IS FRANCE STILL A GREAT POWER?

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1. *The Desire for Power and the Anguish of Decline*

In Paris, the concept of power is usually twinned with that of decline. When leaders and political commentators tackle international questions, their favourite topic always seems to be France's weight in world affairs. To their implied question, in its many forms, there seems to be only one answer: France is declining as a world power; it is losing its rank. Hardly a week goes by without some high-ranking

When *Commentaire* (with *Le Débat*, the most brilliant and influential of French journals) published, in the spring of 1998, a special number to celebrate its 20th

> be a party to the settlement that will follow the affairs in the Near East and the Middle East. France could not be absent from this part of the world.... She is one of the great world powers and must be worthy of her obligations, and our people will understand it....

It is possible to speak of a "Gaullo-Mitterrandist" legacy, based on the vision of a France that is present and active in the world, an equal member of the Western camp, independent (thanks to its nuclear prowess), and possessed of numerous advantages including a profound history and a particular genius for playing an important and original role in international affairs. And if de Gaulle and Mitterrand could occasionally conjure up the spectre of French decline, it was only in hopes of exorcising it more effectively.

In contrast, the political curse that seemed to haunt Valéry Giscard d'Estaing undoubtedly arose from his being the first president of the Fifth Republic who actually conceded the reality of decline. The French have never really forgiven him for this pessimism, born of rationality yet unaccompanied by any offsetting optimism of will. More to French liking was the pluckiness of Prime Minister Alain Juppé, who in the aftermath of Jacques Chirac's election in 1995 brought down the house with an inaugural address to the National Assembly that pledged the government to the policy of its predecessor, namely that of affirming the country's standing as a world power.

We should not allow ourselves to be misled by that rare display of unanimity among the parliamentarians. France's power and position in the world are a constant source of anguish for its leaders. If Washington fears having too much power, France worries about not having enough. Whereas the United States does not want to be the world's policeman, France regrets its inability to play that part.

In the opinion of many observers, the strategic revolution of 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the sundering of the socialist bloc, and finally the implosion of the USSR and end of the bipolar world all contributed to the devaluation of French power. Notwithstanding its ritual condemnation of the "Yalta order" and the politics of power "blocs," France had enjoyed a kind of dividend from the strategic dispensation known as bipolarity: it may have decamped from NATO's integrated military structure, but it continued to benefit from the Atlantic alliance's protection, if only because of geographical factors. Germany served as its glacis against the Soviet threat.

Despite — or, rather because of — this, France was able to afford the luxury of cocking a snoot at the US, which, for its part, simply could not leave Paris out of major strategic deliberations; in this way, France was able to offset its economic, industrial, and monetary inferiority to Germany with its own strategic autonomy. France initiated and played a key role in the construction of Europe, in respect of which nothing was "do-able" without its assent. The inclusion of Greece, Spain, and Portugal had the merit of placing France at the very geographical centre of that Europe. Moreover, France's peculiar status as an independent ally in the East/West context did endow it with extraordinary room for maneuver in what was

then called the Third World, where Paris could back divergent interests and still remain internally consistent. France's security was furthermore assured by its possession of autonomous nuclear power, and its quest for independence led it to equip itself with a formidable armaments industry, whose exports — at a time when demand exceeded supply —allowed France to outfit its own military with equipment purchased at the lowest cost as well as to balance its structural trade deficit.

The end of the Cold War has had two very disagreeable consequences for France and its conception of its own power. It has had to acknowledge the supremacy of the Americans in the world. And it is has had to acknowledge the supremacy of the Germans in Europe. France can no longer believe or even pretend to believe that it constitutes a credible alternative to the US on the world stage. And it would appear that Europe, which had allowed France a new dimension in the second half of the 20th century, will come to be ruled by Berlin, not Paris.

The facts seem to justify these fears. The Gulf War exposed the inadequacy of the French military arsenal in the face of new requirements directed more at the projection of force than at the sheltering of territory. It also brought an end, if not to France's Arab policy (always based more on myth or false perception than on reality), then at least to its vision of serving as some sort of alternative to the superpowers — a vision France liked to project, with profit, to portions of the world. Unfortunately for it, at a time when Asia was taking off economically,

1991, 72 percent of the French still thought of their country as a great power, at a time when such an assessment was far from being shared by the Germans (only 35 percent of whom thought similarly), by the Americans (29 percent), and by the British (25 percent). That was nearly a decade ago; it seems a fair bet that a similar poll today would yield even more mediocre results for France's image. As a result, the French proclivity to give lessons to others and to serve as moral arbiter looks increasingly out of place. General de Gaulle once wanted to be the "spokesman for 200 million people without a voice, who will be secretly grateful to us for speaking for them." Jean Giraudoux has remarked that France was the "world's gadfly"; and even though his diagnosis contains an element of truth, the world finds it increasingly objectionable.

Interestingly, France's intense internal debate on whether its decline is imaginary or real meets with utter indifference abroad, either because world opinion has already pronounced against France, or — worse — because it simply does not care.

An Age-Old Debate

> "I lament and mourn the time that is lost to me,
> Valour, honour...
> My name sinks and becomes a mockery.
> I cry out because I shall perish."

These words, penned by Eustache Deschamps to describe the *Lamentations de France* around 1350, demonstrate that time has failed to damp the fires of passion. Indeed, the puzzle of France's decline dates neither from today nor from the fall of the Berlin Wall; for all its apparent topicality, this debate is really 650 years old.

During the 14th and 15th centuries, the havoc of the Hundred Years' War motivated the resuscitation of the myth of the fall of Troy (the Capetian monarchy used this myth of Trojan ancestry to affirm its power). Lamentations, based on the systematic opposition of a happy and glorious past with the unfortunate present, were in vogue. Thus, in *Le Champion des dames*, Martin Lefranc presented mid-15th century France as:

> A lady, once so powerful,
> Who wanders, aimlessly and listlessly,
> Wearing the habit of a poor Meschine,
> Bewailing the murder and the famine.

At the end of the 15th century, Chastelain again lamented unhappy France, once "a princess, crowned with glory, her head wreathed in fleur-de-lis, seated on the throne of splendour." War had made of her a poor, weeping lady "a princess with changed colour, of diminished estate, languishing."

The myth of decline does not only appeal to such circumstances depicted above. War and other crises are not the only sources of the perceived erosion of French power. In his *Mémoires*, Pierre-Victor de Bésenval, a product of the luminous 18th century (he was the son of a lieutenant in Louis XIV's armies, and succeeded his father in the armies of Louis XV and Louis XVI), ascribes France's decline to his countrymen's lack of virtue. France is nearing "decadence" because "depopulation is depriving her of her defenders; money, limited to the few, is becoming more restricted and this sinew is completely lacking.... Discouragement takes hold everywhere. People find fault with those in charge of government; they are constantly accused, and he who follows a path opposite from that of his predecessor only increases the confusion. No one could fail to see France in this picture." Many today would recognize themselves in de Bésenval's depiction. The rhetoric of decline is an admixture of the indigestion of age and the confusion of traditional thought attempting to grapple with the country's socio-economic changes.

The anguish of France's fall finds expression in the Revolution and its aftermath, and thus intersects with a political current of reaction. After the splendours of the Napoleonic epic, enemy armies camped on the Champs Élysées. The afterglow was harsh, as captured in the conclusion of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*:

> The Emperor left us in a condition of fateful turmoil. We, the most mature and advanced state, show numerous signs of decadence. Just as a critically ill person is

The Monarchists, who had favoured capitulation after the defeat of Sedan, came to fix upon a revanchist nationalism, in which they were joined by a radical fringe. The theme of decadence was always the central line of nationalist thought.

By the end of the century, the prevailing current of thought was of "perpetual collapse" (Drumont, *Les tréteaux du succès*, 1900). The emerging industrial society, the reestablished republic, scientific and technical progress — all could and did serve as foils. Modernity was frightening. Maurras dates his political activity from a trip he took to Greece, during the course of which the external political debasement of France was rudely brought home to him.

Moral standards, decadence, the "putrefaction" of politicians, institutions on the road to ruin — all were censured in turn. Even education was collapsing! Drumont stormed: "The standard of classical studies is falling rapidly; it is getting to the point where candidates for the baccalaureate can no longer spell" (*La France juive*

security on agreement among the "four policemen" (US, USSR, Great Britain, and China) — a group excluding France. Joseph Stalin agreed with the group's composition. France was similarly excluded from the great summits (Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam) convened to plan the postwar order. Only Winston Churchill, recognizing the long-term necessity of a Western continental power able to counteract both Germany and the USSR alike, disagreed, insisting instead that France have an occupation zone in Germany and a permanent seat on the Security Council of the new United Nations.

Within France itself, the joy of the liberation and the enthusiasm concerning the "spirit of resistance" combined to make optimism de rigueur during this otherwise black period. Many regarded French weakness to be only temporary, and with the war won and Germany defeated, it was felt France would naturally reassume its place in the world. Anticipating this outcome, André Siegfried, writing in *Le Figaro* of 21 September 1944, declared that "France does not need to be given a certificate showing that she is a great power, but rather needs to establish herself as such by her own merit....In an almost unprecedented redress General de Gaulle restored to France her honour; thanks to him and to the resisters we can once again look the world in the face. This crisis has nonetheless affected us, and we must fight hard to get back on our feet." Confidence was infectious, perhaps even obligatory, as de Gaulle demonstrated in proclaiming to the consultative assembly on 2 March 1945: "It will require relentless and furious work, a long time and much initiative. But power is at the end of it, a power which will crush no one and will, on the contrary, help our fellow man. May the attainment of this power become our great national ambition!"

Charles Morazé, something of a realist, did not hesitate to speak of France's international "decline" in his 1947-48 course at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, focussed on the topic of "France, an economic and human study." According to Morazé, France's ranking at the same level as that of China "would have stupefied the politicians of 1924." He concluded that "our country has become first among the secondary powers." Twenty years later, in a celebrated editorial of 15 March 1968 entitled "France is slumping," Pierre Viansson-Ponté echoed this theme, in describing "a little France, shrunken almost to the Hexagon, which is neither very unfortunate nor very prosperous, at peace with everyone, without much control over world events."

The trauma of 1940 has to be one of the most profound ever endured by France. It accounts in large part for the government's lack of vision during the colonial wars. We still suffer from its syndromes and effects.

The summary presented in this section serves to provide some context to the disquiet many feel about French decline. Mark Twain, on reading the news of his own demise, commented famously that the "reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." The news of France's own decline is so ancient and so recurrent that it can be called permanently premature as well as constantly exaggerated. Above all, merely posing the problem — and doing so for more than seven centuries! —

in terms that compare the declining France of the moment with the superpower it once was betrays a faulty understanding of the nature of power, and rests on an illusion with little relevance for the present.

An Idealized Power

So *can* we speak of the decline of France? It all depends on one's point of reference, of course, which can never be an easy thing to determine. What should serve as our referent for taking the measure of decline? Gaul occupied by the Romans? Hardly. What about 12th-century France, when the kings were still an element of the feudal system, scarcely able to distinguish themselves politically from the surrounding principalities — let alone match the two powers of the epoch, the Pope and the Holy Roman Empire? Obviously not.

The 13th century might offer a better standard for comparison. The privileged relationship that the kings of France developed with Rome (comparable to that of the king of England or the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire) permitted them to enjoy a privileged status as the "sacred and very Christian king," ruler by divine right, and responsible for the eldest daughter of the Church. France had 21 of the then 39 million inhabitants of Roman Catholic Europe, and it assumed the most active role (what we would today call "leadership") in the Crusades. Paris was considered an important scientific and artistic centre, and the Champagne fairs offered the greatest opportunity for commerce and exchange in all of medieval Europe. However, many European countries knew such temporary halcyon periods, and the "beautiful 13th century" led straight to the Hundred Years' War, when France was once again reduced to powerlessness. Famine, war, and plague combined to produce a high rate of mortality, and anarchy resulted. Although devastated by the war, the country nonetheless survived to become rich and strong once more, under Louis XI.

At the end of the 15th century, France regained enough economic strength to enter the Italian wars. These profited it little, since by the Treaty of Cambrai of 1529, François I was obliged to cede Flanders and Artois to Charles V. The border with the Spanish lands was only 150 kilometres from Paris.

The religious wars prior to Henri IV's accession to the throne marked another ruinous period for the country. It was not until the beneficial effects of Richelieu's management could be felt during the time of Louis XIV that France reached the height of its power. At the start of the 18th century, Europe had 118 million inhabitants, of whom 19 million were French. Russia, with 15 million, was the only other country that came close to being as populous.

But which of Louis XIV's Frances do we really have in mind? Is it the France of the treaties of Westphalia (1648), the Pyrénées (1659), and Nimwegen (1678-79), which marked the apogee of the kingdom and justified Louis' title of the "Sun King"? Or is it the France of 1713, after the War of the Spanish Succession,

Perhaps the real point of reference should be June 1940, when what was considered to be the world's strongest army crumbled in three weeks, opening the chapter of collaboration and the Pétain regime? What role did France, absent from the conferences at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam, have in the planning of the postwar order? It was, as we have seen, only thanks to Churchill that France got its zone of occupation in Germany and permanent seat on the Security Council.

Can it really be said that France today *is* in decline, when set against the France of Dien Bien Phu, of Suez, or of the Algerian war? Was General de Gaulle's France really so powerful, when one considers the domestic situation at the end of his second presidency (viz., May 1968 and the failure of the 1969 referendum)? De Gaulle himself, having been unable either to build the Europe of his dreams or to convince the Europeans to free themselves from Washington, acknowledged failure, confiding to Jacques Foccart that France's place in international affairs had been greatly overrated: "I am on stage, and I pretend to believe, and make others believe, that France is a great country. It is a perpetual illusion."[3]

France has only known two periods in its long history when it actually dominated Europe: during the height of power of Louis XIV, and during the reign of Napoleon I. In each instance this dominance led to aggression against other countries, who in turn forged coalitions against France, cutting it back down to size. For France, as for Rome before it, the Tarpeian Rock remained a feature of the Capitoline Hill. Thus when we consider the current power of France, we should beware the folly of undervaluing the present, for this is as fallacious as to aggrandize the past. Instead, we would be far better to recollect, with Philippe Moreau Defarges, that "since the end of the 18th century, France has known both illusory or ambiguous victories (1802, 1805, 1919, and 1945) and disastrous defeats (1763, 1815, 1871, 1940, even 1954 and 1962). France nonetheless still exists, even enjoying the status of a great power."[4]

Foreign analysts, incidentally, often take a more optimistic view of France's true weight than do the French themselves. In 1995, two respected and influential publications, *Time* and *The Economist*, each published, at about the same time, a special number on France, and judging from what was written, it would appear that the country still has a preeminent place in the world. In the same year, Ezra N. Suleiman argued that the French probably never had become as bogged down as they thought they did, and concluded that the debate over decline constituted, in the end, a non-debate.[5]

The comparison is always made with a past more imaginary (and puffed up) than real. France does not suffer from a sickness that has constantly eaten away at it since the 18th century and that drives it further down in the global pecking order. Rather, its history consists in an uninterrupted stream of high and low points. In sum, contemporary France is far from that condition of degradation so often attributed to it. It retains important advantages; and it is up to it to exploit them to the full.

Notes

1. Alain Duhamel, *Les peurs françaises* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).
2. René Girault, "Les décideurs français et la puissance française en 1938-1939," in *La puissance en Europe, 1938-1940*, ed. René Girault and Robert Franck (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1984), p. 39.
3. Quoted by Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur: la politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958-1960* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).
4. Philippe Moreau Defarges, *La France dans le monde au XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette supérieure, 1994).
5. Ezra N. Suleiman, *Les ressorts cachés de la réussite française* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

2. *What Is Power?*

Because the notion of power has always been at the heart of the problem of international relations, analysts have long pondered its definition. A complex notion with multiple meanings has been the result, of which certain major interpretations can be presented here.

For Robert Dahl, for example, power is one's ability to oblige someone else to do what he or she would otherwise have abstained from doing. Karl Deutsch sees it as "the ability to prevail and to surmount the obstacles." Raymond Aron defines it either as the ability to do, produce, or destroy, or as the ability to impose one's will upon others; for him, political power becomes not an absolute, but rather a relative capability. For Arnold Wolfers, power is the possibility of "imposition, and more specifically, the imposition of losses on others"; he distinguishes more precisely power politics, the imposition of one's will by threat or by force, from political influence, which is the bringing of others around to one's own point of view.

Jean-Baptiste Duroselle establishes another distinction, that between power and strength. If strength is the ability of a state to modify the will of groups or individuals in the domestic sphere, power is the ability to impose one's will externally. A power is therefore a state able to modify the will of individuals, groups, or foreign states. Finally, according to Samuel Huntington, power is the ability of an actor, usually but not always a government, to influence the behaviour of others, which also may or may not be governments. International primacy means that a government can exercise more influence on the behaviour of more actors and concerning more matters than can any other government.[1]

If one had to synthesize these various definitions, it might be said that power is characterized by the independence of the powerful vis-à-vis the other actors, with the reverse holding as well — namely the dependence of the latter with respect to the former. In other words, international relations consists in a zero-sum game. According to the classical definitions, power implies being subjected to only the minimum number of constraints while being able to impose the maximum number

of constraints on others. As such, the notion is not far removed from that of "sovereignty," and, more broadly, freedom of action; if the freedom of the individual stops where that of the others begins, the power of one actor is limited only by the power of the others.

A second and corollary question further complicates these definitional difficulties: how does one reach this objective of exercising "power," and what are that category's criteria?

Niccolò Machiavelli grasped the problem in 1513, when he devoted one chapter of *The Prince* to assessing "how the power of each principality should be measured." The criteria he identified were essentially military and political, involving leadership skill and martial prowess. It was not until the end of the 17th

military strength in nonmilitary ways, as an instrument of persuasion and influence and in order to obtain diplomatic backing and markets, rather than as a means of winning wars. The most notable direct use of its military force ended in a fiasco, with Vietnam.

While we should think twice before assigning the military factor space in the museum of antiquities alongside the spinning wheel and the stone axe, it is true that military might no longer serves as the only or even the chief element of power. For power's meaning has changed. Troop strength scarcely counts nowadays, and the might of an army is measured not by the number of bodies lined up behind bayonets, but rather by the quality of matériel and its degree of technological sophistication — the precision of its missiles, its ability to observe, detect, and attain its targets, and its communications. Some predict that in future, space-based capabilities will possess the same importance to overall military power as do nuclear weapons today.

In the same manner, the demographic factor (long linked to military power), is now singularly devalued, even though the vague idea that a large population must connote international importance remains widespread in France — a legacy of the pre-World War I obsession with Germany's demographic weight. Although the low birth rate in Canada, Australia, and Japan may be a token of relative decline, and even lead to fears regarding national survival, strong population growth without a vigorous economy can also contribute to weakness not strength. Population can as easily be a problem as an asset. The world's most populous state, China, once reassured itself, under Mao Tse Tung, with the thought that because of its greater population it could better absorb the shock of a nuclear war than could the United States. Nonetheless, more than twenty years ago China implemented the strictest possible birth control policy, forbidding families to have more than one child, in order to limit the growth of a population that was adversely affecting its economic development and thus the affirmation of its power.

It would seem that economic strength has replaced military strength as the principal instrument of power.[3] It might even be queried whether the race to prosperity has not become the new engine of history and whether, at the same time, the quest for power, heretofore always at the heart of international relations, has not become the great loser in this evolution. But how are we to define this economic power?

It is noteworthy that the possession of natural resources, once the principal definitional element, is no longer of much significance: Japan has few raw materials, which does not stop it from being in the first rank of world economic powers, while resource-rich Argentina has seen its position decline since 1945, and the Soviet Union, overflowing with mineral wealth, nevertheless disappeared.

Technological mastery has become much more significant. The industries of tomorrow are those of the brain cells: microelectronics, biotechnologies, software, computers, telecommunications, robots, machine instruments. These industries do not have any predetermined location, but go to the regions able to

organize the intellectual resources necessary to attract them. Winston Churchill, once again proving his visionary nature, affirmed that " the empires of the future are the empires of the spirit."

For Alvin Toffler,[4] power in the 21st century thus consists not in the classic military or economic criteria, but in the "K" (for knowledge) factor. According to him, "knowledge, once a supplement to the power of money and of muscle, has become their veritable essence. It is, in fact, the ultimate amplifier." The military powers depend in large part on the degree of technology (knowledge) that they

Chinese, Cubans, and Vietnamese in the most negative possible light. Today's legions of overarmed terrorists who want to blow up everything with megabombs seem always of Arab origin. Hollywood's assistance in this task of ideational molding is the more effective because it is not programmed: there is no ideological script to be followed, as there was in the good old days when the Soviets or Chinese deployed their own propaganda offensives. Instead, American films fix on what the American public is ready to receive. CNN has for its part become the symbol of a media no longer merely a means of transmitting information but now a source in itself of the news, since during crises its images are diffused in places of power as well as in editorial offices. CNN is a private channel, not the voice of the American government; but with such a medium it is understandable that the federal government no longer finds it necessary generously to finance the "Voice of America" and the translation of programs into numerous languages. Citizens of the entire planet tune into CNN spontaneously, thus allowing it legitimately to shape the worldview of the urban upper classes.

Power's inordinate complexity renders its evaluation a delicate business. How to measure it? Is it possible to set up a kind of Dow Jones index for power, where

Although it can hardly claim a first-place standing, it is nevertheless well-ranked; and while it may not be the undisputed leader in any of the categories, for

3. A Multilateral World

Globalization and its diplomatic equivalent of multilateralization inevitably gnaw away at the image of national power. The perception in France of a state never again destined to be a great power results above all from a psychological process linked to multilateralization. French foreign policy, like that of other states, has become increasingly less national, and the country's place on the international

Multilateralism renders power more diffuse, because it forces constant negotiations with everyone, and requires concessions to be made in one negotiation so as to obtain the same from one's partner in another. It also requires that priorities be determined regarding the issues upon which one seeks support, for the good reason that it is impossible to ask for support on all matters and the favours one receives must inevitably be repaid. And it requires knowing how and when to resist the US without upsetting one's partners or making them dig in their heels.

Multilateralism makes compulsory the observance of certain rules: never push your advantage to the limit (why incite desires for revenge?); avoid traditional French arrogance (such narcissistic gratification could prove costly later on); never humiliate or neglect a partner (all votes count); know how to make concessions (without which no gain is possible); avoid the temptation to use force or impose a solution (the means are lacking and, in any case, a project is only really accepted if it appears to represent everyone's point of view); choose which objectives have priority (no one can win all the time); present projects that appear legitimate for the other countries (whose role, after all, is not to promote the French national interest).

Another important rule of the multilateral road is this: forget about privileged bilateral relations, whether between France and the US, Germany, Senegal, Brazil, or whomever. Negotiations will be simultaneous, and global.

No state can impose its solutions alone — not even the US can do this. Richard Haass, director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, invokes the imagery of the "reluctant sheriff" to characterize the American position. Washington can no longer be represented as the world's policeman. Instead, it must be the sheriff, forced to act in concert with others in order to fulfil his role. He directs the operation, but must rely on volunteers, whom he must convince to follow him, in order to carry out the most delicate missions.

This results not from any diminution as such of American power, but rather is a product of multilateralism. Whether it concerns development of policy toward Iraq or toward the environment, Washington will have to pay some heed to the opinion of other states, whom it must attempt to convince to go along with it. If it proves unsuccessful in the attempt, and concludes that it is not in its national interest it

was a bloodthirsty dictator and also (especially, in this context) because he had defied the Americans militarily. Moreover, since he was weakened, Washington had the opportunity of demonstrating its power by furthering the observance of

policy and to make sovereign decisions, but the external aspect is today much more significant than before, and the cost of a departure from what is commonly accepted much greater. If it is not really possible to speak of a genuine "international society" because of the absence of true solidarity between all of its members, there are nonetheless internationally accepted social rules that one ignores at one's peril.

Some factions of society still harbour the sweet illusion that their government, should they happen to be living in a powerful state, can be made to do their bidding. French editorialists and media intellectuals love to denounce loudly the inaction of their leaders: "What, the war in the former Yugoslavia is not immediately ended? You are unable to put out the Algerian inferno at once? Do you mean to say you cannot establish the magical duo of democracy and development in Africa within twenty-four hours?" Alas, multilateralization means it is no longer possible for a single country to resolve, on its own, a problem of major significance.

In France, where the tradition of intellectual commitment is deeply rooted, the sense of decline is strengthened by the commentators' own feeling of powerlessness — they have before them any number of opportunities to intervene and make speeches, but they also realize that they have less and less impact on what actually happens. The media explosion gives them a much greater audience, more fame, and far more exposure than their predecessors enjoyed, but multilateralization

constraint. The decision was presented as "Gaullist": France, thumbing its nose at negative international reactions, decided independently to conduct some supplementary tests because it deemed them necessary and because it wanted to demonstrate its power through nuclear capability. A parallel was drawn between de Gaulle creating the nuclear deterrent in the 1960s, over American opposition and protests from the Third World, and Jacques Chirac wanting to improve this capability in the 1990s. The only difference (but one that was to prove considerable) is this: it was no longer possible in the 1990s to pursue a policy judged illegitimate by the rest of the international community, unless one was prepared to pay a heavy price.

France learned what the price was. In the face of intense opposition not only in the South Pacific, but throughout Asia, in Latin America, and in Western Europe, France found itself obliged to reduce the number of tests (from eight to six), to terminate them earlier than planned (in February, rather than April or May), and to give some proof of its sincerity regarding disarmament (notably by agreeing to the "zero option" on nuclear testing, thereby surrendering the option of conducting low-level tests once the comprehensive test ban treaty [CTBT] entered into force).

Beyond these ineluctable realities, however, multilateralism can be as much a choice as a necessity for France. (How futile, if not downright silly, is the debate heard too often in France on the topic "Globalization: For or Against?", as though it were possible to choose to accept or reject it! One can only attempt to limit the negative or to maximize the positive effects of this inevitability.) In the present circumstances multilateralism should represent a voluntary choice for France because it amounts to a multiplier of its power: no other country is so actively implicated in so many different international institutions. This of course results in certain political, economic, and legal constraints, but France freely accepts these because it needs multilateralism in order to project its influence and interests.

Accordingly, France has, since 1945, chosen multilateralism, seeing it as the

from NATO's integrated structure. International organizations are a means rather than an end for France, and in de Gaulle's judgement NATO did not contribute to France's power, but on the contrary constrained both its ability to gain influence and its freedom of action.

It is important, however, not to succumb to the very French illusion that having one's own nationals heading multilateral organizations is a ticket to enhancing the "national" interest. From the middle of the 1980s on, the French simultaneously headed the European Commission (Jacques Delors, from 1985 to 1994), the EBRD (Jacques Attali, from 1991 to 1993, followed by Jacques de la Rosière), the IMF (Michel Camdessus, since 1987), the OECD (Jean-Claude Paye, from late 1984 until May 1996), and the Council of Europe (Catherine Lalumière, from June 1989 to May 1994). Despite this, it is far from obvious that these organizations served as direct instruments of French policy.

In 1945 General de Gaulle regarded the UN as a place where, thanks to its permanent seat on the Security Council, eternal France (whose power might have been altered because of its behaviour during the years 1940-44) would be duly recognized, as well as a vehicle for the propagation of universal ideals France personified. It did not turn out that way, because the UN became instead the principal forum for protesting French colonial policy, especially during the war in Algeria. However, once the process of decolonization had been completed and internalized in French political psychology, the UN could emerge as a means for France to project its image beyond the European sphere, and to do so with a certain degree of international legitimacy that owed much to France's willingness
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circumventing the UN usually means keeping the other permanent members of the Security Council out of decisionmaking, something it prefers (within limits) to avoid.

French enthusiasm for the UN finds expression particularly in the area of peace-keeping: during 1992 and 1993, France quickly turned into one of the most active

4. *Is France Just a Middle Power?*

Let us now revisit the criteria of power discussed previously, and ask not only to what extent these can be applied to contemporary states, but how they can be said to "structure" the international system itself.

A quick historical survey reveals that the world has known a succession of preponderant powers since the 15th century: Spain, the Netherlands, France, Britain, and the United States. The dominance of each of these leading powers occurred within the context of a particular configuration of the distribution of power. In the 17th century, France, England, the Netherlands, Spain, Austria, and the Ottoman empire could all be considered great powers. In the 18th century, Spain, the Netherlands, and the Ottoman empire were supplanted by Russia and Prussia.

Scholars have suggested classifying the European states of this period into four categories: first were those able to conduct on their own a land or sea war (France and England); second were those obliged to form coalitions (Austria, Russia, Prussia, Spain, and Denmark); third were those able only to provide support; and fourth were the nonpowers. The landscape changed only slightly in the 19th century with the emergence of Italy (and its process of unification), the replacement of Prussia by Germany, and the accession to membership at the end of the century of the US and Japan. The First World War eliminated Austria as a power, and the Second changed the very notion of power.

According to Robert Franck, an essential change occurred in the nature of international relations as a result of the latter conflict.[1] From the time of the Renaissance up until 1942, the number of great powers had in fact varied little, between five and eight. "They formed a club having renewable memberships, with England and France always being renewed." However, after 1942, "there were only two powers with a high degree of independence of action left. The use of the term superpower refers not only to a difference of degree but also to a difference of nature." The emergence of the two superpowers left little room for the others. Germany and Japan, once defeated, were not burdened by severe capitulation penalties. France and Italy, respectively enemy and ally of Germany, scarcely

If France truly were a "middle power" in the literal sense of the word, it would rank somewhere between 90th and 95th among today's 190 or so states. Neither those who daily lament France's decline nor those who eagerly take delight in it would place France at such a modest level. The reality is that of these 190 states, there are very few who are true powers — that is, who enjoy genuine independence, who can assure their own security for the most part, and who can exert an influence over other states or the course of world events. There are really only about a dozen such states, apart from the US, who can fulfil the criterion of being able to influence others. None of them, however, satisfies all the criteria of power. While they have some attributes, they lack others — whether those be a permanent seat on the Security Council, nuclear arms, economic strength, or a strong currency. The current typology of power allows us, then, to distinguish one superpower and, on the basis of very different factors, a dozen or so other powers, among whose ranks are such countries as Russia, China, India, Italy, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, Brazil, South Africa — and France. France is one of the few countries of this group able to act on the world stage.

Zbigniew Brzezinski uses the term "geopolitical actors of the first order" to refer to states with the ability and the national will to exercise power beyond their borders. They, as a result, are in a position to modify international relations and thus can potentially affect American interests. He identifies at least five pivotal points on the contemporary political map of Eurasia: France, Germany, Russia, China, and India. Missing from this grouping are the undoubtedly important countries of Britain, Japan, and Indonesia.[2]

Another, more operational, approach distinguishes the superpower, which can have a determinative effect on matters of world importance, from both the great power, which can play a role outside its own regional sphere and have a strong influence on some, but not all, global matters, and the regional power, which is a major actor only in its own geographical sphere.

Hubert Védrine, in an interview with Jean Daniel published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (28 May 1998), referred to the American "hyperpower," a term that captured American hegemony and is analytically distinct from the concept of "superpower" (seen as too exclusively military) and of "great power" (held to be too traditional). Védrine classified France in the category of "powers having world influence," that is, those states who wield global influence, directly or indirectly, albeit without possessing all of the attributes of power. According to the foreign minister, the following seven countries belong to this group: France, Germany, Britain, Russia, China, Japan, and India. Twenty to thirty other countries could be lumped in the category of "powers with more limited influence." All of the remaining states constitute a final category: while their opinion must be considered in a multilateral world, they cannot be deemed "powers" because they lack direct and active influence on decisionmaking processes.

France, then, must be distinguished from those states that "count" in some international matters, but that do not play a role across the whole of the power

spectrum. From time to time such states as South Africa, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Canada, Egypt, Cuba, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia may well have an influence in certain areas, but it is only intermittent, targeted, or regional. France must furthermore be distinguished from the approximately 140 states that are more onlookers than actors in international affairs.

In the Western public imagination, France is often depicted as a country of good living, elegance, incomparable wine, haute cuisine, and haute couture. Just as often, the French are annoyed by these prevalent clichés and dissatisfied with a stereotype of luxury and refinement — derived largely from an inherited life-style — that is implicitly incompatible with modernity and power. They respond by pointing out that their country does not dwell in the past, however agreeable that might seem. It is also the homeland of the *Ariane*, the Airbus, and high-speed trains (TGV), and is a country that means to compete internationally in the aero-space, nuclear, and electronic industries, as well as in transportation, telecommunication, and software. French leaders intend to lead a country that has influence on the direction of the world, and a voice in its important strategic decisions.

But has France, objectively speaking, the means to realize these ambitions? The current situation supplies no cause for anguish on this score, provided it is accepted that France cannot be the premier world power. That said, France has been and remains able to exploit its favourable geostrategic position, and it pos-sesses the political, military, demographic, and economic attributes of a genuine power.

France's physical size is admittedly modest; it is only the 47th largest country (despite occasional boasts of being the third largest, on the basis an expansive exclusive economic zone under the law of the sea), and its territory represents only .37 percent of the earth's landmass. Nonetheless, France's overseas presence, which includes four departments (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, and Réunion), three territories (Polynesia, Wallis-et-Futuna, and the Antarctic zones), two terri-torial aggregations (Mayotte and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon) and New Caledonia, projects its national presence into four oceans (Indian, Atlantic, Pacific, and Antarctic) as well as into the reaches of the African and American continents. A Western European country of profound strategic importance, France's opening on the Atlantic and Pacific oceans extends to some 3,500 kilometres.

When population not territory serves as the measure, France ranks 19th in the world. If the measure becomes average annual growth in population over the pe-riod 1985-94, then France plummets to 139th overall. Since 1870, France has been preoccupied by its demographic differential with Germany. This demographic datum, considered an important element of power in the 18th century (when France saw itself as populating half of the "thinking world"), and taken as incontrovert-ible evidence of its 19th-century "decline," continues to be greatly overestimated in France. The fallacy resides in the failure to consider other criteria of power in association with the demographic one. Seen in this light, it really matters little

that France is less populous than Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, or Thailand, or that its size is only 1/15th of Australia's, a fifth of Sudan's, or a third of Mongolia's.

France, because of its long tradition of state control and centralized government, can accomplish things. It has stable institutions and a political system in which power regularly alternates (as in 1981, 1986, 1988, 1993, and 1997) without generating political turmoil. Even the period of "cohabitation," when the president is not of the same political persuasion as the government and the National Assembly, does not handicap French diplomacy, as all factions make it a point of honour to present a united face to the world.

France's status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council is not in question, whatever reforms may come to that body. There may one day be new permanent members, with or without a veto, but the current members are assuredly not prepared to give up their privileges.

In the military arena, France's position as one of the handful of officially declared nuclear powers guarantees it the same right to possess nuclear weapons as the US, Russia, China, and the UK —a right that may, grudgingly, be extended to India and Pakistan. Nuclear weapons are held to safeguard the country's physical security. France is, moreover, one of the few countries capable of projecting its armed forces; in addition to permanent stationed units, France can and does take part in peacekeeping operations and is currently developing, within the context of the European security and defence identity (ESDI) a deployable intervention force of 60,000.

France likewise remains a real economic power. Its gross national product represents 3.5,oaluCs-1.2. Thet1 th0ss national product rep-

disinflation, the liberalization of prices and capital during the period 1986 to 1990, and the forging of monetary union. Whereas France was in a chronic deficit position during the 1970s and 1980s (the 1988 trade deficit amounted to FF 88 billion), it enjoyed a surplus of more than FF 174 billion in 1997. In secondary manufacturing alone, France was able to turn a 1988 deficit of FF 85 billion into a 1997

France was, in any event, deeply implicated in the management of these matters. The only other country involved more deeply was the obviously much more influential US.

If, therefore, we look at the world as it is and not as we might wish it to be, we see the debate over French power in a different light. It is only those for whom first place is all that counts who consider France no longer to be a great power; their sense of France's having fallen is also undoubtedly accentuated by the fact that it once stood so high in the international hierarchy. France, nonetheless, remains part of a very small group of countries that can have a decisive effect on many issues.

The perception of a France in inevitable decline and relegated to an inferior, even negligible, role in the management of world affairs is based, as we have glimpsed in this and the preceding chapters, upon a threefold analytical mistake, consisting of 1) an erroneous interpretation of France's past that saw it as a permanent triumphal march; 2) a fallacious definition of international power, the nature of which changed completely during the latter part of the 20th century; and 3) a mistaken idea of the contemporary international hierarchy.

Notes

1. Robert Franck, *La hantise du déclin: Le rang de la France en Europe, 1920-1960 — Finances, défense et identité nationale* (Paris: Belin, 1994).
2. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
3. *Time*, 5 December 1995.

5. *The Franco-American Relationship*

Any discussion concerning French power necessarily involves an examination of the relationship between France and the United States. Power being a relative concept, and because France wishes to be a great power, it naturally compares itself with the country that is the point of reference in this sphere.

Both countries have always been obsessed by their position in the world. From its very beginnings, America questioned whether it should be involved in global affairs. Since Harry S Truman's 1947 answer in the affirmative, a constant fear of overcommitment has regularly informed the debate about the proper degree of US involvement. And although the US sometimes tires of being responsible for the world, it does not want anyone else to take over the task.

France has fears that are both similar and different. It believes that it has a mission in the world. As the eldest daughter of the Church and the birthplace of the Enlightenment and of human rights, France has always seen itself as both exceptional and universal. Very much like America, France regards it as its duty to export its "universal" values for the good of all. It has even justified its forays into territorial expansion — the Napoleonic wars and colonization — by a discourse premised on the general interest, one emphasizing the diffusion of the rights of man, the principle of legality, and the ideas of the Enlightenment.

Given that both countries see themselves as bearing a universal message, the competition between them is obvious. Two formidable narcissisms confront each other, the only societies in the world who believe in their own mission of civilizing the world and in the universal applicability of their own model. (That said, it

the Soviet Union has deprived France of its delightful role as a reluctant ally, albeit one "indispensable" in its own way to the cohesiveness of the Atlantic alliance during moments of greatest peril. Franco-American relations have thus long been characterized by contradiction, with France oscillating between misplaced arrogance and submission.

When in August 1997 the new French foreign minister, Hubert Védrine, announced at a gathering of ambassadors that Paris recognized without bitterness America's status as the world's uncontested superpower, and that Paris (while able to defend its legitimate interests) would no longer delude itself with visions of rivalry, his simple statement of the obvious amounted to a Copernican revolution in French diplomacy.

It would be not only illusory but quite simply foolish to think that France could compete with the US in terms of power. Mere pretension by Paris to such a role suffices to unleash reactions from Eastern Europe to the Middle East that run the gamut from hostility to derision. The US, having neither equals nor rivals, is the first historical global power: it is the only state with the full range of military assets — nuclear weapons, power-projection capability, satellites, technologically sophisticated arms, etc. As well, it is the world's premier economy, with uncon-

same time (20 June 1996), it stated that it would support another African candidate. On 8 July, France gave its backing to Boutros-Ghali. In the first vote, held on 19 November 1996, the US vetoed the latter's candidacy, despite the fact that the other 14 members of the Security Council favoured it. France refused to countenance the candidacy of any other African. On 4 December, Boutros-Ghali withdrew from the race, while three other Africans announced their candidacy. A straw vote held in the Security Council on 10 December revealed that Kofi Annan had the greatest support (10 to 4, with France voting against). Not until 12 June would the logjam be broken, through a Franco-American agreement that had France lifting its veto of Kofi Annan in return for a French diplomat's being awarded the post of assistant secretary general responsible for peacekeeping, as well as for an American pledge to pay arrears owing to the UN. The Security Council then named Kofi Annan secretary general by acclamation.

The American veto had effectively prohibited the election of Boutros-Ghali, while France's veto only survived one round of voting. The fact that France was current in its financial obligations to the UN while the US was not had no effect on veto rights. Many countries condemned the American decision in the corridors and even publicly, but they resigned themselves to accepting it, as an element of nature that simply could not be withstood. Had France maintained its veto, the

The argument in favour of this decision can be summarized as follows. The countries of Europe do not want a European pillar of defence outside NATO. This truth, however regrettable, must be recognized, and France should therefore no longer seek to fashion a European identity apart from NATO, but should prepare instead to reenter the organization in order to continue to exert influence. The

When France does take a diplomatic stance different from that of the US (but without embellishing it with vitriol), it actually can make itself heard, providing its cause possesses a certain legitimacy. This was the case during the early 1998 crisis over the Iraqi presidential sites, when the world prepared itself (with similar media frenzy) to experience "Gulf War 2." French diplomacy, under the leadership of President Jacques Chirac and Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, was able for a time to effect a peaceful solution, all the more exemplary in that it employed the ingredients of a policy permitting France to play a more important role in an international crisis than was justified by its actual power. Starting from a credible political and military position (if France had not participated in the Gulf War, it would have lacked all legitimacy to propose a peaceful solution to the crisis), proposing an alternative way without appearing to be primarily and systematically anti-American, consulting abundantly with its partners, relying intelligently on its status as permanent member of the Security Council, and refraining from crowing over its success at the time, leaving to the French and foreign media the task of paying homage to its diplomacy — such were the bases of an effective French diplomatic intervention in early 1998.

The differing viewpoints of Paris and Washington became apparent on 29 January, during a working dinner between Madeleine Albright and Hubert Védrine. However, the lines of communication were never cut, and Paris' sending of an envoy (the secretary-general of the Quai d'Orsay) to Baghdad was not perceived as an attempt to get unwarranted recognition, much less to go it alone. Although Paris' attitude to Iraq is usually thought to be tainted by commercial interests (even when that country is under embargo), France's continual consultations with Washington and London, fortified by leaks deftly managed by American leaders, prevented the Anglo-Saxon press from fulminating against its position. The French envoy, while stressing the necessity of complying with the various Security Council resolutions, suggested a compromise concerning access to the presidential sites that bought some short-term resolution of the crisis, by providing a means of distinguishing between the places of habitation, on the one hand, and the surrounding areas on the other. A visit by the secretary general from 20 to 22 February enabled Baghdad's agreement, and put off for ten more months the military operations desired by the Americans.

France does not have the means to compete with the US. Europe itself lacks both the means and the desire to do so. But France need not transform herself into a ze9(o)1e]TJTw (ag)18.fh di(rg3e Quailthe)0i France's conal [(aanyflu6(3(it 2[(f(Alth09

countries; this is not always the case. In the long run, this attitude bespeaks a lack of understanding between the Western allies. France's role, in this context, is to pose the hard questions about readjusting the poles of power. This must be done with intelligent arguments and in the proper tone. It would be senseless to contest gratuitously American superiority. By the same token, it would be just as foolhardy for France to conclude that it had best do everything it can to please the world's leader, refraining from even the hint of action that might displease Washington, in the hopes of being well rewarded.

The road to a rebalancing the bilateral relationship between France and the US is to be found in a candid recognition of points of agreement and disagreement, a lucid analysis of the relationship of strength, a recognition of what needs to be changed, the forging of coalitions (with other Europeans, other power poles, and other regional groups) whose shapes may change with the matters at issue — and through never speaking too loudly in an attempt to make up for the small stick France carries. These Americans are the world's greatest power. But is it not in their own long-term interest to be able to count on a strong Europe to help them run the world in the least chaotic manner possible?

Note

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

6. France and Europe

The transformation of the European Community into the European Union and the ratification by referendum of the treaty of Maastricht, rekindled the debate about the significance for France of the construction of the European house.

(then on the brink of concluding a common government program) — since one of their principal points of disagreement was over the construction of Europe.

Things would not be so tranquil at the beginning of the 1990s, given the novelty of such developments as the deepening of European integration; the progressive transfer of certain decisionmaking powers to common authorities, held to represent a relinquishing of "national" power; the efforts at fiscal probity in order to

in respect of the growing conflict in Yugoslavia, the "hour of Europe had arrived." Disillusionment set in quickly, as the hour turned into a long and uncomfortable one in which Europe showed itself incapable of halting the conflict. Was it even possible for it to do so at that time? Did anyone upbraid the US during the 1980s for not putting an end to the civil wars in Central America? In any event, many began to ask if France was not losing out on the European deal, if it had not abandoned national independence for the shadow of a Europe unable to behave like a power, and if, contrary to Georges Bidault's formula, it was simply impossible to make Europe without unmaking France?

On the diplomatic level, Europe was said to have the double defect of paralyzing autonomous national action without permitting collective decisionmaking, the latter demerit stemming from differing historical perceptions of common interest. In effect, Europe is a congeries of 1) countries that are profoundly atlanticist, 2) countries that have long renounced any international ambitions, 3) neutral countries still mistrustful of even the whiff of power, 4) countries possessed of an extroverted vision of their own security needs, and 5) countries possessed of just the opposite!

Thus the three great European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom, and France), which could provide the impetus for the formation of a common foreign and security policy, have proved too diverse to act in concert. Britain, a nuclear power with world interests and ambitions, is hampered by a specific link with the US, known as the "special relationship." It believes that its influence stems more from NATO than from EU membership, and thus insists that the development of the latter not be to the detriment of the former. If France regards Europe as its "force multiplier," then Britain sees NATO in the same way.

For its part, Germany remains moulded by the Second World War, as evidenced both by the modesty of its global strategic presence and by its dependence on the US. It is afraid of itself, and of the negative consequences of an overly strong assertion of its national interests. It fears a renationalization of its defence policy, and that of others. NATO, less necessary than it used to be for assuring Germany's security and defence, is more than ever needed to prevent the country from becoming "unhinged" once more. Just as the gambler who, fearful of the consequences of an irresistible passion, swears off going to the casino, so does Germany, thanks to NATO, deny itself national independence. However, this does not mean that it works for genuine European autonomy.

The other European countries, lacking the weight or the status of the three majors, see NATO as a way of counterbalancing both France and Germany, seen singly or together to exert too strong an influence at the heart of Europe. Their comfortable habit of depending on the US, their fear of the unknown (defined as anything other than such dependence), their preference for an external guardian, and their budgetary constraints all steer them in the same direction.

Since the French project of strategic autonomy for Europe is so difficult to implement, the European option becomes counterproductive for French power, or

announced that he had asked his economics minister to reduce to 5.6 percent the VAT on multimedia products and services. Alas, this measure, designed to stimulate the market for domestic computers, proved difficult to introduce — for

McDonnell-Douglas merger. France was also able to obtain certain concessions on the Common Agricultural Policy and on culture during the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations — by making an appeal to European solidarity.

During the international conference on climate held in early December 1997 at Kyoto, European strength revealed itself in a most remarkable way. The objective was to limit and reduce gases harmful to the ozone layer, which result in the warming of the planet. Since the dawn of the industrial age the temperature of the earth has risen by .5ºC and the level of the oceans by between 10 and 25 cm; it is possible that over the course of a century temperatures may rise at a rate ten to twenty times that of the previous 10,000 years. The absolute increase could be of between 1° and 3.5° or even as much as 5ºC by the year 2100, which could unleash one of the greatest climatic changes of all time.

At the beginning of the conference, positions varied. The OPEC countries denied the gravity of the situation. The US wanted to stabilize levels of emissions in 2010 at 1990 levels, and to introduce a system of exchanges similar to "negotiable licences," with pollution becoming as freely traded as wheat on the Chicago exchange or metals on the London exchange. For its part, the EU, supported by Latin America (except Argentina) and the Third World, proposed reducing emissions by 15 percent. The Europeans refused the system of exchanges except if those could be used to reduce not just stabilize emissions; they proposed the initial exemption of the Third World countries so as not to penalize their development.

During the opening session of 1 December 1997, the US announced that it would not approve an accord that was ineffective and contrary to its interests. By the end of the summit, a compromise had nevertheless been reached. It called for an average 5.2 percent reduction in toxic emissions in the industrialized countries, before the period 2008-2012. The fifteen EU countries undertook to lower their emissions by 8 percent, on a scale of their choosing; Canada and Japan agreed to a 6 percent reduction. In the face of international pressure as well as pressure from domestic opinion, the US accepted the principle of a 7 percent lowering and gave up both the system of exchanges and the binding of Third World countries.

The EU had been successful; it did not bow to the Americans. The solidarity of its members paid off. In the end, the US had to accept seven additional constraints, while the EU had seven fewer than at the outset. France was able to rediscover a leadership role in the negotiations and to play a large part in maintaining a firm European position against the Americans. It is clear that this outcome would have been impossible without the backdrop of European strength. The Kyoto conference thus stands out as an excellent illustration of the right way for France to use Europe as a force multiplier: pick a legitimate position to defend; garner support from the other Europeans; and show -1.UTc 0.redi US a8t thedy Chica(rnerr1(d)7.9(r)10.0.1(e

percent support a common currency; 73 percent envisage a strengthening of the political powers of the EU; 54 percent think the continued construction of the European house will have positive effects on economic growth; and 62 percent are of the opinion that with the EU, France will be better protected against the downside risks of globalization.

As for life-style issues, which touch on the specificity of a culture, the designers of this poll, Gérard Grunberg and Pascal Perrineau, emphasize that "contrary to the discourse on the loss of cultural identity, the French do not appear to fear assimilation into the European whole. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents even hope for positive effects in this area, leading to a relativization of the range of identity discourses."[6] They conclude that the country's pro-European parties have been too timid, since the French are convinced not only that building Europe is inevitable, but that it is also beneficial.

It is understandable that political groupings whose agendas do not include the promotion of French power (e.g., the Communists or the ecologists) do not declare themselves in favour of Europe. What is more curious are those who, in the same breath, spout an anti-European rhetoric yet constantly appeal to the grandeur of France. This is a complete contradiction. An isolated France could not create an attractive alternative to American positions. What, it might be asked,

Nevertheless, he saw the imperial impetus being provided by humanitarian motives, which legitimized the whole endeavour: colonialization, he argued, furthered the struggle, begun more than a century earlier, between the spirit of the Enlightenment and that of injustice, between slavery and submission to the forces of darkness. It was a crusade for civilization. (Speech by Jules Ferry to the Chamber of Deputies, 28 July 1885.)

The anticolonialists, for their part, believed that France was dissipating, that it was wasting scarce resources on useless expeditions, and that because of its declining birth rate, it did not have a surplus population sufficient to sustain true emigration. In their eyes, the country was too unstable and politically divided to permit itself the luxury of global adventurism. Colonization drastically drained the budget, deprived the country of troops needed in Europe, isolated France diplomatically through the competition with London, and diverted French public opinion from what should have been its sole preoccupation — the reconquest of Alsace-Lorraine. Paul Déroulède put it bitterly: "I have lost two sisters, and you offer me twenty servants."

The Fachoda episode was thus seen as proof of the weakening of French power: France had extended itself too far afield, and lacked the means of defending its empire. Colonialism had also blinded France's leaders to the rise of a new threat right next door. Revision of its military policy was unavoidable: could France really expect to have both an army as strong as Germany's and a navy as strong as Britain's? The Socialists reiterated their objection in principle to colonization, which "brings no happiness to the working class," and one party on the right considered it absolutely pointless, since France (unlike England) had a "balanced" economy, and thus did not need to search for external markets in which it might dispose of its industrial surplus.

Decolonization would similarly unleash an anguished debate among the country's political class. Echoes of the preceding century's polemics over colonization reappeared in different form, moral and power issues were once again confused, and bitterly opposing coalitions were forged.

Some defended decolonization in the name of the right of a people to determine its own future; others did so in the name of French interests. Raymond Aron and Raymond Cartier both belonged to the second group, though for different reasons. Denouncing the costs involved in maintaining French tutelage, Aron pointed to the example of the Netherlands, which had prospered *after* the independence of Indonesia, something that at first had not been considered likely. Aron further understood that it was impossible to preserve a colonial link against the wishes of the colonialized, and that France would have to face up to this fact: "France needs reality therapy. It can no longer act the part of a great power, and the Algerian drama merely marks French passage from a world to a continental power."

The nationalists, on the contrary, maintained that the government did not have the right to dispose of this colonial heritage. As Gaston Monnerville put it in

the same time, France, a member of the EU, the UN, or a series of other international organizations.

But Europe is also a trampoline. France is one of the rare countries today that want to make Europe a power, rather than a simple economic space. Just as political Europe was not built in a day, so strategic Europe will not be built in the twinkling of an eye. Over time, however, Europe can become *the* major power in a multipolar world. France may not be the boss of this Europe, but it will be one of the most influential countries at its heart. Europe functions, more than any other multilateral entity, as a "mega-multiplier" of French power.

Notes

1. Marie-France Garaud, "Avertissement," in *De l'Europe en général et de la France en particulier*, ed. Marie-France Garaud and Philippe Séguin (Paris: Belfond-Le Pré aux Clercs, 1992).
2. *Discours pour la France: Assemblée nationale, 6 mai 1992* (Paris: Grasset, 1992).
3. Paul Thibaud, "De l'Europe imaginaire à la France réelle", *Le Monde*, 27 December 1996.
4. *Le Monde*, 31 December 1997.
5. *Le Point*, 15 March 1997.
6. Cevipof-Sofre poll, conducted 26-31 May 1997, *Libération*, 4 June 1997.
7. Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1972).

7. *Toward a Multipolar World?*

France likes to think of itself as the birthplace of individual and collective freedoms. It derives a special aura from being the home of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Ignorant of the earlier British and American contributions in this regard, France considers itself to be the one and only cradle of these universal values, entitling it to great and eternal world prestige. It is true that this was for a long time an important element of France's influence, a major factor accounting for the attraction of its model, and the current of sympathy it excited abroad. This influence was all the stronger in that France's national interest was held to *be* the interest of all peoples; the promotion of public freedoms was to everyone's benefit.

A number of factors combined to gnaw away at this image. First of these is that

principle that corresponds to the aspirations of the majority of the world's people. If all France wants to send aloft is its own balloon, it cannot be too long before it pops and drags the national image down with it...

Aid to developing countries is one area in which France retains legitimacy, combining both a promising discourse and a coherent practice. The theme of North-South relations has been stressed equally by General de Gaulle, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, François Mitterrand, and Jacques Chirac.

France's activity in favour of development draws upon a widely shared domes-

assumption, no doubt related to the image of the Western Europeans as being content to batten forever on their strategic dependence upon Washington — a dependence of which the Eastern Europeans can only dream. However, many countries outside Europe do share France's desire for multipolarity, which is synonymous in their eyes with a democratization of the international community. France should turn to them for support.

France might, for example, establish a strategic partnership with South Africa, without being obsessed with the linguistic reality of that part of Africa, where France never did establish a colonial presence. France, after all, was one of the strongest opponents of apartheid. During his term as prime minister, Laurent Fabius made combating the racist regime in Pretoria a major plank in his foreign policy, as well as providing support to those fighting the regime in South Africa itself. Because of this policy, France can draw upon a reservoir of warm feelings in the most economically and strategically important country of Africa.

For a variety of reasons — relating to its recent history, the quality of its élites, the strength of its economy and military, and its ability to influence international outcomes — South Africa is one of those rare African states that possess a global vision. After a lengthy meeting with President Clinton during the latter's visit to South Africa in March 1998, President Nelson Mandela took advantage of the presence of the world media to defend his country's diplomatic relations with countries regularly diabolized by Washington. Cuba, Iran, and Libya had stood firmly against apartheid, and South Africa would repay that support. Mandela also expressed reservations about Washington's diplomatic offensive on the African continent.

Reconfiguring France's African policy, however, needs to be part of a larger diplomatic picture. Traditionally, French policy toward the continent reflected the pursuit of such classical ends as territory, status, and clients within a "sphere of influence." During the Cold War, the French sphere represented an oasis of peace in an otherwise turbulent continent, and this allowed France to justify the special links it had with its clients, whose means of governance France rarely questioned. Today, the poles of power in Africa have shifted, and include Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea (despite their differences), Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa. None of these states is aligned with a former colonial power. By contrast, France's traditional sphere of influence now smacks of being one of the continent's chief zones of turbulence, as a result of a series of succession crises.

Faced with this situation, France has two options, each of which reflects a different conception of power. It can try to tighten its hold over its own "sphere," and defend to the end the most indefensible of leaders, as it did for so long with Mobutu. In so doing, it risks losing everything, including its credibility in Africa. If by chance France were to succeed in stabilizing its sphere of influence, its gain would be slight, since its former colonies are among the least wealthy, most insecure, and most aid-dependent states in the heart of the continent.

France's other option is to loosen its ties with francophone Africa and implement a policy for the continent as a whole. This would allow it to have a presence in such emergent poles as South Africa, and to further stabilize the African balance of power. This policy would put the spotlight on France's universalistic vocation, in favour of economic development, rather than deplete scarce political and fiscal resources in a bid to shore up "loyal" clients.

France needs to give up both its Fashoda complex and its sphere of influence, and it should understand that nothing will be gained by the defence, beyond all rationality, of regimes that are politically, economically, and even (as in the case of Mobutu) physically doomed. Could anything have been more obtuse than to have done what France did with Mobutu back in 1996, and present him as the *guarantor* of stability in Zaire? A new Africa is being born, and France can have a place in it, if it acts wisely.

In Latin America, France is the beneficiary of an exceptional fund of good feeling. The absence of historical disputes, the adoption of French models to lib-

rather than treating it as a bloc), it has, since 1995, painted an enticing picture to the Latin American countries of an enlarged NAFTA in the near future. While Argentina seems to be interested, Brazil, following the model of France and Europe, prefers to play the enlargement (of Mercosur) card. It is to the interest of both Europe and Latin America alike to unite their forces against the US.

War. Even though Lebanon had traditionally been a sphere of French interest — viz., the protection of minorities, and the creation of the Lebanese state — France never really succeeded in protecting it. During a visit to Israel, Mitterrand gave his support to what he believed to be a military penetration of only 20 kilometres inside Lebanon, but which turned out to be the "Peace in Galilee" operation. The measure of power, it is sometimes said, is to be taken in one's attachment to numerous outdated things. In this regard, it is perhaps noteworthy that Britain has tended to concentrate its interest in the Islamic majorities of the Middle East, while France has favoured the minorities. In Lebanon, for example, France has ignored the Shi'ites, despite the fact that they are important not only in that country, but in all of the Middle East.

Moreover, their difficulty in obtaining visas cuts France off from a large part of the élites of the region, who are increasingly being educated in the American universities in Beirut and in Cairo, notwithstanding the excellent French secondary schools in many of the countries of the region. The prestigious French research centres in Cairo or in Istanbul would certainly benefit from studying contemporary matters rather than erudite topics, which, although fascinating, are perhaps of limited direct interest. It would, for instance, be more advisable to study contemporary Egyptian foreign policy than the sewerage system of 19th century Alexandria.

Although there are potential partners for French power in Asia, this would require a reconsideration of the priorities and preconditions of French policy toward that area. There is, first of all, India, whose apparent chaos should not be allowed to mask its undeniable progress: it had a growth rate of 6 percent in 1997. Its official growth rate has not been much lower than that of China (though both must be read with caution). India also desires the emergence of a multipolar world, and is very unhappy with its isolation, caught as it is between China, Pakistan, and, from a strategic standpoint, the US. India's nuclear tests were not aimed at getting it into the nuclear club — it was already there — but rather at breaking down the doors of the five great powers' club.

The Europe-Japan leg of the US/Europe/Japan triangle remains atrophied. Strategic exchanges and contacts between the US and Europe, on the one hand, and

interests at a time when Japan is beginning to ponder the redefinition of its strategic interests. During the period of strengthening of Euro-Japanese relations, Europeans must bear in mind not only Asia's economic weight but also its strategic and political importance.

France's distinctive position as both a member of the UN Security Council and a prime mover of the EU gives Paris a degree of influence with Japan that no other European country can match. This dual "belonging" is what so interests Japan: the European aspect of French power, and the UN aspect, important to Japan because of its hopes of reshaping the balance of the Security Council. The Japanese entertain expectations of France predicated on the assumption that France remains a great power.

Beijing regularly makes use of a certain ultra-Gaullist "great power conspiracy," as well as a shared discourse on national independence, the latter inclining it verbally to stake out a defence of multipolarity. This discourse is based, for both the French and the Chinese, on the memory of de Gaulle's historical 1964 gesture in recognizing the People's Republic of China.

Nevertheless, Chinese testimonials to French power in the context of the Paris/Beijing/Washington triangle poorly mask the absolute priority that China accords to the Sino-American relationship which, for reasons of prestige, dominates Chinese foreign policy. Beijing constantly stresses the links that join the world's "greatest" developed power with its "greatest" developing power. In this context, both France and Europe are simply pawns used by China in its relations with America. Behind the screen of a periodic resort to the discourse on French power, China does not actually see France as a great power — even though France's ambitions in that regard do give China an increased margin of maneuver.

The fact that France deferred to Beijing on the question of arms sales to Taiwan, and that France is almost craven before Chinese authorities with whom it raises such disagreeable matters as the question of human rights in China, does not strengthen France's prestige in that country — on the contrary. The Chinese respect force and are contemptuous of weakness.

The shaping of a multipolar world, in which France can play an important role only by relying on Europe, thus represents not only the most legitimate cause that France can champion on the world stage today, but also the one cause that is most in harmony with French interests. It is the cause that allows France best to reconcile global balance and national interest.

Note

1. *Time*, special issue on France, December 1995.

8. *The Thirst for Power: Consume in Moderation*

The pursuit of power does not always result in its attainment. On the contrary, just as too many taxes are deadly for a tax system, so the quest for power often leads to weakness or exhaustion. It was the Soviet Union's desire for absolute security and the prevention of another humiliating invasion of its territory that led it to expand its military apparatus far beyond what its economic capacities could bear, thereby causing its collapse. In France, those who have been most vociferous in their support of the expansion of French power and who have presented this as the sole motivation of their actions have actually done the country a disservice.

Italy, which under Mussolini wanted to become a great European power, lay in ruins after the war. Germany and Japan paid dearly for their unbridled pursuit of power. As a result, the word "power" is today a taboo in those two latter countries, where strategic modesty characterizes foreign policy.

At the end of the reign of a Louis XIV obsessed by power, the "radiance" of the Sun King's realm was in reality far from brilliant. Napoleon's quest for the complete domination of Europe not only caused the destruction of the Empire, the death on the battlefield of 1,800,000 Frenchmen, the occupation (twice) of French territory, and the accession of a foreign-imposed king; it was also a national catastrophe. The Revolution and the Empire brought about the destruction of France's great maritime commerce, the basis of its 18th-century growth.

The First World War, far from being "fresh and joyful," resulted in the death of 10 percent of the 1913 male population of France and Germany; Great Britain's loss was "limited" to 5.5 percent, and that of the US to a mere 0.4 percent. Apart

against Germany to get an idea of the extent of the country's suffering. The distinction between those countries that served as battlefields and those that were not (or only lightly) affected, was, in fact, much more significant than that separating the victors from the vanquished.

France must avoid two pitfalls in its conjuring with "power." On the one hand, it would be senseless to abandon all ambition to power and retire to the lesser ranks, playing a role similar to that of the Netherlands — albeit with greater topographical diversity and more cheeses. It would not only be contrary to France's history and its interests, but it would also work against the general interest, which needs France to play the part of civilized protester and democratic opponent of the established order.

On the other hand, to get one's hackles up, to talk interminably about France's destiny, mission, grandeur, and to call for more power would only irritate the rest of the world and thereby weaken France. Just as with the consumption of fine wines, France's quest for power must be taken in moderation. Abstinence would be very depressing and drunkenness extremely dangerous.

When the minister of defence justified the renewal of nuclear testing in 1995 on the grounds that France needed to remain a great power, he hardly furthered the stated objective. Instead, he entrenched the very damaging — and incorrect — notion that France needed nuclear arms only to maintain its "rank," and not to further its national security. A large segment of international public opinion thinks that France's pride makes it lose its head, and this further increases the country's

Between 1714 and 1919, French was the primary language of diplomacy. The European élites, whether royal or intellectual, spoke French in both the 18th and the 19th centuries. Illustratively, Austria's ultimatum to Serbia following the assassination of the Archduke Franz-Ferdinand in Sarajevo, which touched off the First World War, was written in French.

The deterioration of the status of French as an international language occurred

cultural diversity, the French-speaking world is more acceptable to others, and is more well regarded.

President Jacques Chirac gave the most legitimate definition of the French-speaking world when on a trip to Hungary in 1997: “The vocation of the French-speaking world is to call upon all the other languages of the world to join together to ensure that cultural diversity, which results from linguistic diversity, is protected. Beyond French, beyond the French-speaking world, we must be the

political figure has reached a certain stature and wishes to go beyond being a specialist in a certain area and become a central political leader, he or she invariably feels the urge to demonstrate an interest in foreign affairs. It is a matter of being credible as a leader on the national scale. Foreign affairs and strategic problems do not gain votes, but they can lose them if the electors feel that the candidate does not measure up to an opponent on these issues. French citizens thus show their awareness that France's role as a great power makes it essential that these questions not be overlooked.

It is, however, another matter entirely to decide a question of foreign policy solely or principally on the basis of what is thought to be popular domestically. Henry Kissinger describes admirably in *Diplomacy* how Napoleon III went astray at the international level, by engaging in foreign expeditions he thought would please the public but that were detrimental to the French national interest.

For almost three decades immigration has been one of the most politically

French consulates, and procedures that respect others — these, too, are matters that affect France's global status.

In the area of the "hard" sciences, there exist impediments to international scientific cooperation that have prevented many foreign researchers and students from working in French laboratories. In May 1998, Védrine therefore instructed consulates on new procedures for granting visas to foreign scientists. His instructions underscored that France "means to encourage the arrival of foreign researchers and teacher-researchers, given the context of increased competition at the international level. It is of the utmost interest to our country that it not be deprived of these capabilities if it wishes to remain at the highest level in matters of scientific exchanges."

The May 1998 vote by deputies representing cities with a strong Armenian community, in favour of a law recognizing the genocide of Armenians, is another case in point. The deputies incurred the risk of adverse consequences for Franco-Turkish relations, at a time when Paris had established a fruitful partnership with Turkey and was using its influence to foster the development of pro-European political forces there. That the motives of these politicians were preeminently electoral is obvious, given that they were not similarly moved to recognize the genocide of the Gypsies — which recognition would have had little political pay-off for them.

There is a further risk involved, of making French foreign policy the prisoner of lobby groups of different communities within France. France cannot have a foreign policy that varies geographically in order to please the French of differing ethnic origins. This does not mean, of course, that France must, because of a partnership or the fact that contracts are under negotiation, accept any Turkish behaviour. However, in this particular instance, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the deputies were primarily motivated by a desire to please an important and very well-organized community in their constituency.

By the same token, it is counterproductive to evoke in any and all cases the prestige or the grandeur of France. When a politician, hoping to pander to the electorate, justifies a decision on these grounds, international public opinion gets turned against France for reasons that, although obvious, seem nevertheless to escape certain French leaders: the supreme goal of the other peoples of the planet cannot be the advancement of French interests, or the celebration of French grandeur.

National interest should determine French diplomacy, but it cannot be allowed to justify any activity beyond France's borders. Speeches on the hackneyed theme of the need to maintain French rank — a theme both complementary and contradictory to the myth of decline — so often appear ridiculous to even the moderately objective observer. Such speeches are intended to reinforce the image of a France steeped in itself, motivated primarily by the defence of its own interests. There is a striking gap in perception between the politicians most ready to pluck the nationalistic string — they claim to be convinced that the whole world is struck

dumb with admiration for, and overwhelmed with gratitude toward, France because of the universal brilliance of its values — and the conclusions that international public opinion derives from such bombast.

Hypernationalism is detrimental to the French national interest. The uncontrolled celebration of power weakens that interest. True ambition lies in realism.

Note

9. *Conclusion*

How could a soccer fan, reading the page proofs of the French edition of this book right on the heels of France's World Cup victory over Brazil, resist the temptation to add several concluding lines?

Long before this happy outcome, I was convinced that soccer had become an element of strategy.[1] It is undeniable that the French team's progress throughout its World Cup season produced shock waves that were felt not only in the sports world, but also beyond, into the political and social spheres. Could it be that the team had become a vehicle of international power for France, achieving in its own way the same things France gets from its permanent seat on the Security Council, its nuclear deterrent, or its status as the world's fourth-ranking exporter?

To be sure, even the most perfect World Cup season would hardly enable France to negotiate with the US as an equal, impose peace in the Middle East or the Balkans, or resolve the problem of North-South disparity. Nonetheless, the victories on the soccer field are sure to have a positive impact on France's global status. They will alter the image that we project of ourselves to the world.

Thus it was possible to read in the *New York Times*, even before the championship game: "This ungovernable country, never agreeing on anything, eternally divided, profoundly skeptical, has found itself united around a soccer team.... The team has become the positive symbol of a country renewing its acquaintance with growth after a long depression."

France's team exudes the aura of successful integration, of internal cohesion. It unified the whole society around it, regardless of social, ethnic, or partisan rifts. It proved that France could open up to and cross swords with the rest of the world, could win without aggression and, above all, without arrogance. The World Cup triumph showed that France need not fear globalization, that it can, on the contrary, take up the challenge, and that Europe has allowed for the strengthening of its enterprises as much as of its soccer players.

Apart from soccer, France does not dominate the world. This is true, yet not regrettable. Were France to dominate, it would have all the faults of a dominating

power: confusing its own interests with the general interest, getting irritated over the expression of desires different from its own, expressing incomprehension that other points of view might exist and be acceptable. These defects are neither French nor English, Soviet nor American — they are those of a power without equal. Such a power inevitably incites collective resistance to its hegemony. No dominant power has been able to preserve its dominance forever. The outcome will be the same for the US as it was for the others, even if the periods of transition, on a historical scale, may be longer this time.

France, for all that, is neither a nonpower nor a middle power. It is a "power" in the full sense of the term, and even though it cannot claim first rank, it is part of the group of states whose point of view counts on all international matters. France can only be collectively in the first rank by using the European multiplier. This should not be alarming for the other EU members, as the European decisionmaking process is made up of reciprocal concessions, of the taking into account of the interests of different countries — in short of a permanent dialogue on a relatively equal footing, where no one state can alone impose a decision.

Moreover, France's plan for a multipolar world arises within a framework where the general interest is incompatible neither with that of Europe nor of France.

To bewail French decline is not only intellectually spurious but also politically perilous. One gives credence to that which one wants to resist. To deny that the multilateral world exists and that France can do nothing without taking into account the international environment is as inexact as it is dangerous. True ambition today needs first to be nourished by a precise analysis of the prevailing relations of strength. This demonstrates not only the limits of the impossible, but also the field of the possible.

Just as remembering is not the abandonment of the future but the condition of its confrontation, so realism is not the abandonment of ambitions but the condition of their realization.

Note

1.

About the Author

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