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France and International Relations in the
Post Cold War Era: Some Lessons of the Past

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France and International Relations in the post Cold War era:
Some Lessons of the Past¹

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'Misunderstanding the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past. But it is perhaps just as futile to struggle to understand the past if one knows nothing of the present'. Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou métier d'historien*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1952), 13.

The ending of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany have disorientated French diplomacy and forced France, more than most powers, to reconsider her foreign and strategic interests. As a country which has a greater sense of history than most her natural reflex is to turn to the past for counsel. According to a recent report France is probably the country which directs the greatest effort to the teaching of history, while figures released by the French publishing association, the *Syndicat national de l'édition*, show that in 1992 one eighth of all paperbacks published were on history, which is one third more than novels. As the historian Pierre Lepape put it: 'The French taste for history can be taken as read. It can even be said to be one of our most notable national characteristics.'² And history in conjunction with geography makes geostrategy of particular importance to the French. This may be related to France's ambivalent geographical position, which makes her both a major continental power and a maritime power. It may also have something to do with the fact that in France history as a discipline is taught in conjunction with geography giving the

¹ I should like to thank Robert Tombs, Martin Alexander and Jean-Marc Penetier for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² *Le Monde*, 18 March 1993.

French a more acute awareness of the spatial dimensions of the subject.³ Certainly under the 5th Republic, the prime movers in foreign policy making, the Presidents of the Republic, have taken decisions with an acute sense of history. This was self-evident with de Gaulle; it has become so with President Mitterrand who, perhaps more than being an astute political animal, is more importantly an 'historical' animal who views things very much over the 'longue durée' happy, in his words, to let time take its course ('laisser le temps au temps').

It is customary to think of Britain as the arch exponent of balance of power principle designed to satisfy her foreign policy objective of ensuring that no power exercised hegemony over continental Europe. Arguably, however, since the last quarter of the nineteenth century France has been as great a practitioner of the balance of power as Great Britain. To a considerable extent Britain wished to balance French and German power. The force to be balanced in the French equation was above all Germany, by courting either Russia or the so-called 'Anglo-Saxons' or, when they were deficient, any combination of smaller states situated to the east of Germany and which would force her to fight on two fronts, as witnessed by the nurturing of the Little Entente in the inter-war years. Certainly in the international relations field François Mitterrand's reading of history seems to have been pointing him in this direction.

³ Of much use would be a comparative study of the teaching of history and its effects in for instance France, where it is combined with geography to give 'histoire-géo', in Italy where it is often combined with philosophy and Britain where it is often the partner of politics.

This article will attempt to situate the debate on France's post Cold War international position in an historical context. In so doing it will point to some of the unspoken assumptions and historical reflexes behind the foreign policy and strategic options France is now contemplating. It will attempt to understand France's present strategic choices in the light of the past and perhaps to throw light on aspects of France's past through the present. But in order to understand France's position in the aftermath of the Cold War it is necessary to begin with a picture of her role during the Cold War itself.

I France's position in the Cold War

France always expressed opposition to the Yalta settlement of 1945. According to the French it was at Yalta that the decision to divide Europe into two blocs was taken. This interpretation had a good deal to do with the fact that France was not present with the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain at Yalta. Partly to alleviate the humiliation of her absence, in France the Cold War was widely depicted as the consequence of the Yalta decisions. France constantly repeated that the Cold War could only be ended by opposing the bipolar world dominated by the two superpowers. Paradoxically, however, the Cold War benefitted France in a number of ways.⁴

First, it allowed her to carve out a niche between the

⁴ For what follows on France's special position during the Cold War I have followed the ideas of D Vernet, 'The dilemma of French foreign policy', *International Affairs*, 68, 4 (1992), 655-6.

superpowers which enhanced her role on the international scene. This was most obvious under the presidency of General de Gaulle, who championed many a Third World country or weak nation at least verbally against the superpowers. Thus a medium-sized power appeared to have the status of an independent operator on the world scene, which enhanced its great power pretensions in a way that Britain was not able to do given the international perception of her as being in the pocket of the United States.

Second, in pretending to be aloof from the two blocs and the Cold War, France could have her cake and eat it - she benefitted from the US nuclear umbrella, while being able to remain on relatively good terms with the Soviet Union, thereby satisfying one of her traditional foreign policy objectives of having a 'friend' at Germany's back similarly dedicated to seeing that Germany did not regain her former strength.

Third, the division of Europe into two blocs had the advantage of dividing her old enemy Germany, arguably the single most important issue in French foreign policy since 1870. This satisfied what had been a French war aim in 1918 and 1945: the dismembering of Germany. Thus France achieved the longstanding objective of seeing her old enemy reduced to manageable proportions without the stigma of having brought it about herself. Not only did the Cold War perpetuate that division, but under the terms of the 1945 Potsdam agreement France, having been accorded the status of victor, was given the right to share in the occupation of Germany, which further enhanced France's physical control of her adversary and France's prestige.

Fourth, the Cold War justified France's possession of

nuclear weapons which, though apparently held to defend the national 'sanctuary' against a Soviet attack, were at the same time a further guarantee of security against Germany and symbol of great power status. Thus the Cold War became the fig leaf for the ultimate guarantee against Germany, because according to post war treaties Germany could never possess nuclear armaments. France's position on the nuclear issue in relation to Germany was revealed after the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954 and the inevitability of German rearmament encouraged by the 'Anglo-Saxons'. This provoked the leader of the government, Mendès-France, to bring the issue of France's possession of nuclear weapons to the cabinet on 26 December 1954. Here he explained how he was conscious of the nuclear gap with other atomic powers 'and the advantage that France had in this matter over Germany, as a result of the latter's renunciation of the construction of such a weapon'.⁵ Following that meeting France launched her secret programme for the construction of a nuclear weapon.

Fifth, the Cold War in part justified France's other outward sign of greatness, her permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. While the Soviet Union existed as the adversary of the Western powers, among whom was of course France, it was most unlikely that those powers would give up their numerical superiority among the permanent members of the Security Council or 'Big 5'. France's permanent seat on the Security Council - together with Britain's - was therefore guaranteed for

⁵ Quoted in W Mendl, *Deterrence and Persuasion. French Nuclear Armament in the Context of National Policy, 1945-1969* (London: Faber, 1970), 28.

the duration of the Cold War. Moreover with a divided and weakened Germany there could be no serious challenge to France - or Britain - retaining their seats, despite those states now being only medium-sized powers with less economic influence than either Japan or Germany. With a united Germany restored to full political sovereignty there are already requests that France and Britain should renounce their permanent seats in favour of, for example the European Union, which would by itself decrease France's international status and increase Germany's. To a certain extent also, Germany's divisions resulting from the Cold War, together with her lack of political self confidence and reluctance to play a role on the international stage, contributed to making the European Community a Franco-German club in which France remained the dominant partner.

The ending of the Cold War and the unification of Germany in 1989 has shaken France's cosy position in international relations. It has brought to the surface old demons. A country such as France with its historical perspectives on most things is already taking lessons from the past.

II) *Lessons of the past in the post-Cold War era*

1) Germany

It was Gambetta in the 1880s who quietly warned his fellow Frenchmen: 'Think of it always, never speak of it'. That advice on how they should regard the loss of Alsace and Lorraine is in

reality perhaps a more fitting description of how France has viewed the 'German threat' in general since the 19th century. As André Fontaine put it in 1952: 'France has a German policy: she has no other'.⁶ Or as President Pompidou tactfully put it in 1973, when the more self-confident Germans were beginning to balk at forever being the paymasters of the European Community: 'The Germans must act tactfully, for one does not have to scratch too far for the French once more to uncover an old aversion'.⁷

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 immediately brought the 'German question' to the fore again. France's natural reaction was to oppose what seemed the next logical step, the reunification of Germany. This is not surprising. France had been wary of Germany's 'ostpolitik' in the early 1970s, which was designed to move slowly towards a reunification of the two Germanies. In 1978 François Mitterrand, then head of the French Socialist Party, had remarked: 'Without ignoring what unification can represent politically and morally for the Germans, I shall stick to the rigorous criteria of the European balance, the security of France, the maintenance of peace, I neither think it possible nor desirable'.⁸

⁶ Quoted in D Pickles, *The Government and Politics of France*, vol 2, *Politics* (London: Methuen, 1973), 228.

⁷ Quoted in H Simonian, *The Privileged Partnership. Franco-German Relations in the European Community 1969-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 181.

⁸ Quoted from Louis Wiznitzer, *Le grand gâchis ou la faillite d'une politique étrangère*, Paris, 1991, 125 by G-H Soutou, 'La France et les bouleversements en Europe, 1989-91, ou le poids de l'idéologie', paper given at the Franco-British Council conference, Royaumont, September 1991, typescript, 5.

Given traditional French anxiety about the might of Germany, it was not surprising that six days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and despite all the euphoria about what this represented for Germany and the world, the French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas declared: 'We know today that reunification cannot be a topical question'. In December 1989 President Mitterrand declared that without being hostile to the idea, 'reunification is not on the agenda'.⁹ The old demon of the German threat with its roots in the 19th century and in three wars seemed to be moving to centre stage. How should France react?

2) Russia.

France again seems to have looked to history for counsel. In a typically French geo-strategic reflex, President Mitterrand turned to France's traditional counterweight to Germany on the European continent since 1894, Russia. "The alliance of France and Russia is something so natural that it would be madness not to expect it; for of all of the powers, they alone, by reason of their geographic position and political aims, have the minimum causes for dissension, since they have no interests which are necessarily in conflict". This statement was not made by François Mitterrand but by Bismarck to the Prince-regent of Prussia on 26 April 1856. More important it was the favourite quotation of one of France's longest serving foreign ministers, Théophile Delcassé, who while at the Quai d'Orsay from 1898 to 1905 jealously nurtured the Franco-Russian Alliance, then the

⁹ Quoted in Soutou, 'France et bouleversements', 7.

corner-stone of France's security policy.¹⁰

Whenever German strength has been perceived as a threat this French reflex has operated without regard to the political nature of the regime in Russia. Thus under the Third Republic Republicans were willing to forget their repugnance for the autocratic Tsar and his regime because from 1892 the Franco-Russian Alliance was the backbone of French foreign and defence policy. In the inter-war years moderate French governments were happy to seek the friendship of the communist Soviet Union, culminating in the 1935 Franco-Soviet friendship pact. Similarly, after the Second World War General de Gaulle was adamant that France should always maintain privileged relations with the Soviet Union. François Mitterrand has continued this tradition. In 1986 in his book Réflexions sur la politique extérieure de la France he said of Russia, in words reminiscent of Delcassé's favourite quotation: 'Our interests, more often than one might believe, bring us together. Russia has always represented in our history and can still represent a useful counterbalance, either at the European level, or at a global level.'¹¹ Thus France was the first country to receive the new leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, on 2 October 1985 with President Mitterrand stating that Franco-Russian relations were important 'for the search for the necessary balances in Europe and the world'.¹²

¹⁰ Quoted in CM Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 13.

¹¹ Quoted in Soutou, 'France et les bouleversements', 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

As soon as it became obvious that German reunification was likely France approached the USSR in the knowledge that that country has herself long feared German might. As Mitterrand put it in his book on French foreign policy in 1986: '...Russia is also a great European country. She feels in her bones what we feel'.¹³ Hence Mitterrand's repeated suggestions between 1989 and 1991 for a settlement of German reunification through what he referred to as 'European Confederation' and the Helsinki Agreements of 1975 on Cooperation and Security in Europe, which restricted European border alterations and necessarily involved the Soviet Union. In a trip to Kiev in December 1989 Mitterrand declared that French and Soviet views on German reunification were broadly in line.¹⁴ This meant opposition to reunification, for in September 1989 Gorbachev had told Margaret Thatcher that the Soviet Union did not want German reunification either.¹⁵

At the same time as wishing to ensure that German reunification should take place on French terms, France also wished to ensure that her principal bulwark against Germany, the Soviet Union, did not disintegrate as a result of her serious internal problems. Margaret Thatcher has explained how President Mitterrand called a special European Council meeting in Paris in mid-November 1989 specifically to discuss the consequences of

¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ Soutou, 'France et bouleversements', 7-8. Soutou suggests the motive for Mitterrand's policy to have been ideological when in reality it was far more a question of the *realpolitik* France has long operated in relation to Russia.

¹⁵ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), 792.

events in the East and the fall of the Berlin Wall. There he pressed hard for the creation of a European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) 'in order to channel investment and assistance to the emerging democracies'. Though the British Prime Minister was at first sceptical, at the Strasbourg summit in December she agreed. The Bank was in place in record time by the spring of 1990.¹⁶ The French hoped that this would ensure that the Commonwealth of Independent States, and above all Russia, obtained the necessary finance to remain afloat. As Margaret Thatcher has since admitted: 'President Mitterrand and I finally put together a deal in 1990: I agreed that his protégé Jacques Attali would be EBRD President and he agreed that the bank would be situated in London.'¹⁷ Jacques Attali, President Mitterrand's confidant and special adviser at the Elysée since 1981 and initiator of the EBRD project, was indeed put in charge. When in June 1993 Attali was forced to resign for his profligate management of the Bank, the former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas portrayed the whole episode as a plot by the Anglo-Saxon establishment to unseat the French, thereby ensuring that Attali's replacement remained French in the shape of the former Governor of the Bank of France, Jacques de la Rosière. Such was the importance of the position to French interests.¹⁸ Once again it appears that President Mitterrand

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 759. On the EBRD's establishment see also the article by Françoise Lazare in *Le Monde*, 27-28 June 1993.

¹⁷ Thatcher, *Downing Street*, 759.

¹⁸ *Le Monde*, 27-28 June 1993. Attali, acting as the mouthpiece of the French government, declared that the Presidency of the Bank should remain with 'a citizen

was taking a lesson from history and how from the late 1880s to 1914 France, through massive loans and investment in Russia, built up her principal ally industrially and militarily to act as a counterweight to Germany.

3 The 'Anglo-Saxons'

History and geopolitics have long conditioned the French view of Great Britain and the United States. The fact that Britain is an island is the pat answer as to why her foreign policy interests do not always coincide with France's. The USA's geographical position across the Atlantic is an even clearer example of this. Hence de Gaulle's recording in his memoirs of Churchill's quip to him in 1944 that 'every time we have to choose between Europe and the open sea we shall always choose the open sea'.¹⁹ The French attitude to Britain and the USA has traditionally been ambivalent; they are regarded as allies, though not without a degree of distrust motivated by a certain incompatibility of interests partly derived from their geographical position. Thus though French and British interests

of the [European] Community'. The official mission of the Bank was to help Eastern European states move towards a market economy. Attali actually reorganised the Bank to downgrade its merchant banking side and upgrade its development banking strategy, which in effect meant a greater concentration on infrastructure investment in the former communist countries more likely to stabilise the regimes in the short term. See L Zecchini 'Le départ inévitable de Jacques Attali', *Le Monde* 27-28 June 1993.

¹⁹ Quoted in D Pickles, *Government and Politics of France*, vol 2, 225.

might coincide when Germany becomes too powerful, as in 1914 or 1939, France has never felt quite sure of a British commitment to her in the event of aggression from Germany because Britain is not so immediately exposed to the German threat. In French eyes this explains British hesitation about supporting France in August 1914, and was behind French scepticism of Britain after 1938 and Munich. In a letter to Stalin in 1944 General de Gaulle remarked: 'Between France and the Soviet Union there are no matters in direct dispute. Between France and Great Britain, there always have been and there always will be.²⁰ Greater suspicion is reserved for the United States, who according to French perceptions always came to France's aid when a great deal of the damage has already been done, as witnessed in 1917, and December 1941.

Furthermore, following the two world wars, disagreement ensued between the French and the 'Anglo-Saxons' over how Germany should be treated in the post-war period. History records France's firm attitude to Germany in the years from 1919 to 1923 and from 1945 to 1950, while Britain and the United States have been viewed as wishing to conciliate Germany. The American return to isolationism in 1920, leaving Britain and France to police the world and operate the League of Nations as well as British appeasement of Germany from 1936 to 1939 are given in example; so too is Britain and America's desire to rearm Germany from 1950 onwards to counter the potential Soviet threat to Europe exposed during the Korean War.

General de Gaulle's diplomacy was influenced by the belief

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

that Britain was more committed to the Commonwealth and the 'special relationship' with the United States, and that the latter's interests were hegemonic and thus often in conflict with France's. This belief that France could not necessarily rely on the United States coming to her defence in the event of war also contributed to the development of France's independent nuclear deterrent.

In the post-Cold War era France is still informed by a Gaullist reading of history. With the disappearance of the Soviet threat there is still the belief that America will eventually return to isolationism, or that her geopolitical interests do not tie her sufficiently to intervention on behalf of European interests and that consequently France should organise her own security or in conjunction with the European powers. A recent article in *Défense nationale* referred to the little noticed decision by Canada on 27 February 1992 to withdraw all her forces from Europe in 1995 and the impact that this would have on the United States giving the signal for North America to 'disengage' from Europe. The article went on to describe the necessity for a Franco-British *rapprochement* proportionate to an American withdrawal from Europe, particularly in the nuclear weapons field.²¹ But though the British Minister of Defence, Malcolm Rifkind, has often underlined the need for Franco-British nuclear cooperation, he has been careful to emphasise that this should be done to reinforce the European side of NATO. Furthermore the French were recently upset at being informed only

²¹ Henri Coze, Jean Pug, 'L'Avenir de la dissuasion nucléaire' in *Défense nationale*, 50, Feb (1993), p.18.

one week before Britain announced on 16 November 1993 a 25 per cent reduction in the explosive power of her submarine launched nuclear weapons.²² Here lies France's ambivalence towards Britain, still viewed as too wedded to the United States and insufficiently committed to Europe to wish to defend French interests in her hour of need, such as for instance a threat from the southern Mediterranean. This explains France's strong feelings about whether in the post-cold war era the defence of Europe should continue to be through NATO (from whose integrated military organisation she withdrew in 1966 partly as a reaction to the Anglo-Saxon domination of it) or the Western European Union, which excludes the USA and is more exclusively European.

Suspicion of American hegemonism is at its most virulent on the French left. France's socialist defence minister during the Gulf war, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, believed in best Gaullist tradition that neither France's interests nor her geography coincided with America's. *Socialisme et République*, the left-wing section of the French Socialist Party, to which Chevènement belonged before his resignation from the Party, is imbued with a strong anti-American flavour also to be found with many Gaullists. In his book *Le Pari sur l'intelligence* published in 1985, Chevènement stated that though American colonisation was less disagreeable than a Soviet invasion, the latter was improbable whereas the former was happening every day.²³ There

²² *Le Monde*, 18 Nov 1993. I am grateful to Jean-Marc Pannetier for bringing this reference to my attention.

²³ See M Blunden, 'Is This Really the End of the Defence Consensus', *Modern and Contemporary France*, no. 51, Oct (1992), pp 32-38.

is a widening belief that American hegemony, of which the French have always been fearful and critical, particularly on the Gaullist and left wings of French politics, is on the increase in the post Cold War era. It is given credence by academics such as Professor Alain Joxe, the international relations specialist from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and brother of the Socialist former Minister of Defence, Pierre, who believes that the United States is dragging the West into a new bipolar conflict, no longer along an East-West axis, but a North-South one. This, he believes, will lead the world into interminable conflict the consequences of which will be sorely felt by Europe, and more especially France. France is seen as most at risk because of its situation on the fault-line between the prosperous North and the poor South, which begins at the southern Mediterranean rim, while the United States will always be able to withdraw into its safe North American haven.²⁴.

Now that the Cold War is at an end, France's relations with the US are likely to be less cordial, as the final GATT negotiations in the Uruguay Round demonstrated at the end of 1993. As for relations with Britain France still remains ambivalent. On the question of German reunification both Mitterrand and Thatcher acted in concert to oppose it. At two private meetings organised at Mitterrand's behest at the Strasbourg summit of December 1989 the two opponents of reunification discussed the lessons of the past to be learnt from

²⁴ A Joxe, 'Autonomie stratégique de l'école française' in Actes du colloque, *Un Nouveau débat stratégique*, (Paris: La Documentation française, 1993) 117. See also Blunden 'Defence Consensus', *Modern and Contemporary France*, no 51, Oct (1992), p 36.

Germany's role in European history; Mitterrand stressed that 'in history the Germans were a people in constant movement and flux', while Thatcher produced from her handbag 'a map showing the various configurations of Germany in the past, which were not altogether reassuring about the future.'²⁵ They discussed what should be done. Mitterrand was critical of Kohl's handling of events and stated 'that at moments of great danger in the past France has always established special relations with Britain and he felt that such a time had come again.' The British Prime Minister called for papers to be drawn up showing ways of strengthening Anglo-French cooperation. In a further meeting at the Elysée on 20 January 1990 Mitterrand was more pessimistic about the ability to stop the reunification process, though sharing Thatcher's worries about 'the Germans so-called 'mission' in central Europe.' Though a decision was taken to get French and British Foreign and Defence ministers to discuss reunification and the scope for closer defence co-operation nothing has yet come of it. The reason Margaret Thatcher gives is Mitterrand's decision to switch to a policy of trying to tie Germany down by the alternative means of a closer federal Europe rather than returning to that associated with General de Gaulle - the defence of French sovereignty and the striking up of alliances to secure French interests.²⁶ Here was evidence of the old alternatives which had faced French foreign policy in relation to Germany dating back to at least the 1920s and Aristide Briand's plans for a 'United States of Europe'. In the

²⁵ Thatcher, *Downing Street*, 796.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 798.

short term the Mitterrand push to greater European integration has delayed the possibility of an Anglo-French axis.

In the post Cold War era there is obviously a need for closer cooperation between Britain and France on nuclear and defence issues and on joint arms production programmes, not least in the nuclear area. Nevertheless there remains the French historical belief that Great Britain can only be relied upon when her interests coincide with those of France.

4 Europe

The fourth lesson and reflex of recent French diplomacy concerns Europe. On 24 February 1964, General de Gaulle's Prime Minister Georges Pompidou stated that France 'by her geography and her history is forced to play the European card'.²⁷ Leaving aside the Gaullist belief that Europe, preferably led by France, should decide its own destiny, the issue of European integration is inextricably linked to differing conceptions within France of how best to guarantee her security and prosperity. To schematise, French security policy since the early part of this century has been characterised by two traditions: on the right of the political spectrum the tendency has been to wish to build up French armaments, allies and national defence to guarantee French security; on the left to favour collective security. This has been particularly evident in relation to Germany. European union has long been seen as a means of smothering Germany in a

²⁷ Quoted in A Grosser, *Affaires extérieures. La politique de la France 1944-1984* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 193.

network of agreements and alliances capable of depriving her of her economic, military and political independence. Indeed French reactions to Germany may be seen as moving through a series of cycles since 1870 from hostility, to containment and conciliation and which particularly after the two world wars might also be expressed as rejection, rapprochement and reconciliation.

Modern European integration is not therefore a new way of providing collective security likely to smother Germany in friendship. This in part motivated Aristide Briand's policy for a United States of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s; it was behind the European Coal and Steel Community as witnessed in the 1950 Schuman declaration: 'The gathering together of the European nations requires that the age-old opposition of France and Germany be eliminated: the action undertaken must deal primarily with France and Germany'. Thus the ECSC would, according to Schuman, 'make all war between France and Germany not only unthinkable, but physically impossible'.²⁸ This was also at the heart of another French initiative, the European Defence Community in the early 1950s, prompted by the outbreak of the Korean War and British and American pressure to rearm Germany against French wishes. When the EDC failed in 1954, that was what was behind the European Common Market project from the Conference of Messina in 1955 until the inception of the EEC in 1957.

Mitterrand as a man of the left is a serious subscriber to the idea of collective security and integrating Germany further

²⁸ Quoted in Mark Wise, 'France and European Unity' in Robert Aldrich and J Connell, (eds) *France in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1989), 46, 63-4.

into a united Europe. As Margaret Thatcher has recently explained, the immediate effect of the prospect and then the reality of German reunification was to 'fuel the desire of President Mitterrand and M Delors for a federal Europe which would "bind in" the new Germany to a structure within which its preponderance would be checked'. In her words 'the French were federalists on grounds of tactics rather than conviction'.²⁹ When Helmut Kohl announced his plan for a vague federation between the two Germanies on 28 November 1989 he received a very negative reaction from France. At the European summit in Strasbourg which followed on 9 December 1989, Mitterrand explained that reunification needed to take place democratically on the basis of the collective security principles inherent in the Helsinki agreements of 1975: 'It should take place in the context of European integration'.³⁰ Forced by the sheer momentum of events into accepting that German unification was inevitable France now insisted that it could only be contemplated within the context of a more integrated Europe. This became patently apparent after the March 1990 elections in the German Democratic Republic, which clearly signalled the overwhelming desire for reunification. Hence President Mitterrand's approach to Kohl the following month to take European integration a step further with what would become the Maastricht treaty. This treaty in its preamble took cognisance of the need for accelerated European integration by '...recalling the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to

²⁹ Thatcher, *Downing Street*, 759,760.

³⁰ Quoted in Soutou, 'France et bouleversements', 7.

create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe' and resolved to create a common foreign and security policy.

The French referendum campaign on the Maastricht treaty in September 1992 exposed the counter view to that of European integration as the solution to the 'German question', just as the debate over the European Defence Community had done in the 1950s. In 1953 Michel Debré pointed out that the EDC treaty would erode France's national sovereignty and allow a German revival to take place under the cover of the treaty. Similarly, in the 1992 Maastricht debate in France, the nationalist camp rejected further European integration as a means of controlling Germany, and called for a return to greater national self-reliance to avoid France being dominated within the Community by an all-powerful and overbearing Germany.

It remains to be seen to what extent the present centre-right government will wish to press ahead so steadfastly with further integration, in particular after the 1995 presidential elections when the integrationist President Mitterrand will no longer be at the Elysée. An opinion poll in May 1993 showed 51% of the French opposed to Maastricht; while at the time of international speculation against the franc in the spring of 1993, and the German Bundesbank's refusal to lower German interest rates, a considerable body of French opinion blamed Germany for France's economic plight. The Gaullist RPR party's former Agriculture Minister (1986-88) François Guillaume, an opponent of the Maastricht treaty, warned in 1993 that Europe was succumbing to the 'American diktat' with 'German Europe raising

its head behind'.³¹ This is a statement representative of the nationalist French historical tradition in its view of Germany and European integration and which is likely to gather momentum as Germany begins to recover from the recession and the short term disadvantages of reunification.

5) The Mediterranean

This is the final area in which the past impinges on the present in the post Cold War era. Louis Blanc, the influential French socialist leader of the 1840s, for example, called for France's civilising mission to be extended to the peoples of North Africa, and who looked forward to the day when the whole of the Mediterranean would become a 'French lake'.³² Some fifty years later, in the 1890s, Delcassé said that the Mediterranean runs through the French Empire as naturally as the Seine through Paris. The question of French security and the Mediterranean surfaced again during the inter-war period, as it did during the Algerian war of 1954-62. Then French security was thought to rest on a defence line along the axis Paris-Alger-Brazzaville. This conviction was not limited to the military or politicians of the right. The French Parliament heard on 30 September 1957 that it was necessary to tell 'the allies who have not quite understood - perhaps because they have not been made to understand - that the Mediterranean, and no longer the Rhine, is

³¹ 'Guillaume repart à l'assaut', *Le Point*, no 1069, 13-19 March 1993, p 5.

³² Quoted from LA Loubère, *Louis Blanc*, Evanston, Ill, 1961, 52-3, quoted in Andrew, *Delcassé*, 54.

the true axis of our security and thus of our foreign policy'.³³ These words from Guy Mollet's former Minister of Justice, François Mitterrand, were part of a debate in which, as Alfred Grosser puts it, 'National defence and defence of the West came together...to justify military effort in Algeria'.³⁴ Until the recent ending of the Cold War it was somewhat overlooked that France is still an important Mediterranean power, albeit without a formal empire, but still with an informal one along the same axis as in 1957 and still closely associated with an updated version of the 'civilising mission' through the medium of 'francophonie'.

With the disappearance of the immediate threat from the East and lessons learnt from the 1991 Gulf War, the most serious threat to French security is now perceived as coming from the south across the Mediterranean. It is depicted in the form of hordes of economic or political 'boat-people' fleeing poverty and oppression or, in the light of the Gulf War, as a direct armed attack on a southern French city such as Marseilles from potentially hostile powers along the Mediterranean southern rim equipped with the ballistic missile technology to deliver nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Given the apparent availability of such technology from parts of the former Soviet Union or China in exchange for hard currency and the fact that France's defences are still largely geared to an attack from the east, a distinct anxiety has beset France. This was a fear first expressed by the extreme right *Front National* party, but has

³³ Quoted in Grosser, *Affaires extérieures*, 134.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

since become more widespread. In the *FN's* manifesto for the 1993 legislative elections there was a call for the setting up of an anti-ballistic missile defence system in France capable of guarding against an attack from the south.³⁵ An anti-missile defence system has now won more widespread approval. An opinion poll commissioned by the French Ministry of Defence carried out in May\June 1991, showed 58% of those questioned believing that the principal threat to France came from the south, of which 22% believed Algeria.³⁶ The threat from regional hegemony from the south has also prompted the significant shift in French policy on nuclear proliferation and which has led France at last to sign up to the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and become one of its warmest supporters.³⁷

The idea of the threat from the southern Mediterranean is not restricted to the right. It really gathered momentum during the Gulf War when the left-wing Socialist Minister of Defence Jean-Pierre Chevènement resigned on 29 January 1991 on the grounds that such a war against an Arab nation was playing the American game and making an historical and geopolitical error which ran counter to French interests. This was taken up by Gaullists who, in keeping with the General's pro-Arab diplomacy, understood the importance of French interests as a Mediterranean

³⁵ *Le Monde, Dossiers et Documents, Elections législatives de mars 1993* (Paris: Le Monde, 1993) 'Le programme des principales forces en présence', 52-3.

³⁶ Blunden, 'Is this the end of the defence consensus?' *Modern and Contemporary France*, no 51, Oct (1992), p 34.

³⁷ I am grateful to Martin Alexander for this information.

country and the need to stay on good relations with her neighbours to the south. Chevènement has long suggested a New Deal for the Maghreb to maintain and develop allies in the region and avoid the possibility of extreme poverty, the threat of large population migrations, or attack from a hostile power.³⁸ This strategy would avoid France becoming embroiled in the North-South battle by basing her security on 'a diplomacy of development'³⁹ which has the added advantage of fitting snugly into that age-old strand of French diplomacy, the 'civilising mission'.

In a conference organised by the French Ministry of Defence in September 1992, the German Defence Minister, Volker Rühle, was less bashful than the French Foreign Minister when he stated quite unambiguously: 'We Germans know well that the potential for crises which directly confronts France and Spain along the North African coast opposite them, constitutes a problem for the whole of Europe'. He went on to say: 'What is needed is a preventative social and economic policy in which the whole of Europe would participate'. At the same time he referred to the recently established Mediterranean maritime cooperation agreement between France, Italy and Spain created to deal with the potential threat from the southern Mediterranean.⁴⁰ In the March 1993 legislative elections, nearly every major party standing stressed the need

³⁸ On the strategic aspects of the threat from the south see the article by M Blunden, 'defence consensus?' *Modern and Contemporary France*, no 51, Oct (1992) p 32 et seq.

³⁹ A Joxe, 'Autonomie stratégique de l'école française', in *Un nouveau débat stratégique*, p 119.

⁴⁰ V Rühle, 'De nouveaux contenus à la politique de sécurité et à la stratégie' in *ibid.*, 21,22.

for directing considerable aid to North Africa and the African continent in general, which to paraphrase former American President Reagan is France's 'back-yard'.⁴¹

With the ending of the Cold War there is likely to be an even greater focus on France's traditional Mediterranean strategy. In a debate on 18 May 1993 in the French Senate the French Prime Minister, Edouard Balladur, noted that one of the challenges facing France was: 'To avoid weakening the Atlantic and Mediterranean facades in the face of a centre of gravity which recent history has rendered more continental'. In the same debate the Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, one of the principal opponents of the Maastricht treaty, remarked: 'Europe has three dimensions: Mediterranean, continental, Atlantic, and France was 'the only country in the Community to have been and to be, an active player in all three'. And he announced that in this 'great project' France could enrich European construction which is 'for the moment too continental'.⁴² This is redolent of General de Gaulle's call in 1948 for some European framework which could guarantee France's security because France's 'dignity' and 'duty' required that she should be 'the centre and key' of a group of states 'having as

⁴¹ *Le Monde, Dossiers et Documents, Elections législatives mars 1993, 'Le programme des principales forces en présence', pp 52-3.* For instance the manifesto of the *Union pour la France* (UPF), now the governing coalition, stated in the best traditions of the civilising mission: 'France has a natural vocation for generosity', which it called to be exercised in favour of the poorest African countries. UPF manifesto, *Plate-forme commune UDF-RPR: Le Projet de l'Union pour la France*, March 1993.

⁴² *Le Monde*, 20 May 1993.

its arteries the North Sea, the Rhine and the Mediterranean'.⁴³ In many ways France is moving closer to the old geo-strategic dilemma which for several centuries has characterised her position and is epitomised by the 'continentalist' and 'Blue Water' schools of French security-thinking. Has she ever been willing to make up her mind over whether her vital interests lie east of the Rhine or south across the Mediterranean? For the moment the south has the potential to become the front line: the prospect of the Algerian regime sliding into Islamic fundamentalism leading to a possible 'domino effect' from Agadir to Alexandria, the recent death of the staunchly francophile President Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast eroding French interests in Black Africa, together with the inabilities of the French economy to continue to sustain the Franc Zone, all contribute to making the Mediterranean again a focus of France's vital interests.⁴⁴

Already military planning and training in France is working increasingly on the assumption of a threat from across the Mediterranean. In September 1992 the Minister of Defence, Pierre Joxe, opened an international conference organised under his auspices on *Le nouveau débat stratégique*. He talked of France's nuclear deterrent and the need for it to cope with new threats 'other than those connected with the massive deterrence which has dominated until now'. He noted that: 'I have already indicated

⁴³ Quoted in Mark Wise, 'France and European Unity' in Aldrich and Connell (eds), *France in World Politics*, 40.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Martin Alexander for drawing my attention to these points.

that we ought perhaps, with that aim, to develop more flexible, lighter and more precise arms systems.⁴⁵ The defence contractor MATRA is said to be reviving its research for a French neutron bomb likely to be of greater use against a threat from a small Mediterranean state than France's present inflexible nuclear arsenal geared to massive retaliation. France has also been invited to participate in the American Global Protection against Limited Strikes programme, an offshoot of the strategic defence initiative, and intended to protect against the kind of strike likely to come from a Third World country.⁴⁶ The Socialist Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy and his Defence Minister Pierre Joxe turned this offer down in September 1992, but his successors may wish to revive it as part of a new Mediterranean strategy for France.⁴⁷ In unprecedented fashion, the French National Assembly's Defence Commission produced a 150 page report in February 1994 ahead of the government's white paper on defence overwhelmingly recommending that France's nuclear force should be adapted to meet new threats by adopting a limited and more precise strike capability: 'Our nuclear arms must be conceived in such a way as to allow a range of actions intended to defend our fundamental interests, and no longer just our vital interests. Deterrence can no longer be limited to the deterrence of the weak against the strong and we must possess the capability

⁴⁵ P Joxe, Opening address in *Le nouveau débat stratégique*, 9.

⁴⁶ On GPALS see Blunden 'defence consensus?', *Modern and Contemporary France*, no 51, Oct 1992, pp 35-6.

⁴⁷ P Joxe, Opening address, P Bérégovoy closing address, in *Nouveau débat stratégique*, 9, 191.

for limited and very precise strikes.⁴⁸ Once again the importance of the Mediterranean is forcing France to rethink her most fundamental strategic doctrines.

Conclusion

The ending of the Cold War has thrown French diplomacy into turmoil. But the old geo-strategic reflexes from the past appear to be helping to shape the analysis and the response to old demons. The German threat, the importance of Russia as a counterweight and the need to enmesh Germany in a web of agreements in an integrated Europe are not new, nor are France's attitudes to the so-called Anglo-Saxons. Back in 1986 François Mitterrand suggested how all these issues were inextricably linked, that Russia as a great European power could bring much to Western Europe and *vice versa*; at the same time he emphasised the necessity of aligning France and Europe with the destiny of history: 'Working for this symbiosis will speed the advent of Europe's hour, the real one, that of history and geography.'⁴⁹ That Europe is likely to have an increasingly Mediterranean security dimension. Recently Professor Alain Joxe, explained in words redolent of Delcassé the importance of the Mediterranean question for France, remarking that if Latin America begins in Florida then Africa begins in Calais.⁵⁰ He has suggested further

⁴⁸ *Le Monde*, 4 Feb 1994.

⁴⁹ Soutou, 'bouleversements', 22.

⁵⁰ Blunden, 'defence consensus', *Modern and Contemporary France*, no 51, Oct (1992), p 36.

European integration should take place and should include a development strategy for the 'South' different from that organised by the USA. He hopes that Europe will develop according to what he calls the 'French school' 'which wants the international order around France to be compatible with the survival of republican principles' based on the nation-state, 'jus solis and laïc citizenship' in the face of what he calls the 'German' school (based on small independent communities) and the 'American' school (a single imperial order). The French school is that which 'spread across the world and which escapes us and returns to us from all corners of the planet, like a call addressed as much and more to Voltaire, to Rousseau, to Victor Hugo and, now, to de Gaulle, as well as to living Frenchmen'. It is, he explains, the national Republican tradition on which the unity and success of the Third Republic was built and which today is common to left and right.⁵¹ History is again called to the rescue. Amid the general disorientation of the post-Cold War era France seems to be, more than ever, looking backwards to the future.

⁵¹ Joxe, *Un nouveau débat stratégique*, 109-21.