

France and the German Question, 1945–1955

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What role did France play in the Cold War, and how is French policy in that conflict to be understood? For many years the prevailing assumption among scholars was that French policy was not very important. France, as the historian John Young points out, was “usually mentioned in Cold War histories only as an aside.” When the country was discussed at all, he notes, it was “often treated as a weak and vacillating power, obsessed with outdated ideas of a German ‘menace.’”¹ And indeed scholars often explicitly argued (to quote one typical passage) that during the early Cold War period “the major obsession of French policy was defense against the German threat.” “French awareness of the Russian threat,” on the other hand, was supposedly “belated and reluctant.”² The French government, it was said, was not eager in the immediate postwar period to see a Western bloc come into being to balance Soviet power in Europe; the hope instead was that France could serve as a kind of bridge between East and West.³

The basic French aim, according to this interpretation, was to keep Germany down by preserving the wartime alliance intact. Germany itself would no longer be a centralized state; the territory on the left bank of the Rhine would not even be part of Germany; the Ruhr basin, Germany’s industrial heartland, would be subject to allied control. Those goals, it was commonly assumed, were taken seriously, not just by General Charles de Gaulle, who headed the French provisional government until January 1946, but by Georges Bidault, who served as foreign minister almost without interruption from 1944 through mid-1948 and was the most important figure in French foreign policy in the immediate post-de Gaulle period.

1. John Young, *France, the Cold War and the Western Alliance, 1945–49: French Foreign Policy and Post-War Europe* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), p. ix.

2. Guy de Carmoy, *The Foreign Policies of France, 1944–1968*, trans. by Elaine Halperin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 23.

3. See, for example, Pierre Gerbet, *Le Relèvement, 1944–1949* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1991), p. 260; and Michael Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 8.

The problem for France, the argument runs, was that the Americans, with British support, were determined to build up Germany, or at least the part of Germany they controlled. The Western powers were thus deeply divided on the German question; France and the United States were operating on “different wavelengths.”⁴ But given that the bulk of western Germany was controlled by Britain and the United States, the outcome of that conflict was never in doubt. The French, to avoid total marginalization—that is, to have any impact at all on what was going on within Germany—were forced from concession to concession.⁵ Very reluctantly, and because France had little choice in the matter, the French government accepted the German policy of the other Western powers.⁶ But France, it was assumed, had been foolish to adopt an “overly ambitious policy” in the first place; given basic power realities, that policy “never stood any chance” of being accepted.⁷

So French policy evolved. An “agonizing reappraisal,” as Maurice Vaisse put it, began in the spring of 1947.⁸ But the fundamental goal, according to this view, did not really change. “Bidault gradually moved toward a policy of cooperation with the English and the Americans,” Pierre Gerbet wrote, “in the hope of getting them to retain some of the controls on Germany.”⁹ The primary goal was simply to slow down and put some limit on what the Anglo-Saxon powers were doing in Germany and to salvage as much of the control regime as possible. To be sure, it was widely recognized that the French government, especially after Bidault was replaced as foreign minister by Robert Schuman in mid-1948, gradually adopted a more positive policy of replacing the control regime with “European” structures. But once again the assumption was that basic policy had not been radically transformed. Fundamentally, and above all in the key military area, the French were still concerned with keeping Germany down.

It was for this reason, according to the standard interpretation, that when the Americans pressed for German rearmament in late 1950, the French sup-

4. Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 48.

5. Thus, for example, according to Alfred Grosser, “la politique française apparaît comme un constant combat en retrait.” Alfred Grosser, *Affaires extérieures: La politique de la France, 1944–1989* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), p. 81. See also Gerbet, *Le Relèvement*, p. 279.

6. “C’est résignée, et parce qu’on ne pouvait pas faire autrement, que la France entra dans la nouvelle politique allemande de l’Occident.” Jacques Bariéty, in preface to Cyril Buffet, *Mourir pour Berlin: La France et l’Allemagne, 1945–1949* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), p. v. See also Harrison, *Reluctant Ally*, p. 13.

7. Gerbet, *Le Relèvement*, p. 85.

8. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 279.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

posedly fought the proposal tooth and nail. France, as one leading scholar, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, argued, “so recently occupied and ravaged” by the Germans, “opposed any such move with all its strength.”¹⁰ But again to no avail: The Americans held all the cards and ultimately got their way. The plan the French crafted in response to the American pressure—the plan for a European Defense Community (EDC)—was a total failure, repudiated in the end by the French themselves. The Americans, in the final analysis, got what they wanted. This result reflected the basic fact that France in the 1950s, in the words of Duroselle, had become a kind of “satellite” of the United States—a “recalcitrant satellite” perhaps, but a “satellite” nonetheless.¹¹

What is to be made of this whole line of argument? Is it true that the French governments of the late 1940s “tended to deal with the problem of Germany in terms of traditional reflexes rather than pragmatically?”¹² Is it true that they were far more concerned with the German threat than with the threat from the Soviet Union and that their policy during this period was rooted in an “atavistic urge” to keep Germany down?¹³ Were the French opposed in principle in the early 1950s to the rearmament of West Germany, and did they accept the arrangements that were worked out by late 1954—the establishment of a West German army, the liquidation of the occupation regime, and West Germany’s admission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—only because they essentially had no choice in the matter?

France and the “Western Strategy,” 1945–1949

One can begin by reviewing the late 1940s. Was it the case that the French government in that period sought to avoid involvement in the Cold War—that the French were “obsessed” with Germany, that they were not particularly concerned with the threat posed by Soviet power, and that they were reluctant to align themselves with America and Britain in the immediate post–World War II period? The first point to note here is that from the outset French leaders were in fact deeply concerned with the Soviet threat. In 1946, for example, Bidault believed it was the *Americans* who were too soft. The U.S. govern-

10. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States: From the Beginnings to the Present*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 191.

11. *Ibid.* This is the title of ch. 8. Duroselle was perhaps the leading French diplomatic historian of his generation.

12. Herbert Tint, *French Foreign Policy since the Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p. 39.

13. *Ibid.*

ment, in his view, was not sufficiently attuned to the problem of Soviet power.¹⁴ His concerns were by no means atypical. Even before the end of the war in Europe, many high-ranking French officials were very worried about the Soviet Union. U.S. ambassador Jefferson Caffery reported that as early as April 1945, de Gaulle, Bidault, and other “highly placed French authorities” were “frankly apprehensive” about the threat from the east. De Gaulle believed it was “very possible that Russia will take over the entire continent of Europe in due course”; given the Soviet threat, it was very important, he told Caffery repeatedly, that France work with America. And Bidault asked Caffery: “Who is going to stop Attila; he is covering more territory every day.”¹⁵

For France, the German problem of course remained a serious concern; indeed, it remained important for the United States and Britain as well. That problem had by no means been totally eclipsed by the Soviet threat. But it is important to note here that the more astute French policymakers had come to understand relatively early on that a harsh policy was not the only way, and perhaps not even the best way, to deal with the problem. An alternative policy was available, the policy the Americans and the British were moving toward: a policy of integrating western Germany into the Western world. That alternative had become viable thanks to the Cold War. A truncated Germany threatened by the Soviet Union, a rump Germany dependent on the Western powers for protection, a Germany integrated into the Western system, would not pose a threat; the country could therefore be treated relatively gently and could gradually be made into a partner; and a system based on consent would be more stable in the long run than one based on repression. Indeed, a policy of repression could not in the long run keep Germany in the Western camp: a policy of keeping Germany down would not prevent the Germans, one key Foreign Ministry official noted in 1947, from “flirting with the Russians,” and a more positive policy would make more sense.¹⁶ This policy of putting western Germany’s relationship with the Western powers on a new footing, it gradually became clear, might actually be better, even from the

14. Georges-Henri Soutou, “La sécurité de la France dans l’après-guerre,” in Maurice Vaisse, Pierre Mélandri, and Frédéric Bozo, eds., *La France et l’OTAN 1949–1996* (Paris: Complexe, 1996), p. 28.

15. Caffery to Secretary of State, 11 April, 20 April, and 5 May 1945, attached to Matthews to Dunn, 12 May 1945, enclosing a memorandum for the secretary of the same date, in U.S. National Archives (hereinafter NA), College Park, MD, 751.00/5-1245, U.S. Department of State Central Files (hereinafter DSCF), Record Group 59. All three documents were originally classified “top secret.” The documents can also be found in U.S. Department of State, *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files: France, 1945–1949* (hereinafter referred to as *CUSSDCF: France*), reels 1–4, University Publications of America (UPA) microfilm, 1987. Articles are commonly deleted from the text of telegrams, but for the sake of readability, in the quotations cited here the articles have been put back in.

16. Coulet (head of the Direction d’Europe) to Massigli, 31 October 1947, in French Foreign Ministry Archives (hereinafter FFMA), Paris, René Massigli Papers, Vol. 96.

standpoint of France's own interests, than a policy of trying to hold Germany down forever.

France thus was increasingly inclined to accept the solution that the Anglo-Saxons were promoting. The more perceptive French leaders, impelled by the same forces that were shaping American and British policy, were beginning to conclude that the "western strategy" for Germany—the policy of "organizing" western Germany, of building a state there that would be integrated into the Western system economically, politically, culturally, and, ultimately, militarily—might be the best course of action, for France as for the West as a whole. The "western strategy," it was gradually becoming clear, might solve, on a more or less permanent basis, *both* of the great problems France faced in the international sphere, the German problem and the Soviet problem as well.

French leaders, of course, embraced a very different line in public, but public statements are not necessarily to be taken at face value. A gap often exists between what is said in public and the real thinking of the political leadership. In this case, that gap resulted from political conditions in France. In 1946 the powerful French Communist Party was still part of the governing coalition. In such circumstances the French government obviously could not pursue an overt anti-Soviet line. A showdown with the Communists could provoke a political (and economic) crisis within France and might even lead to civil war. An overtly anti-Soviet policy therefore had to be avoided, at least until the anti-Communist forces became stronger at home. But one should not be deceived by appearances. The real thinking of France's non-Communist political leadership was much more in line with the policy of the other Western powers than the public discourse might suggest.

In fact, French leaders made it quite clear that they wanted to cooperate with their British and American friends on the German question but were held back by domestic political concerns. Bidault, for example, met with U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall in April 1947 and laid out the problem very bluntly: "To the American question, 'Can we rely on France?'" he told Marshall, "the answer was 'Yes.' But France needed time and must avoid a civil war."¹⁷ Three months later, when Bidault complained sharply to the Americans and the British that they were moving ahead too quickly in Germany, he emphasized to them that his main objections had to do with the domestic political situation in France. He understood the American position on

17. Bidault-Marshall meeting, 20 April 1947, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1947, Vol. II, pp. 369–370 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers). See also his 29 March 1947 letter to Pierre-Henri Teitgen, quoted in Georges-Henri Soutou, "Georges Bidault et la construction européenne, 1944–1954," *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, Vol. 105, Nos. 3–4 (1991), p. 273. This article was also published in Serge Berstein, Jean-Marie Mayeur, and Pierre Milza, eds., *Le MRP et la construction européenne* (Paris: Complexe, 1993).

the German question, Ambassador Caffery noted, and “realizes that France must eventually go along with us but at the same time emphasizes in the strongest possible terms the impossibility of the average Frenchman doing so at this juncture.”¹⁸ Bidault was not pleading for an end to the policy that the Anglo-Saxon powers were pursuing in Germany; instead he merely wanted the policy to be implemented more gradually and managed more consensually. “I know full well,” he told Caffery, “that our zone must join yours, but I cannot do it at the mouth of the gun. Why won’t your governments let us in on conversations of this kind meanwhile?”—that is, conversations to work out a common policy for western Germany.¹⁹

Even in 1946 domestic political considerations played a key role in the calculations of Bidault and his main advisers. On 11 June, for example, Jean Chauvel, the highest-ranking permanent official at the foreign ministry, discussed these issues in a “personal and strictly confidential” meeting with Caffery. Chauvel thought it quite possible that Germany would be divided between east and west. He understood why in such circumstances the United States and Britain would want to cooperate in organizing the part of Germany they controlled. He told the U.S. ambassador that although he and other top-ranking French officials would like to go along with that policy, for “internal political reasons” it was “impossible for any French government to adopt an official policy of supporting the Anglo-Saxon powers against the Soviets in Germany.” The French Communists, he noted, “would bitterly oppose any such policy with all means at their disposal, and that through their control of the CGT [the most important French labor union] they were in a position to make impossible the task of any French Government.” The leading party in the ruling coalition, the Christian Democratic MRP, would, in Chauvel’s view, probably oppose any policy “certain to throw the Communists into opposition” because it would inevitably lead to “internal confusion and chaos.” The French government could therefore not “formally and officially” side with the Anglo-American powers on the German question. But in a less formal and more gradual way, the French government could cooperate with the other Western powers. If Germany were divided, he said, France would “for very practical reasons be naturally attracted to the Anglo-Saxon group.” Arrangements would be worked out dealing with specific problems having to do with relations between the French and Anglo-American zones; in that way, the French position would gradually evolve, and the situation might ultimately be “formalized by some real agreement.”²⁰

18. Caffery to Marshall, 18 July 1947, in NA, 711.51/7-1847, DSCF; also in *CUSSDCF: France*.

19. Caffery to Marshall, 17 July 1947, in NA, 711.51/7-1747, DSCF; also in *CUSSDCF: France*.

20. Caffery to Byrnes, 11 June 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, Vol. V, pp. 566–567.

The situation with the French Communists, though very important, was not the only relevant factor. Bidault also had to concern himself with pressure from the right. He told the Americans in August 1946 that the official French policy on Germany “had been a mistake.” But he explained that this was because he had “inherited this policy from de Gaulle,” and “internal political reasons—the elections and the general popularity of de Gaulle’s thesis” on Germany—“had made it impossible” for him to reverse it. It was obvious to him that it was in France’s interest to reach an agreement with the Americans and the British, but a change in policy would have to wait until after the domestic political situation improved—that is, until after the next elections.²¹

Thus there was a real gap between the official French policy and what key policymakers such as Bidault actually wanted to do. One historian has recently argued that Bidault was playing something of a double game: His ostensible goals were not his real objectives; those objectives had to be pursued in a less-than-straightforward way. Indeed, it does seem clear that France’s official policy in late 1945 of pressing for a political separation of the Rhineland from the rest of Germany is not to be taken at face value and that the policy should be understood in essentially instrumental terms. It is well known that those Rhenish claims were linked to France’s general policy on the German question. On 13 September, at the London Foreign Ministers’ Conference, the French officially announced that they would not agree to the establishment of central administrations for Germany unless they received satisfaction on the Ruhr-Rhineland issue. When it became evident that the British and Americans would not go along with the French on this matter, the French representatives on the Allied Control Council (the supreme allied authority within Germany) vetoed the establishment of the central administrations. The Rhenish issue thus served as the official basis for a policy of obstruction in Germany.²²

21. Caffery to Byrnes, 30 August 1946, *FRUS*, 1946, Vol. V, p. 596.

22. See Dietmar Hüser, *Frankreichs “doppelte Deutschlandpolitik”: Dynamik aus der Defensive—Plänen, Entscheiden, Umsetzen in gesellschaftlichen und wirtschaftlichen, innen- und ausenpolitischen Krisenzeiten: 1944–1950* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996). For briefer versions of Hüser’s argument, see his “Charles de Gaulle, Georges Bidault, Robert Schuman et l’Allemagne, 1944–1950: Conceptions—Actions—Perceptions,” *Francia*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1996), pp. 49–73, esp. pp. 61–64; and also his “Frankreich und das Rheinland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Realität und Rhetorik der Abtrennungsforderung 1943–1948,” in Tilman Koops and Martin Vogt, eds., *Das Rheinland in zwei Nachkriegszeiten, 1919–1930 und 1945–1949* (Koblenz: Bundesarchiv, 1995), pp. 103–128. See also John Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945–1955: The Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 152, 156. On the threat to veto the establishment of central administrations if France’s Rhenish demands were not met, see especially the French note of 13 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. III, pp. 869–871; and the record of the London Foreign Ministers’ Conference, 26 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 400–410.

It was the *official* basis, but not the *actual* basis. What actually worried French leaders was that the Soviet Union would dominate a unified German state. They repeatedly emphasized (in secret talks with the Americans) that this was the real reason they opposed the establishment of central administrations. On 27 September, for example, René Mayer, the acting foreign minister and a major figure in French political life at the time, saw Caffery. The ambassador reported that Mayer told him, “repeating what de Gaulle and Bidault have often told me before,” that the French were worried that a central German government would “eventually be dominated by the Russians” and that the French would end up having “the Soviets on their frontiers.” This was why, Mayer implied, they were against the establishment of central administrations in Germany.²³ A month later de Gaulle told Caffery much the same thing: The French were opposed to the “setting up of any sort of central government in Germany” because they were convinced that any such government “would inevitably” fall into Moscow’s hands.²⁴ In early December Bidault again made the same point: “centralized administrative agencies” would “inevitably lead” to a Soviet-dominated Germany.²⁵ And this was not just the line French leaders took with the American government. As one of the closest students of French policy in this period has pointed out, the fear of “Russians on the Rhine” was very real.²⁶

All of this suggests that the Rhenish demands are to be understood essentially as an instrument for pursuing an obstructionist policy whose real source lay elsewhere. The real basis of that policy—the desire to keep at least western Germany from falling under Soviet control—could not be avowed openly, if only for domestic political reasons. The Rhenish policy could serve as a convenient pretext for adopting an obstructionist course of action. After all, French leaders did not cling to the Rhenish policy because they were convinced it might succeed. From September 1945 on, the French no longer believed the Rhenish goals were feasible.²⁷ They therefore must have had some other reason for holding on to that policy. Given their concerns about the Soviet Union and given the political situation at home, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they clung to the policy because it provided a basis—indeed the only politically viable basis—for a course of action designed to keep Soviet forces east of the Elbe. If that is the case, one could scarcely criticize the French for foolishly pursuing a policy that never stood any chance of being

23. Caffery to Byrnes, 27 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. III, p. 878.

24. Caffery to Byrnes, 3 November 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. III, pp. 890–891.

25. Caffery to Byrnes, 8 December 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. III, p. 916n.

26. Hüser, “Charles de Gaulle, Georges Bidault, Robert Schuman et l’Allemagne,” p. 60.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

accepted. Instead, the real French policy would have to be viewed as rather astute and effective.

The official French rhetoric about Germany, in short, should not be taken at face value. Bidault himself referred, as early as September 1945, to the German danger as a “convenient myth”—convenient, presumably, in that it provided political cover for a course of action that was in fact directed against the Soviet threat.²⁸ This is not to say that French leaders were not concerned with Germany as such. From their point of view, there obviously was a German problem, even if, for the time being, the Soviet threat was a far greater problem. The point here is simply that French leaders were not locked into the kind of thinking reflected in public statements of policy. From the start, the real thinking of people like Bidault was much more rooted in a concern with Soviet power than the official rhetoric implied.

Now, if all this is true, it obviously affects how we interpret France’s relations with the other Western powers. The issue is complicated by the fact that the American and British governments were playing double games of their own. Officially those governments wanted Germany run as a unit—that is, on a four-power basis. But here, too, the reality was more complex. Britain in late 1945 did not really want to establish effective central administrations in Germany; the British minister responsible for German affairs acknowledged at the time that one of Britain’s “chief purposes” was to prevent effective central administrations from coming into being.²⁹ The basic goal was to keep Soviet influence out of western Germany.

As for the Americans, General Lucius Clay, the head of the U.S. military government in Germany, strongly supported the unitary policy, but Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, who was the real maker of American foreign policy during the immediate postwar period, saw things quite differently. At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945 Byrnes had leaned strongly toward the opposite policy, a policy that looked toward a division of Germany between east and west.³⁰ In fact, in a meeting with Bidault in late August, Byrnes referred very revealingly to a Germany of 45 million, which meant a rump Germany composed of the three western zones (there being 45 million people in western Germany in 1945).³¹ Moreover, at the same time that the American military government in Germany was complaining vociferously about France’s veto of the central administrations, Robert Murphy, the top State Depart-

28. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

29. Quoted in Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 76.

30. See Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), ch. 1.

31. Byrnes-Bidault meeting, 23 August 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 720.

ment official in Germany, was actively encouraging the French in their obstructionism.³²

What all this meant was that, appearances to the contrary, France and Britain and the United States were never that far apart on fundamentals, whatever their differences on secondary issues. The basic idea, the heart of the Western consensus in the postwar period, was that *western* Germany should be “organized” by the allied powers and integrated into their bloc. The U.S. government adopted this approach in 1946, and the British at that time agreed to go along with the policy. The French, however, as noted above, had to hold back, largely for domestic political reasons. But in 1947, after the Communists had been dropped from the government, the French government gradually moved toward open acceptance of the “western strategy” and, in 1948, agreed to cosponsor the establishment of a west German state. Was this because the French had been forced into a corner and the alternative to acceptance was total exclusion from German affairs? Was it the case that the French, in the late 1940s, never really accepted the western strategy for Germany—that their goal in associating themselves with it was to sabotage the policy from within and thus to hold on to as much of the control regime as possible, for as long as possible?

French policy was more positive than that. The more perceptive French leaders accepted the fundamental premises of the western strategy; they understood why a system based on the division of Germany “had major advantages” for them; they understood why a purely repressive policy was not the best way to deal with the German problem and why, in the long run, a more moderate policy benefited France.³³ To be sure, memories of the war were still fresh in people’s minds, and anti-German feelings could not be ignored. But at the highest political level, rational analysis pulled in the opposite direction. It was not just that people had come to recognize the fairly simple point that the Soviet threat meant it was important to draw the Germans into the Western world; they also were coming to grasp the more subtle point that by drawing the Germans into that world they would effectively solve the *German* problem.³⁴ Because the Western countries were status quo powers, a Germany dependent on the Western governments for protection would be a Germany locked into the status quo. The Germans would find their place in the West-

32. Saint-Hardouin to Bidault, 9 October 1945, in FFMA, series “Y: International, 1945–1949,” Vol. 283; summarized in Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, p. 72.

33. See, for example, Massigli to Bidault, 8 July 1947, in FFMA, Massigli Papers, Vol. 92; and Coulet to Massigli, 31 October 1947, in FFMA, Massigli Papers, Vol. 96. See also a note by the head of the European Office at the Quai d’Orsay, J.-C. Paris, of 18 July 1948, quoted in Buffet, *Mourir pour Berlin*, p. 189.

34. Note in this context Maurice Couve de Murville, *Le Monde en face: Entretiens avec Maurice Delarue* (Paris: Plon, 1989), pp. 49–50, 90–91.

ern political system, and integration into that system would automatically limit Germany's freedom of action. If Germany remained divided between east and west and if Soviet forces remained in the eastern part of the country, then Western forces, and especially American forces, would remain in western Germany. The presence of these forces would provide France with security not just against the Soviet Union but against Germany as well. The system that was developing, the Cold War political system, was thus quite satisfactory from the French point of view.

Precisely because French leaders were beginning to understand these things, they did *not* fight the Americans as fiercely as they might have on the German question. For example, in February 1948, Secretary Marshall instructed Ambassador Caffery to take the following line with Bidault and other top French officials:

French preoccupation with Germany as a major threat at this time seems to us outmoded and unrealistic. Germany might possibly become a threat in the distant future, but in the meantime the real threat to France seems to us to be another power which will undoubtedly seek to utilize a substantial segment of the German economy if unable to get control of Germany. In our opinion, French security for many years to come will depend on the integration of Western Europe, including the western German economy. Unless Western Germany during the coming years is effectively associated with the Western European nations, first through economic arrangements, and ultimately perhaps in some political way, there is a real danger that the whole of Germany will be drawn into the eastern orbit, with obvious dire consequences for all of us.³⁵

Did the French react defensively to what might easily have come across as an attack on their policy? Did they deny that their "preoccupation" with the German threat was "outmoded and unrealistic"? Did they dispute the claim that a policy of "integration," a policy of "associating" western Germany with Western Europe, was the way to go? Not at all: Robert Schuman, at this point still the French prime minister, told Caffery that he agreed with the line Marshall had presented. Bidault also agreed "that Germany does not constitute a menace at this juncture, but Russia does."³⁶ On the most basic issues, American and French leaders were on the same wavelength.

At its core, Western policy was consensual. France was not more or less forced to go along with an American policy of which it deeply disapproved. Indeed, on occasion the French played an active role in the development of policy in this area. In 1949, for example, it was the French government that

35. Marshall to Caffery, 19 February 1948, *FRUS*, 1948, Vol. II, p. 71.

36. Caffery to Marshall, 22 February 1948, 11:32 a.m., in DSCF, 751.00/2-2248; Caffery to Marshall, 22 February 1948, 4:44 p.m., in DSCF, 751.00/2-2248. Both documents are also in *CUSSDCF: France*.

took the lead in pressing for a major liberalization of the occupation regime. A top French official, André François-Poncet, “obviously speaking under instructions,” laid out the French view in a meeting with George Kennan (then a high State Department official) in March. The occupation statute that was being drafted by the three Western powers, François-Poncet said, was “over-complicated, impractical and politically deadening.” The foreign minister, Robert Schuman, believed “the time had come for a sweeping and forward-looking solution” to the problem of Germany’s relations with the Western powers. The military government, he said, should be “abolished altogether” and replaced by a small allied commission with limited powers. The Americans decided to support this plan, which later served as the basis for the regime that was actually instituted.³⁷

French leaders thus understood the logic of the “western strategy,” and at a very basic level they accepted it. They understood why the Cold War political system, a system based on a divided Germany, was in their interest; they understood in particular why western Germany had to be tied to the Western world as a whole. They also grasped the point that the “western strategy” implied an eventual transformation of Germany’s political status: as François-Poncet himself pointed out in November 1950, one had to face up to the fact that in the long run there was no way Germany could be treated as part of the Western bloc—that is, as an economic and military ally—unless it was freed from allied control and was given the full rights enjoyed by other states.³⁸ But in his view—and this was typical of the way the French government as a whole viewed the problem—it was “all a question of time.” It was all a question of how fast to go, and of how this process was to be managed. The French government wanted to move ahead, but carefully and cautiously, and that attitude was by no means rooted solely in concerns about Germany.

France and German Rearmament, 1950–1954

The claim that France was “obsessed” with the German threat and the related claim that the French fought American pressure for a liberalization of allied policy in Germany as hard as they could and gave way in the end only because they were too weak to prevent the Americans from doing what they wanted are supported by a common view of French policy on the German rearmament issue in the early 1950s. The French, it is argued, bitterly opposed the

37. Kennan notes, 21 March 1949, *FRUS*, 1949, Vol. III, pp. 113–114.

38. “On ne saurait se dissimuler,” he wrote, “qu’il serait malaisé, à la longue, de traiter l’Allemagne à la fois en alliée économique et militaire et en nation sous tutelle et de droits réduits.” François-Poncet to Foreign Ministry, 17 November 1950, in FFMA, series “Europe 1949–1955,” subseries “Allemagne,” box 913.

very idea of a rearmed West Germany. When the Americans pressed for West German rearmament at the New York Conference in September 1950, French foreign minister Schuman, the argument runs, flatly rejected the American proposal. According to Irwin Wall, for example, Schuman at that time “remained obstinately against any idea of German rearmament.”³⁹ Likewise, Frank Ninkovich contends that “Schuman was completely unmovable” on the issue. David Clay Large and Robert Gildea concur. Schuman, Large writes, “refused to budge from France’s categorical rejection of *any* German rearmament,” and Gildea says that Schuman at that time “was vehemently opposed to the rearming of Germany.”⁴⁰ In Laurence Martin’s view the French, at the New York meetings, “refused to accept even the principle of German rearmament.”⁴¹ Robert McGeehan makes the same point, arguing that at the New York Conference disagreement on the rearmament issue was complete, “with the French representative declining to agree even to the ‘principle’ of an eventual German military force.”⁴²

But in fact the French *did* accept the principle of a West German contribution to the defense of the West. As an internal French Foreign Ministry document noted, the common view that the two approaches to the issue—the American approach and the French approach—were “contradictory” was quite mistaken. Those two approaches, it pointed out, actually had a good deal in common. Both governments had accepted the principle of forward defense—that is, the idea that Western Europe had to be defended “as far to the east as possible.” From this, both had drawn the conclusion that if West Germany were to be defended—that is, if West Germany were “to benefit from a system of security resulting from the application of this strategic concept”—then it was only fair that “she provide her own contribution” to that defense effort. The points “on which agreement now exists,” the document concluded, were of “capital importance”: “there exists, then, an *agreement on the principle* of ‘German rearmament’.”⁴³ Even Jules Moch, the French cabinet

39. Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945–1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 198.

40. Frank Ninkovich, *Germany and the United States: The Transformation of the German Question since 1945*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 79; David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 85 (emphasis in original text); and Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 13.

41. Laurence Martin, “The American Decision to Rearm Germany,” in Harold Stein, ed., *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1963), p. 658.

42. Robert McGeehan, *The German Rearmament Question: American Diplomacy and European Defense after World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 54.

43. Note, 4 November 1950, Cabinet du Ministre, in FFMA, Cabinet de Robert Schuman (1948–1953), Vols. 148–149 (emphasis in original).

minister most hostile to West German rearmament, believed that rearmament would be acceptable under certain conditions. Moch was asked at the NATO Defense Committee in October 1950 whether the French government accepted “the principle of the creation of German military units.” The answer, he said, was yes, “but only under the condition that the creation of these units be not or tend not to become a risk which might be mortal to the democracies. In other words, that these units be not large units, but be integrated into European Divisions.”⁴⁴

The record of the New York meetings makes clear that the French were not opposed to West German rearmament as a matter of principle. Schuman’s remarks there in fact pointed in the opposite direction. “Regarding the participation of Germany in the defense effort,” Schuman told his British and American counterparts at the start of the conference, “it would seem illogical for us to defend Western Europe, including Germany, without contributions from Germany.” “It was not possible,” he said, “to accept a situation in which the Allies had to defend Germany without the Germans making any contribution to the common cause.” But there was a serious “psychological problem to be faced, particularly in France.” Schuman “did not think this was an obstacle to all action”; indeed, in his view, “it was really only a question of timing.” But if the French Government “were forced to take a stand on this issue before French public opinion was ready everything might go wrong.” The answer, he thought, was to take things one step at a time, and the first step was to build up the military strength of the NATO countries. But after the NATO countries had begun to move ahead in this area, after a NATO commander had been appointed and a combined staff had been set up, it would be easier, he said, to “reach a decision on German participation.” “The difficulties confronting the French Government would” by then, in his view, “largely have been removed.” He stressed the point that the delay he had in mind would not be lengthy; in his opinion it was “only a question of a few months,” and maybe even less than that.⁴⁵

In December 1950 Schuman made the same basic point in a meeting with British leaders. The French, he said, “did not object to the principle of German participation. It was logical; we could not conceive of defending Germany on the Elbe without sacrifice and effort from the Germans.”⁴⁶ He just

44. “Minutes of the Fourth Meeting, First, Second, and Third Sessions Held on 28–31 October 1950,” in NATO Archives, Brussels, Record-DC-004.

45. Acheson-Schuman-Bevin meeting, 12 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. III, p. 1200; and Bevin to Foreign Office, 13 September 1950, *Documents on British Policy Overseas* (hereinafter *DBPO*), Series II, Vol. 3, p. 36.

46. Atlee-Bevin-Pleven-Schuman meeting, 2 December 1950, *DBPO*, Series II, Vol. 3, p. 313.

wanted to move ahead one step at a time. In taking this line, moreover, the French were not just temporizing; key French officials framed the issue the same way when discussing it among themselves. Even Moch took the position during those internal discussions in late 1950 that “the error to be avoided” was to accept West German rearmament “while Western forces are still not ready.” Such comments reflected the basic assumption that German rearmament would be acceptable once the Western bloc had built up its own power.⁴⁷

Senior French officials had been thinking along these lines for some time. The military leadership, for example, had generally favored German rearmament since 1948; one of the standard arguments military commanders made was that if Germany were to be defended, the Germans should carry their fair share of the defense burden. As two leading officers put it, the Germans should pay the “blood price” for their own safety.⁴⁸ Even before the New York meetings French officials had generally accepted the idea of West German rearmament—or so it seemed at the time to the American ambassador, David Bruce—and one of the key arguments they made had to do with the burden-sharing issue. “It would be ridiculous,” they thought, if West Germany could enjoy a peacetime economy while at the same time the other European countries had to make “substantial, additional military efforts.” Most French officials, Bruce reported, believed that a highly integrated NATO structure was needed, if only to provide a framework within which West German rearmament could take place. “Nevertheless,” they argued, it would “remain politically impossible to rearm” the West Germans as long as the other Europeans saw “in such action the risk of a resurgence of German military might.” “A truly common effort” was “the only way out”; if the West Germans were made “soldiers in an Atlantic Community army or even a European army,” the West German rearmament question, they noted, would be “viewed in a quite different light.” In addition to “all the other advantages of a really ‘common NATO defense,’” the “problem of Germany,” in their view, was thus “enough in itself” to warrant the establishment of a highly centralized NATO system.⁴⁹ The Americans were beginning to think along similar lines. In fact, Bruce’s long report reinforced the view in Washington that the United States

47. Comité de Défense Nationale meeting, 16 December 1950, in Archives Nationales (hereinafter AN), Paris [Vincent] Auriol Papers (552 AP 44), 4AU 5/Dr 1.

48. General Paul Ely and Colonel Paul Stehlin to the prime minister, quoted in Pierre Guillen, “Les chefs militaires français, le réarmement de l’Allemagne et la CED (1950–1954),” *Revue d’histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, No. 129 (January 1983), p. 4.

49. Bruce to Acheson, 28 July 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 151–159, esp. p. 157. “There seems to be an astonishing unanimity,” Bruce reported, “in the views of French government officials on the need and reasons for a ‘collective’ approach” (p. 152).

was on the right track in working out plans for a “controlled rearmament of West Germany” within the framework of an integrated Atlantic or European defense force.⁵⁰

Given those basic attitudes, it is not surprising that Schuman emphasized to U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson, during a secret one-on-one meeting at the start of the New York Conference that he “was not opposed” to the American plan. But he wanted to move ahead very cautiously. He had already told Acheson that he was willing to discuss the issue *à trois* with the British and American foreign ministers, and he obviously did not believe that agreement on this issue was out of the question. Schuman noted that in the past the three foreign ministers “had been successful in reaching agreement even upon the most difficult issues,” and he hoped that this would be the case once again.⁵¹ But the key point here was that an agreement would have to be kept secret. Schuman stressed that if the French government agreed to the American plan, the arrangement “could not be made public for some time.” The whole matter would have to be kept secret because in the present circumstances, as Schuman pointed out to Acheson, only “a minority in France appreciates the importance of Germany in western defense.”⁵²

A “premature decision”—a *public* decision—was clearly out of the question.⁵³ But this did not mean that Schuman was unwilling to agree to West German rearmament in principle. He wanted to reach a *secret* understanding with Acheson and Bevin, but the Americans refused to proceed on that basis. As a top French official pointed out a few weeks later, “it might have been possible to reach a confidential agreement for action later whilst details and safeguards were being worked out,” but the American attitude—the fact that “the Americans were insisting on a public acceptance of the principle now”—had made that impossible.⁵⁴

50. See Thomas Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 129; and Acheson to Bruce, 2 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950 Vol. III, pp. 261–262.

51. Schuman-Acheson meeting, 12 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950 Vol. III, pp. 267–268; and Bruce to Acheson, 5 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950 Vol. III, pp. 287–288.

52. Schuman-Acheson meeting, 12 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 287–288. See also Acheson-Schuman-Bevin meeting, 14 September 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 299–300.

53. This was a point Schuman made repeatedly during the New York meetings. For one example among many, see his statement to the North Atlantic Council, 16 September 1950, in NATO Archives, C5-VR/3. “What I cannot do,” he said “what my Government cannot do at the *present* time and under the *present* circumstances, is to reach a *premature* decision on this problem.” Emphasis added.

54. Parodi (Secretary-General at the Quai d’Orsay), quoted in Harvey to Bevin, 7 October 1950, *DBPO*, Series II, Vol. 3, p. 136.

Why did the French leadership want to approach the issue so cautiously? Domestic politics was not the only factor involved. There were good foreign policy reasons for moving ahead slowly—reasons having to do with both West Germany and the Soviet Union. To ask West Germany to rearm, the French feared, would weaken the allies' bargaining position vis-à-vis the West Germans, who would be in a position to lay down conditions. The transformation of the bargaining relationship would, in turn, adversely affect the final settlement that the Western powers were busy working out with the Federal Republic. In particular, the West Germans might take a harder line in the negotiations on the Schuman Plan, the plan for a supranational European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It was for this reason that Jean Monnet, the "father" of the Schuman Plan, wanted the rearmament issue put on hold until the ECSC treaty was signed. As Monnet told one of his associates in October: "You well understand, dear friend, that if we rearm, there is no longer a Schuman Plan."⁵⁵

An even more important factor had to do with the Soviet Union. A decision to rearm West Germany, the French worried, might provoke a Soviet attack. In December 1950 Soviet leaders declared that they "would not accept the renaissance in western Germany of a regular German army" and that they "would not tolerate" the rearmament of West Germany.⁵⁶ Even before those threats were made, the French had worried about how the Soviet Union would react if the West declared that West Germany would be rearmed. In Schuman's view it was vitally important to "take care not to give provocation to Russia."⁵⁷ Other senior French officials felt much the same way. One gets the sense reading the records of internal discussions among top French officials that this was perhaps the most important reason that they believed West German rearmament needed to be delayed until the West was strong enough to withstand the Soviet reaction.⁵⁸ These concerns should be taken se-

55. Quoted in Philippe Vial, "Limites et contradictions d'une méthode: Monnet et les débuts de la construction communautaire (1950–1954)," in *Cinquante ans après la déclaration Schuman, histoire de la construction européenne* (forthcoming), p. 23. See also Philippe Vial, "Jean Monnet, un père pour la CED?" in René Girault and Gérard Bossuat, *Europe brisée, Europe retrouvée: Nouvelles réflexions sur l'unité de l'Europe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994), pp. 210–220; and William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). As Hitchcock notes, "the prospect of German rearmament threatened France's entire postwar strategy of recovery and endangered the fragile fabric of controls woven together by the Schuman Plan" (pp. 4–5).

56. Notes of 5 and 14 December 1950, Cabinet du Ministre, in FFMA, Cabinet de Robert Schuman (1948–1953), Vol. 148.

57. Schuman-Acheson-Bevin meeting, 14 September 1950, *DBPO*, Series II, Vol. 3, p. 48.

58. See, for example, the notes of the Comité de Défense Nationale meeting, 16 December 1950, in AN, Auriol Papers (552 AP44), 4AU5/Dr 1.

riously. This was not just an argument conjured up to serve as a pretext for resisting American pressure. Many American officials, it is important to note in this context, also worried that a decision to rearm West Germany at that point might provoke Soviet preventive action.⁵⁹

From the French point of view in late 1950, Acheson was too aggressive. French leaders agreed with the Americans that Europe had to be defended on the ground as far to the east as possible. They also agreed that West German troops ultimately would be required for that purpose. But they wanted to move ahead in a more deliberate way. They wanted to build up the general strength of the Western forces first; only when that process was well under way and there was a strong Western defense structure in place that could absorb West German forces, and only when the West was strong enough to deal with the Soviet reaction, would a controlled rearmament of West Germany be possible. The French were thus not dead set against the very idea of West German rearmament.

In fact, it was a French government that played the key role in shaping the solution that was eventually worked out. It is well known that the French in late 1950 responded to U.S. pressure for a rapid rearmament of West Germany not with an outright refusal but with an alternative plan of their own, the Pleven Plan for a highly integrated European army. This supranational force would have included units from the six continental states—France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg—that were also coming together in the ECSC. By 1951 the Pleven Plan had developed into a proposal for a European Defense Community (EDC), and after long and difficult negotiations a treaty establishing the EDC was signed in May 1952. But no French parliament would ratify that treaty, and in August 1954 the Pierre Mendès France government finally allowed it to be voted down.

Soon after the defeat of the EDC, the allies crafted an alternative arrangement. In two landmark conferences held at London and Paris in late 1954, the conferees worked out a number of crucial agreements. Those agreements, known as the “Paris accords,” provided for the establishment of a West German army and for the integration of that army into NATO. West German rearmament, however, would be limited in a variety of ways, particularly with regard to nuclear weapons. West Germany was prohibited from developing or building nuclear weapons on its own territory. The controls on West German

59. See for example McCloy to Acheson, 13 June 1950, in Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, President’s Secretary’s Files (hereinafter referred to as HSTL, PSF), box 178; “Probable Soviet Reactions to a Remilitarization of Western Germany,” NIE 17, 27 December 1950, in HSTL, PSF, box 253; and “Soviet Courses of Action with Respect to Germany,” NIE 4, 29 January 1951, in HSTL, PSF, box 253.

military power would be exercised by the Western European Union (WEU), a purely European organization that originally had been set up by the 1948 Brussels Treaty. The WEU from the start had included Britain and was now extended to include West Germany as well.

What does this episode tell us about French policy? It might seem at first glance that the French did not quite know what they were doing. The French initially had proposed a supranational solution, which they themselves ended up rejecting after everyone else had accepted it. They had begun by rejecting the NATO solution—the idea of a controlled rearmament of West Germany on a national basis but within the NATO framework—but they ended up not just accepting that arrangement but actually preferring it to their own original plan. “Thus the end of the story,” as Raymond Aron noted, “ironically contradicted the beginning; the National Assembly ended up by preferring the solution that the American Government had proposed in 1950 to the solution proposed by the French Government.”⁶⁰ This was a country that, it might seem, was incapable of pursuing a firm and consistent policy. A country that was so inept, one might reasonably suppose, is hardly likely to get its way in the end.

It is therefore easy to see why scholars have been tempted to interpret the Paris accords as a victory for the United States and, in particular, the Eisenhower administration, which had been in power for only a year-and-a-half when the agreements were adopted. Among the many scholars who have interpreted the 1954 settlement in such terms is Charles Cogan, who argues that the United States “triumphed” at the last minute, snatching “victory from the jaws of defeat in forcing German rearmament without the EDC.” For France, Cogan writes, the result was nothing more than a “half-victory”: The EDC had collapsed, the French could retain armed forces of their own, and French independence would not be sacrificed on the altar of supranationality. But the outcome of the whole affair, in his view, is scarcely to be seen as a French triumph: A certain danger had been avoided, but nothing more.⁶¹ Irwin Wall’s assessment of French policy is more positive. The chapter in which he discusses this subject, titled “France Declares Its Independence,” depicts Mendès France as having stood up to strong American pressure; and Wall notes that it was Mendès France who came up with the idea of reviving the 1948 Brussels treaty. But Wall, too, believes that the Americans got their way in 1954—that with the Paris accords they “got the

60. Quoted in Charles Cogan, *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends: The United States and France since 1940* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 75.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

essentials of what they hoped for in the case of Germany: rearmament, in NATO, in the context of an integrated, if not supranational, Europe.”⁶² Other scholars go much further. Stephen Ambrose, for example, gives Eisenhower the “real credit” for the arrangements worked out in late 1954. A West German army, Ambrose says, “was crucial to [Eisenhower’s] vision of what NATO could become,” and so the president was “absolutely delighted” with what his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, “had managed to achieve” against all odds. “What he got,” Ambrose says, “was even better than EDC.”⁶³

These claims would have come as a surprise to Eisenhower and Dulles. The president and secretary of state yearned for the adoption of the EDC and viewed the events of late 1954 as a great defeat. They accepted the arrangement that was worked out in the London and Paris conferences, but only because they thought they had little choice in the matter. The French, however, were quite satisfied with the 1954 settlement.

It is a mistake to argue that the French government accepted the system embodied in the Paris accords reluctantly and only because the United States insisted on it. Mendès France in particular was personally convinced that the Federal Republic needed to be tied to the West. As he confided to one of his closest advisers, he was “not among those” who viewed West German rearmament “as a catastrophe in itself.” He accepted it in principle but wanted “it to be controlled.”⁶⁴ He was convinced, moreover, that the NATO solution made sense from France’s standpoint. A West Germany integrated into NATO, a West Germany with limited military power, would pose no threat but could still contribute to the defense of the West as a whole.⁶⁵ And so, immediately following the collapse of the EDC—in fact, on the eve of the key vote in the French parliament—Mendès France moved quickly to establish the sort of system he wanted. His basic idea was to replace the EDC with a looser, less supranational grouping—a body that would include the six continental EDC countries plus Britain. The goal was to construct “a little box within the big NATO box.” West Germany’s political rights would be restored, and within

62. Wall, *United States and the Making of Postwar France*, pp. 294–295.

63. Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, Vol. 2: *The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 216.

64. Quoted in Jean Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès France*, trans. by George Holloch (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1984), p. 267.

65. Mendès France to François-Poncet, 22 August 1954, *Documents diplomatiques français 1954 (21 juillet–31 décembre)* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987), pp. 230–231, 254–255; Georges-Henri Soutou, “La France, l’Allemagne, et les accords de Paris,” *Relations internationales*, No. 52 (Winter 1987), p. 460; and Mendès France speeches in the National Assembly on the London and Paris agreements, 7 October and 22–24 December 1954, in Pierre Mendès France, *Gouverner, c’est choisir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 371–400, 600, 629, esp. p. 613.

that new framework the country would be rearmed. Mendès France laid out these ideas to a still-reluctant British leadership on 23 August and to the U.S. ambassador on 29 August.⁶⁶ The time for solutions had come, and appropriate arrangements, he felt, could be worked out in a matter of weeks.

The United States, however, strongly opposed this course of action. With the EDC about to implode, John Foster Dulles met with his advisers on 25 August to consider U.S. options. He was not pleased that the path to the NATO solution was now open; indeed, he was not particularly interested in taking that path at all. “The idea of going ahead on another route toward German rearmament, now that EDC is almost dead,” he said, was “too perfunctory.” The basic U.S. commitment to Europe would have to be reconsidered: “We cannot move blithely ahead towards German rearmament without a fundamental and complete re-evaluation of our NATO strategy to see whether our old ideas still hold good.” He was not too certain that this would be the case. “It may,” he added, “be necessary to disengage ourselves.” Referring to NATO, he argued that the United States could not simply go on building “a beautiful superstructure with armies, standing groups, infrastructure,” and so on. Without the strong political foundation the EDC would have provided—with just a “boggy political foundation, lacking the firmness of unity or integration”—the “beautiful superstructure” could not withstand any real strain. A simple NATO solution would not go nearly far enough. “The situation,” in Dulles’s view, “would not be cured by a NATO protocol which attempts to integrate certain EDC safeguards into NATO, while admitting Germany into the coalition.”⁶⁷

The French, and the British as well, probed to see whether the United States would support the solution based on an expanded WEU, but Dulles rebuffed them. On 14 September 1954 he told the French ambassador “that with the failure of EDC in France the West would have to do the best it could with some other vehicle but that it would be a makeshift at best.” The substitute arrangement, he added, would not be “supported with the same enthusiasm by our Western Allies or by the American people, particularly the U.S. Congress.” The ambassador asked whether, putting the issue of congressional disapproval aside, Dulles thought the idea now being put forward by the Brit-

66. Mendès France meeting with Eden and Churchill, 23 August 1954, in Mendès-France, *Gouverner, c'est choisir*, pp. 245–247; *Documents diplomatiques français 1954 (21 juillet–31 décembre)*, Annexes (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987), pp. 133–141; and Dillon to State Department, 24 August 1954, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. V, pp. 1071–1077.

67. Dulles meeting with State Department officials, 25 August 1954, in Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Dulles State Papers (hereinafter referred to as SGML, DSP), reel 64, frame 62,974.

ish foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, of “German entry into NATO with commitments under the Brussels Pact” might open the way to a solution. Dulles immediately threw cold water on the notion:

He did not wish to give the Ambassador the impression that it was only the Congress which had grave misgivings about any solution other than EDC; that he, himself, shared these views. The Secretary continued that we had given specific assurances to the EDC countries last spring regarding U.S. support in Europe when EDC became a reality. He added that the French Government should not expect that these assurances would be given in other circumstances. The Secretary said that we had very little information about the Eden proposals other than the message from which he had just read. We would not, of course, do anything to hinder the European nations from arriving at the best solution possible in the light of the French rejection of EDC, which was to have formed the political basis for an effective NATO military defense, but that Europe could not expect the same support from the U.S. that it had been prepared to give to a true European community.⁶⁸

In the weeks that followed, Dulles’s support for the arrangements devised by the Europeans was minimal, if that.⁶⁹ He scarcely viewed the London Conference as a triumph. The best that could be said, he told the NSC when he returned from London, was that the conference “had at least avoided the disaster of a neutralized Germany, an isolated France, and Soviet domination of Europe.”⁷⁰ The United States had failed to get the Europeans to accept the EDC, but, as Dulles ruefully admitted, “we cannot always force people to do things they don’t want to do.”⁷¹ Mendès France, on the other hand, was quite pleased with the arrangements that emerged in late 1954. Looking back on these events many years later, he wrote “that in the final analysis we came out rather well.”⁷² So just who was the “victor” in 1954?

Conclusion

The German question was of vital importance for France in the decade or so after the Second World War, in large part because of the depth of feeling it evoked. Given the intensity of French sentiments toward Germany, it is un-

68. Dulles-Bonnet meeting, 14 September 1954, in SGML, DSP, reel 64, frames 63,054–63,055.

69. See especially the extemporaneous statement he gave at the London Conference, *FRUS*, 1952–54, Vol. V, pp. 1357–1361.

70. NSC meeting, 6 October 1954, *FRUS*, 1952–54 Vol. V, p. 1379.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

72. Mendès France to Massigli, 1 April 1969, in Institut Pierre Mendès-France, Paris, Mendès France Papers, Accords de Paris, Box 2, Dossier 6, “Polemique Spaak/PMF.”

derstandable that scholars would be tempted to view French policy in the early Cold War era as rooted in an atavistic “obsession” with the “German threat.” An interpretation of that sort took hold long before archival sources became available. To the extent that this interpretation had an empirical basis, it was rooted in what French leaders said at the time. But political rhetoric should never be taken uncritically. Political leaders live in two worlds: the world of international politics and the world of domestic politics. The imperatives of the international system are bound to play a fundamental role in shaping the thinking of responsible officials, but policy has to be packaged with an eye to domestic political realities. Political rhetoric is therefore shaped by a very different set of pressures. A gap between appearance and reality is to be expected; it is easy to be misled by the public record. To understand what policymakers were really thinking, archival and other declassified sources need to be examined with care.

Important archival materials relating to French policy toward Germany have been available for some time now, not just in France, but in the United States and Britain. Those sources have been analyzed, and a number of important works dealing with French policy have appeared in recent years on both sides of the Atlantic. Cyril Buffet’s *Mourir pour Berlin*, Dietmar Hüser’s *Frankreichs “doppelte Deutschlandpolitik,”* and William I. Hitchcock’s *France Restored* are perhaps the most impressive of the lot. Thanks to these and other works, the current depiction of French policy after 1945 differs greatly from what it once was. French policy on the German question now appears more understandable, more effective, and more rational than people formerly realized. We are in sympathy with this general approach; if anything, we believe the argument has not been taken far enough.

The issue of France’s policy toward Germany in the decade or so after World War II is important in its own terms. The German question played a key role in the Cold War, and French policy had a major impact on how that question was resolved. To understand the diplomacy of the German question, therefore, French policy has to be seen for what it was. But the issue also has a larger significance. International relations theorists of the realist school stress the importance of “systemic” or “structural” forces. They emphasize the way a system based on power, a system devoid of overarching authority, generates incentives for the major states to behave rationally in accordance with power politics. For a country like France after the Second World War, a country with deep and complex security problems, such pressures, those theorists would suggest, would have been particularly strong. If these pressures had been ignored, if French policy had been based simply on emotion, this case would be something of an anomaly. But when it turns out that many traditional interpretations of French policy do not stand up in the light of the evidence, when

it turns out that power politics was far more important and policy was far more rational than had previously been assumed, these findings are bound to have a certain theoretical significance. They suggest that the ability of the system to shape outcomes is greater than one might have thought. The French case is actually in line with what the theory would suggest and is different from what many had long believed; this gap is an important measure of the power of the realist theory.

What that means, however, is that if the goal is theoretical insight, it is important to do the sort of work that can lead to results of this kind—that is, to conclusions that are at variance with the conventional wisdom on a particular subject. Because research in declassified sources—above all, in archival sources—is the most effective way to generate relevant findings, such research is of fundamental importance, even for the theorist. As the case of French policy on the German question after World War II shows, archival research is an indispensable engine of understanding not just for historians but for political scientists as well.

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