

## **France and NATO: The Gaullist Legacy and Roots of Dispute**

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### **Abstract**

*In 1966, General de Gaulle's differences with the United States took the form of an all – out confrontation. He thought that the moment had finally come to clarify the relations between France and NATO. De Gaulle felt that France should be a world power, and it was eligible to gradually rally all European parties interested in an overall solution, by taking the lead in a détente with the East. Looking beyond the classical interpretations of such a relationship between France and NATO and the United States, this research aims at analyzing de Gaulle's quest for grandeur designed to build an independent French deterrence, as well as his plans to overcome the bloc – system which characterized world politics after the Second War.*

**Key words:** de Gaulle, France, NATO

### ***First: Introduction***

It is a well known fact that in 1945, "France came out of the Second War like a wounded nation, led by its healer Charles de Gaulle". These were the words of François Furet, the French historian and president of the Saint Simon foundation. The picture he tried to draw was intended to make a comparison between 1918 and 1945, citing the meaning put by the French philosopher Raymond Aron " November 1918.... what was Paris on the day of the armistice, on the day after the armistice, no one can imagine. One has to have seen it. People were embracing the streets. Every one: the bourgeois, the laborers, the office workers, the youth, the old people, it was a sort of mass madness, but it was a joyful madness.... On the contrary, in the month of May 1945, Paris was mortally sad, the Paris that I saw. I remember a conversation I had with the French writer Jules Roy on that day. He was struck as was I, by this sadness, this absence of hope. It was the victory of the allies more than it was that of France. It was nothing at all like the transport of enthusiasm of the days of November 1918."<sup>(1)</sup>

"Even today, as Stanly Hoffmann put it, it is the liberation of Paris in August 1944, that the French celebrated rather than the victory of May 1945. The liberation of Paris was the instant that the French people discovered their faraway savior General de Gaulle, whose personality and charisma had made it appear for one ephemeral moment that his Free French Forces alone had liberated the city. The victory of May 1945 on the other hand, referred the French back to the origins of the war and the defeat of 1940, leaving – in the words of professor Hoffmann –, two characteristics in the French collective memory: catastrophe and humiliation."<sup>(2)</sup>

When France declared in March 1966, that it intended to end the assignment to NATO of all French armed forces, to withdraw all French staff from the integrated military headquarters, and to require those headquarters and all foreign units to move out of French soil, it seemed at first sight that the effect of this decision on NATO's military position might be disastrous.

France, with the largest land area in Western Europe and important NATO facilities on its soil, was withdrawing from the military organization, leaving NATO's defense with little strategic depth. There was bitterness among France's partners at this unilateral action taken without prior consultations, and without apparent concern for the needs of Western defense, by a country itself sheltered geographically by its allies, and secured under the protection of American nuclear guarantee.

Power, independence, and grandeur, are to be found of course, at the heart of de Gaulle's Atlantic policy. The September 1958 memorandum on the alliance, addressed to Dwight Eisenhower and Harold Macmillan, marked France's return to institutional stability, to general financial and economic equilibrium, and to international influence. The end of the Algerian war at the beginning of the sixties which freed France of its colonial burden, put the finishing touches to a phase in which the General sought to redefine French power and influence. Moreover, it also inaugurated a new era of assertive French diplomacy, bolstered by France's emerging nuclear capability.

It is to be noted that de Gaulle, who remained adamantly opposed to different plans of European integration in the 1940s and 1950s, had by the beginning of 1960s chosen the E.C. as a building block towards European Union. De Gaulle's ideas and policies of the 1940s had not changed, and his ultimate aim was still to restore France's grandeur, and establish its position as a major world power. He still resented the "Anglo – Saxon" not only because of their treatment of him during the War, in which they refused to recognize him as the head of the official French government in exile, but also because he believed that Britain and the United States have few common interests with France. While the Americans saw France as another European power in the same light as Germany and Italy, de Gaulle saw France's position as one of the leading world nations.

The underlying reasons behind his maneuver of courting European Union could be listed as follows:

- 1- To establish France's leadership in Western Europe,
- 2- To distance Britain as a major rival to France for such a leadership role, by duplicating the Western European Union with the European Union, based on the "E.C. six" which would exclude Britain,
- 3- To weaken NATO by distancing France, and eventually the European states that would follow its leadership, from NATO's integrated organization, thus reducing the impact of U.S. influence on Europe and more importantly on France.

Later, the culmination phase of the Gaullist contestation over the Atlantic system in 1965–1967, coincided with a noticeable increase of French power, unprecedented economic expansion, political stability confirmed by the reelection of de Gaulle, and operational nuclear capacity. This was the foundation on which was built a policy of contesting the role of the dollar, of denouncing blocs, and of withdrawing from integration with NATO. And after the crisis of May 1968, when this foundation splintered along social, economic, and political fault lines, de Gaulle's Atlantic policy softened somewhat – though less in principle than in practice.

It was a turning point. France had for a while been subject to American dictates. It now puts an end to any foreign presence that was generally unwelcomed, and disengaged from an Atlantic integration structure. This was the main line of the policy of independence pursued by de Gaulle since his return to power in 1958, a policy that was increasingly perceived across the Atlantic as being directed against the United States, where the 1966 withdrawal decision was seen as a real challenge to the alliance and to American strategies in Europe. This policy appeared to question not just U.S. leadership in Europe, but the whole strategy of containment at a time when the military escalation in Vietnam, threatened former certainties about U.S. power and military capability. Although it already had experienced serious crises, the Atlantic alliance itself was enduring one of the most uncertain periods in its history. Indeed, military integration implemented at the start of the 1950s and denounced by de Gaulle, symbolized the permanence of U.S. engagement in Europe, and the solidarity of common defense under the Atlantic alliance.

Since 1966, the relations between France and NATO had fueled many debates, and much commentary in France and abroad. It has given rise to many different interpretations. In France, de Gaulle's decision rapidly became the founding myth of restored national independence and national pride. In the United States, de Gaulle's Atlantic policy was interpreted as essentially anti – American. The reason is that the political stakes – differing according to viewpoints – have profoundly influenced interpretations of the event. From 1960s through the 1970s, the nature of transatlantic relations remained essentially unchanged, and continued to affect interpretations of this period, whether in France, the U.S., or the rest of the alliance.

Taking into consideration the ideas presented in the introductory remarks, **this research aims** at offering an analytical interpretation of Franco – U.S. relations under the presidency of Charles de Gaulle throughout the fifties and the sixties, a period that reached its climax with de Gaulle's dramatic decision of 1966, to withdraw from the alliance integrated military structure. Depending on accessible sources and official documents from U.S. and French archives, **this research tries to look** beyond the classical interpretations that have prevailed on both sides, by explaining reasons and motives for the great political rift between the United States and France after the Second War.

To achieve the above mentioned aims, and to answer **related questions** concerning this critical period of time, such as:

- 1- What were the roots of de Gaulle's decision to withdraw from the alliance?
- 2- How did de Gaulle's legacy change in later stage after his departure in 1969?
- 3- What was de Gaulle's vision for European security cooperation?

**The structure** of this research is divided into **three parts and a conclusion**, covering different aspects of France's relations with NATO, and the different motives of de Gaulle's 1966 decision to withdraw from the alliance.

### ***Second: Roots of Dispute***

In discussing the French perception regarding security cooperation in Europe, one needs to examine France's relations with NATO, and the background of its decision in May 1966, to withdraw from the Alliance Integrated Military Structure. This issue goes back to the Gaullist era, when the doctrine for an independent French deterrent and defense policy was produced. De Gaulle noted in the early 1960s, that the increasing Soviet Union's retaliatory capabilities would eventually weaken the credibility of the American strategic nuclear guarantee to Western Europe, and thus endangering Europe's security. At the same time, French military leaders repeatedly had expressed such concerns about West European dependence on American nuclear decision.<sup>(3)</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s were significant because they marked the beginning of the nuclear issue, which dominated much of the debates regarding European security cooperation in the following years. The mid-1950s witnessed the evolution of the idea of the independent nuclear projects of both Britain and France. It was also in this period of time that the first tactical and intermediate range nuclear forces were deployed on Western European soil. These developments inevitably created the problem of nuclear sharing, which largely stemmed from one major consideration: The U.S. monopoly which in turn introduced a new dimension to European security cooperation, that of nuclear cooperation. European nuclear cooperation emerged as an idea resulting from necessity. This necessity for nuclear sharing was two dimensional:

- 1- On the one hand, the development of the independent nuclear programmes of both Britain and France at this stage was difficult to realize through exclusively national means. In this context, cooperation with the United States, and on France's part, cooperation with other European countries, was sought to secure the necessary technological and material means to achieve national security programmes.
- 2- On the other hand, there was the issue of nuclear deployments which opened up the problem of sharing in the decision making, involving NATO's nuclear weapons based on European soil. The introduction of nuclear weapons on the continent also raised the question of control and management over nuclear facilities within the alliance.

The French deterrent posture was devised by General de Gaulle at a time when the United States had its nuclear superiority, and could assure Europe and West Germany in particular, of a credible security guarantee. De Gaulle was able to institute a defense system in which nuclear weapons were held to protect France. At the same time, France's commitment to the alliance remained in force after the 1966 withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure, but its leaders described France as an independent power that could freely choose to participate in a possible "forward battle" in West Germany.<sup>(4)</sup>

After the Second War, France has occupied a unique place in the sphere of European security and inner – alliance relations.

On one hand, it is a nuclear power enjoying, at least formally, the same status as the other nuclear states in Europe, and on the other hand, it has, unlike the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, constantly refused to take any military commitments to its allies. When in 1966, General de Gaulle decided to leave the integrated military structure of the alliance, and to end the stationing of foreign, especially American forces on French soil, he made it clear that his aim was to recover his full freedom of action in defense and foreign policies.<sup>(5)</sup> The arguments invoked to justify the French withdrawal from NATO's command system were twofold:

**First**, French president de Gaulle doubted the seriousness and willingness of the United States to protect its European allies, by the threat of nuclear retaliation in case of an attack on one of the members. Until his withdrawal, he effectively blocked the adoption by NATO Council of the new strategic doctrine of "flexible response", which indicated the beginning of a long misunderstanding between France and the United States, and at the same time, the start of a strategic break within the alliance that would be confirmed throughout the sixties and the seventies. But at the beginning, de Gaulle wished to preserve Western solidarity and avoid European division. He took a great care to explain his position. On one hand, he insisted in response to U.S. accusations that he was throwing doubts regarding the reality of U.S. involvement in the defense of Europe, by recognizing that U.S. strategy remained unchanged, that it was still founded on the principle of massive retaliation. He recommended that the United States should adjust its security policies in accordance with European interests and European realities. On the other hand, as someone responsible for his country's security, how could he not wonder about the future? And how could he be assured of the fact that the strategy adopted by him in a case of world conflict, involving tight solidarity between the United States and Western Europe, would remain forever the same without any change.<sup>(6)</sup>

**Second**, General de Gaulle had emphasized the changing pattern of Soviet policies, and the emergence of China as a rival to the Soviet Union. He expressed his conviction that the mutual understanding of the dangerous consequences of a nuclear war, would lead to a new period of Détente, and cooperation between East and West. Moscow's relations with China were deteriorating, and the Soviet hold over the communist bloc was loosening. After the death of Stalin in 1953, there were some Soviet initiatives with regards to its policies with the West in the form of unilateral concessions, including the Soviet suggestion of 1958 to hold a summit conference to discuss the control of nuclear tests and prevention of a surprise attack.<sup>(7)</sup>

By 1966, French president seemed increasingly worried, however, that the growing involvement of the United States in Vietnam might implicate the European NATO partners in a conflict which was not their own. The French government at that time reinterpreted the Washington treaty of 1949, by stating that France would fulfill its obligations under the treaty in case of an attack, and as de Gaulle indicated in his message to the nation of 13 December 1965, France would do what was necessary in order not to be involved in a war between the two rival hegemonies.

In 1967, France developed a national strategy based on the refusal to identify any precise enemy, as a direct threat to its national security. In other words, the French deterrent strategy had to be directed against any threat, from wherever direction it might come.<sup>(8)</sup> For de Gaulle, crises in Europe and conflicts between East and West, confirmed his determination to give France an autonomous nuclear strategy, and strengthened his idea that in the future, the United States would hesitate more and more to put its nuclear firepower in play in cases like Berlin. The crises therefore, were a new and important phase in the strategic divorce between France and the United States and NATO.<sup>(9)</sup>

Although France withdrew from the NATO military organization, the French government clearly stated that it did not intend to leave the alliance proper, unless events in the years to come were to bring about a radical change in East – West relations. The French government did not view its actions as incompatible either with membership in the alliance, or with French participation, if needed, in military operations at the side of its allies.

The shift in French relations with the alliance did not occur, however, with the change of presidents. It was the result of events of the summer of 1968, culminating in the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact, and the subsequent Soviet moves to restore authority with the Eastern block. The end of the 1968 Prague Spring marked also the end of the Gaullist design to change the structure of the European security system.<sup>(10)</sup> The French disengagement from the military side of NATO was, after all, not an end in itself, although it was necessary in order to regain a sufficient degree of liberty of diplomatic action.

It was meant to be an example to the Eastern alliance and, as a first step, an encouragement for some Warsaw countries like Romania, to loosen its links with the Warsaw pact, and to promote greater autonomy vis-a-vis both superpowers.

General de Gaulle himself understood clearly that the push for a mutual military disengagement on the continent was blocked, because of the Soviet reaction to the liberalization movement in Prague, and because of disagreement between Western European states themselves, and the lack of a shared common vision. While de Gaulle was willing to let the U.K. join the Common Market on the condition that the British government went along with his ideas for the reorganization of NATO, his successor, Georges Pompidou (1969 – 1974), who was the prime architect of the Gaullist party, tried to bring France closer to the United States and NATO, dropped this approach and, under considerable pressure from other E.E.C. members and notably West Germany, accepted the enlargement of the Community without any strategic linkage between the two issues.

Initial fears, especially in Washington and Bonn that the Gaullist Republic would move to a policy of "equal distance" between the two superpowers, or would strive for armed neutrality, were never justified. The superpower squeeze was one of the underlying causes of de Gaulle's motives, that they stemmed from a Western European inadequacy to face the Soviet Union on its own, and the inequitable distribution of power in the alliance. The entire notion behind a third force was de Gaulle's desire to establish a Western Europe independent of both superpowers. De Gaulle's motive to pursue this goal of minimizing U.S. influence on Europe, through relegating the role of the alliance to a secondary position vis-a-vis a French – led political union, was due to the relative reduction of the Soviet threat.<sup>(11)</sup>

Although General de Gaulle had pledged military co – operation with the NATO allies in a case of war, French participation at the side of NATO's integrated forces was conditional on a decision by the French president. France had kept away from the security arrangements process since 1967, when it signed and ratified the Outer Space Treaty which bans placing means of mass destruction in outer space. However, this constant military non – alignment, did not prevent the French forces from participating in alliance land and naval exercises, nor did it hinder France's efforts to promote armaments co – production schemes with its European allies, and also with the United States.

It has to be stressed here, that France was the first country, under General de Gaulle to proclaim a different hierarchy of priorities than those of its allies, at a time when the priorities of others were still rigidly defined.<sup>(12)</sup> The French challenge was, of course, directed to the integrated military organization of NATO, and not to the alliance itself. It was quite clear that the priority of alliance relations was lowered dramatically in the name of French independence. Independence of choice was to count most, even if this choice might go against the interests of other allies. At the same time, two of the underlying and unstated assumptions of Gaullism under the General, were widely prevailed among analysts: first, that France did in fact benefit from the American nuclear umbrella and, second, that there would be no serious crisis testing the Western security framework.

Inherent in this Gaullist hierarchy of priorities was a dual ambiguity. There was a French refusal to be a full member of NATO while still collecting the benefits of membership. One of the frequently cited examples here was the French rejection to join the integrated military organization, while continued to use NATO's military facilities and advanced air – warning system. More generally, the French obviously benefited from NATO's deterrent capacity against the Soviet Union, without which the French ability to pursue the same type of independence would be significantly constrained.<sup>(13)</sup> France under de Gaulle adopted the empty chair policy. This deliberate abstention affected and reduced its role in the policy-making of NATO, and deprived its government of an ability to block developments considered to be crucial to French security interests. De Gaulle tried to give France its role as a world power. In short, the United States had a "grand design" on one hand, and France had a "grand ambition on the other".<sup>(14)</sup>

The trend of France's declared commitment to Europe's security had emphasis on a greater possibility of French participation in any conflict in Europe. Although French policy was not entirely consistent or persistent in acting to sustain the alliance structure on which France's security in general depended, the French government had shown a certain pattern of continuity in its diplomacy since De Gaulle, on such key issues as the seriousness of the Soviet threat, the state of the East-West balance of power, the credibility of American guarantees, the quality of NATO's cohesion, and the political and foreign policy stability of West Germany.

This trend of France's position was clearly the main motive of the March 3, 1969 statement of French chief of staff General Fourquet, who insisted more than ever, on the closeness of military cooperation between France and NATO in the defense of Europe. For Fourquet, "engagement along the north and east frontiers against an enemy from the east, the battle corps will normally act in tight coordination with our allies forces". This statement was widely interpreted in France and by the allies, as an indication of France's commitment to the alliance.<sup>(15)</sup>

It would appear that despite rhetoric to the contrary at times, France had an interest in the maintenance of the existing alliance structure, including the American strategic guarantee and military presence in Western Europe. This was clear from a profound concern that French leaders had expressed whenever there had been any risk of extensive American withdrawal from Europe, or any hint of political – military neutralism in West Germany. De Gaulle's judgment was that American military power was so great, and the American position in West Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe was so stable, that France and the alliance could afford a French withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure at a time when Soviet threats to Europe were perceived as no longer imminent, or as menacing as they had been before.

De Gaulle opted for the pursuit of France independence and French influence in Europe, without jeopardizing France's security in the face of the Soviet threat. France hoped to minimize the threat it perceived from both the Soviet Union and Germany, by shunning the influence of the United States, and gradually establishing a special relationship with the Soviet Union. This relationship was aimed in part at the long – term containment of Germany as well as at strengthening France's role and influence in Europe and East – West affairs. Détente, the French believed, was not simply to be imposed by the two superpowers on other nations on the basis of a bipolar logic. It was to be centered on constructive nationalism and the freedom of nation – states to pursue their national interests, without a wider international consensus.<sup>(16)</sup>

France of course, was not on the front-line of the Soviet threat, F.R.G .was. The East-West military balance was, therefore, much more crucial to Bonn than it was to Paris. Nevertheless, France did not wish to see the military balance change in Europe.<sup>(17)</sup> Its opposition to any security arrangements in Europe, came partly from the fact that France feared that the reduction of American security commitment might induce West Germany to increase its own military power, perhaps even to acquire nuclear weapons. There was also the fear in France that the scope and circumstances of East-West security arrangements might be decided exclusively by the super-powers over the heads of their allies, thus undoing the role France sought to play.

Whether French worries of the resurgence of West Germany were rational or not, they were strongly held among many of the French public opinion. The West German threat was still inhibited, at least in the military, if not in the political sense, which stemmed from the German defeat in the Second War, and from post-war partition of the country.<sup>(18)</sup> There had been much discussion concerning this issue in France, motivated by the concerns over the anti-nuclear movement in the Federal Republic of Germany, and of increased Franco-German defense cooperation. But in later stages, as anti - war sentiment receded in Germany, so had this discussion in France, which found itself prepared, on economic grounds, to collaborate with Germany in the production of military equipment, and the co-production of new helicopters.<sup>(19)</sup>

After the Second War, de Gaulle's fears and concerns were mainly connected with the German threat. This threat became fixed in the French mind, based on past experience with perceived German treachery, of an eventual Russo – German combination. France's postwar German policy could be described as centered around three main objectives:

- 1- That Germany never again poses any military threat to France,
- 2- That France be assured of its security on its eastern frontier with Germany,
- 3- That Germany not be allowed to recover economically more rapidly than France.

These French objectives came into conflict with those of the Anglo – Americans, who saw that Germany could not be left to move freely in Central Europe.

French contingency plans for conflict in Europe, apparently envisaged a quick deployment of the bulk of French ground forces on French territory in north-east and eastern France, to block the traditional invasion route from Belgium and Germany, against advancing Soviet forces, while a decision was made to use French nuclear weapons.<sup>(20)</sup>

It was seen by many in Paris, that a collective European security system with no conflicts and wars, and with no superpowers influence, is difficult to achieve. So French analysts doubted that if any security arrangements in Europe, could have a decisive part in reshaping the continent's political and security landscape. Instead, they believed that if the West could avoid such concessions to Moscow, which the French worried about, it might at most reduce to some extent, the immediate Soviet threat to Europe, and push the Europeans for more cooperation. But France certainly would not want that to occur at the expense of reopening in a practical way, the German question.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **Third: Mitterrand and NATO: a New Course of Relations**

After de Gaulle's departure in 1969, his "model" for a durable European status quo, and his vision for France's role as the leading European power, remained an incontestable standard of reference for French Atlantic policy. While certain adaptations were made to confirm the operational flexibility of the "model", in no way were its principles questioned. It was truly a continuity that reigned.

The French posture within NATO continued after de Gaulle to be justified by the wish to overcome the blocs system, and his successors continually made undermining of "Yalta" as one of the main objectives of French foreign and security policies. While de Gaulle's departure in 1969 had coincided with continuous confirmation of the East – West status quo he had denounced, successive French presidents kept to this course, and continued to make détente and the organization of a grand Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals", the focus of their international policies. In the face of a dominant vision of European security organized around the dialogue between the two alliances, France maintained through two decades, the goal of an international order free from bipolar thinking.

Such continuity of France's Atlantic policy was not a foregone conclusion in the aftermath of de Gaulle's departure. Many domestic and international factors could have led to its revision, thus justifying American hopes that de Gaulle's successors would in time reconsider this decision. But nothing came out of such hopes. The effects of the Gaullist legacy were constantly perceived as beneficial, whether nationally or in their Western or East – West dimension, hence the permanence of that "model" was never fundamentally called into question in later stages.

This continuity was expressed in the constantly asserted desire to maintain and protect French "independence". President Pompidou (1969 - 1974), Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974 – 1981), and François Mitterrand (1981 – 1995), were all attached to preserving a security policy founded on a deterrence posture that should remain national above all. During the seventies and the eighties, the French military never stopped developing its capacity in the nuclear as well as in the conventional fields.

So, while the reality of decision - making autonomy was debatable in the sixties, it was not so twenty years later. As a result, France's particular position in NATO was never questioned: While remaining a full member of the Alliance, it stuck to its posture of military non - integration and of selective political participation in the Alliance's other activities. Whether in operational or institutional terms, the situation between France and NATO remained in the seventies and eighties, in basic outline, nearly the same.<sup>(22)</sup>

With the victory of the socialist François Mitterrand in the presidential elections of May 1981, the French domestic scene changed dramatically. Initial fears, especially in the United States, that this change of power in France would destabilize the security policies of the West were quickly put to rest. The new president adopted a stand which was widely perceived as much more "Atlanticist" and, in any case, more pro – American than that of his predecessor. He froze diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, and urged NATO to deploy the two U.S. intermediate nuclear systems before negotiating with Moscow on ceilings for European theatre weapons.

Moreover, the conversion of the left in France, to the idea of an independent national deterrent, had no effect on the usual rhetoric about the need to dissolve the two military blocs, and the goal of achieving a European system of collective security. For the left wing of the socialists, the Soviet threat was invented by the U.S. propaganda for the sole purpose of frightening Western Europe into submission to the United States. The idea of an independent national deterrence was practically translated by France's success in February 1966 in the nuclear field, which automatically made France an effective nuclear power, and a main player in European and world politics.<sup>(23)</sup>

On the whole, the image of East – West relations underwent a fundamental change in the first years of the Mitterrand presidency. The diplomatic interplay between Washington and Moscow, which was a landmark of Giscard d'Estaing reign, and which served to support France's autonomy in foreign and security policy, was replaced by a strategy of re – adjustment to the new mood of the U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union. With regards to NATO, little had changed in concrete terms, apart from declarations of renewed solidarity and symbolic gestures.

This second – line position of France within NATO, was seen as a threat to the political and military status quo in Europe, on which the French conception of independent deterrence ultimately depended. French politicians, moreover, misread the widespread German opposition to the I.N.F. deployment on its soil, as a new attempt to bring about the reunification of Germany in a deal with the Soviet Union, and they failed to understand that the warming – up of the inter – German relations which came after the arrival of the Pershing missiles, was directed at political and psychological " damage limitation " in both countries. The French worries about their unorderly weak Western neighbor, which was apparently not prepared to play its traditional role as a foremost advocate of the Atlantic community, were obviously rooted in the recognition that France itself was too weak to contain the alleged German threat, and that this task had to be left to the U.S. and NATO alliance as a whole.<sup>(24)</sup>

France national priority was without any doubt, directed at limiting super powers influence over Europe, and at the same time, shaping of a West – European security cooperation system, coincides with Europe's own aspirations and interests. Within the French political establishment, and to a much lesser degree, within French public opinion at large, it was recognized that the controversy and contradiction over the " Euro - missile project ", that was the implementation of NATO's dual – track decision of 1979, had led to an excessive polarization of antagonistic superpower goals at the expense of European security interests. French efforts to establish a European identity did not lead anywhere, as they inevitably raised the problem of preventing a European - U.S. split within the alliance.<sup>(25)</sup>

French attitude towards security arrangements in Europe should be placed in the context of its security needs, as well as its relation with NATO. The theme of this attitude was preserving the credibility of an important element of French national security, namely, the strategic nuclear force, while questioning the utility of security arrangements dominated by the two superpowers. France was skeptical about the validity of American security policies which defined long - term stabilization of American – Soviet mutual deterrence through bilaterally negotiated arrangements. French leadership doubted if the Soviet - American security disputes would truly be brought under control through any kind of bilateral negotiations, even if the two superpowers would agree on partial security measures, to limit certain activities or types of weapons.

The French government under Mitterrand returned to the Gaullist belief that certain deliberate limits on military capabilities, would contribute to deterrence by showing the adversary that France's options were so limited that it might turn promptly to nuclear means. While Giscard d'Estaing expressed great interest in developing more options to build up deterrent credibility, defense minister Charles Hernu had placed greater stress on the idea of virtual infallibility of nuclear deterrence. Contrary to d'Estaing idea, Hernu emphasis on the operational purpose of the French military reorganization, showed a return to the Gaullist traditional belief. But within the basic similarity of seeking improved fire – power, mobility and versatility in military forces, intentions differed.

For Giscard d'Estaing, it appeared, the purpose was to build up operationally effective conventional military options of far greater weight and sustainability, than were in fact achieved during his predecessors. For Hernu, French military options must be as flexible and responsive as possible, to give the French government credibility of action, flexibility in time and space, and consequently giving a great scope for any military or political initiatives.<sup>(26)</sup> The French conception of their own security and that of Europe, affected their attitude towards security arrangements with NATO. The French government was particularly outspoken among the Western allies in expressing concerns that any security arrangements in Europe, would lead to the creation of a special security zone that might mortgage West European defense options, by establishing a Soviet influence over the Western side of the arrangement area. So France viewed proposals for security arrangements in Europe with suspicion, and refused to be part of the alliance declarations of 1968 and 1970 that responded to the Warsaw Pact proposals.



France stood apart from the "bloc-to-bloc" security arrangements in Europe. Its main concern was that such arrangements would establish a mechanism for superpower influence over the security of Europe.<sup>(27)</sup> France argued that these arrangements would promote the continued dominance of the two superpowers over European security, since they were taking a decisive role in determining security terms of reference before the arrangements had even been convened. The two superpowers would presumably have played a notable role in the security decision-making of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, a judgment which buttressed the following major objection: such "bloc-to-bloc" arrangements would perpetuate the division of Europe, that in the French view, derived from superpowers collusion at Yalta in 1945.

Yet another reason for France non-participation was the belief that the problem of security arrangements in Europe was its failure to cover Soviet Union territory, the place where troops withdrawn from Eastern Europe could be maintained, and could be stationed dangerously close to the European theater. France was the main Western Country which had taken a position opposing security arrangements in Europe. Because of its withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure in 1996, it was not a party to the arrangements, or to the early statements of NATO which outlined the main principles of the alliance regarding this issue. Indeed, getting France to agree to participate in security arrangements in Europe was one of the primary Soviet objectives, when President Pompidou visited Moscow on 1st January 1973. It was obvious from Brezhnev's comments that convincing France to participate in security arrangements was high on the agenda of topics of the meeting. The Soviets obviously preferred to have the large French army and military forces, as well as French nuclear weapons, fall under any security agreement in Europe.<sup>(28)</sup>

The French judgment of their relations with NATO was derived from some of the interrelated considerations, drawn from some certain general principles of its own as well as European security. The strengthening of the two alliances would clash with France's policy regarding détente between East and West. France believed that the two alliances should be gradually weakened in conjunction with the emergence of an East – West détente, and the reduction of superpowers influence in Europe. This political development would in turn permit more understanding between the two sides. It would be counterproductive and even dangerous, the French added, to initiate negotiations on matters of military substance, before achieving improved East – West political understanding and mutual confidence.

This French attitude was derived from the conviction that security arrangements were founded on a certain concept. If successful, these security arrangements would result in the creation of a special zone in Europe, an area where the Germans would be subject to restraint and control, and to a Soviet right to over sight to which other Western states would not be subjected.

France recognized that some Western allies wanted to be unanimous in adopting security arrangements in Europe, particularly to limit any possible attempts by the U.S. to deal unilaterally with the Soviet Union at the cost of Western Europe, and it had no intention of sacrificing its hard won autonomy within NATO, to go into arrangements which might put restrictions on its leadership. Even more, the French seemed to be worried about the fact that inclusion of the two Germanys under a European security arrangements regime might move them to unify under conditions of neutrality.<sup>(29)</sup>

The French government accused security arrangements in Europe, of not addressing Europe's basic problems, namely the Soviet geographic advantage coupled with the Soviet conventional military superiority, which would enable Soviet troops to move easily comparing with the Americans, who would need to operate from a very far geographical distance. These unbalanced effects, would include the physical challenge of distance that the U.S. forces would face, in undertaking reinforcement of the central region in times of crisis.

#### **Fourth: conclusion**

The end of the cold war, has largely removed some of the obstacles and gaps between declaratory policies and operational ones. That is between ideal and reality. Because the very logic of transatlantic misunderstandings, and Franco – American disagreements, along with the system of power blocs which has been called into question, analysts are given space for more contradictory readings of events.

When analyzing the French objections towards security arrangements in Europe, and its relations with NATO, one can easily notice that some of these objections were of a political nature, related to French rejection to superpowers dominance, rejection of a bloc – to – bloc arrangements confirming the division of Europe, and supporting the process of détente. And some were basically military in aspiration, such as anxiety that military balance be disturbed, and criticism of the narrow geographical zone and other features of the arrangements terms of reference.

In practice, the military objections appeared to reflect France's security concerns on the most basic level. It was in French interests that the U.S. and other NATO allies remained in West Germany with no treaty imposing limitations on their military capabilities. Ending what was called a bloc – to – bloc situation, could raise awkward questions about German reunification and French security. At the same time, the political objection remained sincere, and more so than the concern about the possible creation of a zone of special security status, which could undermine the security of France's allies, and hence that of France. Such arrangements could go beyond reinforcing the status quo to creating a Soviet control over Europe.

One can easily suggest that, in a sense, France's behavior clashed with the French argument against a security dialogue dominated by the superpowers in this situation, since French non – participation in security arrangements, might have reinforced the tendency towards a bilateral dialogue heavily influenced by the superpowers. On the other hand, the objection to bloc – to – bloc arrangements was simply an objection to prevailing political realities, since no security arrangements between NATO and Warsaw Pact could avoid reaching a common negotiating position for each side.

In concluding the discussion regarding the French attitude towards NATO, one can suggest that, the French approach was rooted in a much longer tradition and greater expertise in foreign affairs that had at its core, the notion of the political autonomy and independence of France. In 1960s, the debate between the atlanticists and the Gaullists drew on the heritage from the Fourth Republic and earlier, on their control over the state apparatus in crucial phase of political, economic and military change and consolidation, and on de Gaulle's own capacity to win symbolic battles while not really challenging the ways in which the alliance worked in practice.

In the 1960s, the socialist government made some moves towards Atlanticism, but most of the time it avoided crossing the Gaullist bottom line, which was guarded by important factions in the socialist party. A genuine belief in the centrality of European détente had driven ever more pro – Atlanticist French leaders towards the Gaullist approach.

In the 1970s, the Giscardians, drawn from political groupings traditionally more favorable to Atlanticism, but dependent upon the Gaullist support in coalition politics, made some moves towards the greater coordination of French forces, strategy and tactics with the United States and NATO. However, they were constrained not only by the Gaullist consensus, but also by Giscard d'Estaing's own desire to appear as a strong and independent presidential figure in world politics.

More important perhaps, two fundamental changes had taken place since the establishment of the Gaullist consensus. In the first place, a phase of détente, both at the superpower level (e.g. in the SALT), and at the European level (e.g. inner German relations, the CSCE process, and increasing contacts and official visits between Eastern and Western Europe on number of levels) occurred after the mid-1960s, indicating the beginning of an era of co-existence between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Secondly, however, in contrast to these signs, France's capacity to play such an independent and effective role in pursuing détente had become more complex and problematic.

In the context of French politics, the old division between Atlanticists and Gaullists were still there, cutting across the lines of parties and coalitions. Not only had the recession led to a squeeze on defense spending and readjustment of priorities, it had also necessitated trade - offs between economic policy and foreign policy.

In the military context, perhaps most importantly, the development of "Weaponry" had involved a French need to "keep up" by producing a wider and more complex range of nuclear weapons of all sizes, whilst development of nuclear strategy had meant the need for a tactical nuclear capability, and the question of a European response to the American SDI.

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