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TOPIC 20: FOREIGN STATESMEN AND THEIR STATECRAFT

CHARLES DE GAULLE

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Seminar D

COURSE 1: FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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TOPIC 20: FOREIGN STATESMEN AND THEIR STATECRAFT

CHARLES DE GAULLE

Charles de Gaulle: An Analysis of His Strategy and Statecraft: 1959-1967

There is but one theme in the
life of Charles de Gaulle,
and that is power.¹

I: Charles de Gaulle

Charles de Gaulle was born in Lille, France, in 1890 and died at his home in Colombey, France, in 1970. He was a French soldier, scholar, and statesman who served with distinction in World War I, studied, taught, and wrote about military history and strategy, led the French resistance during World War II, first from exile in London and then from North Africa, served as Premier of France from 1945-1946, and was recalled in 1958 to lead France out of its post-war political chaos, serving as President of France under the new constitution of the Fifth Republic from 1959 until his resignation in 1969.

During his tenure as President of France, de Gaulle sought to secure French independence from Anglo-Saxon domination, taking France out of NATO's integrated military command and ensuring that France was successful in developing an independent nuclear capability. (He retained, however, France's political consultative status within NATO and made clear his intention to remain a party to the NATO Treaty, thus, maintaining a strong link between two parts of a tripartite (Anglo-Saxon, French-European, and Soviet) balance of power.) In addition, to preclude eventual British (and therefore also U.S.) domination of European economic affairs, de Gaulle blocked Britain's effort to join the European Economic Community (Common Market). Elsewhere, de Gaulle was instrumental in convincing the French to give Algeria its independence and succeeded within a few years of his return to power in 1958 in securing the independence of ~~and~~ other French colonies. Finally, he pursued French interests in the Third World as another means of countering Anglo-Saxon

¹
Don Cook, Charles de Gaulle, A Biography, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1983, p. 15. L'etat, c'est moi (Louis XIV) would be equally appropriate, but has been used so often it has become almost trite. Since this paper is based principally on information and analysis contained in Chapters 17 and 18 of the Cook book, a leading quote from this insightful historian would seem to be entirely appropriate.

domination.

This paper will focus on de Gaulle's strategy and statecraft as he undertook to disengage France from NATO and to block British participation in the European Common Market as discussed in Charles de Gaulle, A Biography, by Don Cook.

II: Assumptions about the Nation and the World

De Gaulle's policies and strategies were driven by a determination to enhance the power and independence of France and to ensure the ascendancy of France as the premier power on the European continent. These objectives derived from the fundamental character of the man, his studies of military history and strategy, and his deep prejudices against, suspicions of, and resentments toward, the Americans and the British. Cook observes that "General DeGaulle . . . had forgotten nothing of his wartime dealings with the United States and Great Britain, the subsidiary role he had been forced to play and the exclusion of France from all of the central decision-making by the Allies."⁶ In addition, he deeply resented the U.S. delay in 1944 in recognizing him as head of the provisional government of France.⁷ While he acknowledged the French debt to America for its help to France during the two world wars, France could not forget, he told Eisenhower in 1959, ". . . that during the First World War that help came only after long years of struggle which nearly proved mortal for her and that during the second she had already been crushed before you intervened."⁸

De Gaulle was primarily a realist who believed in nationalism and the nation-state as the principal actor in foreign affairs and in a balance of power as the principal system for ensuring French and European independence and security and for deterring threats to peace. His intense dislike and resentment of the dominant influence of the Anglo-Saxons (the U.S. and the British) in French and European affairs and his belief that this was not in the best interests of France or Europe inspired him to seek to enhance the power of both so that they would be free to resist such domination. He, thus, sought a

⁶ Cook, p. 333.

⁷ Gaddis Smith, American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-1945, Newbury Award Records, Inc., a subsidiary of Random House, Inc., p. 131.

⁸ Cook, p. 345.

greater, indeed, a dominant, role for France in Europe as well as a role for Europe as a major power in the balance of power with the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviet Union. The resulting relationship would be a tripartite balance of power in which the power of Europe, with France in the lead, would provide a balance against the power of the other two blocs: U.S. and Great Britain, as one, and the Soviet Union (and its allies), as the other.

De Gaulle was also to, a lesser degree, an idealist. He was opposed to power blocs, while recognizing the necessity for some power alignments in the prevailing situation, particularly since they were capable of exercising hegemony over France and thus threatening French independence of action. ^{on his part} He sought their dissolution. He did not see the balance of power system as permanent or as a preferable system for the organization of nation-states. He saw Communism as temporary manifestation of ambition and sought a ". . . Europe balanced between the Atlantic and the Urals, once totalitarian imperialism has ceased to deploy its ambitions."²⁵ His belief that a militarily independent France would be a sufficient deterrent to Soviet aggression was idealistic (although a case might be made that his perception of the reliability of the U.S. nuclear guarantee may have been more realistic than not; something we will probably and fortunately never know). ^{TT} Much of the motivation for de Gaulle's actions in foreign affairs stemmed from continued antipathy toward the Anglo-Saxons, and thus might be characterized as stemming more from an emotional (idealistic) than from an intellectual (realistic) basis. At the same time, a case could also be made that De Gaulle was basing his views on a realistic assessment of France's national security requirements, taking into account, in particular, the history of U.S. slowness to come to Europe's aid during both World Wars, and thus had a foundation in a realistic appraisal of likely U.S. responses, the existence of NATO notwithstanding.

III: Interests and Threats

De Gaulle assessed the national interest of France against his desire for a powerful and independent France that would dominate European political, military, and economic power. Policies which advanced these permanent interests were pursued; others were rejected or thwarted. De Gaulle saw NATO and the Marshall Plan as new forms of Anglo-Saxon domination and as threats to

²⁵ Cook, pp. 356-357.

the independence of France, to nationalism, and to French power on the European continent.⁶ He did not believe he could trust the U.S. nuclear guarantee; any potential aggressor, he believed, must know the French would strike back without waiting for permission from the U.S. and the other NATO countries. Finally, he saw the interdependence and integration of Europe as a threat to the French nation. Cook recalls de Gaulle's response to a U.S. proposal for cooperation with the U.S. on a minor project in Africa as: "Non. To cooperate is to lose one's independence."⁷

IV: Objectives

Cook observes that, "When he returned to power, de Gaulle seldom left his allies in any doubt about what he was against. It was more difficult to figure out what he was for. Everything revolved around the endless allusions and justifications embodied in 'independence'"⁸ His desire for independence from the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union, and his view that France could not depend on the U.S. nuclear guarantee led him to pursue two key objectives: 1) disengagement from NATO coupled with an independent French nuclear retaliatory capability, and 2) the blocking of British participation in the European Common Market. Cook states that, "In essence, he wanted to do away with the postwar Euroatlantic economic and security system that had been built during his years of exile and replace it with some vaguely nineteenth-century or eighteenth-century Europe des patries, with France as its epicenter in the West."⁹ Any policies or alignments that might undermine French independence would be resisted.

V: Strategy

Cook provides the following on de Gaulle's strategy for enhancing French power and securing French independence:

Insofar as there was some "grand design" to Charles deGaulle's foreign policy on his return to power, these were the objectives:

⁶ Cook, p. 333

⁷ Cook, p. 334.

⁸ Cook, p. 333.

⁹ Cook, p. 334.

-- Demonstration of France's complete independence in all military, defense, and policy making decisions;

--Creation of France's own nuclear capability and force de frappe (strikeforce) to give her equal standing with the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union as a nuclear power;

--Withdrawal of France from NATO and the disappearance of the NATO military command structure in Europe, but continuance of the twenty-year American security guarantee to Western Europe embodied in the North Atlantic Treaty. . .;

--Establishment under French leadership of a purely continental system of loose military, political and economic cooperation around the European Common Market, in which France would wield veto power against any excessive integration and control of its policies;

--Exclusion of Great Britain from this continental system, as long as her "special relationship" with the United States remained a British first interest.

--Finally, in de Gaulle's words: "To make this European organization one of the three world powers and, if need be one day, an arbiter between the two camps, the Soviet and the Anglo-Saxon."¹⁰

VI: NATO Strategy Implementation

In implementing this strategy, de Gaulle realized that he had to move gradually. He noted in his memoirs that he was ". . . anxious to proceed gradually, linking each stage with overall developments and continuing to cultivate France's traditional friendships."¹¹ Thus, he broke his plan out into separate, although not entirely discrete, steps, taking the initiative in some instances, taking advantage of opportunities in others, and in so doing both reducing likely resistance at each step and retaining substantial control over the pace and substance of the process.

De Gaulle's first priority was the removal of France from the NATO military structure.¹² He began by laying the groundwork in meetings with the British and the Americans, telling British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in June

¹⁰ Cook, p. 334.

¹¹ Cook, p. 336.

¹² Cook, p. 335.

1958, shortly after his return to power, that, "France will be in NATO less and less," and lecturing Secretary of State John Foster Dulles about NATO the following month.¹³ Next, in September 1958, in a personal letter to Macmillan and President Eisenhower, he proposed a tripartite organization for global strategic policy making, stating that NATO "no longer answers the essential security requirements of the free world, as a whole."¹⁴ His letter included the following passage:

Political and strategic questions of world importance should be entrusted to a new body, consisting of the United States, Great Britain, and France. This body should have the responsibility of taking joint decisions on all political matters affecting world security, and of drawing up, and if necessary putting into action, strategic plans, especially those involving the use of nuclear weapons.¹⁵

He added that the whole development of French participation in NATO was predicated on such a security organization.¹⁶

This turned out to be a political bluff. DeGaulle was counting on British and American rejection of his plan, since, in effect, it would have involved the power to veto U.S. use of its nuclear weapons, and expected that this rejection would provide him with sufficient justification to leave NATO.¹⁷ In March 1959, de Gaulle announced that the French Fleet deployed in the Mediterranean was being withdrawn from assignment to NATO. A few months later, he declared that ". . . no nuclear weapons or nuclear warheads could be stationed on French territory unless they were under the complete and sole control. . . of the French government."¹⁸ In September 1959, he rejected a proposal from President Eisenhower to ". . . relieve France of the an expensive and largely unnecessary burden if they could agree on nuclear cooperation in return for joint control over [nuclear] weapons," adding that,

¹³ Cook, p. 335.

¹⁴ Cook, p. 336.

¹⁵ Cook, p. 336.

¹⁶ Cook, p. 336.

¹⁷ Cook, p. 336.

¹⁸ Cook, p. 337.

". . . while remaining faithful to our alliance, I cannot accept France's integration into NATO."¹⁷ In February 1960, ". . . France's first atomic device was successfully tested in the Sahara. . . ." and France began simultaneously to develop nuclear-capable bombers, missiles, and submarines.¹⁸ At a press conference in September 1960, de Gaulle publicly ". . . attacked integration in NATO and denounced the failure of the three Western powers to coordinate their policies toward the Congo, through [his proposed] tripartite machinery."¹⁹ In May 1961, de Gaulle, continuing his gradual approach, told President Kennedy that, ". . . France had to have her own nuclear weapons, because she could not be certain that the United States would risk its own destruction in the defense of Europe."²⁰ When Kennedy the same year ordered U.S. reinforcements to NATO, including U.S. supply lines across France, de Gaulle, in a public address, expressed his disapproval of this U.S. action.²¹

In response to Kennedy's proposal in 1962 to provide France with Polaris missiles for its submarines, provided France join a Multilateral Liaison Force (MLF) and assign French units to NATO Command, de Gaulle did not immediately reject the proposal but appeared to give it consideration. On January 14, 1963, at a press conference, however, de Gaulle declared that, "Principles and realities combine to lead France to equip herself with an atomic force of her own."²² Regarding Kennedy's MLF proposal, he stated that,

It does not meet the principle of disposing of our own right of our own deterrent force. To turn over our weapons to a multilateral force under a foreign command would be to act contrary to that principle of our defense policy. This multilateral force necessarily entails a web of liaisons, transmissions and interferences within itself, and on the outside a ring of obligations such that there would be a strong risk of paralyzing it just at the moment, perhaps, when it

¹⁷ Cook, p. 345.

¹⁸ Cook, p. 344.

¹⁹ Cook, p. 347.

²⁰ Cook, p. 350.

²¹ Cook, p. 351.

²² Cook, p. 362.

should act.²⁵

On June 21, 1963, de Gaulle announced that "all units of the French Fleet were being withdrawn immediately from assignment to NATO."²⁶ In the spring of 1964, de Gaulle held a press conference in which he again expressed his opposition to the U.S. MLF proposal, stating that, ". . . without its own nuclear arms, France would be relying entirely upon a foreign protectorate, and for that matter an uncertain one [[emphasis] added], for her defense and thereby for her very existence and policy Two weeks later, he announced that France was withdrawing all of its naval officers from the various NATO command headquarters," as well as from SEATO.²⁷ In October 1964, de Gaulle enlisted the support of the Germans in opposing the idea of a MLF, which ultimately sealed its fate. Finally, in early 1966 de Gaulle withdrew French troops from all NATO military commands, at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE) and elsewhere, and ordered the withdrawal of NATO troops and military headquarters from France by April 1, 1967.

VII: European Strategy Implementation

Like his strategy for disengagement from NATO, de Gaulle's strategy for achieving the dominant and controlling role in Europe was one of gradual implementation, pursuing his own initiatives and taking advantage of available opportunities as they arose. His strategy vis-a-vis Europe required, as one of its elements, convincing key European allies of the disadvantages of Anglo-Saxon domination and that France was better able to protect European interests.

Utilizing a technique which Cook refers to as the "drip treatment," De Gaulle took advantage of meetings with the Germans to drop critical comments about the Anglo-Saxons, expressing skepticism about the wisdom of British entry into Europe, questioning whether U.S. negotiators were not too willing to accept "sham compromises," and contrasting to these negative characteristics French strength and reliability.²⁸

As with his strategy towards NATO, de Gaulle used what might be called

²⁵ Cook, p. 362.

²⁶ Cook, p. 365.

²⁷ Cook, p. 367.

²⁸ Cook, p. 341.

preemptive press conferences to announce significant French decisions. Thus, in November 1958, de Gaulle, through his information minister and the press, informed Britain and the rest of the world, of his rejection of the British proposal for a European Free Trade Area (EFTA).

Following Britain's application in July 1961 to join the EEC, negotiations on this possibility proceeded. De Gaulle, however, used these negotiations not out of any belief that they would be productive, but as a way to set the matter of British membership aside until the time was more appropriate for him to announce French rejection of British participation. During a meeting at Rambouillet in December 1962, de Gaulle informed Macmillan that, while France could oppose German and other policies with which it disagreed, "Once Britain and all the rest joined the organization, things would be different. . . the rest of the world would demand special arrangements and the enlarged Common Market would not be strong enough to stand them."²² De Gaulle, thus, revealed to an "indignant" Macmillan that the on-going negotiations were a sham.

On January 14, 1963, de Gaulle used a major press conference finally to reject Britain's bid to join the Common Market, stating that:

. . . the entry first of Great Britain and then of other states will completely change the series of adjustments, agreements, compensations and regulations already established between the Six. This community . . . would be confronted with all the problems of its economic relations in a crowd of other states, and first of all with the United States. It is foreseeable that the cohesion of all its members would not hold for long, and that in the end there would appear a colossal Atlantic Community under American dependence and leadership which would soon completely swallow up the European Community.²³

De Gaulle, however, while exercising extraordinary influence over military, economic, and political policies in Europe, was not omnipotent. Thus, when the U.S. sought clarification of the new Franco-German Treaty, which had been signed in January 1963 a week after the press conference noted above, Germany readily provided the requested clarification, stating that ". . . nothing in the Treaty superseded West Germany's commitments and obligations under the NATO

²² Cook, p. 358.

²³ Cook, p. 361.

treaty. . . ."³¹ De Gaulle was "furious," seeing this clarification as the continued assertion of Anglo-Saxon hegemony in Europe. The Treaty which he had hoped would help to ensure French dominance in Europe was to take a back seat to NATO.

Finally, in July 1965, de Gaulle, in response to West German efforts to enlarge the role of the Common Market, ". . . abruptly announced that France was suspending its participating in all Common Market activities."³² This ploy backfired, however; the other parties to the Treaty of Rome refused to play deGaulle's game and simply waited him out, and his political opponents in France were able to use the economic repercussions against de Gaulle in the next election.

VIII: Other Opportunities

De Gaulle exhibited French independence from Anglo-Saxon political and military hegemony in other areas. He had no interest in nuclear arms control, nuclear disarmament, limits on nuclear testing, limits on nuclear weapons proliferation, or limits on the spread of nuclear weapons to Antarctica or Outer Space, despite their importance to other nations. He wanted no limits on French freedom to develop French military power according to what he perceived to be French requirements. This French view was reinforced by the Cuban Missile Crisis which further cemented de Gaulle's view that the French needed an independent deterrent to Soviet use, or threat to use, nuclear weapons against Europe. In other examples of French independence from his Anglo-Saxon allies, de Gaulle recognized Red China in 1964, wrote a letter of support to Ho Chi Minh condemning U.S. intervention in Vietnam, and the same year condemned U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic.

IX: Instruments of Policy

In seeking to implement his "grand design," De Gaulle's technique seemed to have involved, first, through the use of personal diplomacy, the gradual implantation of warnings of future actions, such as his remarks to both the U.S. and British concerning future French participation in NATO. Similarly, he used personal diplomacy as a means of persuading others to accept his negative views of the U.S. and Britain, as exemplified by his dropping of negative

³¹ Cook, p. 365.

³² Cook, p. 370.

comments about the U.S. and British in remarks to the Germans. De Gaulle also used bluffs, a technique he appears to have used when he proposed his tripartite organization for global decisionmaking. Cook concludes that this does not appear to have been a serious proposal, but was instead a "... a political sham, a red herring, to confuse and divert his allies, ... a convenient maneuver to 'retain complete freedom of action' ..."³³ In the same way, de Gaulle used negotiations on British entry into the Common Market to stall for time while he waited for the right opportunity to reveal that France was opposed in principle to British entry into the Common Market, again retaining control and freedom of action, while keeping the British occupied and out of the way. In this way, his position of principle is made to appear more reasonable, since he can appear to have reached his position as the result of the negotiations. For example, he stated at his January 1963 press conference that:

It is possible that Britain one day would come around to transforming itself enough to belong to the European community without restrictions and without reservation, and placing it ahead of everything else... It is also possible that England is not yet prepared to do this, and that indeed appears to be the outcome of the long, long Brussels talks. (Emphasis added.)³⁴

De Gaulle used the vehicle of the preemptive press conference to present his decisions--France's positions--as faites accomplis (what some might more crudely describe today as "done deals"). These press conferences preempted unwanted attempts to manipulate or undermine de Gaulle's decisions, including further discussion or negotiation, enhancing his control and power over the desired outcome. The press conferences also had the advantage of visible decisiveness which he undoubtedly intended as a means of impressing both his domestic as well as foreign audiences. The vehicle of the press conference for the announcement of major policy decisions accomplished three key, linked objectives: 1) by presenting a decision as a fait accompli, it preempted unwanted outside influence on the decision, 2) it contributed to de Gaulle's objective of enhancing French power; France would not be manipulated; indeed, France would do the manipulating; and 3) it distanced de Gaulle and France from

³³ Cook, p. 346.

³⁴ Cook, p. 361.

the U.S. and Britain and thus contributed to de Gaulle's objective of achieving French independence from Anglo-Saxon domination. France would consult as appropriate with the Anglo-Saxons, but France would not be controlled by the Anglo-Saxons.

Finally, de Gaulle's personality and character, his sureness, firmness, clarity, dignity, and what Cook describes as his "lofty indifference" and "aloof imperturbability," were undoubtedly used consciously, as well as unconsciously, by de Gaulle in furthering his objectives. Cook observes that, "Intransigence was [de Gaulle's] prime weapon, often his only weapon, and it remained his prime instrument of power to the end of his days."³⁵

X: Conclusion

From the U.S. perspective, there are numerous contradictions in de Gaulle's foreign policy. Cook summarizes them as follows:

In American eyes there was no logic in preaching firmness against Khrushchev in Berlin and then pulling NATO apart. There was no logic in France building an expensive tiny independent nuclear force and at the same time asking for a veto over American weapons. There was no logic in de Gaulle repeatedly protesting about America having been late in coming to France's assistance in two world wars, and then wanting to do away with the American command in Europe that made it impossible for that ever to happen again. . . . the real problem was that both presidents [Eisenhower and Kennedy] sought to find understanding with General de Gaulle, to accept, encompass and accommodate his ambitions and assertions of French independence within the framework of the existing Euratlantic system, while it was de Gaulle's objective to break the mold and get out. ³⁶

Indeed, the logic of de Gaulle's approach to foreign policy is not always readily apparent. There would appear to be no reason why France could not have remained a part of the NATO military command and still, like the U.S., maintained an independent nuclear capability and otherwise taken actions perceived to be in the French national interest. (One might ask what would have become of NATO had all the other members decided to get out of NATO military commands.) There would also appear to be no reason why Britain could not have been admitted to the Common Market without compromising French

³⁵ Cook, p. 16.

³⁶ Cook, p. 347.

interests. One possible conclusion is that much of what de Gaulle did in these two areas may have been based as much on a personal psychological need of de Gaulle for independence from the Anglo-Saxons as much as on a political, military, or economic need for such independence.

Finally, Cook makes the following observation regarding de Gaulle's foreign policy:

. . . de Gaulle's foreign policy was in the final analysis the least successful aspect of his exercise of power. The drama of press conference announcements, the tactics of fait accompli and surprise attack, the intransigence, the persistence of slurs, doubts and invented misjudgments and mistrust of others may have served his ambitions for France, but they did not add up to a coherent or constructive foreign policy. De Gaulle in the end became a voice that declaimed at everyone but spoke only for himself. . . .

Nevertheless, in the narrower context of France itself, which was all that mattered to de Gaulle, his achievements place him on the highest plateau of the country's history.³⁷

³⁷ Cook, pp. 22-23.