

Biographie

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Résumé

Il est communément établi que les intérêts français et américains se heurtèrent violemment au début des années soixante. Selon ce point de vue, le conflit était basé sur deux conceptions diamétralement opposées sur la façon dont l'Europe devait être organisée et le rôle que l'Amérique devait jouer sur le continent. Cet article postule cependant que lors qu'il s'agissait de questions économiques et de sécurité cruciales, les différences franco-américaines ne furent pas aussi contrastées qu'on a pu être amené à le penser. Sur le front économique international, l'expression publique de désaccords était beaucoup plus véhémente que les frictions intergouvernementales, dans la mesure où Français et Américains proposèrent à plusieurs reprises de s'entraider lors de difficultés monétaires. Sur le plan stratégique, les désaccords étaient davantage le résultats d'incompréhensions plutôt que de conflits d'intérêts. Sur la question la plus controversée – le revirement vers une « stratégie de réponse flexible » – l'argumentation américaine ne doit pas être prise au sens de la lettre. Kennedy ne voulait certainement pas dénucléariser l'Europe et demeurait ouvert à coopérer avec les Français dans le domaine nucléaire.

"The Interests Of France And The United States Were Essentially The Same':

Reassessing Franco-American Economic and Security Relations during the 1960s"

Francis J. Gavin

In May 1963, French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville met with U.S. President John F. Kennedy in the White House. Franco-American relations had been strained during the preceding year by public disputes over Berlin policy, nuclear sharing, monetary policy, and the British application to the European Economic Community. Given these troubles, it was no surprise that the President bluntly asked the Foreign Minister, “what are the objectives of French foreign policy?”

Couve replied directly. The first task was to “bring about some kind of union of Western Europe” in order “keep the balance” against the Soviet Union “with the assistance of the United States.” Europe would “never be able to fight alone” and would “always need US support.” In time, the West would have to reach some sort of “accommodation” with the Soviets in Europe. Another key object was “to link Germany so tightly to the West” that she could never start a war without French consent. On the economic front, France desired “liberalization and increase of trade.” Furthermore, Europe needed to recognize its responsibilities toward “the less developed countries.” Concluding, Couve stated that the United States could never be excluded from the “life of Europe in the political and defense fields.”

The President asked why it was that “all these thoughts which all sounded very reasonable” were often directed against the United States? Why was there such a bad atmosphere between the two allies, when there “were really no problems of major importance between the United States?” Kennedy did not even think there was a fundamental disagreement over France’s nuclear program, and Couve agreed. The foreign minister went even further, arguing, “the interests of France and the United States

were essentially the same.”¹ Five months later, the President and Couve reaffirmed the shared political and economic interests. But as Kennedy pointed out, a disturbing puzzle remained. “Why do we give the appearance of having friction with France, which is an unhealthy condition?”²

It has long been the received wisdom that French and American interests violently clashed during the early 1960s. This conflict was based, according to this view, on two diametrically opposed views of how Europe should be organized, and what America’s role on the continent should be. On the economic side, the French resented the exorbitant privileges the Bretton Woods monetary order bestowed on the dollar. Many in France believed the system allowed the U.S. to avoid fiscal and monetary discipline, export inflation, and purchase European companies on the cheap. Strategically, the disagreement was if anything more sharp. Who would control nuclear weapons, and how would they be incorporated into alliance strategy? The French believed that the strategy of flexible response aimed to “de-nuclearize” Europe and prevent any of America’s continental partners from getting an independent atomic capability. The Americans, for their part, felt that the French were unreasonable, questioning the American commitment to defend Europe but refusing to discuss how alliance strategy could be changed to enhance deterrence.

Were France and United States really as far apart on these questions as the conventional wisdom suggests? There is no doubt that the U.S. and France did not see eye to eye on any number of questions during the 1960s. But Franco-American disputes

¹ MemCon, “Review of French Foreign Policy,” dated May 25th, 1963, The Foreign Relations of the United States: West Europe and Canada, (hereafter FRUS) vol. XIII, ed. by Charles S. Sampson and James E. Miller, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1994, pp. 769-775).

² MemCon, “Franco-American Relations and Europe,” dated October 7th, 1963, FRUS, vol. XIII, pp. 782-786.

were no deeper than the disagreements between the United States, and its closest ally, Great Britain. Consider-the British did not support the Multilateral Force, U.S. policy in Vietnam, undermined flexible response by pulling troops out of Europe, and ignored America's pleas to isolate the People's Republic of China, to name just the most notable differences with U.S. policy. Furthermore, the United States was forced time and time again to bail out sterling, yet the British never hesitated to ask for gold when they had surplus dollars. Yet, almost no one speaks of a crisis in U.S.-British relations during the 1960s.

The point of this paper is to suggest that when it came to fundamental issues, Franco-American differences may not have been as sharp as we have been led to believe. On the international economic front, the public "bark" was far worse than the inter-governmental "bite," as the French and the Americans offered to help each other out of monetary jams on several occasions. Strategically, the disagreements were far more a product of misunderstanding than a core clash of interests. It turns out that on the most contentious question – the shift to the strategy of "flexible response" – American rhetoric is not to be taken at face value. Kennedy certainly did not want to de-nuclearize Europe, and was open to nuclear cooperation with the French.

I. MILITARY STRATEGY

What exactly do I mean when I say that the US did not really take flexible response seriously? This was a controversial military strategy that most of Europe, and especially the French, distrusted as an effort to "de-nuclearize" Europe. Was this not a source of sharp conflict in Franco-American relations?

Pick up almost any text on this question, either in Europe or the United States, and you'll see the same story. America's national security policy was dramatically transformed on January 20th, 1961, when the incoming Kennedy administration began replacing "Massive Retaliation" with a new military strategy called "Flexible Response." Focusing largely on the Soviet threat to Western Europe, the new strategy was seen as a radical departure from the policies of the past. Flexible Response was supposed to enhance deterrence by providing the President with flexible nuclear options and increased conventional capabilities to deal with any number of military crises in Europe.

Many in France and elsewhere saw this as an effort to prevent Europe from having a meaningful say in alliance nuclear policy. At the very least, it was an effort to prevent any independent European nuclear force. And the emphasis on conventional forces and talk about "pauses" and "escalation ladders" convinced many Europeans that, as nuclear parity with the Soviets emerged, the Americans wanted to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons in the defense of Europe

It turns out that this is not the full story. In fact, recently declassified documents and newly transcribed Presidential recordings reveal that neither Kennedy nor McNamara, despite their public pronouncements, did not really buy into many of the core strategic arguments surrounding the flexible response doctrine, at least when it came to America's role in Europe.

I have written about this elsewhere – about how top U.S. policymakers reluctantly embraced a strategy they did not believe in for a variety of reasons, the most important of which was that it helped them deal with the explosive questions surrounding the German

question.³ It turns out that neither Kennedy nor McNamara was convinced that “controlled” nuclear war was possible, both entertained the possibility of assisting independent European nuclear programs, and both would have preferred to reduce rather than enlarge America’s conventional forces in Western Europe. The SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan) was never changed in any meaningful way, and the number of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe was dramatically increased during the 1960s. Furthermore, Kennedy was not enamored with a strategy that relied on a conventional military response, and made it quite clear that any Soviet move across the Fulda Gap would lead to the immediate use of nuclear weapons.

All of this was quite at odds with the public rhetoric, of course. And the French could not be blamed for thinking that the views Robert McNamara laid out during the Athens speech were actually policy. But on the most important strategic question between France and the United States – the question of nuclear sharing and the issue of the “pause” – something other than an immediate nuclear response to a Soviet attack – the differences were far smaller than we have been led to believe. Separating the myth from the reality behind flexible response is essential when assessing Franco-American relations during the 1960s.

Consider one of the great political questions within the Western Alliance during the 1950's and 1960's: who would possess and control nuclear forces. Nuclear weapons had revolutionized international politics, and it was inevitable that the powers of Europe – Great Britain, France, and even West Germany – would want their own atomic forces. But building these modern forces from scratch was enormously expensive and diverted

³ Francis J. Gavin, . “The Myth of Flexible Response: American Strategy in Europe during the 1960s,” *International History Review*, December 2001.

European resources away from other alliance goals, such as increasing and improving NATO's conventional forces. The question naturally arose as to whether or not the United States should actively support Western Europe's atomic aspirations.

American policy on this question was often obscure during the late 1950's, but Eisenhower himself was sympathetic to Europe's nuclear ambitions. To be sure, President Dwight D. Eisenhower did not want to see Europe's scarce resources wasted on separate national programs. Perhaps some type of European multilateral force, with American assistance, would encourage the Europeans to move closer to Eisenhower's cherished goal of increased European integration and eventual unity. The key point is that Eisenhower was not unduly *alarmed* by Europe's nuclear desires.

Publicly, the Kennedy administration was adamantly opposed to independent European nuclear forces, including the *force de frappe*. This stance was justified by the logic of strategy in the missile age. Small independent forces, such as the French desired, were unstable. They invited pre-emption from the Soviets, and could only be effective against cities, not the types of military targets American strategists were emphasizing in their new counterforce strategies. Most importantly, to successfully implement a strategy of graduated response and damage limitation, nuclear decision-making had to be centralized. You needed very tight, centralized command and control to fight a flexible nuclear war. If flexible response was to be taken seriously, the United States could under no circumstances aid independent forces, and should have made efforts to force the Europeans to abandon their nuclear programs. This view was forcefully laid out in Robert McNamara's speech to NATO in Athens in May 1962. "In short, then, weak nuclear capabilities, operating independently, are expensive, prone to obsolescence, and

lacking in credibility as a deterrent. It is for these reasons that I have laid such stress on unity of planning, concentration of executive authority, and central direction."⁴

Quite surprisingly, however, the Athens line did not reflect the real views of either McNamara or President Kennedy. Only weeks before McNamara belittled small independent nuclear forces in Athens, the Secretary of Defense was actively pushing a pro-sharing line within the administration. McNamara told the President that nuclear sharing with the French "would be justified on balance of payments reasons alone."⁵ Others in the administration shared McNamara's position, including Defense Department officials Roswell Gilpatric and Paul Nitze, U.S. Ambassador to France, James Gavin, and Kennedy's top military advisor, Maxwell Taylor.⁶ Kennedy decided to maintain the no-sharing line, but for reasons that had little to do with military strategy or concerns about the French – primarily, he "did not want to have the Germans clamoring for help in their turn."⁷

It turns out that nuclear sharing was an open question throughout 1962 and 1963. The President toyed with the idea of helping the French nuclear program in September 1962. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy directed that the French be offered nuclear assistance.⁸ Kennedy also authorized a shift in policy during the Nassau

⁴ "Remarks by Secretary McNamara, NATO Ministerial Meeting, 5 May 1962, Restricted Session," May 5, 1962, OSD-FOIA, 79-481, p. 12.

⁵ Kohler to Rusk, "Secretary McNamara's Views on Nuclear Sharing," April 12, 1962, RG 59, 740.5611, USNA, p. 1.

⁶ Bundy, Memo for the President, "Action on Nuclear Assistance to France," May 7, 1962, POF, 116a, France-Security, JFKL.

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

conference with the British in December of 1962. When McNamara's cancelled the Skybolt air to surface missile for budgetary and technical grounds, the President offered the British the Polaris missile. Since Polaris would extend the British deterrent well into the future, Kennedy, with McNamara's support, decided to reverse America's nuclear sharing policy with France and directed Charles Bohlen to open negotiations with de Gaulle. Kennedy made it clear to Bohlen that everything – including warheads and submarines -- was negotiable.⁹

Despite the failure of the Nassau policy, the United States reopened the question of nuclear aid to France during the summer of 1963. Surprisingly, given the poor state of Franco-American relations, the Kennedy administration was ready to give the French "Polaris or Minutemen missilesOr Polaris submarine technology" if the French signed the partial test ban treaty.¹⁰ Carl Kaysen, who was intimately involved in the test ban negotiations, claimed that the administration was even willing to give the French "nuclear warheads for their bombs" if they supported the treaty.¹¹ While again nothing came of this offer, it was clear that the Americans did not oppose France's nuclear efforts for the reasons McNamara laid out in the Athens speech.

⁸ See Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the NSC, October 20, 1962, in FRUS 1961-1963, vol. 11, pp. 126-136; and Minutes of the 506th Meeting of the NSC, October 20, 1962, in FRUS 1961-1963, vol. 11, pp. 141-149.

⁹ For an account of this story, see Richard NE. Neustadt's "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy-Making and Anglo-American Relations" November 15, 1963, Papers of Francis Bator, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. My interpretation of this incident is based on Marc Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 359-367.

¹⁰ "A USSR-US Enforced Non-Proliferation Agreement – the probably positions of the FRG, France, Italy, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands," n.d. (but presumably June, 1963), National Security Files, Carl Kaysen, Nuclear Energy Matters, 6/63, box 376, JFKL, p. 3. See also "On Nuclear Diffusion, Volume II," NSF, Carl Kaysen, Briefing Book, Vol. II, box 376, JFKL, p. 3.

¹¹ Interview, Joseph E. O'Conner with Carl Kaysen, July 11, 1966, p. 131, JFKL.

While the Kennedy administration certainly sent mixed signals about their willingness to help, the President was not automatically opposed to helping the French with their nuclear aspirations. Kennedy, even as he made the decision to reverse American policy at Nassau and offer the French nuclear assistance, pointed out that the no-sharing policy had its roots in a fear of how American assistance might be interpreted in West Germany:

The United States however had not supported the French in the nuclear field and the result of this policy had been to sour American relations with France. Rightly or wrongly they had taken this attitude because of Germany....The United States were concerned at what would happen in Germany after Dr. Adenauer left the scene ... They regarded Germany as potentially the most powerful country in Europe and one whose future was in some doubt And if the United States did help France then pressure in Germany for similar help would rise.¹²

Nuclear sharing was a fundamental political question during the early 1960's, because the administration believed that keeping West Germany non-nuclear would be essential to end the crisis over Berlin and establish détente with the Soviet Union. Most mid-level Kennedy officials believed that you had to be against any type of nuclear assistance as a matter of principle. But Kennedy and McNamara's attitude was much different. Both the President and the Secretary of Defense were amenable to helping the British and French if they got something substantial -- support for their policies in Europe, for example -- in return.

There were other aspects of the flexible response doctrine that the French did not like. The emphasis on increasing conventional forces and the talk of "pauses" and

¹² Meeting between Kennedy, Macmillan and other officials, at Nassau, December 19, 1962, Record of Nassau Conference, Prem 11/4229, PRO, Kew, England.

“thresholds” made it seem as if the Americans were moving away from using nuclear weapons in the event of a Soviet attack. De Gaulle and others in Europe believed this would weaken deterrence.

Kennedy did not, however, buy into a military strategy in Europe based on conventional forces. By 1962 Kennedy appears to have concluded that the only *military* reason for the large numbers of American troops was the threat to Berlin. Since West Berlin was well within the Eastern bloc, NATO would have to *initiate* military action to restore Western access to the city. America's nuclear forces, on the other hand, could do little to maintain the viability of West Berlin. But the situation in West Berlin was anomalous, almost bizarre. Kennedy felt that the strategic requirements for the defense of *Western Europe* were much simpler than the requirements for maintaining access to West Berlin. If the Berlin crisis could be resolved, then Kennedy believed he could bring large numbers of American troops home.¹³

What if the Soviets invaded Western Europe? Contrary to Gaullist rhetoric, the President made it clear that *any* Soviet move against Western Europe would "lead promptly to nuclear warfare." For that reason, "the nuclear deterrent would be effective."¹⁴ The Americans "would be forced to use nuclear weapons against the first Russian who came across the line."¹⁵ Recently released secret recordings reveal that Kennedy told Eisenhower in 1962, "if we did not have the problem, I say, of Berlin and

¹³ See, for example, Kennedy-Bundy-Rusk-McNamara meeting, December 10, 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, microfiche supplement, vol. 13-15, document 27, and Kennedy-McNamara-JCS meeting, December 27, 1962, FRUS 1961-63, vol. VIII, p. 449, and Memorandum for the Record, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting with the President, February 28th, 1963 - Force Reductions in Europe," dated February 28, 1963, FRUS, vol. XIII.

¹⁴ Kennedy-Bundy-Rusk-McNamara meeting, December 10, 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, microfiche supplement, vol. 13-15, document 27, p. 3.

¹⁵ Memorandum from William Y. Smith to Taylor, August 9, 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, v. 15, pp. 268-269.

maintaining access to that autobahn of ours, then you can say that any attempt to seize any part of West Germany, we would go to nuclear weapons." In order to maintain access to Berlin, you cannot suddenly "drop nuclear weapons the first time you have difficulty." Kennedy concluded that the unique and perplexing challenge the West faced in Berlin was the only "valid reason" for "our emphasizing the necessity of their building up conventional forces."¹⁶

As the President told his National Security Council in 1962, it was the "credibility of our nuclear deterrent" which held the Soviets back – because "they think we might use the bomb if they pushed us hard enough."¹⁷ It was only the "geography of Berlin," which would force the West to "make the first military move," which "detracted from the credibility of our threat of nuclear war" and made it necessary to "use our conventional forces."¹⁸ Kennedy told the British Chief of Defence staff that the "Berlin situation distorted the whole Western military posture," and that all of NATO would only need "ten divisions in Central Europe" if not for the need to maintain access to West Berlin.

II. INTERNATIONAL MONETARY RELATIONS

¹⁶ Conversation between President John F. Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower, September 10, 1962, Presidential Recordings, JFKL, transcribed by Erin Mahan. Earlier in the conversation, Kennedy told Eisenhower that de Gaulle would "be perfectly right in talking about our immediate use of nuclear weapons, it seems to me, if we didn't have [the] Berlin problem, because then obviously any Soviet intrusion across the line would be a deliberate one and would be a signal for war." See also Meeting, JFK and Mayor Willy Brandt, October 5, 1962, FRUS, 1961-63, vol. 15, document 128): "The Geography of Berlin was such that the disadvantage lay with us because it was we who would have to make the first military move. This detracted from the credibility of our threat of nuclear war and made necessary readiness to use our conventional forces."

¹⁷ Summary of President's Remarks to the NSC, dated January 7, 1962, NSF, box 313, NSC Meetings, 1962, JFKL.

¹⁸ Memcon, President Kennedy and Mayor Willy Brandt of West Berlin, October 5, 1962, FRUS, vol. 15, p. 347.

In terms of nuclear strategy, the differences between France and the United States during the 1960s were not as sharp as we have been led to believe. This is not to say there were not important disagreements. But the Americans were not, as many French feared, trying to de-nuclearize Europe with the flexible response strategy.

The other sharp category of dispute, according to the conventional wisdom, lay in the realm of economics. What was the real status of the other international monetary relations between the United States and France during the early 1960s? There is a standard interpretation of this question – monetary relations were terrible, verging on economic warfare. This acrimony was based on a clear and sharp clash of interests. Why? According to the political scientist Robert Gilpin, the United States strove to maintain hegemonic power vis-à-vis Western Europe "based on the role of the dollar in the international monetary system and on the extension of its nuclear deterrent to include its allies."¹⁹ The historian Dianne Kunz claims that the Americans had no interest in reforming monetary arrangements that were "a prerequisite for continued American global hegemony."²⁰ Joanne Gowa goes further, claiming that "because it was interested in preserving the privileges it derived from the operation of the Bretton Woods regime," the United States would not "condone a structural reform" of the system that threatened "the continued preeminence of the dollar."²¹ And the economist Benjamin Cohen has pointed out that while most of "America's allies acquiesced in a hegemonic system that

¹⁹ Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Monetary Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 134.

²⁰ Diane Kunz, *Butter and Guns: America's Cold War Economic Diplomacy* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 99.

²¹ Joanne Gowa, *Closing the Gold Window: Domestic Politics and the End of Bretton Woods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 52.

accorded the United States special privileges to act abroad unilaterally to promote U.S. interests," the French did not.²²

The reasons for the clash, it would seem, were clear. The French resented the fact that the United States refused to reform an international monetary system that conferred unfair privileges upon the American dollar. France actively exploited America's balance of payments deficit in an attempt to force the United States to abandon the Bretton Woods system. The United States, unwilling to sacrifice these privileges or countenance reform, was able to thwart this French effort, until the American deficit ballooned in the late 1960's and early 1970's as a result of massive "guns and butter" inflation.

Once again, it turns out the real story is rather different. In fact, the documents reveal that American policymakers had no great love for the Bretton Woods system. The United States was quite willing to reform the system, even if it meant reducing or even eliminating the reserve currency role of the dollar. Throughout the early 1960s, dramatic plans to alter and even end the Bretton Woods system were discussed at the highest levels of the Kennedy administration. Even more surprising is the fact that for a brief period in 1962, the French appeared willing to help the United States out of its monetary difficulties.

Again, I have written about this elsewhere.²³ But in the summer of 1962, Minister of Finance Valéry Giscard came to the United States with constructive ideas to end the dollar and gold outflow. Giscard even offered a general, European wide standstill on gold takings. So instead of hostility towards the dollar, France, was, for a time,

²² Benjamin Cohen, *Organizing the World's Money: The Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 97.

²³ Francis J. Gavin and Erin Mahan, "Hegemony or Vulnerability? Giscard, Ball, and the Gold Standstill," *Journal of European Integration History*, December, 2000

cooperative. Inspired by Giscard's hints of support, Undersecretary of State George Ball and key members of the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) crafted a monetary plan that would have essentially ended Bretton Woods while providing the Americans with time and protection to end their balance of payments deficits.

The key provision of this plan was the gold standstill agreement offered by Giscard, whereby the European surplus countries would agree to hold US deficit dollars and formally limit their gold purchases from the American Treasury. This was a remarkable offer. In return, the United States would move aggressively to end its balance of payments deficit. At the end of the agreement (likely to be two years), a new international monetary arrangement would be negotiated with the Europeans. The U.S. would redistribute some of its gold and perhaps guarantee dollar holdings in gold against devaluation. Most significantly, the US would undertake a “thorough-going” revision of the Bretton Woods system, “multilateralizing” responsibility for the creation of liquidity so that European currencies would be used as reserves as well.

Surprisingly, many within the Kennedy administration were willing to sacrifice the central role of the dollar and its "seigneurage" privileges in any new system, a position that would have had much appeal for the Europeans. For example, during a taped meeting on August 20, 1962, Ball told the President that "we're not persuaded that it is at all vital to the United States that we do return to a situation in which the dollar would be the principal reserve currency we can see many disadvantages as well as advantages." President Kennedy appeared to agree with Ball's analysis. "I see the advantages to the Western world to have a reserve currency, and therefore it's an

advantage to us as part of the Western world, but what is the national, narrow advantage?"²⁴

Monetary relations certainly soured after this. But reports of "international monetary war" were quite exaggerated. Countries like Spain and even Great Britain often held far lower percentages of dollars and far higher percentages of gold than France during the 1960s. France participated in the gold pool—a group of countries that supplied gold to the London market to keep the price down—until 1967. And when the French came into monetary difficulties of their own in late 1968, the United States quietly worked behind the scenes to help the French out.

The May 1968 student disturbances in Paris were followed by workers' strikes that produced sharp increases in French wages in the summer and fall of 1968. By September, the French Treasury had lost an astounding \$3 billion in reserves. The Johnson administration did not gloat or try to take advantage of the situation. Strikingly, the United States even risked alienating its closest continental ally, the Federal Republic of Germany, by pressuring them to revalue the mark upwards so as to relieve pressure on the franc, despite West German Finance Minister Franz Joseph Strauss's contention that France's economic problems were not the Federal Republic's concern.²⁵ In the end, de Gaulle announced that he would not devalue the franc, a position that would have been impossible without American support.²⁶

²⁴ Presidential Recording, Tape 14, August 20, 1962: 4:00-5:30, International Monetary Relations, Presidents Office Files, JFKL, Transcribed by Francis J. Gavin.

²⁵ Telegram, Embassy in Germany to the White House, 21 November 1968, NSF, Subject File, Monetary Crisis, November, 1968, Cables and Memos, vol. 1, Box 22, LBJL.

III. CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that Franco-American relations were tense during the early 1960s. But did they have to be so bad? Going down the policy issues, one by one, it does not appear that France took positions that were less friendly than America's closest ally, Great Britain. And on two questions that have traditionally been identified as intensely sharp conflicts, the real as opposed to merely rhetorical, differences, have been overstated.

But how does something like this happen? It seems strange that the normal disputes between sovereign powers, states that are ostensibly allies, mushroom into bitterness that effects national perceptions even to this day. Think about Joe Nye's concept of soft power – the ability to influence another country with your ideas, culture and values. Franco-American acrimony has created a situation where neither country has much soft power towards the other. Or think about students in American and French universities. One way to get a laugh in any American classroom is to simply mention French foreign policy. And I am sure the reaction is very similar in French classrooms. This is deeply distressing, because, in fact, these two countries share far more in terms of values, perspective, and history, to say nothing of interests, than just about any two countries in the world

The actual clashes that fueled this animosity were, for the most part, simply the normal, mundane conflicts that always animate geopolitics. Then why were there such bitter feelings between the two countries? I certainly don't have an answer for such a

²⁶ The franc was devalued on August 9, 1969. For the reaction of the Nixon administration, see McCracken to Nixon, "Weekly Report on International Finance: The French Devalue," 9 August 1969, White House Central Files, FO 4-1, Box 44, Nixon Materials Project, USNA.

question, which goes well beyond the scope of this paper. It is clear that when public rhetoric does not match policy reality, there will be great confusion. The documents from the 1960s do reveal a misunderstanding for how the policy process of each country worked. The Americans spoke with many, confusing, and contradictory noises – imagine a French foreign ministry official trying to figure out what the *real* US strategy was in 1961-62, listening to all the different clamoring, contradictory voices, including Dean Acheson, Curtis LeMay, Robert McNamara, or Chip Bohlen. White House official David Klein pointed out the contradictions and confusion in American policy that was certainly responsible for some of the misunderstandings in France:

We are calling for the creation of the MLF, with the proviso that the contributions to the conventional forces will not be reduced. But then we go on to say, either you put more into the conventional pot, and support our strategy, or we'll pull back and support your strategy. And then before the Europeans can respond, we go on to the or of the either-or condition, and come out looking like good Gaullists.²⁷

But while it is not always clear what caused these great and unfortunate understandings, one way to begin to clear up these differences is to understand the past; to identify what conflicts were conflicts over core interests, and what were simply the product of overheated rhetoric and misunderstanding. When it comes to the two issues that are often identified as sharp, bitter clashes of interests – nuclear strategy and international monetary relations during the early 1960's – it is clear that the legacy is more one of missed opportunities and miscommunications than fundamental and irreconcilable differences.

²⁷ Klein to Bundy, dated May 10, 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, vol. 8, microfiche supplement, document 323. Underlining from the original.