contained by Western solidarity during crises. De Gaulle's analysis of this was that even though Soviet bellicosity was causing problems internationally, détente was still worth pursuing. With the knowledge that Khrushchev was keen to avoid conflict, and that a nuclear conflict between the superpowers now seemed less likely, pursuing better relations with the Soviets seemed like a policy increasingly worth investing in, though in 1962-63 West Germany remained the big prize as is evident from his attempts to sway them.

The Cuban Crisis ended without a bang. Instead, missiles were removed from Cuba and Turkey, and a direct phoneline was established between Moscow and Washington, thus further distancing the “secondary powers” of the West from important decision making processes.¹¹² This worried de Gaulle, because it reduced his ability to influence US-Soviet relations, and it was a blow to French *grandeur*. In a letter to Adenauer in August of 1963, de Gaulle stated he was worried about becoming isolated, his issue being with “direct relations that our Anglo-Saxon allies tend to establish with the East” without any consultation.¹¹³ This was the basis of renewed Franco-American tensions in the early 1960s.¹¹⁴ However, it would also serve to encourage growing Franco-Soviet contacts along a parallel track, according to Vaisse. Ambassador Vinogradov, in conversation with de Gaulle in July of 1963, had also expressed disappointment that Franco-Soviet relations had taken a hit due to Cuba and the direct

¹¹² Vaisse, *De Gaulle et la Russie*, 153.

¹¹³ Ibid, 153; Letter to Konrad Adenauer, 23 August 1963. De Gaulle, *Lettres Notes et Carnets, 1961-1963*, 363-364.

¹¹⁴ Vaisse, *De Gaulle et la Russie*, 152.

line, however Vaïsse identifies Cuba and the renewed isolation of France within the West as the moment that produced a marked shift in Franco-Soviet relations towards closer relations and rapprochement. Before this took place, however, de Gaulle's efforts to deepen French relations with West Germany culminated in the Elysée Treaty, which represented the depth but also the limits of his efforts to find alternate partners within the West.

Turning to West Germany, 1962-63

West Germany posed a perennial challenge for French foreign policy. Three major wars meant that Germany was regarded as a security risk; the FRG's rearmament and entry into NATO had taken place only after significant political conflict within France. Shared concerns with respect to Germany provided a potential bridge between France and the Soviet Union. Both the Soviets and French were worried about a resurgent, militarized, and nuclear capable West Germany.¹¹⁵ The French and Soviets ultimately found common ground on the German issue to continue building their historically-minded and oriented (for de Gaulle at least) relationships: Germany as a whole was a threat to European security in a broad sense, and also posed a potential threat at the individual level.

However, this *rapprochement* only occurred after intensive French efforts to court West Germany. The events of 1958-61 clearly indicated that de Gaulle, while seeking good relations with the Soviets, believed that the best way of addressing the German question was by becoming a closer partner with the Federal Republic. By the early 1960s relations with Konrad Adenauer's FRG were of central importance to de Gaulle. French and West German interests seemed to be converging in a variety of ways. Both powers sought to promote reconciliation in the wake of war, and both felt a desire to ensure that West European nations could pursue their own foreign policy options within the context of the Cold War. Further than this, the French were in direct competition with the United States over who would be the primary partner, and thus handler, of the FRG. Though the odds were heavily in America's favour for reasons of history and money, the French

¹¹⁵ Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 271-275.

made a major effort. De Gaulle and his officials concluded that if they could usurp the role of the United States in relation to West Germany, there was less of a chance of German revanchism taking hold, much less being acted upon. Furthermore, it would help solidify the political status quo in Western Europe and increase stability within the Western camp. All of these would help to further de Gaulle's ambitions.

The Franco-West German relationship during the 1958-64 period thus rivalled the importance of all other French foreign relations in terms of its impact and influence upon de Gaulle's foreign policy making. Authors such as John Keiger, Marc Trachtenberg, Alfred Grosser, and Phillip Gordon, to name a few, stress the level at which Germany figured in the policy-making of de Gaulle.¹¹⁶ John Keiger characterizes de Gaulle's foreign policy towards the FRG in terms of three main goals; make Germany an element and actor for peace, help Germany towards reunification as France sees fit, and help to implement a framework to achieve it.¹¹⁷ As de Gaulle himself observed on February 4th, 1965: "The German problem is *par excellence* the European problem."¹¹⁸ De Gaulle had linked his quest for a unified Europe with solving the German problem of reunification.

While de Gaulle was trying to unify Europe under his own tutelage, which required solving the German problem, Khrushchev and the Soviets sought to keep Germany divided for the benefit of global Communism and their nation's security. More than this, a divided Germany was a safe(r) Germany from their perspective. Both the Soviets and French had suffered immensely due to the actions of Germany, and as such,

¹¹⁶ Philip H. Gordon. *France, Germany, and the Western Alliance*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995; John F. V. Keiger. *France and the World Since 1870*. London: Arnold, 2001; Grosser, *French Foreign Policy Under de Gaulle*; Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*.

¹¹⁷ Keiger, *France and the World*, 196.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 196.

each sought to control the divided nations' path into the future, albeit in contrasting ways. To summarize, France wanted a degree of influence over West Germany to counter the American presence and hegemony, to protect their Eastern border against potential threat, to gain industrial resources, to quell fears of revanchism, and to unify Europe as a whole. The Soviets wanted to expand Communism and therefore their economy, solidify the territorial status quo and gain recognition of GDR, and thereby ensure national security. The basis for Franco-Soviet cooperation was thus based upon the shared notion of limiting the revival of German power to achieve national interests. However, de Gaulle's priority during this period was cultivating a strong relationship with the FRG, rather than developing détente with the Soviets.

Under de Gaulle and Adenauer, the Franco-West German relationship flourished. Their first meeting took place at de Gaulle's family home in Colombey-les-Deux-Églises in September 1958 and went without incident. It was this meeting that served as the first step towards true Franco-German cooperation. Personal differences aside, the two leaders had a common understanding of where to direct their political efforts: "foreign policy is the only true political arena."¹¹⁹ An interesting contradiction arises between de Gaulle's philosophy about historical relationships and increased contacts with West Germany: if de Gaulle's notion of foreign relations was predicated primarily upon the legacy of history, as is evident in his overtures to the Soviets, why run counter to this when establishing relations with the FRG? As previously mentioned, de Gaulle was a hardnosed diplomat and negotiator who always sought the best deal or compromise possible. For him to transgress his own political philosophy meant there was some

¹¹⁹ Grosser, *French Foreign Policy Under de Gaulle*, 65.

unrealized potential in pursuing relations. Alfred Grosser makes an important distinction here. He states that de Gaulle based Franco-German relations not upon the political nature or capability of Germany, that is, what it could do within its government, but rather upon the character and capability of Germany itself, its people, what Germany as a country *was*, relating back to de Gaulle's political and historical philosophies.¹²⁰ Further, the continued failure of the Tripartite Memo to come into effect may have been a contributing factor in de Gaulle seeking closer relations with West Germany. For the FRG, relations with France were a necessity considering West Germany's preference for an Atlantic community, albeit while remaining tied closely to the Americans. For France, Bonn could be the key to leading a unified but independent European community, thus thrusting France into the role of superpower.¹²¹ Franco-West German relations were thus a potential catalyst for ensuring French *grandeur* and as such became central to de Gaulle's foreign policy.

By 1962 the Franco-German relationship was at a high point, as was de Gaulle's power. He had won the 1962 presidential election, ended the Algerian Conflict, was beginning to produce nuclear weapons, and had stood firmly against the Soviets during the Berlin Crisis. Further, Adenauer and de Gaulle each participated in state visits to help further the relationship. This last point is significant for the Germans because it demonstrated, for them, that de Gaulle was open to the possibility of German reunification under favourable circumstances while continuing to be regarded as a supporter of a democratic, capitalist-oriented Germany. In essence, de Gaulle was seen as

¹²⁰ Grosser, *French Foreign Policy Under de Gaulle*, 70.

¹²¹ Keiger, *France and the World*, 148.

representing and respecting German rights as well as the integrity of a unified Germany. This helped give rise to the Élysée Treaty of 1963.

Talks for the Treaty were successful despite differences between France and West Germany on many key issues. These included pursuing the Tripartite Memo that would leave Germany out of NATO decision-making, the French decision to veto Britain's entry to the Common Market, de Gaulle's preference for less military integration within Europe, and Bonn's fixation on the USA as a defense partner.¹²² There is no indication that the Soviet threat figured explicitly in the talks, but it may be assumed that it was on the mind of the FRG considering their preference for America as a primary defense partner. Preliminary meetings began in 1958, culminated in the Treaty in January 1963, and featured substantial agreements in the areas of defense, culture, education, and science. The Treaty was laid out in three categories: foreign affairs, defense, and education and youth. It stipulated regular meetings at varying levels of government including foreign ministers, education ministers, chiefs of staff, and defense ministers to coordinate and report on the programs and exchanges established.¹²³ The main takeaways from the Treaty were relatively few in number but nevertheless quite significant. First, the agreement to consultations in respect to "important questions [on] foreign policy" demonstrates de Gaulle and Adenauer's willingness, at least in theory, to work closely together prior to making major foreign policy decisions. West Germany stood to gain from this since it was still a relatively weak power despite its rapid economic revival. For

¹²² Keiger, *France and the World*, 149.

¹²³ Treaty between the French Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany on French-German cooperation. Accessed March 2nd, 2019. https://www.cvce.eu/obj/trait%C3%A9_entre_la_republique_fran%C3%A7aise_et_la_republique_f%C3%A9d%C3%A9rale_d%27Allemagne_sur_la_cooperation_franco_allemande_22_janvier_1963-fr-68956f73-75cb-4749-a6e2-344c8aad84ba.html. This citation will henceforth be referred to as "Élysée Treaty."

its part France gained checks and balances on West German foreign policy, which was unquestionably an asset given the state of the international system at the time.

Second, the cultural exchanges, military exchanges, and secondary language programs demonstrate a concerted effort to forge a new relationship in the face of nearly 100 years of conflict between the two nations.¹²⁴ Not only was the effort at the diplomatic and political level, but it managed to extend its reach into domestic affairs. The rationale for the French was simple: if young German children learn to speak French, visit France, and learn the culture, there is a strong chance that an entire generation of Germans will harbor no animosity or ill feelings towards France. In theory the same worked in reverse for French children and German culture and language. In the French case, this was a preemptive effort to indoctrinate the historical enemy's youth to be sympathetic to France.

The section on defense was less specific. Ambiguously worded, part 1(3) states “With regard to armaments the two Governments shall endeavour to organize work in common beginning at the stage of drawing up suitable armament projects and of preparing plans to finance them.”¹²⁵ The fact that France was willing to share information on weapons developments is interesting, and it becomes even more so when one considers the possibility of de Gaulle sharing nuclear secrets with the FRG. At face value, this may seem easily dismissed as a far-fetched proposal. But how far-fetched is the notion, really? The two countries had already agreed in principle to share research and information concerning weapons and soldiers, and the FRG was the first line of defense

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Élysée Treaty

against any traditional land or air based threat from the East, so it makes some sense to have nuclear weapons there as a deterrent. Next, de Gaulle was trying to woo Adenauer and the FRG away from the USA so that France could develop its own special relationship with Bonn; sharing nuclear technology could have been a step towards that. Lastly, sharing nuclear technology with the FRG may have been intended as a catalyst for reunification discussions, with France as arbiter/mediator considering its contributions to the FRG. The Soviet threat figures heavily into this point, and, speculatively, must have figured in de Gaulle's thought process as well considering that he was proposing a *de facto* arms deal with Germany.¹²⁶

Regardless of whether the sharing of armaments was meant to progress to the nuclear level or not, de Gaulle demonstrated his political flexibility and foreign policy skills through this treaty. It also exhibited a willingness to extend a hand to West Germany, although it must be noted that France stood to gain much from the Treaty too. At a minimum, French officials had the opportunity to regularly meet and discuss affairs with West German officials, which gave them the ability to keep notes and track the steps taken by their FRG counterparts, their foreign policy aims, and the process of rearmament. Part of de Gaulle's strategy with the Treaty was to move the FRG towards a Eurocentric union to help fulfill his vision of a Europe with France at the helm, and to move the FRG away from the United States-style Atlanticism. From the French perspective the treaty provided a mechanism for shaping West German foreign policy while maintaining a close and cordial relationship.

¹²⁶ There is no direct proof of this, but it is the opinion of this author that considering de Gaulle's concerns in respect to the Soviets, they played a part in his decision making.

However, De Gaulle's hopes of usurping the role the United States played in relation to West Germany were crushed shortly after the Treaty was ratified by West Germany. In order for the Treaty to gain popular legitimacy, de Gaulle and Adenauer thought it should be approved by their respective parliaments. When it arrived in the Bundestag in Bonn, the Treaty would not pass without a preamble reaffirming the Federal Republic's ties with the United States and the wider Atlantic community. This was a significant blow to de Gaulle's Europeanist vision and also to his foreign policy goals towards West Germany. In fact, the Treaty lost much of its political and symbolic substance due to the adoption of the preamble. Keiger states that this blow to the Treaty caused de Gaulle to abandon West Germany "as a strategy" to counter American hegemony in Europe.¹²⁷ This implies that the general had hoped that the Treaty would change global and European power dynamics. A prevailing perception in the historiography surrounding the Treaty is that de Gaulle had curtailed his other foreign policy ambitions to pursue the West German relationship. Indeed, authors such as Keiger, Grosser, and Bozo describe the relationship as if it were a microcosm within the broader Cold War, treating it as if it were a static, unchanging thing, which of course it was not. But this perception of the relationship is nevertheless significant. It shows that many historians see de Gaulle's foreign policy in the early 1960s as focused on making West Germany a sympathetic collaborator of France's goals and motives.¹²⁸

All of this to say that the FRG was the focus of de Gaulle's foreign policy at this time. He saw a viable and fruitful option in pursuing relations with West Germany.

¹²⁷ Keiger, *France and the World*, 149.

¹²⁸ I use the word "collaborator" here because it is the terminology used within the Élysée Treaty. It is used seemingly interchangeably with cooperation or cooperate.

Relations with West Germany satisfied both long term and short-term policy goals like a united Europe, less American influence on the continent, a close trading partner, and perhaps most importantly, a way to observe and perhaps influence a once terrifying enemy. With this option taken off the table, de Gaulle sought another relationship that could fulfill his policy goals, that being the Soviet Union.

Beginnings of Franco-Soviet Détente: 1963-1964

With Germany out of the running for France's diplomatic special relationship and clearly aligned with the United States, and the United States unwilling to make concessions to the French towards the reestablishment of *grandeur*, de Gaulle now opted for other foreign policy goals, primarily increased contacts with Khrushchev and the Soviet Union. De Gaulle could not realize France's foreign policy goals without a powerful partner. Further than this, the perceived failure of the Elysée Treaty solidified France's perception of the European power dynamic and its own foreign policy goals. It also shed light on a few key notions that would come to influence the course of global diplomacy in the following years, including the clear distinction between the Europeanist (France) and Atlanticist (USA, Germany) divide within the Western Alliance. This entrenched France's determination to either reform NATO to enhance its influence or distance itself from elements of the alliance; it firmly affixed West Germany to the USA, despite de Gaulle's wish to keep the FRG within the Western alliance and within Europe; and it made the Soviet Union a more attractive partner going forward to act as the counter-weight to West Germany in Europe and the USA globally.¹²⁹ Lastly, the perceived failure of the Treaty, by merit of bringing the Soviets and French closer together, helped lay the foundation for future attempts at rapprochement and achieving East-West détente.

As noted by Angela Stent, the emerging Franco-Soviet relationship was pragmatic, instrumental, and cynical, albeit for different reasons for each of the two

¹²⁹ Gomart, *Double détente*, 115-120.

states.¹³⁰ This claim holds up well to the test of time. De Gaulle sought a Europe independent of American influence in its various forms but remaining within the framework of the nation-state. Strengthening relations with the Soviets now became a critical element of his vision. Doing so would legitimize his political and historical philosophies and would also contribute directly to the fostering of French *grandeur*. This is evident from the outburst of new social, political, and economic exchanges and contacts from 1963 onward.¹³¹ The deepening of connections, including a deal for colour televisions (March 1965), Andrei Gromyko's visit to Paris (April 1965), increased cultural exchanges (May 1965), Couve de Murville's visit to the Soviet Union (October/November 1965), and steps taken towards de Gaulle's visit to the Soviet Union (June 1966) all paved the way for a significant effort to achieve détente.¹³² Given the benefits of the relationship, why did it take so long to develop?

For their part, there is evidence to suggest that the Soviets were interested in deepening relations with the French prior to 1963, despite moments of friction such as the exchange of some harsh words during the Berlin Crisis.¹³³ One important piece of evidence to support such an interpretation is Soviet foreign policy with respect to the French-Algerian War of 1954-62. Despite growing Soviet involvement in, and desire to be seen as a champion of, the "Third World" under Khrushchev's leadership, when it came to Algeria the USSR's stance seemed to be at odds with its broader objectives of promoting global socialism and portraying the Soviet Union as a champion of workers'

¹³⁰ Stent, "Franco-Soviet Relations," 2.

¹³¹ Gomart, *Double Détente*, 408-420.

¹³² *Ibid*, 402.

¹³³ Yahia H. Zoubir. "The United States, the Soviet Union and the Decolonization of Maghreb, 1945-62." *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995). 59.

rights and of the developing world. In essence, the Soviets were surprisingly soft on France regarding the latter's role in the Algerian war, evidently as a result of their desire to improve bilateral relations. Overall, Soviet policy towards France and Algeria, especially during the latter half of the conflict, was often contradictory and self-serving. Yahia Zoubir, in his article "The United States, the Soviet Union and Decolonization of the Maghreb, 1945-62" makes this clear. In general terms, Zoubir notes, the Soviet Union and the United States had similar objectives with respect to Algeria. For both, the primary concern was how to best safeguard strategic, political, and economic interests while maintaining friendly and close ties with the French.¹³⁴ Interestingly, when the conflict erupted in 1954, Khrushchev and the Soviets showed no reaction. This demonstrates the potential importance of France to Soviet foreign policy. In sum, the Soviets risked their identity as defender of the developing world so as not to disrupt or destabilize relations with the French. As Zoubir explains:

Moscow's main concern remained the evolution of the situation in Europe. The Kremlin's priority consisted of preventing German rearmament and Germany's integration into NATO. The Soviets, aware of France's historical fear of a strong Germany, continued to court the French in the hope of obtaining their support against American manoeuvres to integrate Germany into NATO. Consequently, Soviet attitudes and policy toward the Maghreb were contingent upon French-Soviet rapport.¹³⁵

Indeed, the Soviets recognized that in order to achieve their political and territorial goals in Europe, the Algerian question would need to be pursued gently and at times not at all in order to maintain amicable relations with France.¹³⁶ This remained the Soviet

¹³⁴ Zoubir, "Decolonization of the Maghreb", 58.

¹³⁵ Zoubir, "Decolonization of the Maghreb," 63.

¹³⁶ The Algerian question was what to do about French presence there. Should Algeria remain an extension of French soil given "historical ties," or should Algeria be granted independence to pursue its own national interests within the global community?

approach until the very end of the conflict in 1962, when they threw their support behind Algeria when it was clear that the nationalists would succeed in the rebellion.

Soviet strategy towards France with respect to the Algerian War was in line with what might be called “typical” Soviet strategy at the time, that is, ignoring aspects of another country’s foreign policy that would be considered anti-Communist or anti-revolutionary, if doing so benefited Soviet interests. Soviet officials knew that one of de Gaulle’s primary objectives was to restore the international prestige of France, and they exploited this to the fullest. The Soviets wanted a quick resolution to the Algerian conflict so as to expedite their European plans and help to maintain a favourable image of France internationally, despite French atrocities in the conflict. When de Gaulle proposed a ceasefire and peace talks to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1961, the Soviets saw an opportunity to openly side with him. Khrushchev saw de Gaulle’s proposal as a potentially important and groundbreaking endeavor that could directly contribute to bringing peace to the region, going so far as to say “It is easy to see that a peaceful settlement of the Algerian problem would contribute to the growth of France’s international prestige and her role as a great power.”¹³⁷ This was not the first time that the Soviets had pursued this approach with respect to Algeria; the same method of “diplomacy through flattery” was used on French Socialist premier Guy Mollet in 1956 after he granted Morocco and Tunisia independence in the same month, despite sending half a million troops to Algeria at the same time. The chief difference between the two scenarios was that the Soviets felt that such an approach was more likely to be successful

¹³⁷ Jack R. Perry, “Soviet Policy toward French North Africa” (unpublished dissertation, New York: Columbia University, 1972), p. 377; cited in Zoubir, “Decolonization of the Maghreb”, 77. Unfortunately, I could not find the original source of this quotation.

with de Gaulle compared to previous French governments, given their opinion of him as a black sheep or outlier within French politics and Western politics.

Still, the situation in Algeria did cause some tensions between France and the USSR. The Soviets, along with Nasser's Egypt, gave some support to the FLN, while the French sometimes depicted the Algerian nationalists as puppets of global Communism due to Soviet support and Algerian Communist Party support, despite the party's ban in 1955 by the French government.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Rey makes clear that the Soviets gave "favourable treatment" to the French over the Algerian conflict. She explains this phenomenon by stating the importance of European issues and the desire for public support from the French were more important to the Soviets than fostering discontent through open criticism. However, over time it became evident through multiple crises, including the U2 Affair and the Berlin Crisis, that de Gaulle and the French were firmly affixed in the Western camp, and as a result, Khrushchev and the Soviets shifted towards more explicit support for the Algerian nationalists, eventually waging a brutal slander campaign against de Gaulle and France.¹³⁹ However, such tensions were not enough to prevent de Gaulle from pursuing better relations with the Soviets after Algeria achieved independence in 1962, nor did it prevent the Soviets from being receptive to those overtures, as France was no longer interfering in the affairs of a budding revolutionary nation.

Thus, the Algerian Conflict is very revealing of the importance the Soviets accorded to their relationship with France and shows the adaptability of their

¹³⁸ "Impossible Opposition: The Magic of the One-Party Regime." by Malika Rahal. Accessed November 1, 2019.

<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/29730/Impossible-Opposition-The-Magic-of-the-One-Party-Regime>.

¹³⁹ Rey, "De Gaulle as seen from Moscow," 27.

opportunistic style of foreign policy. The FLN's active effort to internationalize the conflict, paired with the pre-existing French colonial presence made the Algerian conflict an epicenter for Cold War diplomacy, and was ultimately a turning point in both Franco-Soviet relations by way of alleviating a sticking point, and French credibility in the developing world by way of ending a colonial conflict and granting independence to Algeria. Lastly, the conflict helped contribute towards Franco-Soviet rapprochement since relations stayed potentially friendly and contributed to broader East-West détente as a result.

By 1963, then, one obstacle to Franco-Soviet rapprochement had been removed; moreover, de Gaulle had exhausted other diplomatic options that involved a more pro-Western stance. After the failure of the Tripartite Memo to gain political ground and a deciding hand in NATO, and the gutting of the Elysée Treaty by the Bundestag, de Gaulle concluded that he was left with no other options to pursue his foreign policy, nor to regain grandeur.¹⁴⁰ The Soviets, from his perspective, were now – though only now – the most viable option. The relationship must have been one of necessity. Had it not been, one would think that de Gaulle would have quickly pursued relations with the Soviets rather than adopting the trial and error style diplomacy witnessed through the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Soviets as a diplomatic partner satisfied multiple French needs and goals; limiting American influence in Europe by acting as a NATO member transcending the Alliance and the Iron Curtain; bolstering the French position internationally; bringing the Soviets (Russians in de Gaulle's parlance) into the European sphere of influence as

¹⁴⁰ It may be said that de Gaulle could have tried courting the British, but they were too firmly attached to the hip of the Americans. Additionally, de Gaulle had vetoed British entry into the Common Market in years past, and as such was not viewed favourably in Britain.

part of a unified but independent Europe; and containing possibly revanchist German state(s) in both the East and West. Thus, the Soviets were potentially useful to many of de Gaulle's major policy goals, but the evidence suggests that he preferred other options, namely aligning France firmly with the West, albeit one reconfigured to suit French interests; he turned more intensively to the USSR once it appeared that other options were not viable. This in turn suggests that de Gaulle's foreign policy was less schematic and more incremental than some scholars have contended.

Like French interests in pursuing relations with the Soviets, the Soviets had selfish reasons for pursuing relations with the French. More broadly, Soviet policy aims during this period tended to focus on the German question and the necessity of solidifying the territorial status quo through legal and international recognition of two Germanies. This goal was pursued within the context of competing presences of Atlanticism and Europeanism in the Western bloc. The USSR was marginalized from Europe as a result of organizations such as NATO and the European Economic Community.¹⁴¹ One possible solution to these policy barriers was to strengthen relations with an increasingly assertive France. By disrupting NATO and the Western alliance through France, the Soviets hoped to achieve a few things. First, they wanted to weaken the Alliance from within by fostering support for France's struggle against American hegemony in Europe. Not only would this fragment NATO, it would also weaken the position of America in Europe, rendering the continent more susceptible to infiltration or revolution. Second, by establishing relations with an independent France, the Soviets could enhance their legitimacy as an international superpower, which would thereby

¹⁴¹ Stent, "Franco-Soviet Relations," 3.

make the claim for German territorial recognition much harder to deny on an international scale. Lastly, and this is speculative, by openly supporting the French struggle against America, the Soviets would demonstrate their anti-imperialist credentials, which was a broad appeal to developing or Third World nations.¹⁴² Indeed, a large part of Soviet foreign policy during the 1960s involved attempting to bring developing nations into the Communist fold, especially within the African continent. Supporting anti-American sentiment could therefore be seen as a point in favour of the Soviets as far as these developing nations were concerned.¹⁴³ Thus, the Soviets wished to drive a pre-existing proverbial wedge between France and America for the purpose of fostering an independent and sympathetic France, and to contain Germany.¹⁴⁴

Part of this multipolar balance involved expanding foreign relations past the Iron Curtain to Moscow. De Gaulle's political philosophy revolved around the importance of history and nationalism and rejected the primacy of ideology in politics. Considering the close relationship France and Russia had enjoyed in times past, and both having fears over a resurgent Germany, the relationship, for de Gaulle at least, was one of both security and history. The turning point in Franco-Soviet relations towards concrete détente, according to Thomas Gomart, was in 1963. This happened primarily due to various cultural, scientific, and economic exchanges between the two countries.¹⁴⁵ Such exchanges were an effective public opinion tool as well, as shown by the steady increase

¹⁴² This is an interesting point because of the Soviet willingness to ignore French colonialism, yet they could still operate as an anti-colonial actor.

¹⁴³ "Developing nations" throughout Africa had varying degrees of experience with colonialism/expansionism/imperialism and was almost always negative. If America was seen as the pinnacle of contemporary colonialism, and the USSR its antagonist, it reasons to follow that developing nations would be drawn into the fold of the latter.

¹⁴⁴ Stent, "Franco-Soviet Relations," 3-5.

¹⁴⁵ Gomart, *Double Détente*, 402-3.

of spectators for artistic and musical exchanges, from 255,829 in 1958 to 640,600 in 1963.¹⁴⁶ This is an important part of legitimizing relations with an ideologically different nation, especially within the context of the Cold War. Gomart also points to a letter from Khrushchev to de Gaulle on December 31, 1963 in which he suggests avoiding the use of force in border disputes as a change in Soviet rhetoric toward détente. Further, a meeting between de Gaulle and Nikolai Podgorny, then First Secretary of the Ukrainian SSR, showed a marked change in other high-ranking Soviet thinking. De Gaulle, in discussion with Podgorny, was surprised by his attitude towards evolution within the USSR. Podgorny asserted that evolutions or major changes within the Soviet Union would not be ideological, the same as in France, but that “if there is ideological discord, we must live together in good standing; there is no other way.”¹⁴⁷ After this meeting, de Gaulle called for increased scientific and economic cooperation, and proposed augmentation in commercial areas.¹⁴⁸

Although these exchanges fostered a friendly relationship between France and the Soviets, and benefitted France in numerous ways, it did little to counter American influence in Europe or draw the FRG away from the United States. Nevertheless, from the French perspective, 1963 was the start of a shift to détente that would reach its peak between 1965 and 1968. De Gaulle’s philosophy, paired with a determination to limit American influence in Western Europe (although it was not realized) eventually led him to transcend the East-West divide, reducing tensions and enhancing relations with the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 407-8.

¹⁴⁷ Gomart, *Double Détente*, 420.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 419-420.

Soviets. De Gaulle, in short, sought to achieve his policy goals through various attempts at establishing close bilateral relations.

Conclusion

At face value, it seems de Gaulle failed across the board. Very few of his foreign policy goals were realized, yet France was ahead of where it had been in 1958 prior to his return to office. How did this come to happen? The Soviets proved to be a relatively good partner, and helped usher in a short era of détente in the latter half of the 1960s. Despite few tangible results by 1964, foundations for broader détente and a thawing of hostilities were established. Despite not being an initial policy goal, this was a significant achievement for both de Gaulle and Khrushchev. However, it remains that many of the general's plans had not come to fruition. Since de Gaulle was leap-frogging through potential partners, and seems to have been dealt several blows to his policies towards NATO, USA, and FRG, it stands that his policy goals should be restated and briefly assessed on their success and overall significance. First, he did not succeed in solving the German problem, despite him identifying it as a key to ending the Cold War. In fairness, no other leader of the time solved this situation either and as such does not count against de Gaulle much. He did not limit greatly the influence of the United States in Europe either. There are multiple factors to this, including losing the special relationship with the FRG as well as multiple crises that required American presence to overcome, such as Berlin. He ultimately did not restore *grandeur* to the level he would have liked. This is evident, since France remained an influential, albeit medium weight power internationally. Lastly, de Gaulle was not successful in forming a neo-Concert of Europe, which left Atlanticism fully intact and Europeanism dead in the water, for the time being.

But this does not mean that his foreign policy should be judged a complete failure; indeed, there were significant successes. He brought an end to the Algerian

conflict, thus alleviating France of its colonial war and giving itself a free hand within the west. This also improved France's image internationally, especially within the developing world. Many of de Gaulle's policy goals, like the reformation of NATO, were dropped at times of increased hostilities and crisis. It is also noteworthy that he put aside his own policy endeavours to help and support allies during crises like the Paris Summit, Cuban missile crisis, and the Berlin crises. This demonstrates the de Gaulle understood that his own desires for France did not supersede the need for cohesion and solidarity at times of international conflict. His most important policy success is, without a doubt, breaking the East-West divide through the establishment of relations with the Soviet Union. As previously mentioned, this is significant because it contributed directly to broader détente in the latter half of the 1960's.

Thus, it seems although de Gaulle did not achieve his own set of policy goals, he unquestionably contributed to the reduction of hostility internationally through his help in the handling of crises, the ending of the Algerian conflict, and had a hand in sparking the first era of détente in the Cold War. Being the first to transcend the international divide, and being the "black sheep," as Vinogradov said, of the West ultimately worked out in de Gaulle's favour, and in favour of international détente. To this author these count as major successes, despite other failed policy initiatives. In all, de Gaulle used a trial and error system of diplomacy which ended up becoming, ironically, a stabilizing force internationally, and can therefore be judged successful in important ways.

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