



Universiteit  
Leiden

The Netherlands

## **Atlantis lost : the American experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969**

Reyn, S.J.G.

### **Citation**

Reyn, S. J. G. (2007, December 18). *Atlantis lost : the American experience with De Gaulle, 1958-1969*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12535>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12535>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Introduction

How does one take the measure of a statesman the size of Charles de Gaulle? The Frenchman was without doubt one of the giants of his time. He saved his country from eclipse in 1940 and from civil war in 1958 almost by force of personality. His political life was enveloped by a unique sense of national mystique. The quasi-mystical attitudes and feelings surrounding his mission – to restore France to a position of greatness – were an unalienable part of his larger-than-life political persona and of his political philosophy. To many he was the General, le Grand Charles, the ‘man of June 18<sup>th</sup>,’ the miraculous reincarnation of Jeanne d’Arc, Georges Clemenceau, and Louis XIV, rarely ever just de Gaulle – a brigadier-general of the French army who, animated by an adamant loyalty to his country, turned into a remarkably effective and strong-willed political leader in times of extraordinary crisis.

Among Americans, too, de Gaulle’s Olympian stature summoned a respect that devolved to few other foreign leaders. Walter Lippmann, America’s foremost commentator on foreign affairs, confessed that, “having been one of his American admirers since June of 1940, when he raised his flag in Britain and summoned the French to go on with the war, I cannot pretend to write dispassionately about General de Gaulle.”<sup>2</sup> Cyrus Sulzberger, a long-time European correspondent of the *New York Times* who often visited de Gaulle, thought of him as the “last of the giants” in an “age of mediocrity.”<sup>3</sup> He was voted *Time*’s ‘man of the year’ in 1958. “He has given Frenchmen back their pride, swept away the miasma of self-contempt that has hung over France since its ignominious capitulation to Hitler in 1940,” the news weekly judged.<sup>4</sup>

De Gaulle’s popularity among Americans probably reached a peak in April 1960, during a state visit to the United States. The symbolic value of his rendezvous with President Dwight Eisenhower, his wartime companion, was easily recognized. The historic achievements of the French president and his efforts to extricate France from Algeria were dwelled upon in a spate of well-disposed press reports. Senators and congressmen regaled the visiting statesman with a standing ovation as he spoke, in an address to a joint session of Congress, of his country’s dedication to the cause of liberty. “Despite changes of fortune, the Americans and the French feel for one another a friendship now two centuries old, and still as much alive as ever,” de

---

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New York: Random House, 1981), 399, from a column written in 1960. Also: “Walter Lippmann and Charles de Gaulle,” in: Robert O. Paxton and Nicholas Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States: A Centennial Reappraisal* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 377.

<sup>3</sup> Sulzberger’s two volumes of published notes – *The Last of the Giants* (New York: Macmillan, 1970) and *An Age of Mediocrity* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) – give ample evidence of his high regard for de Gaulle.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/personoftheyear/archive/stories/1958.html>.

Gaule stressed. “France, for her part, has made her choice. She has chosen to be on the side of the free people. She has to be on that side with you.”<sup>5</sup> His ensuing tour of American cities was the jubilant cortège of an old comrade-in-arms, with large crowds gathering along streets and on squares to catch a glimpse of the General’s statuesque appearance. New York even bestowed on him the honor of a Broadway ticker parade, with the bells of Trinity Church ringing the Marseillaise, and an estimated one million onlookers. At the end of his journey through America, de Gaulle volunteered to the mayor of San Francisco that it had been “le plus agréable” of his life.<sup>6</sup>

But American opinion about de Gaulle was not always this unequivocally positive. President Franklin Roosevelt’s hostility to the World War II leader of the Free French has become something of a legend. De Gaulle’s popularity in the United States during the early years of the Fifth Republic was moreover at an artificial zenith. The implications of his dissenting views on the transatlantic relationship were not yet visible in 1960 and seemed of minor importance compared to the Cold War showdowns with the Soviet Union. But during the remainder of the 1960s, in particular after 1962, de Gaulle’s policy of ‘independence’ and ‘grandeur’ made him the culprit of successive crises within the Western alliance. In 1963, after de Gaulle’s veto of British membership of the Common Market, the American public had already become evenly divided on the question of France’s dependability; by July 1966 – after France’s announcement of its withdrawal from NATO and with de Gaulle openly courting Moscow – the majority of Americans stopped viewing France as a dependable ally and many described de Gaulle as “power-hungry,” “egocentric,” and “overly nationalistic.”<sup>7</sup> President Lyndon Johnson received thousands of letters from infuriated citizens urging him to stand up against the General. They wanted to see diplomatic contacts with France reduced to the very minimum; they planned to set up a campaign to discourage American tourists from going to France; they urged Johnson to demand that France pay off its remaining war debts to the United States instantly; a retired colonel of the Air Force announced his decision to destroy or return the “Croix de Guerre avec Palme Vermeille” that de Gaulle had personally awarded him for his valor in World War II.<sup>8</sup> Characterizations of de Gaulle had thus deteriorated from proud to obstinate, from solemn to haughty, from visionary to acting mainly in narrow self-interest.

---

<sup>5</sup> “Discours prononcé à Washington devant les deux chambres réunis en Congrès,” 25 April 1960, in: De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, vol. 3, *Avec le renouveau* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 196-200.

<sup>6</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 April 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Gallup Poll in the *Washington Post*, 9 July 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Robert Pace to President Johnson, 1 April 1966; letter, Robert C. Brown to President Johnson, 13 April 1966; letter, R.E. Kendall to President Johnson, 9 June 1966; all in: White House Central File, Subject File, CO81, France, box 31, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (henceforth abbreviated as LBJL).

Most Americans came to understand that de Gaulle's return to power in May 1958 had signalled an important change in the Franco-American relationship. Even as many of the policies of the Fifth Republic were arguably a continuation of those of the Fourth, the change was more than one of style.<sup>9</sup> De Gaulle brought France, as Michael Harrison put it, "the novelty of resolute leadership and the pride of an ambitious program,"<sup>10</sup> with important implications for the Franco-American relationship and – more broadly – for European integration and the Western alliance. During his eleven years as president of France, de Gaulle was both America's staunchest Cold War ally – in particular in the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 – and its greatest detractor within the alliance. Besides his achievements in bringing political stability to France and his check on European integration, his 'loyal' opposition to the superpower made him one of the outstanding political figures of the 1960s. When Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, a noted French historian, decided to count how often the political leaders of his day were mentioned during a conference on American-European relations in 1965, de Gaulle even finished well ahead of his competitors. In those circles, he observed, de Gaulle had become an "obsession," and exasperation over his nationalist policies had produced a new and bizarre branch of learning: "Gaullology."<sup>11</sup> Duroselle had ample reason to conclude that this score was evidence of damnation mixed in with admiration. Apart from the mesmerizing quality of his leadership, the depth of his political vision, and his undeniable achievements, de Gaulle's size can therefore also be measured by the degree of controversy he evoked. "Être grand, c'est soutenir une grande querelle," he had quoted from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Le fil de l'épée* (1932).<sup>12</sup> In the 1960s, his greatest quarrel would be with the Americans.

---

<sup>9</sup> Etienne Burin des Rozières, a long-time aide of de Gaulle, rightfully disagreed with historians who emphasized the continuity between the Fourth and the Fifth Republic, observing that the instructions he received as a diplomat "changed completely as de Gaulle came back to power" and that this had far-reaching ramifications for France's relationship with the United States. In: Paxton and Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States*, 422-3.

<sup>10</sup> Michael M. Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 54. The governments of the Fourth Republic, to be sure, also had chafed under American postwar predominance and often resisted the roles assigned by Washington. In particular the Suez crisis of 1956 had a major impact on French foreign policy, and as French historian Maurice Vaisse noted, "Gaullist France was already on the horizon in 1956." Vaisse, "Post-Suez France," in Wm. Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez, 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 335. For accounts of Franco-American relations under the Fourth Republic, see Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); John W. Young, *France, the Cold War and the Western Alliance, 1944-49: French Foreign Policy and Postwar Europe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1990); and Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States: From the Beginnings to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 220.

<sup>12</sup> De Gaulle, *Le fil de l'épée* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 2<sup>nd</sup> édition, 1944) (1932), v. The Dutch historian H.L. Wesseling has pointed out that de Gaulle's citation – which would translate into "to be great is to sustain a great argument" – was not entirely correct as it refers to the following passage in *Hamlet*: "Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at stake." (act IV, scene IV) H.L. Wesseling, "De

\* \* \*

As a history student sifting through the documentary wealth available at the United States' presidential archives three to four decades later, I was struck by the strong sentiment that de Gaulle and his policies provoked among American officials. Since de Gaulle sought to reduce American military, political, and economic might in Western Europe, it was probably inevitable that he was seen by policymakers in Washington as a difficult – or adversarial – ally. From the documentary record, however, he comes across as much more: an irrational, vainglorious leader possessed by a *folie de grandeur* who endangered the fundamental achievements of postwar American foreign policy. Many officials seemed to wear their distaste for Gaullism as an albatross around their necks. They appeared to denounce Gaullist foreign policy ever more strongly because it ran counter to their own ideas about the transatlantic relationship and of the place of the United States therein. Apart from the man himself, I became intrigued by the American perception of de Gaulle.

France in the 1960s clearly presented the United States with problems unlike those posed by any other European ally. De Gaulle's challenge to American leadership could hardly be more overt, since it was a mainstay of the political views he laid out in his writings, speeches, and press conferences (which he turned into virtual *pièces de théâtre*). Unease about de Gaulle's policy of independence in fact appeared to be an important determinant of American policies towards Europe, confirming Walt Rostow's reminiscence that "a good deal of European and Atlantic policy was [...] taken up with coping with de Gaulle's enterprises in ways which permitted the EEC and NATO to survive."<sup>13</sup> Policymakers in Washington also often seemed consigned to a state of uncertain anticipation about de Gaulle's next move. "Our working situation in Gaullist France is not unlike that in the Soviet Union where we have to look to the small, symbolic actions to identify significant policy trends," one White House staff member observed (even though the Central Intelligence Agency had de Gaulle "taped").<sup>14</sup>

---

Gaulle en Hamlet," *NRC Handelsblad*, 22 May 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Walt W. Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1972), 394. Rostow served in the Kennedy White House staff and, from November 1961, as chairman of the Policy Planning Council at the State Department. In March 1966, he became President Johnson's National Security Adviser.

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum, David Klein to McGeorge Bundy, 3 April 1963, France-General, CS, NSF, box 72, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (henceforth abbreviated as JFKL). Bohlen revealed that one of de Gaulle's closest advisers served as an informant of the American embassy and "had him taped." The problem, however, was that de Gaulle very often did not apprise even his closest advisers and ministers of his next move. Bohlen quoted in Note C., page 41, file 4, box W-13, Arthur M. Schlesinger jr. Papers, JFKL. François David, too, has suggested that the CIA had a confidential source of information within de Gaulle's cabinet. François David, "Les Etats-Unis et les débuts de la cinquième République. May 1958 - Janvier 1961," *Mémoire de maîtrise 1992-1993*, Université de Paris-IV.

This is not, therefore, a study of French foreign policy during de Gaulle's presidential tenure but of the United States' response to this policy. It looks at one of the most turbulent episodes in this bilateral relationship from the receiving end of de Gaulle's politics of grandeur. It is particularly concerned with understanding this response in the context of American approaches to the transatlantic relationship after World War II. Based on the American documentary record, it attempts to answer the following broad questions:

- I. How did Americans *interpret* de Gaulle's policy of 'independence' within the larger framework of their ideas about the transatlantic relationship?
- II. How did consecutive administrations actually *deal* with the challenges posed within this framework by de Gaulle's 'independent' foreign policy from 1958 to 1969?
- III. Did de Gaulle's policy of 'independence' *modify* American policies towards Europe and the Atlantic alliance?

\* \* \*

One should, of course, have solid reasons for adding to the already massive body of scholarly literature on American postwar diplomacy and on the Franco-American relationship. I am nonetheless convinced there is reason to add a pebble of my own to this ever rising mountain.

To begin with, this study will examine in more detailed depth than most studies before it how consecutive American administrations dealt with the Gaullist challenge on a number of defining issues; it will, as a result, also advance some alternative conclusions.

Chapters three and eight are mainly concerned with the politics of organizing the Atlantic alliance. Chapter three describes how Eisenhower and President John Kennedy grappled in vain to come to terms with de Gaulle's memorandum of September 1958, which proposed a 'tripartite' security organization that would coordinate the policies of the United States, Great Britain, and France across the globe. The chapter will underline, *inter alia*, that Eisenhower's search for a compromise with de Gaulle continued up to the end of his tenure and preoccupied him more than is commonly understood; Kennedy, too, showed interest in the tripartite issue during his first year in office, even as the gist of his policies ran counter to de Gaulle's vision. Chapter eight analyzes Johnson's response to the French withdrawal from NATO in 1966 and de Gaulle's politics of "*détente, entente, coopération*" with the Communist bloc. It will demonstrate how the United States in fact anticipated the French withdrawal well in advance and deftly used its occurrence to provide new impetus to an alliance long held hostage by French obstructionism. But it also shows how prominent members of the policy community, led by the formidable

former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, were seriously disenchanted by Johnson's refusal to stand up to the General.

Chapters four and seven focus on political and military issues concerning the defense of the West, dealing in particular with the vital role played by nuclear weapons. Chapter four details Kennedy's drive to shift the emphasis in NATO's military strategy from massive retaliation to flexible response, his quest to unify the strategic deterrent of the alliance under American control and his all-out attempt to abort the French nuclear effort. Chapter seven argues that de Gaulle was to a larger extent than hitherto recognized, responsible for torpedoing the American proposal for a sea-based multilateral nuclear force (MLF) in 1964, at the end of Johnson's first year in office. It moreover puts forward that the MLF must be seen as the last big Atlantic project of American foreign policy, and that its demise caused important shifts in the foreign policy mode of the United States vis-à-vis Europe.

Chapters five and six deal principally with the American clash with de Gaulle over the movement toward European unity. In these chapters in particular, Jean Monnet ('Mr. Europe') emerges as a central figure in American policymaking next to Acheson and Undersecretary of State George Ball. While chapter five focuses on the Kennedy administration's activist policies in 1962 to ensure the Atlantic orientation of an integrated Europe, chapter six shows how it is forced to scramble for a response to de Gaulle's blunt obstruction of these policies in January 1963. De Gaulle's veto of Kennedy's design for an Atlantic 'partnership' revealed the limits of American power in Western Europe more clearly than any other event in the history of the transatlantic alliance (save perhaps the demise of the European Defense Community in 1954). It served as a catalyst to change Washington's perspective on European affairs.

Chapter nine, finally, sets out how the policy designs of both countries were reaching a dead end, creating the conditions for a shift from divergence to accommodation. This chapter will give ample attention to the American response to de Gaulle's attack on the dollar, to his criticism of the Vietnam War, and to the turbulence of 1968. It underscores that a remarkable rapprochement between Washington and Paris was nonetheless already underway in Johnson's final year in office. This rapprochement laid the groundwork for an accommodation with France within a changed transatlantic relationship in the Nixon years. The emergence of a different – more conservative and even Gaullist – European policy under President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger marked the end of the era in American foreign policy that had been dominated by a liberally-bent bipartisan establishment. The realist turn in American foreign policy in the late 1960s was a vindication of many of de Gaulle's foreign policy views; what is more, de Gaulle can also be seen to have contributed to this turn in various ways.

Although these chapters are arranged in chronological order, the aim has not been to provide a chronological account but to highlight the evolution of the disagreement with France over the transatlantic relationship by focusing on key areas. This study thus does not, for instance, contain separate chapters of the United States' dealings with France in the context of the Algerian conflict (or of the broader issue of decolonization), the Berlin crises of the late 1950s and early 1960s, or the war in Vietnam. This is not to argue that these issues were unimportant to the bilateral relationship. Neither are they ignored, as the reader will find out. But they are considered less central to the aims of this study, which concentrates on the American experience with de Gaulle in the context of the *transatlantic* relationship.

In addition to providing a detailed analysis of how American administrations dealt with the Gaullist challenge and drawing some alternative conclusions, this study responds to the need for a monograph that explains the American reception of de Gaulle's policies and assesses their implications for American foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Such a monograph has been lacking, despite the wealth of both primary and secondary material. It is important for at least three reasons.

---

<sup>15</sup> The monograph that approaches this one the closest, because it likewise covers the bilateral relationship within the transatlantic framework from 1958 to 1969, is Frédéric Bozo's *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe. De Gaulle, les États-Unis et l'Alliance Atlantique, 1958-1969* (Plon et Fondation Charles de Gaulle, 1996), which has been translated as *Two Strategies For Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001). John Newhouse's *De Gaulle and the Anglo-Saxons* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970) may also be mentioned as such; while well-informed, he did not, however, have the important benefit of archival research. Frank Costigliola covers a much longer period in *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), but his chapter on the period of de Gaulle's presidency equally deserves mention (pages 118-159). The same can be said of Charles Cogan's *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends: The United States and France Since 1940* (New York: Praeger, 1994); however, although de Gaulle looms large throughout the book, only his chapter on the Multilateral Force falls within the scope of this study. Vincent Jauvert's readable *L'Amérique contre de Gaulle. Histoire secrète, 1961-1969* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000) makes no academic claims and is subordinated to only a few documents. The contributions of scholars and 'witnesses' in Paxton and Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States*, are highly relevant to this study, but do not constitute a monograph. For other valuable accounts of the bilateral relationship in either a longer or shorter timeframe, see: Duroselle, *France and the United States*; Maurice Ferro, *De Gaulle et l'Amérique. Une amitié tumultueuse* (France: Librairie Plon, 1973); Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally*; Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (University of California Press, 1993); Erin R. Mahan, *Kennedy, De Gaulle, and Western Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and Marvin R. Zahniser, *Uncertain Friendship: American-French Relations Through the Cold War* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975). Political scientist Stanley Hoffmann has not devoted a full-scale study to the topic, but he has written extensively on Franco-American relations during de Gaulle's hold on power; see in particular: "De Gaulle, Europe and the Atlantic Alliance," *International Organization* XVIII, Winter 1964: 1-28; "Perceptions, Reality and the Franco-American conflict," *Journal of International Affairs* 21, no.1, 1967: 57-71. The same applies to David Calleo, see in particular *Europe's Future: The Grand Alternative* (New York: Horizon Press, 1965) and *The Atlantic Fantasy: The United States, NATO and Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970). Henry Kissinger, too, has written perceptively on Franco-American relations under de Gaulle; see, e.g., *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance* (New York: McGraw-Hill for Council on Foreign Relations, 1965), chapter 2; *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), chapter 24. William I. Hitchcock devoted a chapter to "the Gaullist temptation" in *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-2002* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 221-241. Geir Lundestad has similarly included a chapter on de Gaulle's challenge in "Empire" by *Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 58-82. For a more complete listing of relevant works see the bibliography.



Firstly, whereas de Gaulle's anti-Americanism has been given ample attention (and has often been overstated), the anti-Gaullism among American policymakers largely stands to be examined. De Gaulle was the first postwar European leader to seek less rather than more American involvement in Europe. De Gaulle's willful search for independent French – and, by extension, European – policies vis-à-vis the United States set him apart within the Western alliance. However, while this remains the crux of *l'affaire de Gaulle*, the American attitude towards this self-willed European leader and his pretension to an international role of weight was an equally defining part of the dispute. What made it so difficult for many Americans to disregard de Gaulle's abrasive style, to accept his fundamental allegiance to the Cold War alliance, and to assess his – at times remarkably clairvoyant – propositions about world politics at face value? Why was it not possible to find common ground with the one European leader who appeared ready to assume more responsibility? What made him unpalatable as the harbinger of a resurgent Europe?

Secondly, a historical examination of the American experience with de Gaulle is not merely important in the context of the history of the bilateral relationship but also in that of American foreign policy. During the Fourth Republic, American policymakers were still overwhelmingly concerned about the deleterious effect on the Western alliance of supposed French weakness; the Fifth Republic's foreign policy transformed their concerns about the implications of a Europe which regained its strength and composure. De Gaulle brought the question of how to cope with a resurgent Europe to the fore in a way that could not be ignored in the United States. How Americans responded is indicative of how they approached all of Europe after World War II. This is only compounded by the fact that no debate between Atlantic allies has matched the range and the depth of the Franco-American dispute from 1958 to 1969. The study of the American experience with de Gaulle therefore will tell us more about postwar American views of Europe than a study of American attitudes toward any other European country. The French, John Dos Passos already wrote in *Journeys Between Wars* (1938), “embody a stubborn, unfanatical, live-and-let-live habit of mind, a feeling in every man and woman of the worth of personal dignity that is, for better or for worse, the unique contribution of Western Europe to the world. [...] It's easy to forget how central the French people are in everything we mean when we say Europe.”<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, in so far as the American experience with de Gaulle *has* been reviewed, I find there to be sufficient reason to add my own perspective and findings. Historians who have examined the American documentary record have most often chided the United States for its

dismissive attitude towards de Gaulle. They have attributed this attitude on the part of American policymakers to an overriding reluctance to share power or, worse, to a combination of hubris and blinding parochialism. Assessments of this type are to be found particularly in the work of the French historian Frédéric Bozo and his American colleague Frank Costigliola. As this study will differ with them, a brief review of their main conclusions is in order.

Bozo's *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe* (1996) deals specifically with the bilateral relationship during de Gaulle's Elysean years within the context of the Atlantic alliance and is without doubt the most relevant here. His assessment of the American reaction to de Gaulle is determined by his chief contention that the latter's foreign policy, surpassing the "narrow nationalist objectives that have long been attributed to it," was "truly a grand design." Bozo emphasizes that de Gaulle genuinely aimed to bring an end to the Cold War: he carved out 'European' autonomy vis-à-vis the United States, broke with the logic of opposing blocs, and actively promoted a fundamental relaxation of East-West relations through '*détente, entente et coopération*.' Bozo does not see de Gaulle as the cause – least of all the culprit – of the "existential" crisis within the Atlantic alliance in the mid-1960s. He claims this crisis above all reflected "ongoing transformations of the power relations that underpinned the international system"– in other words: Europe reemerged, the Cold War abated, and de Gaulle was if anything the champion of an adjustment of the Cold War alliance to these new realities. Regardless of the overriding significance he attaches to de Gaulle's design to 'overcome the blocs,' Bozo disavows the "accepted wisdom" that de Gaulle sought to weaken the Atlantic alliance. De Gaulle's objective, Bozo finds, "was not so much to weaken NATO as to transform the Western group of nations, if not somehow to *reinforce* transatlantic ties." (emphasis added)

Not surprisingly, therefore, Bozo finds American policies toward France under de Gaulle seriously flawed. He criticizes the United States for resisting the validity of de Gaulle's revisionism and for putting its foot down to maintain the bipolar status quo. American policymakers were stuck in their preconception that de Gaulle was above all a French nationalist with anachronistic notions of grandeur. Their policies were "reactive" and "devoid of a truly constructive vision to pit against de Gaulle's design." Only eventually did the United States feel compelled to adopt "a more constructive and dynamic approach" – a reference to the Johnson-led revitalization of the alliance in the wake of the French withdrawal from NATO in 1966. Oddly, Bozo commends the United States for what at other times he has found objectionable: it reestablished its leadership within the alliance. The United States effectively rebuilt a political and strategic consensus within NATO, but not – Bozo notes – without integrating important

---

<sup>16</sup> John Dos Passos, *Journeys Between Wars* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1938), 334.

elements of de Gaulle's vision. The renewed consensus stressed the desirability of détente in East-West relations, gave a greater role to nuclear deterrence in the new alliance strategy than envisioned at first, and tolerated the Gaullist model for military cooperation – i.e. the Lemnitzer-Ailleret agreements – within the allied framework. Of the two strategies for Europe, however, Bozo finds the one put forward by de Gaulle superior and largely faults the United States with a singleminded focus on dominating the Western alliance.<sup>17</sup>

Costigliola's *France and the United States* (1992), the most comprehensive chronological account of the bilateral relationship through the Cold War, is also highly critical of American policies with regard to France. Costigliola sharply condemns consecutive American administrations for a fundamental unpreparedness to share power within the alliance. He portrays the Franco-American relationship as one between, on the one hand, a hegemon systematically engaged in unilateral power politics and, on the other hand, a particularly difficult client that resents taking orders and consistently questions the wisdom of the schemes in which it is asked to cooperate. American policymakers are exposed as manipulative – perhaps even hypocritical since their oft-stated preparedness to consult allies as real partners was merely of a rhetorical nature. Irrked by persistent diatribes among American politicians and officials against “those damn French,” Costigliola finds that most of the blame for the querulous nature of the Franco-American relationship lay in Washington. American officials and politicians emerge from his largely narrative account as notably insensitive to French concerns and interests. They were given to self-righteous behavior and belittling complaints about the supposed mental lapses and feminine unsteadiness of the French. Costigliola gives much weight to metaphors which cast de Gaulle during the Roosevelt years as an indisposed “bride” or a “temperamental lady” and the Fourth Republic as a “weak sister”; extending such metaphors, he typifies Ronald Reagan's America and François Mitterrand's France as an “odd couple.” Costigliola pronounces no distinct verdict on American approaches to France during the 1960s, except to note that when de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, “Americans generally stopped feminizing France.” In a string of meteorological metaphors, however, he suggests that what has “most often been a cold alliance” went into “the deep freeze” in the 1960s to be followed by a “slow thaw” only after de Gaulle's departure.<sup>18</sup>

While Bozo dispels interpretations of de Gaulle as a narrow-minded nationalist, Costigliola exposes the behavior of consecutive administrations toward France as domineering and belittling. Both call attention to a persistent American reluctance to share power with its European allies and to a general lack of understanding in American policymaking circles of de Gaulle and his vision.

---

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

<sup>18</sup> Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 7, 104, 121.

Both are largely justified in this regard. The documentary record strongly suggests that the United States was at least partially responsible for allowing the transatlantic dialogue to degenerate into a Franco-American quarrel. It is true that many American policymakers habitually castigated de Gaulle as a narrow-minded nationalist obsessed with grandeur. They found his opposition to American leadership hard to swallow. They found his pretension for a distinct role for France hardly justified given its modest national resources. They tended to set de Gaulle apart from his political environment, narrowing down their differences with him to a confrontation between, on the one hand, the United States and most of its allies and, on the other hand, 'one elderly ruler in Europe.' This attitude of ridicule and reprehension failed to do justice to the quality of de Gaulle's strategic vision. It also made it inherently more difficult for consecutive American administrations to come to terms with this vision in a more constructive way.

Yet none of this can be satisfactorily explained by a supposed small-mindedness or a singular attachment to power on the part of American policymakers. Nor is it true that American policymakers all exhibited this attitude, or exhibited it in the same degree. In a general sense, deprecating behavior towards de Gaulle was mostly to be found within the State Department and less in the White House and the Defense Department. There were also important philosophical differences between the various administrations with regard to de Gaulle. Neither Bozo nor Costigliola has made a genuine effort to put American attitudes towards de Gaulle in perspective. Costigliola, in particular, devotes scant analysis to the principal considerations which motivated American policies towards France. His view of the bilateral relationship and his preoccupation with exposing the manipulative ploys and the almost childlike recriminations on the American side provide us with relatively little insight into the rather more complex American experience with de Gaulle. Both disregard the fact that the strong American reaction to de Gaulle was partly due to the latter's uniquely confrontational style and his wounding criticisms of American leadership. They do not consider the possibility that de Gaulle sought a certain amount of friction in his relationship with the United States in order to further his political objectives, both domestically and internationally. Above all, no effort has been made to consider the reactions in the United States towards de Gaulle in the context of American ideas about the transatlantic relationship, perceptions of European history, and self-perceptions as a nation and a civilization. While I have no reason – or desire – to exonerate Americans where criticism is due, this study makes an effort to understand the American disposition toward de Gaulle in the historical and political context in which American policymakers believed they operated.

\* \* \*

Besides a conventional study into diplomatic history, this study is a less conventional history of ideas in American foreign policy – in this case a history of the evolution of American ideas about the relationship to Europe.

There is, of course, a wide range of approaches to explaining the American experience with de Gaulle. One approach is to follow the realist school of thought and to stress the hegemonic nature of American foreign policy after World War II. This study will indeed give plenty of evidence for hegemonic behavior vis-à-vis the Gaullist challenge on the part of the United States, even if it will also make clear that American hegemony was more accommodating than is sometimes suggested. The United States was the leader and the manager of the Atlantic alliance. It was looking for an efficient division of labor among the members of the alliance that left its controlling position intact. The bottom line for Washington usually was to retain the ability to control or to influence European events in its own interests. American Cold War policies vis-à-vis France were hence aimed at fashioning it into a cooperative ally. De Gaulle, however, had no interest in subjecting France to a division of labor drawn up in Washington. Because Americans did not like to think of the Western alliance in hegemonic terms, they preferred to speak of American ‘leadership.’ But exercising leadership often is not all that different from exercising hegemony, even as it reflects the degree of consent considered desirable within the Western alliance for the charted course.

However, while the ‘hegemony approach’ thus addresses an important dynamic in the Franco-American relationship during the Cold War, it would not add significantly to existing interpretations. Both Bozo and Costigliola have stressed that the United States’ hegemonic behavior, of which they are highly critical, was a chief cause of the Franco-American conflict in the 1960s. Henry Kissinger has similarly faulted the American division-of-labor approach to the alliance for creating unnecessary tension in the relationship:

We looked at the alliance as if it were a technical problem of assembling a certain number of boards in which burdens were assigned on the basis of a kind of quota. Overall efficiency would be the motive of all participants of the Atlantic relationship. There would be an appropriate division of labor [...]. The problem for de Gaulle was not how to relate France to a division of labor, but his conviction that before France could relate itself to anybody, it had to relate itself to itself, that it had to have some sense of its purpose.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “Dealing with De Gaulle,” in: Paxton and Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States*, 334-335.

By giving singular attention to how power is distributed and exercised within the Western alliance, the 'hegemony approach' furthermore has the disadvantage of overlooking other important dimensions of the American perspective on de Gaulle's challenge. It is, in particular, less instructive about American reactions to the political nature of this challenge. These reactions would not have been so strong if de Gaulle's policies had been perceived merely as the irksome but not abnormal objections from a satellite to the dominance of the superpower.

Another approach to explaining the American experience with de Gaulle is to contrast American and French attitudes in a more philosophical light. Charles Cogan's *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends* (1994), for instance, provides important clues in this regard. Cogan, who spent twenty-three years abroad for the Central Intelligence Agency acquiring *inter alia* first-hand knowledge of French politics, appears to join Costigliola and Bozo in stating that the United States has "systematically refused to give consideration to the national interests of France" and that "too often in the past, America has seen dialogue with France as an act of ratification of its wishes."<sup>20</sup> But he recognizes, too, that France has been highly sensitive to real and perceived infringements on its national independence, in particular in the areas of foreign policy and defense. Cogan explains this not only from the country's frightening roller-coaster ride during World War II and its severely weakened position after the war, but also from a particularly French brand of nationalism which takes an exalted view of the state and believes French civilization sends a universal message to mankind. Cogan's analysis thus takes on a more philosophical nature than either Costigliola or Bozo. He contrasts French and American political cultures, societies, and historical experiences. He shows how communication is hampered by the fact that the French tend to think of politics in abstract notions, while the pragmatic mindset of Americans is inclined to go with what works.<sup>21</sup> Cogan also sees the impact of demographics, noting that, in contrast to most other Europeans, the French have not emigrated *en masse* to the United States. One result is that there has been no distinctly pro-French element in American public opinion; another that American society has been predominantly shaped by its British roots.

Ultimately, Cogan believes, the Franco-American argument boils down to an uneasy encounter between two universalist pretensions that have their roots in the two main liberal revolutions of the eighteenth century: the American Revolution (1775-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799). The American and French universalisms have accounted for overblown

---

<sup>20</sup> Cogan, *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends*, 203, 213.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Mead has likewise emphasized such differences in a perceptive analysis: "The French think that Americans always try to oversimplify a problem; the American thinks every situation is a problem that admits of a solution. All Frenchmen think of a problem as a situation, which calls not necessarily for a solution, but for clear perception and the hope of a gradual transformation effected more by time than by man." Robert O. Mead, *Atlantic Legacy: Essays in*

aspirations and self-perceptions on either side. They are not ideologically incompatible, allowing for a certain fundamental solidarity arising from a shared commitment to liberty, explaining why the two countries have found themselves on the same side when confronted with less compatible universalisms. But they are nonetheless distinct, causing France and the United States to act on different wavelengths. Cogan's approach of contrasting the two universalisms is helpful to distinguish between American-style versus French-style thinking. But it tends to overestimate the degree to which there were two coherent or monolithic bodies of thought. It is for this reason less helpful in explaining the diversity of responses in the United States to de Gaulle's foreign policy. It is furthermore less useful in comprehending its evolution in relation to the transatlantic relationship.

This study therefore hopes to find added value by looking at the American experience with de Gaulle from a somewhat different angle. It attempts to explain this experience in the context of longstanding American attitudes towards Europe, of the distinct traditions which have historically shaped American foreign policy, and of conceptions of the transatlantic relationship that prevailed in the United States during the early decades of the Cold War. This aspect of the study is necessary in order to gain deeper insight into the – variety of – responses in the United States to de Gaulle; in addition, it will help us understand some of the less tangible changes in American foreign policy as a result of the de Gaulle experience. Washington and Paris had important interests that go a long way in explaining why they often clashed – and these will certainly be discussed. But there was much more at play. I have come to agree with the political scientist Philip Cerny, who has written that the Franco-American conflict of the 1960s was “the accumulation of a series of divergences which were not so significant in themselves, but which became crucial when set in the context of the conflict of paradigmatic perspectives.”<sup>22</sup> I have also come to appreciate the wisdom in Polybius' classic words, cited in the epitaph, which admonish the historian “not [to] pay so much attention to the actual narrative of events, as to what precedes, what accompanies, and what follows” and to consider “the discussion of why, how, and wherefore each thing was done [...]”<sup>23</sup>

Perusing the extensive documentary record, I began to realize in particular that American policymakers were imbued with certain notions about – the American relationship to – Europe that prejudiced their assessments of de Gaulle. Behind the differences on a range of topics lay a

---

*American-European Cultural History* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 230-231.

<sup>22</sup> Philip G. Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of de Gaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 213.

<sup>23</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, Book III, nr. 31 (Harvard University Press, 1922 thru 1927 Loeb Classical Library, vol III, translation by W. R. Paton), 73

fundamental disagreement about the nature of the transatlantic relationship. To de Gaulle, there certainly was historical solidarity between the United States and France, but there could be no bonds which would tie both sides of the Atlantic permanently together; in the final analysis, the Atlantic alliance was to him a temporary expediency to stave off a specific threat. Many Americans, in contrast, had come to view the transatlantic relationship in ideological and organic terms. The Cold War had transformed their mental map of the Atlantic Ocean, changing it from a geographical and mental barrier into a *mare nostrum*. “With the development of the Atlantic Community,” the American political philosopher Louis Halle typically observed in 1957, “it has become instead of a broad wilderness separating two worlds or two hemispheres, a lake which makes close neighbors of all who live on its shores.”<sup>24</sup>

Was there one predominant conception of the transatlantic relationship in the United States during the early decades of the Cold War, one that has influenced American policymakers in thought and in action? Amid the huge diversity of views, I was struck in the course of my archival research by persistent and widespread references to the transatlantic relationship as an evolving Atlantic “community.” This more encompassing notion of a “community” was furthermore elaborated in an avalanche of policy papers, historical studies, political treatises, and citizen’s initiatives. The Atlantic community – or slight variations thereof – was *the* catchword in the American political discourse from the late 1940s until the late 1960s to describe the transatlantic relationship. It implied that the Atlantic alliance was much more than a security response to a temporary exigency. It had unmistakable ideological and civilizational connotations. Organizations with transatlantic membership, such as NATO and the OECD, were seen as the expressions of an underlying reality and the harbingers of growing Atlantic unity. The notion of an Atlantic community indeed had all the characteristics of a foreign policy paradigm.<sup>25</sup> As a result, there seemed to me to be some truth in the observation of two American policymakers in 1965 that “for almost twenty years America’s major foreign policy has been sustained on a nightmare and a dream. The nightmare was the Soviet threat in Europe [...]. The dream was an ‘Atlantic Community.’”<sup>26</sup> But was there any reality to this dream? Did Americans all mean the

---

<sup>24</sup> Louis J. Halle, *History, Philosophy, and Foreign Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 117, 120. A State Department official who served at the Policy Planning Staff under Kennan, Halle turned his mind to political philosophy in the 1950s after a stint at the National War College.

<sup>25</sup> In the study of international relations, a paradigm denotes a coherent set of beliefs or assumptions about the world which serves as a guide for thought and action in the area of foreign affairs. It is most commonly used to describe a set of beliefs or assumptions which is seen as dominant during a given period. The concept of paradigm itself originates in the philosophy of science, where it was developed by Thomas Kuhn in order to explain *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). For a definition of a paradigm in the realm of international relations, see Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 416-7.

<sup>26</sup> Richard J. Barnet and Marcus G. Raskin, *After Twenty Years: The Decline of NATO and the Search for a New Policy in Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 1. The authors worked at respectively the State Department and the White



same thing by it? Was it more than a rhetorical convention? In order to understand the American reaction to de Gaulle, I first had to come to grips with the notion of an Atlantic community.

Diplomatic historians have traditionally shied away from giving much weight to the idea of an Atlantic community in explaining the United States' policies towards Europe during the Cold War. Because of its admitted vagueness, it is indeed tempting to argue that this notion had a mostly rhetorical or even propagandistic function. The Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad, for instance, has flatly stated that "the deepest reason" for the absence of more Atlantic integration "was quite simply that there was virtually no interest in the United States in anything that would reduce American sovereignty."<sup>27</sup>

The concept of the transatlantic relationship as an evolving community of like-minded nations was nonetheless an important and influential characteristic of the perspective of the postwar generation of American policymakers. The Atlantic community idea served as a beacon in their view of the evolving world system, perhaps something akin to a mental map.<sup>28</sup> In this perspective, the institutional development of organizations such as NATO and the OECD not only seemed logical but also just the beginning of something more permanent and more desirable. The idea of an Atlantic community was more than a hyperbolic restatement of Cold War solidarity. The prevalence of the notion indeed reflected the fact that the transatlantic relationship had become the object of high-strung expectations among Americans after World War II. It was also one premise for the activist American support for European integration and unity from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, for within an Atlantic community any European entity that might be created would likely be agreeable to American interests and ideals. What is more, Atlanticism was to most American policymakers the peacetime alternative to American isolationism and European nationalism. In this light, as in others, they regarded de Gaulle as a dangerous obstructionist: his foreign policy appeared to awaken ghosts of the past.

This is far from saying that all Americans in the early decades of the Cold War unequivocally subscribed to the notion of an Atlantic community or meant the same thing by it. On the contrary, this study suggests that its emergence as an idea in American foreign policy is to be explained in part by its ability to wed the conservative and the liberal traditions of American foreign policy and their essentially different approaches to Europe. Postwar American foreign

---

House during the Kennedy administration.

<sup>27</sup> Geir Lundestad, *"Empire" by Integration*, 148.

<sup>28</sup> For the importance of mental maps in diplomatic history, see Alan K. Henrikson, "Mental Maps," in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Patterson, eds, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 177-192. Henrikson defines mental map as a "cognitive frame on the basis of which historians of international relations, like diplomats and others who think and act internationally, orient themselves in the world."

policy can be seen as an uneasy yet reasonably effective synthesis between these two traditions, embodied by a bipartisan foreign policy establishment that determined the broad outlines of this policy. On the one hand, the idea of an Atlantic community could be supported from the conservative perspective as the extension of the Anglo-American strategic partnership to Western Europe; on the other hand, liberals tended to lend support to the Atlantic community as a scaled-down version of Wilsonian one-worldism in the context of the Cold War. The idea of an Atlantic community, in addition, incorporated the fundamental ambivalence felt towards Europe, making it a kind of compromise between the tendency to limit American engagement in Europe and the inclination to reform it. Under the pressure of the Cold War, the notion of an Atlantic community thus helped to bridge important differences within the internationalist segment of the American political community. This, in turn, also helps to explain both the pervasiveness and the ambiguity that has led diplomatic historians to neglect its function.

The first part of this study is therefore devoted to understanding where each side of the argument came from. Chapter one provides an analysis of de Gaulle's vantage point, focusing on the ideas underpinning his foreign policy and on his views of the United States and Europe. Chapter two describes how Americans have approached the transatlantic relationship following World War II, dissecting the notion that this relationship was evolving into an ever closer Atlantic community.<sup>29</sup> It argues that postwar American diplomacy was to an important extent defined by the interplay between the liberal and the conservative tradition in American foreign policy, by the New World's ambivalence toward the Old World, and by a historical evolution from aloofness to engagement in geopolitical approaches to the European question. It suggests that the emergence of the Atlantic community as an idea in American foreign policy is to be explained by its ability to wed the conservative and the liberal traditions of American foreign policy and their different approaches to Europe.

---

<sup>29</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published earlier in Sebastian Reyn, *Allies or Aliens? George W. Bush and the Transatlantic Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Den Haag: Atlantische Commissie, 2004), 25-120.

