Why Has the Franco-American Security Relationship Been so Semi—Hostile for so Long?

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Abstract

Many people assume that Franco-American relations since 1776 have been far more harmonious than those of the United States’ relationship with Great Britain. After all, France fought on the side of the new aspiring republic in the American War of Independence against a colonial power. Although still a country ruled by a king, France itself became a republic shortly after the American Declaration of Independence was ratified. But in fact, France and the United States (and the colonies that preceded them) have often had poor relations. In his book Sister Republics: Security Relations between America and France, David Haglund asks why security relations between France and the United States been so fractious since the beginning of the American republic, and even well before it. He debunks the generally accepted mythology and its attendant symbology of two sister republics. The French-built and donated Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor and the statue of General Lafayette on the Seine opposite the Quai d’Orsay in Paris are misleading. In truth any special relationship between France and the United States has been special on the whole in its lack of mutual liking, even respect. Haglund traces this difficult, even suboptimal, relationship over three centuries and shows how the weight of history still continues to upset Franco-American relations regularly.

Keywords: France; United States; strategic culture; Erbeindschaft (ancestral hatred); leadership; diaspora

In his book Sister Republics: Security Relations between America and France, David Haglund asks us to consider how the security relationship between France and the United States has evolved since the first establishment of colonists on the North American continent and, in particular, since the French and American revolutions of the eighteenth century.1 Haglund is a well-established commentator on French relations with the United States. Here, he tackles a series of extremely difficult questions about these relations using the lens of “strategic


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He asks if this could be a way of looking at the world, one that he himself admits it not without many critics, which gives us a distinct and new path to understanding the security relations of France and the United States over the last nearly 250 years. It is a brave and worthy attempt, even if difficult to operationalize, and he mostly succeeds. The book is a dense read that is worth the effort. I shall not try to cover all the topics he discusses in the same depth, but I will address what I feel I can address most adequately.

The book is also important in two ways, in my view. First is the ever-ongoing attempt that both Haglund and I hold dear, which is the need to try to bring together the linked but often unharmonious fields of political science and history. As a historian who has tried to bridge the trenches with political science, I am aware that different obsessions with method and approach (ontology, if you will) nearly always bring down attempts to bring the two disciplines together. Historians mostly ask where the proper evidence lies for all the speculation they see before them. Political scientists find it difficult to admit but, when pressed, will often say they find historical research just “too much.” All those archives! All that dust! No scientific approach possible! And of course, incommensurate methodologies. The answer as demonstrated here is to take all writings in political science as examples of the history of ideas, as a genealogy. The French like this—just look at why Michel Foucault’s work was such a breakthrough. Plough through the often pompous language and what he gave us was a kind of common sense. My brighter students on both sides of the English Channel have often found common cause with him. The main problem has been linguistic. Foucault has not been well served (with honorable exceptions) by translation. I am not sure that Haglund was consciously driven by such metatheory, but such is what he has produced and his book is all the better for it.

Second, it is evident that some phenomena in international relations are difficult to decode without a cultural lens. We have only to look at the mutual incomprehension of much of the Russian elite and population on one hand and that of most of Western opinion (at all levels) on the other to realize that both strategy and culture, however defined, play a significant role in the war over Ukraine. Historians Timothy Snyder and Richard Evans, among others, disagree as to whether Russia is or is not a genocidal state by nature. But they are arguing about culture and its interplay with strategy, nonetheless. The problem is, and it is one explored in depth by Haglund, is how we can put together and define strategic culture, a binary concept that Haglund agrees slips through the fingers in that it is like another parallel concept he explores, “national character, the underpinnings of state,” one much favored after the Second World War to explain how a civilized state like Germany could have built concentration camps, then annihilated millions of European Jews (including many Germans), gay people, and gypsies, not to mention vast numbers of Poles, resistance fighters, and anyone else deemed unworthy of life.

Whether we agree or disagree with Haglund’s use of the term, it is surely worth thinking about it and not just assuming an analytically liberal mind set where foreign policy is dictated by a respect for the rights and existence of everyone equally.

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2 Haglund, Sister Republics, 35–70.
4 Haglund, Sister Republics, 37 and elsewhere in the book.
The West has rarely gone to the aid of any non-European people faced with a genocidal dictator, a painful fact that has been pointed out by many people in Africa. Indeed, on occasion they accuse us of being that genocidal dictator. The current wave of coups d’états in former French colonies since 2020 (Niger and Gabon being the most recent examples) have had a distinctly anti-French flavor. More worrying for the cause of Western liberal democracy has been that the coups’ supporters have often been waving Russian flags. French thinkers about social justice, like Foucault, touch on this problem in our own Western societies and help us understand what happens in others. The West has been just as cruel to its own populations as has Russia in its own neighborhood.

So it seems to me particularly interesting to use strategic culture to examine the relationship between France and the United States, both of which have hardly got clean hands in their dealings with places where they have not been made to feel welcome. France, in particular, has historically (if not, I think, contemporaneously, despite the African coups) had many stains on its national character, and they continue to sour relations between la Métropole and Algeria, indeed, the Maghreb in general. French politics and the “national psyche” (an even braver category?) still suffers enormously from its defeat in 1940; hence, the centrality of Charles de Gaulle, a devout Catholic nationalist (Gaul by name and by nature), still seen by most of the French as the Messiah who had saved them from total humiliation and restored their pride and dignity. In reply to chapter 6, “Do Leaders Matter?” of this book, they certainly do. Even Raymond Aron, in my estimation the greatest liberal thinker that France has produced since the Second World War, gave de Gaulle his due place in the pantheon. And he understood that standing up to the United States was part of what de Gaulle had been forced to do best, even though Aron himself can be counted among the best French friends the United States ever had. The couple that is France and the United States has driven the development of the West by virtue of what Haglund calls “suboptimality” every bit as much as has the other special relationship with Britain. As I read through the chapters it became apparent, not for the first time, that the English-speaking states of the Atlantic triangle have been drivers of the creation of an unhappy but essential and perennial debate about what we now call the “West.”

Haglund’s opening pages are a good summary of this prickly relationship. French diplomats have been constantly bitter and humiliated about the disrespect they see coming from both London and Washington, DC. They were often right: the Anglo-Saxons have often worked behind the scenes to undermine French positions on just about everything. This has been increasingly so after 1919, when the Anglo-Saxons created the beginnings of a think-tank universe, ironically in the very corridors of the Paris Peace Conference. The Council on Foreign Relations and Chatham House were at the heart of that universe, as they still arguably are. The French have had no real parallel means of influencing Anglo-American foreign policy debate. In the interwar period, the respectively opposed stances by the Americans, British, and French toward world order arguably left the way open for the English-speaking states to drive the development of the West as Haglund and I have noted.

I do not think Haglund should exclude Canada from this analysis, a country where he teaches and was born. Adolf Berle, a key official in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration in 1940, could not stand Lord Lothian for what might well be called cultural reasons, but got along very well with the Canadians who interpreted Lothian for him. A lot more might be made about Canada’s mediating effect on France and the Anglo-Saxons.
clear for the rise of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Nazi Germany, and many other horrors. De Gaulle’s difficult relationship with Churchill and Roosevelt is a picture-perfect example of the psychological drama that was Franco-American relations during the Second World War.

After that war, the United States undermined French confidence in Vietnam, and not just the supercilious John Foster Dulles, who believed that “[t]he American people, far more than the people of either Britain or France, are a religious people who like to feel that their international policies have a moral quality.” Constantine Brown, the Evening Star correspondent, described France in 1954, the year of the disaster at Dien Bien Phu, as “an overripe [mûrissante] prima donna, who has lost the finest qualities of her voice, but retained a semblance of temperament and prestige, and receives from her public respectful but unenthusiastic applause.” The cruelty of this jibe is shown by the awful fact that one entire graduating-year group of St. Cyr, the French equivalent of Sandhurst or even West Point, had been wiped out in Indo–China. The French were also upset about what they saw as American influence in North Africa in the 1950s, “real interference in North Africa [véritable ingérence dans les affaires de l’Afrique du Nord] … to the point of it being damaging to French interests [néfaste aux intérêts français].” This was mainly because, at that time, the United States was seen by the locals as a liberating force. The Suez Crisis was seen as a vile American plot in Downing Street and the Elysée palace, not in Cairo. Maybe the mystery there is that Washington, DC, managed to throw away that advantage in fairly short order, much as they did in Baghdad in 2003. Strategy and culture were self-evidently factors in all these cases and for both France and the United States.

As anyone who has studied the relations between the United States and France will know, we can be constantly surprised by how societal, intellectual, and certainly governmental differences can appear between these “sister Republics.” In mining language, we often see sink holes appearing that often correspond with long-forgotten mine workings but immediately lead to statements such as “well, are you surprised?” What Haglund does in this book is to dig a lot deeper than most analysts who write off the relationship as inevitably stormy. He questions why these relations are so difficult and how they have resonated historically and continue to do so. I sometimes felt while reading his subtle and intriguing thoughts that he was trying to square a circle that might best be just described as a stormy marriage, or as I prefer it, a ménage à trois with the two Anglo-Saxon states, Britain and the United States alternately flirting and schmoozing with France as they have found it in their interests to do so. As Haglund is nice enough to say in a footnote, I am one of the few scholars to find this dynamic compelling. In the book, he stresses the importance of the idea of special relationships and

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9 Some of the above quotes were gathered in Williams, France, Britain and the United States in the 20th Century, especially chapter 4.
contrasts that of the Anglo-American stereotype and the suboptimal version that is the Franco-American.

In so doing, he is taking on a number of big dragons. On a theoretical level, he has to climb over the heights of a number of disciplinary silos that he wants to bring to more mutual understanding. The historians are, indeed, often criticized for being so focused upon individual trees as to be incapable of comprehending the meaning of a forest. There have been moves within both political science and history to bridge that gap, or rather to rebridge it after far too long a period when many within political science dismissed history as journalism, incapable of rational analysis, even verbiage. The debates between two very clever intellectuals, French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and American political scientist David Singer, that I observed first hand during the years of my doctoral studies in Geneva (the late 1970s and early 1980s) were simultaneously stimulating and deeply depressing and still mark the debates that separate Anglo-Saxon political science and history from that of the European continent. Constructivism, Haglund suggests, has been one such bridge. All of us will have sat through discussions in which the importance of historical study is nodded at. The normative turn in international elations that preceded constructivism did much to help because it re-emphasized political theory and gave space, in Britain at least, for ideas to re-emerge. Equally, historical sociology (eg, the works of Michael Mann) liberated both political scientists and historians to play with ideas again. But, optimist as I am, the problem with this is that such deep trenches were dug in the 1970s and since, that I cannot see the chances of a real ceasefire or peace treaty ever being signed.

Haglund has also taken on a powerful populist dragon. How culture can be a useful tool for understanding security issues has always been a fraught question. I was very struck by a conversation I had with one of my neighbors in the Ardèche region of France in the early spring 2022. When I remarked how awful the invasion of Ukraine was, he simply replied, “C’est la faute aux Américains—ils l’avaient voulu.” Roughly translated, “the Americans put the Ukrainians up to it.” This was said in a region of France known for its independence from Paris, but it is a deeply entrenched position among a large part of the French population, and among ordinary people and intellectuals alike, accentuated since the stupidities of US foreign policy under George W. Bush.

The historical roots are certainly there to see and admirably traced for us in this book. Listening to my French neighbor, the feelings of de Gaulle in 1958 and many other examples tripped easily into my mind, as in his conviction that France needed a nuclear deterrent—*force de frappe*—so the Americans could not again use French soil to fight their battles as they had in 1917–19 and 1940–45. When talking to the then-young Henry Kissinger on a mission in February 1962 in an attempt to understand, precisely, de Gaulle’s strategic culture, diplomat François de Tricornet de Rose, the main specialist in the *Quai* for atomic affairs told him, “[T]he United States had to realise that France was not a little country to be pushed around … Franco-American relations were at an all-time low. He would not say they were as low as it was possible for them to get, had not experience taught him that the depths of folly were unplumbable.”

In 1963, and only three days after Kennedy’s assassination, President Johnson’s ambassador to France,

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Charles Bohlen, reported that although Kennedy’s passing was regretted, “[d]e Gaulle reiterated his well-known thesis that France cannot depend for protection on a United States which had entered the First and Second World Wars at a relatively late date.” If the Russians were to attack, said de Gaulle, “Europe would be overwhelmed. Europe must therefore look to herself.”

But, as Reid Davis claims Aron believed, this independence was more apparent than real; the force de frappe was minuscule in comparison to the arsenals of the United States, the USSR, and Britain, at the time the only other nuclear powers.

None of the urgings of Eisenhower, then Kennedy, and Johnson would persuade de Gaulle that the American nuclear umbrella would protect France from all comers. Haglund brings out this anti-Americanism very well. To be sure, the British have their own form of anti-Americanism, which, in the security and diplomatic domains, often comes over as class snobbery but also as a superiority of knowledge based on longevity and a Yoda-like grasp of the true meaning of life: When you have had an empire as long as we had, you will understand Haglund is right to often conflate the British and Americans as Anglo-Saxons, an expression used on many occasions by the French. He is also right to see the origins of that in the wars that preceded 1776.

One of the most convincing, and probably original, parts of the book is where he examines the question of the importance of considering ethnicity in Franco-American relations, which is in chapter 3 on historical context. This is another difficult and controversial concept for many analysts of the last hundred years. I had to read the chapter several times to clear my mind of the horrors with which I associate the term ethnicity. But of course, the horrors were there in even my reading of the subject matter of this book but buried in a different silo of my own memories of childhood and adulthood. The essential part of the chapter is a record of French encounters with what were then colonial British forces with their French equivalents from the 1600s to about the 1750s. These were wars as bad as anything seen in the Balkans in the twentieth century, with ethnic cleansing pursued on a grand and horrific scale. The success of the film “The Last of the Mohicans” and the book on which it was based, by James Fenimore Cooper, which I lapped up as a child, are testament to the Erbefeindschaft (“traditional or hereditary enmity”) thesis elaborated here, one which has, on occasion, reemerged in recent times, for example under the strain of poor Franco-American relations over the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The 1826 novel was about the campaign of 1757 during the Seven Years War (also called the French and Indian War), which has been described as the moment when Britain became the great power that it was to remain until 1914 (or later). This was notwithstanding the American War of Independence, hailed as a victory for all concerned by none other than British politician Edmund Burke, so more akin to a misunderstanding compared with the real battles against France and between tribes of indigenous native Americans that preceded it, in that case, the wars of 1675–76, “the bloodiest in American history, not excluding even the Civil War.”

11 Bohlen—Secretary of State (Rusk), 25 November 1963, Box 169, NSF Country Files, Johnson Library.
13 Haglund, Sister Republics, Chapter 3, especially 87–98.
14 Haglund, Sister Republics, Chapter 3, 77.
15 Haglund, 94.
To relativize the period, France ended up in the 1750s losing its most important and lucrative colonies in North America and elsewhere to Britain. Meanwhile, the native Americans, forgotten in the Great Power competition, were mostly wiped out in wars of extermination. To paraphrase Hitler: Who now remembers the Algonquian and the Iroquois? Britain ended up gaining a global empire. Many in London saw 1783 as a relief: the thirteen colonies were seen as a burden, less than the real value of a couple of West Indian slave and sugar islands. Certainly the Crown was able to indemnify most of those who had supported the King and the American loyalists, the alleged losers, who often went on to rebuild the British Empire in Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The French and the Americans chose, says Haglund, esp. 8–85, to attempt to forget what had happened, with myths of the War of Independence, and a “suboptimality” born of “relational realism”.

Chapter 4 extends the ethnicity discussion to an exploration of what Haglund calls the “Duroselle-Tardieu thesis,” a reference, of course, to the great French post-1945 historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and André Tardieu, the sometime premier of the Third Republic before 1939. Essentially this holds that “America’s demographic mix ... has redounded poorly for French interests in the past, and perhaps still does.” Certainly at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the French felt disadvantaged by the influence the United States exerted across the globe due to its diaspora relationships. I have no quarrel with Haglund’s analysis (or that of Duroselle and Tardieu) about the interwar period. Where I do disagree is to link it to the threat felt by the current French president about the import of dangerous ideas. This rather echoes my point made earlier about Franco-American disagreements about how we should study, even think about, politics. Haglund seems to emphasize his feeling that the thesis by Duroselle and Tardieu is one that has its current echoes in Macron’s dismissal of “certain social science theories” that he thinks risk politicizing the French debate about identity in dangerous ways and emphasizing “gender, race and post-colonialism.” This is echoed, to some extent, by some French theorists of international relations, though I could, in particular, point to the work of Bertrand Badie, who embraces very French sociological theorists like Emil Durkheim and his successors who believe that Durkheim “affirm[ed] the social nature and the social origin of all cultural phenomena.”

On the current debate highlighted by Macron, we can hardly blame the United States for Foucault and many other French social theorists who arguably changed the debate about, precisely, gender, race, and post-colonialism in the United States, not the other way round. But where I agree with both Duroselle and Tardieu on one hand and Haglund on the other is that there has been little meeting of minds on the questions of race and gender until recently between France and the United States. Macron is wrong is to entirely blame US social theorists for this, and many French people think “Me Too” and “Black lives matter” were way overdue, be they generated at home or imported from the United States. Moreover, France’s relationship with gender equality and its former colonies has been problematic for decades; these are not recent problems. France’s educational system has long

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17 Haglund, Sister Republics, 114.
18 Haglund, 115.
been ridiculously elitist, as Macron admitted and then did nothing to change. So this chapter was the one that I was most intrigued about, but potentially is the most important of the whole book for the future of both France and the United States, indeed, of the West.

After looking at ethnicity as the reason for the suboptimality of the Franco-American relationship, Haglund turns to the question of the importance of ideas in chapter 5. This is, of course, another area that raises as many dilemmas as it solves. Where do ideas come from and how do they get mediated into actions? In the two countries and cultures being contrasted, Haglund quotes Roger Cohen as saying, “no other countries make such claims for the universality of their virtue,” a line that I exemplified earlier in my Dulles quote. I can think of no scholar who would seriously disagree. Haglund suggests, and I agree, that the First World War was the moment when this really started to matter, when France (and Britain, of course) had to start thinking of themselves as no longer *primus inter pares*. That led, as Haglund notes, to the most significant period of anti-Americanism in France.20 (I will confine my comments on that period because it is the one I know best of all the examples used.)

My question would have to be, why was Britain not so affected as France after 1919? Partly it was due to my point about the existence of think tanks: better communication. Britain had also carried out a kind of preemptive strike, marrying off many destitute peers to rich American heiresses, the stuff of American novelists like Henry James and Edith Wharton. No feelings of universal virtue can be said to taint the British psyche. American heiresses married more than a third of the House of Lords. The *Diaries* of the Chicago-born “Chips” Channon, that have been such a literary sensation in Britain, have helped that impression. Channon’s many indiscretions have given us a new window into not only Anglo-American relations before and after 1939 but also on Anglo-Saxon views on the French. He wrote extensively in his *Diaries* about the divide in British politics between those British parliamentarians who supported the “virile” Germans and those who supported the “effeminate” French.21 Channon was an appalling snob, a social climber, and an acute observer of British politics and society. This is what makes his judgements so amusing and recognizable. But here is one answer to the question asked earlier: in effect, Britain and the United States, who certainly had their own differences, ganged up on France and presented her as effeminate.

Simultaneously France felt diminished, humiliated, and not in the least pragmatic, with an obsession about its reduced population (a source of huge angst) and the dreadful losses in the trenches, hurrying through the 1920s and 30s to the disaster of 1940, getting progressively more embittered. Both historian Marc Bloch and Pétain agreed that this was because French school teachers had taught far too little about the martial past of France and stressed such organizations as the League of Nations, also unpopular in much of Britain and the United States. In terms of ideas, there was also a huge reaction against the League on the French right. Duroselle’s most read book on the period of the 1930s was entitled *La décadence.*22

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To explain this, Haglund introduces some very interesting sociological and psychological explanations that rarely get mentioned in such contexts, and I found that a refreshing opening up of the usual debate about power in international relations. I admit to sharing a great admiration for both psychologist R.D. Laing and sociologist Anthony Giddens. They might also have been used to elucidate some of the British comments cited earlier in this article. This is the kind of reflection I find intriguing in this book, again crossing the silo barriers. Jean-François Revel and Philippe Roger used similar argumentation to the United States despite its actions in Iraq, Revel being an early convert to American liberalism when most of his intellectual compatriots were Marxists. They both come from the same stable as Aron, who made many enemies on the left for pointing out what is now taken, outside France, as evidence of how awful the totalitarian states were in the 1940s. The ideas of the majority of French intellectuals in the period 1940–80 about the USSR have now been thoroughly debunked by Anglo-Saxon intellectuals like the late, great Tony Judt, but they often reemerge over events like the invasion of Ukraine. Should we conclude, therefore, that France’s thinkers were mostly tainted by their collective sense of humiliation and loss of power? I personally think so. And I entirely agree with Walter Russell Mead’s statement that “anti-Americanism is not confined to France, but it is there that it has shown its ‘most sophisticated intellectual expression.’”

Last, but never least, a few comments on chapter 6, on leadership. Haglund knows me to be an arch-Gaullist, as is probably clear from what I have said so far. I have never met a French person who is ignorant about de Gaulle, which is not to say that just as many French people as Americans suffer from historical amnesia. I remember once having to explain to a large number of French visitors to the tunnels that start under Arras’s Hôtel de Ville (in preparation for a British Empire offensive to take the heat off the coming disastrous attack on the Chemin des Dames in 1917) that, yes indeed, there had been Scottish and Canadian troops in France during 1914–18. A friend of Robert Frost, British poet Edward Thomas, was killed while lighting a cigarette in a trench during that battle.

However, de Gaulle is a standout leader in ways that Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), Wilson, and all the others that Robert Jervis warns us about taking too seriously. De Gaulle had no structure to rely on, no back up to count on, indeed, no obvious reason to exist. And yet he did. That he knew he was guided by some mysterious destiny seems strange to us. But it does not in the small village of Colombey-Les-Deux-Eglises, where stands a huge cross of Lorraine, and there is a cult that overshadows that of Churchill, or FDR, or even that of Joan of Arc. The Republican presidential nominee of 1940, Wendell Willkie, was overheard by Free French officials in Washington, DC, in late 1942 saying de Gaulle was “quelque chose entre un politicien et un mystique [something between a politician and a mystique].”

23 I confess to knowing little about Jennifer Mitzen’s work (162–63), which I have learned helps bring in these thinkers to International Relations (though Giddens has been used by writers like Vivienne Jabri for one).


25 Haglund, Sister Republics, 172

mystic],” and he was.27 But there has been such denigration of France’s military prowess (many more French were killed in the First World War than British Empire and US troops combined) that de Gaulle is still ridiculed in Britain and the United States. I have a British sense of humor, so I do not mind being accused of being the only British Gaullist (to muted boos), but the French can be deeply offended. I found Haglund’s pages on Roosevelt’s views on le grand Charles far more measured and insightful, and hopefully will be further discussed over a pastis at some point.28

In conclusion, a few comments. If I have an overarching concern, it might be that “methinks he doth protest too much.” This is not a criticism of Haglund’s sincere wish to explain the French, but rather my own belief that the French have been, and still are, vital counterpoints of the whole Anglo-Saxon liberal imperial project, even of the inevitably self-interested actions of both Britain and the United States in Ukraine. I like the way the French are usually realists in foreign policy, and that includes being unpredictable; that they can be rude, certainly condescending, snapping at the hand that feeds them. Churchill understood that only a great man could behave like de Gaulle. Kennedy was far more worried about his first meeting with de Gaulle in 1961, which actually turned out to be a breeze, than he was about his subsequent encounter with Khrushchev, which turned into a nightmare for the young president. De Gaulle and Churchill were gentlemen who accorded respect to their adversaries, as in the apocryphal story from the battle of Fontenoy, a French victory of 1745, when a French officer met his British adversary on the battlefield with: “Messieurs les Anglais: Tirez les premiers” [English gentlemen: Shoot first.]. When French politicians went to Washington, DC, with the intention to curry favor, they always, or mostly, were treated with contempt. Badly advised maybe, French Premier Guy Mollet was ridiculed for his attempts to seem a “regular guy” by boasting about his collection of dolls after Suez in 1957, while John Foster Dulles made sanctimonious statements about the upholding of the rule of law in international relations. Eisenhower, on the other hand, treated de Gaulle as a fellow general and they hunkered down in his rumpus room in the American’s Gettysburg farmhouse for a productive and friendly chat. De Gaulle is said to have loosened his tie for the occasion! Stalin held France and de Gaulle in contempt at Yalta in early 1945, refusing to invite them, until de Gaulle refused to sign the joint invitation to the upcoming San Francisco meeting. As de Gaulle said, “je n’ai d’estime que pour ceux que me résistent, mais je ne peux pas les supporter” [I only have respect for those who resist me, but I cannot stand them]. A good basis for an equal relationship.

De Gaulle is the central figure who must be considered, not just on the theme of leadership. He gave a narrative to a wide sweep of French history. He actually wrote his own script in his prewar writings. The experience he had as a prisoner of war after he was captured in the battle of Verdun in 1916 gave him the opportunity to write a book, Le discorde chez l’ennemi (1924), about Germany that persuaded him that his present and future foe was potentially amenable to change and to act as a companion in creating a world where Anglo-Saxons did not rule the roost. He wrote another book that his erstwhile commandant and future

foe Marshall Philippe Pétain had hoped would be “his” book on *le soldat français* but turned into *Le fil de l'épée* [*The Edge of the Sword*] (1932). This wide-ranging, though admirably compact work—he was called by one admirer “the last of the Romans”—showed the English to be bitter but worthy foes of France, and the Americans as *des arrivistes*, with nowhere near enough real history for de Gaulle to take them seriously. It is hardly surprising that with such a national hero, Franco-American relations were always going to be difficult. But without de Gaulle, it is perfectly possible that France would not have had the influence to create a new Europe with Germany, and without that the West would have been in deep trouble.

What would I improve in this book? First, I always have to moan about not letting the French tell their own story more. The Anglo-Saxon thinkers about the subject matter of this book dominate, indeed, in places I felt they should have been put in their place a bit more. There are, frankly, too many American theorists here. I am glad that Duroselle has had his say, but there are many political scientists and historians who do not. In addition, there are British historians that Duroselle would have liked to see here, the “English School” were very much to his liking. Many Americans liked and admired him as well, and he had no beef with what we now call classical realists. But he could not abide behavioralists. One reason was his own association with Verdun, where his father lost an arm; history was personal. In one of the most nervous encounters of my youth, I sat beside him at the Hotel Richemont in Geneva one evening in about 1981 at a meeting of *Relations Internationales*, a journal he had established and co-edited with my then-boss, Jacques Freymond. The other memory was him telling me about his love of *Série Noir* crime thrillers, still being published today. My only true lifetime intellectual triumph was telling him to read Raymond Chandler, though I am not sure he ever did. Laurence Badel, professor of international history at the Sorbonne, has directed a very good book on his influence, which might be a good source for more exploration of the themes Haglund highlights.

Second, I think Haglund has missed an important trick in his argument about incompatible strategic cultures where Russia is concerned. Russia is, of course, mentioned and the war in Ukraine is referenced quite a few times. But in terms of how Russia fits into French strategic culture, we could make a stronger case that France and the United States have very different views on the country. The first thing that de Gaulle did when he became president of the provisional government in the summer of 1944 was to go for his first major foreign policy visit not to London or Washington, DC, but to Moscow. There, he was treated with some contempt, Stalin ignoring him and getting Molotov to meet him at the airport and show him the sights. Then there was the abovementioned treatment of de Gaulle over Yalta. It is true that he backed Kennedy very strongly and warmly during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. In the all-important battle for hearts and minds in the newly entitled “Third World,” de Gaulle was perfectly happy to both alarm and pacify his American friends about his views on Russia. Kennedy was told by his advisor Bob “Blowtorch” Komer in the buildup to his visit to Paris in 1961 to have no doubt that de Gaulle was “deeply convinced of the gravity

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31 See, for example, Haglund, *Sister Republics*, 193–94.
of the threat the Soviet Union poses to Western civilization,” and he will agree with the idea that “a united West must deal firmly with the Soviets.” But significantly, Komer thought de Gaulle also thought that the Soviet Union was nothing more than a “temporary phenomenon,” for, in the long run, “Communist China will become the great menace—the yellow peril.” Eventually, de Gaulle was said to believe the Russians would realize that China was a greater threat than the West. Russia “will realise it is a European nation and will return to the family.” Hence the “door [must be left] open to the Soviets,” and he was preparing the ground by “propos[ing] joint Soviet-Western projects for aid to underdeveloped countries.”

Much as there are many members of the Russian elite who disagree profoundly with Putin’s actions on Ukraine, there were members of the Quai d’Orsay (and beyond) who disagreed with de Gaulle on Russia and Franco-American relations generally.

In France, Macron fits this Gaullist mode quite well. He was the most prominent Western leader to propose giving Putin an “exit ramp” in early 2022, not a popular idea among any of my British or American acquaintances or commentators I admire. France has been one of the least generous with its hardware for the Ukrainian government. I am told by several of my Parisian academic friends that the majority of their colleagues were pro-Russian at the start of the war, fully swallowing the line that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was to blame for the invasion. _Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose?_

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32 Robert Komer, “Program for President Kennedy’s Visit to Paris … Position Paper; Relations with the Soviet Bloc,” 22 May 1961, NSF Box 233, Kennedy Library. Komer got his nickname “Blowtorch” because of his later views on Vietnam. Unfootnoted quotes in this paragraph are from the Komer source.