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The Suspension of Military Cooperation Between France and NATO in 1966

Graduate thesis in Modern History

Supervisor: George Chabert

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Introduction

The year 1966 was a crucial year in the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (NATO). The 1960s was a tumultuous period for the NATO alliance, and this peaked with France withdrawing from the integrated military cooperation of NATO in 1966 (Martin, 2011, p. 232). After several years of diplomatic tension between France and NATO leadership, president Charles de Gaulle dispatched a short letter to his American colleague, president Lyndon B. Johnson, which stated that he was suspending integrated military cooperation (Boniface, 2021, and Gaulle, 1966b)¹. France had been withdrawing assets from the alliance for some time to better pursue an independent military policy, and the crisis became a public affair when "... French President Charles de Gaulle declared on 21 February 1966 that France intended to regain sovereignty over its national territory and armed forces and would therefore review its relations with the Atlantic Alliance" (Haftendorn, 1996, p. 1). This came in the form of a letter addressed to President Lyndon B. Johnson which was sent on the 7th of March 1966. Both the press conference and the letter to Johnson declaring the French withdrawal were organized only three months after de Gaulle had secured his re-election to the French Presidency. He was the first president to be directly elected by a public vote in the new Fifth Republic presidential election model that he himself introduced in 1958. The French withdrawal was finalized a year later on March 14th, 1967, when allied forces had left France (Vidal, 2008). The content of the letter de Gaulle sent Lyndon B. Johnson placed emphasis on the changing East-West relations between the foundation of NATO in 1949 and the current world situation in 1966. De Gaulle's assessment of the political situation was that French sovereignty, which from his point-of-view was very important, could only be achieved by suspending the integrated cooperation system of NATO (Gaulle, 1966b).

De Gaulle withdrew his officers from NATO headquarters and had allied personnel exit France. Subsequently NATO relocated its headquarters from France to Belgium (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, n.d.). France did remain in the NATO alliance, but not as a fully cooperating member (Boniface, 2021). The suspension of cooperation and subsequent allied relocation and withdrawal of military assets from France were among the more significant events of post-war Europe up to that point (Stein & Carreau, 1968). Haftendorn

¹ Charles de Gaulle is a frequent primary source in this text, with several different pieces of correspondence and transcripts provided.

(1996, p. 1) states that there was great concern, especially in the United States and West Germany, that the French withdrawal would be a serious threat to the continued existence of NATO.

The French withdrawal had been foreseen by some US diplomats' years before the French withdrawal from the integrated military system. They had noted the "deterioration of the political situation in France" since September 1956, especially the dissatisfaction the French felt over being denied independent military action by the United States (Dillon, 1956).

Haftendorn (1996, p. 2) states that "The Fifth French Republic had been distancing itself from the Alliance in stages, and there had been signals prior to the final step in the spring of 1966, though nothing had been said as to what measures were contemplated." Nevertheless, the French discontinuation of integrated military cooperation with NATO caused a major crisis in the alliance as France was regarded as a very important NATO member. The French withdrawal was the closest any nation had been to leaving the alliance at the time (Johnston, 2017). France did remain politically committed to NATO and would still participate in a NATO response if a war with the USSR occurred. This drastic change in diplomatic relations prompts the question for why de Gaulle decided to break off French conventional military cooperation with NATO in 1966 and is the research question for this text. The emphasis of the answer(s) to this question will be placed on several key political events during the period from the end of World War Two in 1945 to the year 1966. A brief overview of the impact of the Second World War on France and modern French political history will therefore also be provided.

French politics often deviate markedly from the dominating cultural and political presence of the United States in our current times. This was also true during the Cold War when, despite the dominant political actors being the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States, France attempted to create a third political bloc to assert its own political power and sovereignty. France is an old country with a rich cultural, political, and social history spanning centuries. It has been a prominent political, economic, and military power in Europe since the Middle Ages. French political history has been eventful, and the country has experienced major upheavals. It is also the country from which a vast array of ideas and philosophy originates, which has had a strong influence on the rest of the world, especially through the legacy of the French Revolution (Tignor et al., 2017, p. 562-565).

This strong legacy has apparently fostered a nation that is confident of itself and its own capabilities. Especially Charles de Gaulle, the famous French general, president, and political leader, held a grand vision of what France should aspire to be. After World War Two, the French cultural self-confidence was weakened by the occupation of France by Nazi Germany. Adding to the humiliation of surrender in World War Two, military defeats followed shortly after the war was concluded. France lost wars to native independence movements in Indochina and Algeria and suffered the fallout from the Suez crisis of 1956, which harmed French prestige in global politics. The Cold War period did not define France the way that it did to the United States, but rather saw events like the Suez Crisis and French colonial wars at the forefront of the national imagination (Soutou, 2001, p. 35). De Gaulle desired to rectify French political setbacks by consolidating and increasing the political power and relevance of France. A concerted effort by de Gaulle and his “Gaullist” political movement sought to live out the “certain idea of France”, which they felt existed but weakened in a post-world war era, in which France lost control of large parts of its colonial empire and the prestige it had held for more than a century. To de Gaulle, France itself was a sublime entity and sovereign nation-state, a noble ideal whose faults always laid with Frenchmen, not the idea of France itself: “All my life I have thought about France in a certain way. This is inspired by sentiment as much as reason.... Instinctively I have the feeling that Providence has created her either for complete successes or for exemplary misfortunes. If, in spite of this, mediocrity shows in her acts and deeds, it strikes me as an absurd anomaly, to be imputed to the faults of Frenchmen, not to the genius of the land” (Gaulle, 1955, p. 3-4). De Gaulle fundamentally regarded the world as a collection of sovereign states and sought to promote France among these.

France suffered a series of political humiliations on the international stage after the world wars ended in 1945. France emerged from World War Two as a seemingly unified country aligned with Western Europe and the United States of America. This relationship brought France into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, the relationship between France and its NATO allies became strained by several political incidents and conflicts. This ranged from a French opposition to a commodification of culture and import of American cultural influence – alongside other Marshall Plan aid in the post-war recovery of the French economy – to disagreements on military policy and the question of what was to happen with Germany. French colonial wars, such as the First Indochina War and the Algerian crisis, saw France use Marshall Plan support to fight – and fail – to maintain its crumbling empire. The United States and the USSR blocked the British and French plan to

take back control of the Suez Canal from Egypt, which had nationalized it. On top of this, France had been denied a leading role in NATO, and was left out by the US and Britain. Britain had even bought discounted nuclear weapons from the US; a deal France did not get. Instead, the French state had spent years developing its own nuclear weapons programme to be able to obtain the level of destructive ordinance necessary to play great power politics. All these events were key to influencing President Charles de Gaulle's decision to discontinue military cooperation with NATO in 1966. De Gaulle's ideal of France was a core element of the factors that informed his political decisions. This "idea of France" is presented in his war memoirs and permeates his views on the many events, like the Suez failure, that influenced the French suspension of conventional military cooperation with NATO and the US in 1966. The French decision to withdraw from the integrated military structure of NATO in 1966 had long-lasting ramifications for the country. The new path de Gaulle forged for France was followed by subsequent governments, as the idea of an independent military policy was popular (Klein, 1977, p. 23-24).

Research question and assignment structure

The research question for this assignment is: why France suspended conventional military cooperation with NATO in 1966. Several major political events preceded the events of 1966, which – combined with strong personalities and political opinions – would shape the French decision to terminate the cooperation. These topics will be examined in detail as laid out in the method section of this assignment. The events preceding 1966 will be laid out in detail and explained across several topics. This will range from the aftermath of World War Two, the colonial wars that France fought between 1945 and 1966, and the relationships between France and the superpowers. The analysis of the events as causes of the split in 1966 follows, before a conclusion as to why the suspension of conventional cooperation took place as well as an attempt to answer why 1966 was the year it happened. A reference list for the source material to this assignment is provided at the end of the text.

This paper will not cover the events preceding 1966 in a strictly chronological order, as it is not a retelling but an attempt at answering why France suspended cooperation with NATO that year. To do this, the text is structured by topics before drawing a conclusion based on the material laid out. The topics are as follows:

1. The aftermath of World War Two in France
2. The loss the French colonial empire in the First Indochina War, the Algerian war, and the Suez crisis
3. Charles de Gaulle and his “Certain Idea of France”
4. Relations to the USSR, US, and NATO
5. France’s relationship with the rest of Europe, especially Germany and Britain
6. The creation of an independent French nuclear arsenal

In a political situation as complex as the Cold War, there will be some repetition and crossover between the different subjects. For example, the section about de Gaulle and the “Certain Idea of France” will to some extent overlap with other topics such as de Gaulle’s engagement in European matters and NATO as president of France. The “Idea of France” as a nation and the foreign policy choices of de Gaulle also entailed domestic repercussions. De Gaulle’s withdrawal from French colonial possessions in Algeria was a major event where both international and domestic policy collided. Algeria was considered a part of provincial France itself, not just a colonial outpost. The sections regarding superpower and NATO relations, and the section on European relations with France will overlap somewhat. Both will also overlap with the section on Charles de Gaulle and his political ideas, as de Gaulle was crucial in shaping French relations for his entire presidency.

Relevant literature

The works of several authors have been important in the research for this assignment. The work of Garret Martin (2011) providing a valuable source as it addresses the personality and political opinions of Charles de Gaulle in great detail. Soutou (2001) covers French cold war politics from 1944-1963 and has been an excellent source of information. For understanding on the Suez crisis, the work by Reynolds (2000) was very informative. Others, like Vidal (2008) and von Riekhoff (1968) also provide source material covering the period that was insightful. For information on French colonial possessions and the process of decolonization, Robert Aldrich (1996) provided detailed and extensive information. Crockatt (1995) gives a broad overview of the Cold War period in world history, and the political backdrop which shaped French decision-making between the end of World War Two and 7th March, 1966.

Of special note for this text is the work of Henry Kissinger in his famous work *Diplomacy* (1994), in which he covers the internal politics of NATO in relation to growing French independence, and a reassertion of European diplomatic strength post World War Two. The work of Haftendorn 1996 is comprehensive on why de Gaulle pulled France out of NATO, while Cartigny (2009) provides a shorter summary of the situation that generally agrees with Haftendorn on causes and the chain of events while as well as excellent quotations to underline important points. The personal correspondence of Charles de Gaulle is also used. His letter to Harold Macmillan in 1958 and the press conference he held before withdrawing France in 1966 are among these. The letter de Gaulle sent to Lyndon B. Johnson where he stated his intent to withdraw France from the NATO cooperation system is also referenced. The consensus of the literature points to the French colonial wars after World War Two and the French desire to rebuild both the nation and its international status as important reasons why France ended joint military cooperation with NATO in 1966. Notably, Charles de Gaulle himself is described in nearly every source, and de Gaulle seems to have embodied French politics of the period with his “Gaullist” political movement. His personal political views aligned closely with the goals of the French State during the Fifth French republic. Indeed, in the literature it is at times difficult to know where de Gaulle as person ends, and where the French State as an institution begins.

The Aftermath of World War Two

The end of World War Two created a major shift in the international political landscape much like the end of many other great wars. The sheer scale of societal tumult and organized violence of the war fundamentally restructured the political system of participating nations (Leffler & Westad, 2010, p. 538). France was no exception to this. It had declined markedly in relative international power by 1945, as the two new superpowers seated in Washington D.C. and Moscow replaced the former Great Powers with their own bipolar world system. France’s colonial empire was disintegrating in Indochina after Japanese occupation, and the North African territories had been fought over for several years between Allied and Axis forces (Aldrich, 1996, p. 276). The country faced internal division after the war with a divide running between supporters of the occupying German regime and those who sided with the Allied forces and de Gaulle. The uncertainty of the French political situation was so bad that

the US had laid plans to potentially occupy France after the war was concluded (Lacroix-Riz, 2003). Although this did not happen, it demonstrates the weakness of French political leadership in the eyes of its allies. France was left in a precarious position following five years of Axis occupation and war in both the homeland and various French overseas colonies. French political stability when faced with communist influence was also a concern for its allies. The United States' fear of the Soviet Union were tied to the "...stability of Western Europe and its ability to resist the inroads of communism. The chief fear in the late 1940s was not of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe – even American military leaders discounted this – but of the strength of the communist parties in France and Italy..." (Crockatt, 1995, p. 71). Crockatt expands on this by explaining that "...the consolidation of American influence in Western Europe is to be explained in terms of internal European conditions as well as American ambitions" (Crockatt, 1995, p. 71). France was a key European ally, although not always happy with American conduct and involvement.

Britain was also faced with the reality of a decline in political power and national status. Britain decided to attach itself more closely to the power of the United States, because Britain was being pressured out of its worldwide colonial possessions. Attaching France more closely to the US or even Europe was not in the interests of Charles de Gaulle. However, de Gaulle would not influence the course of post-war French politics as he retired in 1946, after disagreements on the powers of the executive branch of the new French government.

The perceived undermining of French national interests by the United States, and the strong American military and political influence through NATO, was difficult to accept for many, especially Charles de Gaulle. As soon as de Gaulle returned to French politics, he made moves to assert the French position in NATO and Europe, and started talks on France's role in NATO (Gaulle, 1958).

Indochina, Algeria, and the Suez Crisis

Three major colonial conflicts would have a strong influence on de Gaulle's decision-making and eventual suspension of integrated military cooperation with NATO in 1966. These were, in chronological order, the First Indochina War, the Suez crisis, and the Algerian War. France decided to commit to military action to maintain control of its colonial empire, as it had not been faced with major issues in maintaining it unlike Britain, which had faced issues of control in its colonial possessions since before the Second World War (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 211).

The First Indochina War (1946-1954) was an important event in post-war and colonial French history. The conflict was fought between French colonial forces with American support and mainly Vietnamese Communist resistance groups. France first lost control of Indochina (modern-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) to Japanese forces during World War Two (Tignor et al., 2017, p. 755). In the First Indochina War, the Viet Minh was the chief force seeking a French withdrawal from Indochina. The Viet Minh was a Marxist-Leninist² group fighting for an independent Vietnam from any would-be imperial power. Indochina had been a complex geopolitical area for many years before the conflict broke out in earnest, and the First Indochina War was the first war France fought after World War Two (Aldrich, 1996, p. 277-280). This war was hugely expensive to France, but it was able to play up the anti-Communist argument for fighting the war to obtain massive financial aid from the US, due to the ongoing American involvement in the Korean War at the same time (Soutou, 2001, p. 45). Despite several years of war and vast amounts of resources spent to reclaim the colony, France suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, necessitating a military withdrawal from the region and a humiliating prestige loss for France.

In 1956, a mere two years after Dien Bien Phu, France suffered another international humiliation. This was the Suez Crisis, which saw Britain and France trying – and failing – to occupy the Suez Canal after the canal has been nationalized by Egypt, in addition to other perceived threats to Franco-British power by the regime of President Nasser of Egypt (Reynolds, 2000, p. 190-191). Britain and France decided to stage a military intervention due to the Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal. This plan was carried out with the covert aid

² Usually grouped under the umbrella term “communists”, Marxist-Leninist groups are a distinct political phenomenon within the wider pool of ideas and groups labelled communist

of Israel, where Israel was to instigate conflict on the Sinai Peninsula to provide an excuse for the British and French to move in, under the cover of protecting the Canal (Barrass, 2009, p. 109). The military intervention was thwarted shortly after Franco-British forces arrived in Egypt by the combined efforts of both the USSR and the US. The US did not like its Western allies acting as imperial aggressors towards a third-world country, ostensibly breaking with US principles, but also acting as fuel for the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist propaganda of the Soviets. Furthermore, Moscow's rulers did not sit idly by while the Suez Crisis unfolded. The chairman of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, indirectly threatened with nuclear intervention against the Western powers if Britain and France went through with their plans in Egypt (Barrass, 2009, p. 109). Without US support, the France and Britain had no nuclear deterrence against the Soviet threats. Faced with massive American diplomatic pressure and the USSR rattling its nuclear arsenal, France and Britain backed down.

The Suez Canal has been a supremely important global shipping route since its construction by the French in 1859-69 and had been under British control since 1882. Losing control of it to Egypt was seen as a dangerous blow to national powers to both France and Britain. It was a vital supply route for the Empire and had tens of thousands of British troops protecting it (Leffler & Westad, p. 309). Nevertheless, the British and French were forced to abandon their plans. American condemnation and the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's threats of possible Soviet nuclear intervention on the side of President Nasser and Egypt saw to that (Leffler & Westad, 2010, p. 309). Britain decided to pursue an even closer relationship with the US because of the Suez failure, not daring to jeopardize its privileged relationship with the US any further. France took a different view of the situation and saw the superpower intervention as a violation of its interests. Furthermore, unlike Britain, France did not enjoy a privileged status with the US and NATO (Furniss, 1961, p. 351)³. Kissinger (1994, p. 597) states that France strengthened its efforts to make itself independent from the US due to anger over the fallout of the Suez crisis.

Following both the defeat in Indochina and the humiliation over the Suez Canal, France was faced with a crisis even closer to home. Having conquered Algeria in 1830 and spent several decades suppressing revolts afterwards, Algeria eventually turned into the most important French holding in North Africa: "So important was Algeria to France, at least in colonialists' eyes, that it became constitutionally and legally an integrated part of France" (Aldrich, 1996,

³ There are two articles by Furniss cited in this text: one from 1956 and another from 1961.

p. 24-28). Algeria was a “department” of France, legally a part of mainland France itself. Therefore, Algeria could not be granted formal independence without giving away an integral part of France itself, and so the Algerian nationalists had to be resisted by force of arms (Heller, 2006, p. 96-97). We can distinguish between two forms of “Algerian” nationalism: one in the form of French colonists demanding that Algeria remained a French territory, and another formed by the native population that shaped an anti-colonialist nationalism through several different constituencies and movements (Thomas, 2005, p. 245). The latter, native form of Algerian nationalism is what inspired a widespread revolt against French colonisation. The revolt took years to handle for the French military, but by deploying substantial numbers of men and materiel to Algeria, the Fourth French Republic was able to retake large parts of the country. The war proved to be brutal, with widespread use of torture and terrorism, but was largely won by 1959 (Hobsbawm, p. 220).

Eventually a revolt of army units in Algeria supported by French colonists in Algeria placed the Fourth Republic in a crisis. The parliamentary political system was changed to a presidential republic by de Gaulle when he was brought in to solve the crisis in Algeria and the wider French political system upon his election on the 21st of December 1958 (Rynning, 2002, p. 27). This was the creation of Fifth French Republic spearheaded by the presidency of de Gaulle. Despite a change in political leadership of France, the war resulted in an eventual French withdrawal at a later point, as the Algerian war grew to be deeply unpopular among the French population and damaging to French resources and international standing. All this was too much for continued control of Algeria to be worth the French effort (Heller, 2006, p. 97-98). De Gaulle had regarded Algerian independence as inevitable for some time and was open to the idea of granting the colony independence (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 220). He eventually did so in 1962.

In sum, the rise of Algerian nationalism and eventual independence of Algeria in 1962 would precipitate a crisis that brought down the Fourth French Republic, placed Charles de Gaulle once again in command of the nation, and marked the loss of most of the French overseas empire (Aldrich, 1996, p. 266-267). It was a vital moment in allowing France to shake off its colonial legacy and reshape its political image⁴, as both the US and USSR were against the old colonial system that Britain and France had dominated before World War One and World War Two. De Gaulle had started this process in 1958 when he offered most of French Africa

⁴ France granted its other North African colonies autonomy in 1956.

independence, resulting in the creation of sixteen new states (Reynolds, 2000, p. 209). The loss of direct French control over colonies and global political influence was a major part of French politics of the period. France had gone from being a major global power – with a large colonial empire – to suffering first a costly victory in the first world war, and then a full occupation by Nazi Germany, before being liberated by a global alliance of states where France was relegated to the side-lines of political power.

Post World War Two, France's fight to maintain its colonial empire would prove to be unsuccessful. The First Indochina War was lost at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the Suez Crisis would see the US and USSR pressure France and Britain to cease their plans. The Algerian crisis had domestic and international opinion split, which coupled with the strain on military resources eventually leading to France granting Algeria formal independence. The man who would oversee the end of the French colonial wars was Charles de Gaulle, as his political ideas shaped his handling of these important political events beyond sheer political pragmatism. Maintaining a colonial empire was difficult when both the Cold War superpowers were against colonialism (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 217). This made it difficult to promote the idea of France that de Gaulle subscribed to.

Charles de Gaulle and the Idea of France

The person who carried the greatest influence on the events directly preceding the suspension of integrated military cooperation in 1966 was President Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle was a man of strong character and convictions. Garret Martin (2011, p. 232) states that: "Forty years after his death, former French President Charles de Gaulle remains a towering and divisive figure in the history of the Atlantic Community. His often bold and fiercely independent policies won him praise throughout the world, and strong criticism from France's Western allies." In other words, he was a strong political figure who dominated French politics and carved out a more independent path for France in world politics.

Consequently, an analysis of the French suspension of conventional military cooperation with NATO in 1966 would not be complete without discussing the character of Charles de Gaulle himself. In addition to having very strong convictions, de Gaulle had grand ideas about what France was to be in the world. He held a view of history as a struggle between nations, not

ideologies, and that ideologies need not hamper cooperation between nations (Martin, 2011, p. 233). Another important view of de Gaulle was his fear of German rearmament, and lack of trust in the intentions of the US in European affairs (Martin, 2011, p. 236). The career and life of de Gaulle was long and eventful. He remains a major political figure of the twentieth century, remembered for his contribution to the Allied cause in World War Two, and later his independent foreign policy. Starting his career as a French military officer, he led the forces under his command with distinction in 1940 during the German invasion of France. Refusing to accept the surrender of the French government unlike many other French soldiers, de Gaulle escaped to Britain where he would organize and lead French forces in exile. He eventually returned to mainland Europe and France as a liberating hero in 1944 after D-Day. De Gaulle would retire from politics as the leader of the pro-Allied Free French forces in 1946. This was due to his proposals for a reorganized and rebuilt French state were not followed. Thereafter he spent the next twelve years as a so-called president-in-waiting. This situation continued until the armed conflict between French and Arab forces in the French colony of modern-day Algeria turned into a massive political crisis.

The attempted solution to Algerian crisis was that the then President René Coty invited de Gaulle back into French politics as president in 1958. De Gaulle accepted this – but only after the French constitution was changed and a formal election held – to affirm so he could better serve as president. He became president on January 8th in 1959 on Coty's resignation. De Gaulle was harsh in his description of the military leadership in Algeria and had a difficult situation to solve. He had not governed France in twelve years and had to adapt his political strategy to the reality of his current circumstances. Because he had led the French military and political forces, which had remained loyal to the Allies in World War Two and fought for a liberation of France from German occupation, president de Gaulle was held in high regard by large sections of the French population and army. A failed assassination attempt against him in 1962, committed by discontented elements of the Army, garnered de Gaulle even more public support. This gave him a unique advantage in tackling the unfolding Algerian crisis. De Gaulle needed to withdraw France from Algeria so that France could take its place as a modern nation, essentially shaking off the relic of a colonial empire when both the US and USSR hostile to colonialism (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 217).

After the assassination attempt in 1962, de Gaulle would hold a referendum to change the electoral process to the Presidency, so the President was directly elected by a citizen vote.

This would be to his advantage as it granted him a direct popular mandate when he was reelected and enabling him to enact major political decisions more easily. This would also be the case in 1966, as he withdrew France from the integrated military cooperation system with NATO on March 7th, a mere three months after his re-election (Vidal, 2008). This was signalled earlier in the same year in a press conference on February 21st (Gaulle, 1966a). The letter de Gaulle sent Lyndon B. Johnson stated that "... France considers that the changes accomplished or in the process of being accomplished since 1949 in Europe in Asia and elsewhere, as well as the evolution of its own situation and its own forces, no longer justify, as far as it is concerned, the military arrangements made after the conclusion of the alliance, either in the form of multilateral conventions, or by specific agreements between the government French and the American government. This is why France proposes to recover on its territory the full exercise of its sovereignty, currently undermined by the permanent presence of allied military elements or by the habitual use, which is made from his heaven, to cease his participation in the "integrated" commandments and to no longer put forces at NATO's disposal" (Gaulle, 1966b). The decision was supported by the Right and the Communists in France, while the Centre and Centre-Left heavily disapproved of it, desiring to stay more fully committed to NATO (Boniface, 2021).

Key to understanding why France suspended conventional military cooperation with NATO in 1966 is the "Certain Idea of France" as presented by de Gaulle in his war memoirs. Here he explains that he regards France as a great and separate ideal to the actions of Frenchmen and is a nation in need of and striving towards greatness: "Instinctively I have the feeling that providence has created [France] either for complete successes or for exemplary misfortunes. If, in spite of this, mediocrity shows in her acts and deeds, it strikes me as an absurd anomaly, to be imputed to the faults of Frenchmen, not to the genius of the land" (Gaulle, 1955, p. 3-4). Gordon (1993, p. 3) sums up this "Gaullist" idea of policy as "the absolute need for independence in decision making, a refusal to accept subordination to the United States, the search for grandeur and rang, the primacy of the nation-state, and the importance of national defense". De Gaulle regarded the Cold War as a departure from normal policy relations where the US and USSR had decided the political future of France and Europe without consulting their interests (Martin, 2011, p. 233). This went against his ideas of French sovereignty and greatness. Both the Algerian crisis, France's relation to its NATO allies and European economic partners, the fear of German unification, and the desire for a strong and sovereign national policy influenced his political decisions.

De Gaulle eventually pulled France out of the costly war in Algeria in 1962, a defining moment of his presidency and the history of France. He also oversaw the culmination of the French nuclear weapons programme, tested in 1960 in Algeria. This came after the Americans refused to sell ordinance to the French despite allowing Britain to purchase nuclear arms. US denial was not something France took gracefully, resenting the favouritism displayed towards Britain. France was also denied being part of a threefold de facto leadership of NATO, as the British and Americans kept the privilege of being the main deciding powers in the alliance to themselves. Being kept on arm's length from playing in the very upper league of international politics was not something de Gaulle took lightly. The possession of nuclear weaponry places the state controlling them in a very exclusive club of military powers. France stated that to maintain the country's own security, it would not integrate its own nuclear arsenal with that of NATO (Klein, 1977, p. 26). This would also allow France to pursue an independent military and security policy from Washington and Moscow, as neither could easily demand that France followed their instructions by rattling their arsenals. An independent French nuclear deterrent could potentially prevent a repeat of the nuclear intimidation of Khrushchev in 1956 during the Suez Crisis. The independence was more fully realized when de Gaulle pulled out of the integrated military command of NATO, with the justification for this move falling on the NATO forces present in France and the demand for full territorial sovereignty for France (Cartingy, 2006, p. 145).

NATO membership was a constraint on France's independence in the eyes of de Gaulle. He regarded the chance of a war between the superpowers as small, and in the worst case, to be brief affairs. The reduced need of NATO protection discredited the main rationale for sustaining the military alliances of the Warsaw Pact and NATO in his eyes. His "certain idea of France" demanded that France acted independently from others, and he despised the loss of French status in NATO to the United States (Martin, 2011, p. 233-234). The goal of achieving independence meant France had to fight the wars of its choosing and not be dragged into the conflicts other powers started unless it was in France's best interests. According to de Gaulle, the supreme way of displaying and maintaining France's sovereignty was independence in military affairs (Martin, 2011, p. 234). The French war in Indochina did see the Americans involve themselves, ostensibly to fight "global communism". The French had manipulated this outcome by playing up the dangers of the Communist movement to achieve financial support from the US. However, the Viet Minh were more concerned with gaining independence from any would-be overlord than implementing "global communism", and the

French were more concerned with maintaining control of their colony than with fighting “communist” ideology. Thus, the war was fought for French national interests, but still lost. Algeria was also lost after a prolonged war of guerrilla actions, terrorism, brutal crackdowns, and torture, in which French resources were spent for little gain (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 220).

Calling de Gaulle a “nationalist” has a ring to it that current readers will typically associate with right-wing extremism and ideological, racist separation between ethnic groups. The more positive word “patriot” is a better word to use, as de Gaulle held a positive view of France but not of all Frenchmen. He was a believer in the nation-state, but not a nationalist in the current, negatively charged use of the word. In his letter to General B  thouart regarding the creation of a European army, he very clearly states that this is an attack on the idea of the Nation, and that while he is pro-Europe as an entity, Europe must be built by nations and not supranational organizations (Gaulle, 1954). US Ambassador to France Charles Bohlen stated that “The fundamental and basic element in de Gaulle’s foreign policy is his strongly held and unchangeable conviction that the nation (the state and not the people) represents the permanent unit in international affairs” (Foreign Relations of the United States, n.d.). Such a sentiment against joined military forces and supranational European organizations is not an isolated opinion for de Gaulle. He was sceptical of both NATO and the emergent European Union, but he had to make do with the political situation at hand when he became president after over a decade in retirement from politics. To assume what France’s role in either organization would be if de Gaulle remained the leader of France in the twelve-year period after 1946 would be speculation. However, we do know what de Gaulle did after 1958. According to Kissinger “De Gaulle frequently behaved obstreperously⁵ in order to make ignoring him painful...” (Kissinger, 1994, p. 598). De Gaulle had a clear and thought-out idea of what he wanted to achieve politically and did not back down from trying to achieve this, even at the cost of cordial relations with French allies.

⁵ Obstreperous is an adjective meaning unruly or resistant to control.

US, USSR, and NATO Relations

The Cold War featured a bipolar world system where two political alliances formed around the superpowers of the era. The American-led bloc formed around the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and consisted of western liberal-democratic powers. The Soviet-led bloc included the USSR and its satellites and allies in Eastern Europe, called the Warszawa pact. The Cold War was not solely a showdown between the United States and the United Soviet Socialist Republics. Other countries and political actors pursued their own goals and agendas, but the East-West conflict and threat of nuclear war was the backdrop to which all other political developments took place. As a political system, the Cold War had two superpowers and associated countries aligned themselves along national and ideological lines: a liberal-democratic side led by the US and a socialist side led by the Soviet Union (Leffler & Westad, 2010, p. 545). France found itself on the liberal-democratic side after the war had ended, liberated from the German occupation but not free from external threats and pressures.

That France was liberated from German occupation was not necessarily a foregone conclusion. De Gaulle and his forces had only been recognized by the Americans in 1944. Before that, the US had plans to occupy France after the war had ended, and the US and France did not share an altogether amiable history: “While the Franco-American friendship has deep historical roots, the policies of the two countries have not always been in harmony. During the two world wars, the United States only intervened alongside France in April 1917 and December 1941, although it is true that their intervention tipped the balance definitively. But historians at least know that in 1919 the United States did not respect the commitments made by Woodrow Wilson to Georges Clemenceau, and that in the absence of their guarantee, Europe could only go towards a new world war. Similarly, can we forget that without General de Gaulle, whose government was only recognised by Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1944, our country would have been treated as a defeated and occupied country?” (Chevènement, 2009).

NATO was formed in 1949 by twelve countries including France. The goal of the alliance was protecting Western Europe against the perceived threat of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite states (Institut national de l’audiovisuel [INA], 2021). It supplanted the earlier defence organization of the Western European Union (WEU) founded in 1948, as the latter was regarded as too small and not sufficient to provide adequate defence to Western Europe in case of Soviet aggression (Crockatt, 1995, p. 81). France had been a cornerstone of

both proposed defence systems. France aligned itself with the US, Britain and the liberal-democratic side organized around the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after World War Two ended. French relations with the US remained strong for several years, and the US aided French efforts in Indochina against the Marxist-Leninist insurgency in Vietnam that eventually became the Vietnam War. Cooperation with the rest of NATO in the integrated military command system would grow to become a serious strain on relations, especially after de Gaulle became president. France would increasingly desire and work towards becoming a bloc-independent political power that would rely on itself for military power, and by extension, sovereignty. This was in part due to de Gaulle proposing an expansion of NATO coverage to areas of the world where France had special interests, and de Gaulle "... sought to take advantage of France's strengthened position in NATO in order to consolidate its influence among the Six on the basis of a Franco-German partnership" (CVCE, 2016). Further, "He also proposed the creation of a tripartite Directorate of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), whereby France, the United Kingdom and the United States would be put on an equal footing for the purposes of discussing nuclear strategy" (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe [CVCE], 2016). The tripartite proposal was first proposed to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in a letter for Macmillan and President Eisenhower of the US to discuss. De Gaulle's letter proposed special French privileges within NATO along with this tripartite leadership structure of the alliance. Britain and the United States refused the idea, and in response France started to withdraw military assets from NATO, starting with its Mediterranean fleet in 1958 before fully withdrawing in 1966 (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016). It is necessary to see the French distancing from NATO as part of the ongoing Cold War taking place at the time, as the impetus for withdrawal – and the existence of NATO itself – would not have been present if not for changing American and French relations. France and de Gaulle attempted to shape NATO to accommodate French interests and provide a pathway to the "Greatness" de Gaulle desired for France. The way to do this was to jointly govern NATO alongside Britain and the US and ensure that NATO and Europe were tightly linked. Further, French interests would need to be covered by NATO so France would not be the cover for American interests and not France's own. When this did not happen, de Gaulle likely laid plans to seek French fortunes outside NATO.

The French exit from the military structure of NATO was a political upheaval for the alliance. Although the exit was abrupt and short notice was given to France's allies, it was the result of

disagreement and tension building up between France and its allies. The withdrawal also seriously reduced the conventional military capabilities of NATO on mainland Europe (Riekhoff, 1968, p. 281-282).

France had an especially strained relationship with the US when compared to other Western powers due to the hegemonic dominance of the US. De Gaulle later blocked British membership to the Common Market in 1967 – something the Americans under Eisenhower and Kennedy had worked hard for – as de Gaulle regarded it as an American ploy for increased influence in Europe (Schwabe, 2001, p. 29-30). The US held very strong influence over Europe, and France sought to challenge American dominance since France lacked the ability to substantially influence US decision making and thereby shape the political system to its liking (Kissinger, 1994, p. 602).

Soutou (2001, p. 46-47) lists three grievances France held against NATO:

1. France was not part of a three-part NATO leadership, consisting of itself, Britain, and the US, like France had envisioned.
2. NATO did not extend to cover French colonial interests.
3. Britain and the US were not willing to share nuclear arms with France and other European countries.

Soutou concludes that de Gaulle also held these issues with the NATO alliance but was more determined to do something about them than preceding Fourth Republic leaders. Wenger (2004, p. 26-27) states that: “In 1958 de Gaulle had demanded that NATO be reorganized to form a Trilateral Directorate that would accommodate France’s status as a great power. Once his demand had been rejected by the Anglo-Saxon powers, de Gaulle began to implement a step-by-step withdrawal of France’s naval and air forces from the integrated commands in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. By 1966 only the French land and air forces stationed in the FRG were still assigned to the allied command in Europe, although NATO’s headquarters remained outside Paris.” Regarding the third point listed by Soutou (2001, p. 46-47) – that the United Kingdom and the US did not want to share nuclear arms – it is interesting to note that France desired to be an independent nuclear deterrent from the rest of NATO. This clearly demonstrates the less important position of France relative to the two English-speaking powers within the NATO alliance, as France was not given access to nuclear weapons but had

to spend resources on develop their own. This will be discussed in more detail in the section about French nuclear weapons later in this text.

French Relations in Europe

France went through a hard time in the Second World War along with large parts of Europe, suffering through years of warfare and German occupation, in which a large portion of France was controlled by a collaboration government. This made France, along with other European nations, weak compared to the power the US enjoyed at the conclusion of World War Two. Kissinger (1994, p. 602) states that “For several decades, [relative US dominance] had caused American leaders to forget how unrepresentative the attitudes of a devastated, temporarily impotent, and therefore pliant Europe were compared to Europe’s conduct when it was dominating world affairs for two centuries. They failed to recall the European dynamism which had launched the Industrial Revolution, the political philosophy which had spawned the concept of national sovereignty, or the European style of diplomacy which had operated a complex balance-of-power system for some three centuries. As Europe recovered, with America’s indispensable help, some of the traditional patterns of its diplomacy were bound to recur, particularly in France, where modern statecraft had originated under Richelieu.”

This quote perfectly encapsulated how France were to act as the country started to recover after World War Two and started to reassert themselves in European politics, especially after de Gaulle came to power in 1958. The French president held very strong views on what France should be and how European politics should be organized. As NATO included a great deal of Western Europe, it was difficult to negotiate European policy in favour of France due to the political dominance of the US, and the danger internal disagreement posed when faced with a strong Soviet Union. When the military threat the USSR posed diminished over the course of the Cold War, de Gaulle made moves to pursue European politics more independently within the Alliance (Kissinger, 1994, p. 600).

The events that led to the 1966 withdrawal from the NATO integrated military structure had some analysts raise fears over possible French disagreement with NATO as the alliance experienced serious conflict between France and other members (Dillon, 1956). A common thread in the literature is the French frustration of being outside the top leadership of NATO,

as Great Britain and the USA in large part ran the alliance. De Gaulle felt that national security concerns and national sovereignty were hampered by being in NATO. Furniss (1956, p. 545) states that the Algerian war had drained French military resources away from NATO cooperation while French prestige was lost in the war, and NATO was rearming Western Germany. France had "... an aggravated national inferiority complex." (Furniss, 1956, p. 545). Despite the French withdrawal from the NATO command structure and allied personnel leaving France, France kept some two divisions in Germany to further its own political goals and foster dependence on France for security (Riekhoff, 1968, p. 281). Objections over German rearmament had been an issue for France for years. It rejected the American proposal of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 as it did not want a rearmed West Germany. The Americans would instead admit West Germany into NATO in 1955 and soothe French fears by placing a large American military force in Western Europe as a counterbalance to a potential future German threat to France (Crockatt, 1995, p. 127).

De Gaulle held personal fears of what a unified Germany would mean to French national security. Actions like leaving thousands of troops in Germany despite discontinuing cooperation with NATO speaks to the continued focus Germany had in de Gaulle's foreign policy. Martin (2011, p. 233) states "And from de Gaulle's perspective, balancing German power and solving the 'German problem' appeared as a vital precondition for peace and stability in Europe." The national inferiority complex that Furniss refers to had deep historical roots. When France dominated Europe for a little over two decades during the French Revolutionary Wars, France had a substantially larger population than did Germany. This had dramatically changed by the time of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and by the time of the World Wars, Germany enjoyed a demographic advantage of tens of millions of people over France (Piketty, 2020, p. 471-474). The population and industry of Germany had simply eclipsed France, and a major conflict between the two would leave France at a serious disadvantage. European relations were also harmed by the French withdrawal from NATO cooperation in 1966. Cartigny (2006, p. 146) states that not only the Americans, but also the Dutch, British, and West Germans were "very angry" or "appalled" with the French, while the Soviets were pleased with how the situation unfolded. France was also internally divided by the decision, with the Right and the Communists supporting de Gaulle, and the centre-left disapproving of his policy decision (Cartigny, 2006, p. 147).

French Nuclear Weapons

Great Powers was a term used before the World Wars. The term was often used to describe the political situation in Europe during and after the French Revolution. The list of Great Powers of Europe included Prussia, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary and some would also include the Ottoman Empire. In the period after World War Two, the former great powers were either gone, in decline, or had transformed into superpowers. Nuclear arsenals ensured that the superpowers – i.e., the US and the USSR – were orders of magnitude more powerful in a military sense than any other states. The Soviets insinuated possible nuclear retaliation if France and Britain carried through their plan of seizing the Suez Canal from Egypt in 1956 (Leffler & Westad, 2010, p. 309). If France had a nuclear arsenal of its own to retaliate against any potential nuclear strike, insinuations, or direct threats of nuclear attacks against France would have been less of a concern. If either France and Britain had a nuclear deterrent independent from American control, the risk of initiating a potential nuclear war might have kept the USSR from meddling with the ambitions of France and Britain for the Suez Canal. Nuclear weaponry would also raise French prestige and be a massive deterrent to a potential German resurgence and conflict with the French. An often-overlooked Cold War fact is that France carried a great deal of anxiety over a strengthened Germany for many years, as France had fought three costly and humiliating wars with Germany from 1870 to 1945. The international system had changed since then, however. The old system of European “Great Powers” was over, replaced by the new Cold War “Superpower” system. It is still useful to explore the topic of Great Powers in the context of French nuclear weapons development.

Mearsheimer (2001, p. 30-32) states that all Great Powers have five features:

1. They view the international order of nations as anarchic, i.e., without any power over that of a nation-state.
2. They have the ability to commit offensive military action.
3. No state can know the intentions of other states.
4. The main goal of a state is to continue its existence – to survive through security.
5. They are rational actors.

Following this logic and using France as an example, France as a nation desires to survive and gain power, like all states do. During the Cold War, the best guarantee against destruction of the nation was nuclear deterrence. France, as a rational political actor, would then pursue its own nuclear weapons programme to ensure the nation's independence and survival. Another aspect of great power behaviour is fear of each other, i.e., fear of other nations (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 32). Germany used to be a great power and had a military record against France decidedly in Germany's favour when not accounting for French allies. For France, the spectre of German unification was not just a potential political loss, as it would be to the USSR or US if Germany united and fell in with its rival, but a serious threat to French national interests. Mearsheimer (2001, p. 32) states that: "The point is illustrated by the reaction of the United Kingdom and France to German reunification at the end of the Cold War. Even though these three states had been close allies for almost forty-five years, both the United Kingdom and France immediately began worrying about the potential dangers of a unified Germany."

A key part of being an independent nation-state is the ability to pursue independent policies. This must be accomplished both domestically and internationally. Sovereignty is only achieved when a country is free from foreign influence and can assert itself. Kissinger (1994, p. 602) explains that the US misunderstood Europe after World War Two. Europe and its most powerful nation-states had dominated the world for two centuries and featured a complex game of statecraft and diplomacy that was disrupted by the world wars. This tradition for dynamic interstate diplomacy resurged as the Europe was rebuilt after 1945. France had to stake out its role among the European states but was left with an identity problem that was acutely felt by many French people, not least de Gaulle himself (de Gaulle, 1955, p. 3-4). The idea of maintaining French status as a "Great Power" was important to de Gaulle and many French citizens. Before World War One, no nations, except perhaps for Great Britain regarding maritime strength, was regarded as a superpower. Superpowers are nations with enough political might – be it military, economical, or diplomatic – to be considered as clearly above and beyond other countries in terms of power. France took steps towards becoming a great power again by developing its own nuclear arsenal, pursuing diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union outside of American approval to signal independence, withdrawing from unwinnable colonial conflicts, and appealing to increased European cooperation.

Boniface (2021) states that it was the possession of nuclear arms that allowed de Gaulle to pursue his independence policy from the US within NATO, as France no longer needed the protection of the US nuclear umbrella. The concern of being outside the alliance had lessened over time and certainly after an independent nuclear deterrent was acquired. If we look back to earlier sections of this text, the French loss of European and global status, the series of unfortunate outcomes in various colonial wars and crises France found itself embroiled in only deepened this problem. The defeat in Indochina, the failure of the attempted Suez campaign, the withdrawal from Algeria, not being allowed to purchase nuclear weaponry from the US and take part in the practical leadership of NATO - the failure of NATO to adequately protect France and French interests in the eyes of de Gaulle was important even among these major events, as by 1966 the USSR had developed nuclear arms that could strike the mainland United States. Would the US sacrifice itself to nuclear war if the USSR invaded West Germany and then France? De Gaulle thought not, and thus NATO was obsolete to his mind (Cartigny, 2006, p. 151). France needed an independent security policy to guarantee its safety (INA, 2021). Wenger (2004, p. 27-28) showcases the French doubts about the US nuclear guarantee in NATO; there had been doubts for years over its efficacy, as changing power relations between the USSR and the US – as well as an alteration of Washington’s nuclear policy – stoked European fears. This alteration was away from the policy of pre-emptive strikes against the USSR – attacking the USSR with nuclear weaponry when war seemed inevitable – to a more flexible approach where other means besides nuclear attack were to be considered in the case of war (Crockatt, 1995, p. 141-145). This was unacceptable to France, as the previously mentioned possibility of the US not sacrificing itself to retaliate against a Soviet attack on Europe made the alliance obsolete to president de Gaulle.

As mentioned in the earlier part of this text addressing the subject of superpowers and NATO relations, France was not even part of a desired “tripartite” leadership within NATO, i.e., France sharing control of the alliance with the US and Britain. Instead, the alliance was clearly dominated and controlled by the US with Britain as its close political partner and second most powerful nation. Adding to this, the Americans sold the British nuclear weaponry at discounted prices but did not offer this to the French. Instead, France had to spend resources, which it could have saved for other purposes, on creating its own arsenal. France did develop its own nuclear arsenal independently of this, but not being offered the same deal as Britain was a slight to French national pride.

The dilemma France was faced with could appear to have been simply a choice between buying American nuclear weaponry *versus* developing its own arsenal. Yet the dilemma ran deeper. Developing an independent nuclear capability was essential to the sovereignty of France and the nation's ability to pursue independent military policy. As such, the French government in Paris developed its own nuclear arsenal free from US control to defend France, a cornerstone of the policy of the presidency of de Gaulle (Martin, 2011, p. 235-236). What was supremely important for France was not just possessing nuclear arms, but also appearing independent. The two went hand in hand for de Gaulle; where Britain was content with appearing less independent but in practice deciding on its own nuclear arsenal, France had to both appear independent and *be* independent. Kissinger (1994, p. 602) sums this up as: "...that Great Britain was prepared to sacrifice form to substance, whereas de Gaulle, in striving to reassert France's identity, equated form with substance." Nuclear arms were to de Gaulle important both for symbolic and military purposes.

Why Cooperation Was Suspended

To sum up, the six main points that led to the suspension of French conventional military cooperation with NATO, are the following:

1. The aftermath of World War Two
2. Loss of the French colonial empire and humiliation during the Suez crisis
3. Charles de Gaulle and his "Idea of France"
4. French relations to the US, USSR, and NATO
5. French-European relations, especially to Germany and Britain
6. The loss of French prestige and the development of French nuclear deterrence

The Fifth French Republic withdrew from crucial aspects of NATO in 1966 over fundamental disagreements surrounding French autonomy and foreign policy. This included the need for France to share in the protection provided by American nuclear deterrence system, the disposition of French military forces, and French diplomatic efforts towards the USSR and Germany. President de Gaulle felt that French national sovereignty and power was

constrained and disregarded by NATO political structures. A significant economic and military player walking out of step with the rest of the alliance caused a major political and diplomatic incident for NATO. It remained this way for forty-three years.⁶ The more peripheral placement of France in the Cold War political landscape, relative to its former Great Power status, was apparent by the perseverance of NATO despite less French involvement. The exit was a crisis for NATO, but in hindsight it did not cause serious impairment of the alliance.

It is not possible to know if France would have suspended NATO military cooperation if not for de Gaulle and his presidency. The full explanation of why France took such a drastic measure in a period of sharp tension between NATO and the USSR has more to it than the personality and political views of the former general and president. France did not just put its military cooperation on hold due to years of policy disagreements with the US and NATO. Deeper underlying reasons such as strong national identity giving rise to disagreements and conflicts with other perceptions of the world can also partly explain why France decided to suspend conventional military cooperation. However, this national identity was weakened by a loss of French status and power, a dissolution of its colonial empire, and embarrassing military and political defeats in the decades preceding 1966. The humiliation which France experienced in Indochina, Algeria, and Egypt, the occupation of France by Germany in the Second World War, and the US and Great Britain keeping France out of NATO's top decision-making, all contributed to this loss of national identity. Furniss (1961, p. 349) states that the Fifth French Republic under de Gaulle "... has persisted in the complaint of the Fourth [Republic] that France does not occupy the position of leadership and equality with the United States and the United Kingdom to which its status as a great power entitles it."

The strain on the NATO cooperation because of France fighting an independent war in Algeria, and the inability to face down Soviet nuclear threats under the 1956 Suez crisis, were both relatively recent events in 1966. A reliance on NATO – or rather the US – and relinquishing of military and nuclear policy independence to a unified NATO command would strip France of might, then independence, and then the Idea of France would not be achieved. Not suspending military cooperation with NATO would limit French sovereignty, and so it became necessary – at least in the eyes of de Gaulle – to break with the NATO Alliance. His statement in a press conference shortly before the suspension of cooperation on

⁶ President Sarkozy would re-integrate France with NATO in 2009

March 7th confirms this: “Nothing can make a law binding without amendment when it is no longer in line with morals. Nothing can make a treaty remain valid in its entirety when its object has changed. Nothing can make a covenant to remain as it is when the conditions under which it was concluded have changed. The law, the treaty, the covenant, must be adapted to the new circumstances, otherwise, the texts, emptied of their substance, will be nothing more than useless archival papers, unless there is a brutal break between these” (Gaulle, 1966a). France as a political entity might have felt that it should be of great power status, and de Gaulle made policy out of this idea. As laid out in the analysis sections about France as a nation and de Gaulle as an individual political actor, there are several factors which should be considered. First is the idea of France. France as a concept beyond borders and a political unit, i.e., also as a force or culture with a certain perception and grandeur in the world. For France to achieve its greatness, it needs independence. Independence must be based on military and political might, hence the importance of France being able to fight its own wars and have its own nuclear arsenal. “Greatness” was also a key component of the “Idea of France” (Gaulle, 1955, p. 3-4). This was in part achieved by disentangling France from its colonial empire. The possessions which had given France great prestige for over a century by displaying overseas power had become a liability when both superpowers and a large part of the French electorate were opposed to colonialism, so ironically France emerged from the 1954-1962 Algerian crisis with enhanced prestige when Algeria was granted independence.

Thus, the year 1966 was the culmination of many events: France tested its first nuclear weapons in 1960; de Gaulle had been president since 1958 and won his re-election campaign right before the 1966 withdrawal; the Suez Crisis humiliation was ten years previous, taking place in 1956. Furthermore, since Algeria became independent in 1962, de Gaulle had gradually withdrawn military assets from the NATO integrated military structure. He declared that troops returning from Algeria would not “re-enter” NATO, and also withdrew the Mediterranean fleet as early as 1959 (Riekhoff, 1968, p. 281). The suspension of integrated military cooperation had several of these smaller withdrawals of French cooperation preceding it: “...de Gaulle consistently railed against integration within NATO and moved away from the military organisation in a number of stages. In March 1959, France withdrew its Mediterranean Fleet. Three years later, it announced that the troops coming back from Algeria would not be integrated into NATO, and the Atlantic Fleet was withdrawn soon after in June 1963. In March 1964, de Gaulle decided that French naval ships would no longer be under NATO’s command. Finally, in March 1966, the French President informed US

President Lyndon B. Johnson of his country's final withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure" (Martin, 2011, p. 235). De Gaulle likely chose March 7th in 1966, as the date to declare the withdrawal as he had been re-elected a mere three months previous, but it was clearly not a sudden turn of policy (Vidal, 2008). He had been raising question and objecting to NATO policy for several years, and a press conference on February 21st, 1966, was the point at which the intentions of suspending the integrated military cooperation system was first presented seriously in public (Gaulle, 1966b). Yet it is likely he saw the need for independent French action as far back as 1958.

As previously mentioned, de Gaulle proposed that France join Britain and the US in a tripartite leadership structure of NATO, that the alliance would extend to cover French interests abroad, and that NATO, Europe and a Franco-German cooperation would be at the centre of French interests in Europe. This was not to be, and de Gaulle did not find room inside NATO to achieve French interests in the form of sovereignty and the "Greatness" he aspired to for France. The withdrawal from the integrated military structure was the final event in a pattern of French behaviour clearly discontent with its role in the alliance. France had tried to form closer military bonds with other European nations and tried to avoid public conflict with NATO over this for some time. Eventually, a failed Franco-German summit in 1964 saw West Germany decisively side with the US, and de Gaulle started taking steps towards suspending conventional military cooperation with NATO (Martin, 2011, p. 237). The road to French prestige would have to be outside NATO if it would not be achieved within after the failed summit of 1964, and it seems likely he waited to 1966 to finally pull the plug on integrated cooperation as he would then be freshly re-elected to the Presidency. The presidential republic model of the Fifth Republic he had created in 1958-59 would then mean he was directly elected by the French people, giving him strong legitimacy and the political power to pull out of NATO with popular support.

Moreover, de Gaulle thought he would be able to predict a future shift in East-West relations that would make military alliances obsolete, yet he remained in NATO without having to fulfil normal membership obligations in case the USSR grew resurgent (Martin, 2011, p. 239). The steady reduction in French cooperation with NATO was in part due to alliance members being unwilling to renegotiate the alliance with France as early as 1958 when de Gaulle first became president (Klein, 1977, p. 24-25). Klein (1977, p. 26-27) points out the inability of NATO to adapt itself to changing political realities and the relative decline in the power of the

American security guarantee as another issue that strained relations. As American nuclear policy was the NATO nuclear policy, France would be involved in conflicts overseas if the US desired it. If the US did not desire to protect France, NATO would not protect France in the event of nuclear war, and this was an untenable state of affairs to de Gaulle (INA, 2021). Cartigny (2006, p. 151) sums it up as “The United States Was not prepared to risk New York for Hamburg. In the nuclear age, General de Gaulle did not believe in the proportionality of responses that which characterised the “graduated response””. Nevertheless, the French withdrawal reduced NATO's capacity to project conventional military strength in Central Europe, as it cut out the biggest NATO ally on Continental Europe (Riekhoff, 1968, p. 281-282).

In the years following the suspension in 1966, de Gaulle did not stop throwing the Americans curveballs after the break with NATO. He would continue to hold speeches reinforcing and promoting French independence and visited ostensibly “communist” countries to engage in diplomacy with them. This strategy was in line with his clear conviction that ideology was a temporary, almost cosmetic thing for a nation, and that states were the true and lasting tool of social organization and ought to be interacted with like governments, not ideological blocs. De Gaulle's efforts to advance and maintain France as a sovereign and politically powerful nation persisted through his entire presidency. The 70s and 80s saw French security politics heavily influenced by “Gaullist” thought (Gordon, 1993, p. 163). De Gaulle's legacy remains today as a figure of extraordinary personal and political importance to the events preceding the suspension of cooperation between France and the NATO integrated military structure in 1966. France did not re-join the integrated military structure until 2009 under President Nicolas Sarkozy, a full thirty-nine years after de Gaulle had passed away.

President Sarkozys re-integration of France into the shared military structure of NATO could be viewed as a repudiation of the Gaullist legacy. As de Gaulle had not found room for French sovereignty within the integrated military structure of NATO, he went outside it. This policy was followed by de Gaulle's succeeding presidents for forty-three years, a long time period in international relations and the history of NATO. If Sarkozy intended to take a stand against Gaullist politics, re-integrating France with the US and other countries de Gaulle consciously broke away from in 1966 would certainly be a powerful statement.

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