NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF CHARLES DE GAULLE

CORE COURSE 1 ESSAY

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Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
1994		**00-00-1994 to 00-00-1994**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
National Security Strategy of Charles De Gaulle	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **National War College,300 5th Avenue,Fort Lesley J. McNair,Washington,DC,20319-6000**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT
see report

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**		**10**	

INTRODUCTION

Charles de Gaulle was recalled to leadership during a series of political crises in France in 1958. There had been 24 governments in the 12 years since he had resigned as President in 1946. The costly war in Indochina and now the rebellion in Algeria were disintegrating the French Empire abroad and riots threatened civil war at home. Out of the morass of competing political factions, only two had any cohesion, the communists and the Army. It was the French Army that summoned de Gaulle from retirement (Schlamm 47).

De Gaulle's terms for accepting the burden of leadership were nonnegotiable: he was granted constitutional authority for a powerful executive branch that stood above any legislative authority. Having at last been imbued with the power he believed necessary to govern France, he set about an ambitious agenda to restore France to "greatness." His visions of France as an equal partner in a triumvirate with Great Britain and the United States and as the uncontested leader of a unified European Community were never realized. He did succeed, however, in restoring France's self-confidence and dignity both as a people and a nation, and in placing her on more equal terms in the competitive international system (Harrison 55).

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FRANCE AND THE WORLD

De Gaulle's foreign policy was grounded in his personal view of the world and France's appropriate role in that world. His view was anchored by his nineteenth century education that was steeped in classical traditions and the collective French psychology of France as a strong, glorious and powerful nation. The unfortunate reality, of course, was that the world had changed. After World War I, Europe was no longer the center of western civilization, and France had not been a central European power in decades. Nevertheless, de

Gaulle's world was one of symbols, not realities. "France is not herself except in the first rank. . . to my mind, France cannot be France without *la grandeur*" de Gaulle explains in his memoirs (Luthy 11).

De Gaulle was an uncompromising nationalist. Serving France well was all that mattered. He had no allegiance to any political ideology per se. He believed ideologies were mere illusions in the realm of international politics; the reality was and always would be a game of power (Luthy 12-13). The balance of power (equilibrium) was ever-changing--the ally of the moment could be the adversary of tomorrow. Contrary to the assumptions of most of the rest of Europe and the United States, de Gaulle did not believe in the continuing need for NATO as it was then structured. De Gaulle did not even believe that Europe could rely on a United States-dominated NATO (Isenberg 117). Thus for de Gaulle, it was imperative that France be returned to a state of independence and power.

NATIONAL INTEREST AND THREATS

The centerpiece of de Gaulle's national security strategy was the reassertion of France as an independent (sovereign) and powerful (free to act) state. De Gaulle's perception of world affairs was predicated on the notion of the sovereignty of states: "Nations, homogeneous peoples, the traditions and cohesions of the nation-state, these were permanent, these were everything" (Cook 356). Thus, de Gaulle elevated French independence to the survival level on the Nuechterlein scale of national interest priorities (9). It was his first and only priority. If France was to survive as a state, she must be free from subordination, without any enduring external or internal constraints on her ability to make policy decisions in the national interest (Harrison 49). For de Gaulle, independence was "an operative ideal meant to . . . link foreign policy and national identity in such a way as to maximize the political efficacy of the French state both at home and abroad" (Gerny 270). France's ability

to act as a state was diminished by numerous internal and external factors that de Gaulle viewed as threats to her survival.

The primary internal threat to France's survival as a state was her abysmal national self-esteem, a deficit that manifested itself in complacency with the status quo and left her bereft of any will to make independent judgements. The French people emerged from World War II with a sense of defeatism that shattered her social structures and left politics in a state of "frenzied catatonia" (Schlamm 46). The epitome of the decay was Algeria; France's Right and Left were deadlocked over whether to free Algeria to go to war to keep her as a colony. It was this power vacuum of national will that swept de Gaulle back into power.

The external threat to France's survival as a state was twofold: her dependence on (subordination to) the NATO alliance for her physical security and the press from the West for a supranational integration of Europe. De Gaulle believed France's participation in NATO subjected her foreign policy to its control, specifically the control of Britain and the United States (Cook 333). A supranational Europe meant the participants would have to sacrifice sovereignty for mutual security and benefit, that is, cease to be states in their own right. These perceived threats to French national interest formed the basis of de Gaulle's foreign policy objectives.

FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

Cook (334) lays out De Gaulle's "grand design" to foreign policy with the following summary of his explicit objectives :

" - Demonstration of France's complete independence in all military, defense and political policymaking and decisions;

- Creation of France's own nuclear capability and *force de frappe* (strike force) to give her equal standing with the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union as a nuclear

power;

- Withdrawal of France from NATO and the disappearance of the NATO military command structure in Europe, but continuance of the twenty-year American security guarantee to Western Europe embodied in the North Atlantic Treaty that had been signed in 1949;

- Establishment under French leadership of a purely continental system of loose military, political and economic cooperation around the European Common Market, in which France would wield veto power against any excessive integration and control its policies;

- Exclusion of Great Britain from this continental system, as long as her "special relationship" with the United States remained a British first interest;

- Finally, in de Gaulle's words: "To make this European organization one of three world powers and, if need be one day, the arbiter between the two camps, the Soviet and the Anglo-Saxon."

Cook generalizes these objectives into a central goal: de Gaulle was indulging in a nostalgic effort to restructure the post World War II economic and security system with French hegemony (334). Such a goal was quite unrealistic given that he would have had to enlist the cooperation of the rest of Europe and convince them they would be just as secure under French leadership as they were already under NATO. Yet de Gaulle was quite successful in achieving in some measure all but the last of these objectives.

POWER AND RESOURCES

"Having power means having the wherewithal, the capacity to act" (Puchala 176). De Gaulle clearly recognized the limits to France's latent power: shrinking population growth, over-extended territories, economic and political chaos, and social apathy (Peyre 20-34.) To regain control of France's diminishing resources, he gave priority to sustaining the will and

capacity to make independent judgements both in his constitutional reformation of the domestic state and in his intransigent approach to foreign policy (Harrison 50).

Since his reality of international life demanded that a state be *represented*, he ensured the French government would have a strong authority as head of state (Luthy 15). De Gaulle exercised this authority on two levels. Not only did he fully use the unprecedented power with which he was vested constitutionally, but he also used his extraordinary personal presence and demeanor to convey the very personification of a powerful French state. De Gaulle often followed the Hobbesian prescription, "reputation of power is power," thus the grandeur he sought and personified for France, he equated with power (Harrison 53).

Within France, he successfully used this power to forestall the domestic crisis. Although it took four years and as many shifts in domestic policy to resolve the Algerian problem, de Gaulle, recognized France could no longer expend the resources (military, economic, and social consequences) necessary to contain the nationalist rebellion. Contrary to the purpose for which the Army recalled de Gaulle, by 1962 he was able to convince France to grant Algeria her independence (Puchala 186-7). "He knew how to submit gallantly to what he could not prevent. . .and miraculously. . .succeeded in transforming into a personal triumph what under any other regime would have appeared to be a catastrophe" (Luthy 18-20).

By ending French colonial pursuits, he conserved and refocused domestic resources and social energy. His Fifth Republic transformed France by providing political stability which allowed the restructuring and modernization of the military, development of a nuclear capability (force de frappe), currency reform, industrial retooling, and economic expansion (Grinnell-Milne 311). De Gaulle's interventionist state provided France its first effective government under a republic (Hauss 155). It was effective because it restored a measure of

real power from which France could operate in the international arena.

PLANS AND PRIORITIES

The reassertion of France's independence and grandeur was both means and ends for de Gaulle. International recognition (the reputation of power) was essential to bolster France's lack of relative real power in the world arena (Harrison 53). His successes in achieving improved security and economic independence increased both France's real and perceived power. Likewise, increases in real and perceived power assisted him in achieving further independence. This reciprocal reinforcement of independence and power went a long way towards redefining the terms of French security and economic interdependence.

Each successive repudiation of NATO (France's withdrawal from NATO exercises and denial of United States nuclear weapons on French soil without French control in 1959; banishment of United States forces from French bases; removal of the French fleet from NATO in 1963 and French officers from the NATO command headquarters in 1964; and the scuttling of the United States multilateral nuclear force project in Europe) asserted French leverage over her hegemonious partners. Such actions reduced the ability of transnational actors to make decisions for France and about French security without her participation. The successful testing of the atomic bomb in France in 1960 ensured that France could not be ignored as an international actor. De Gaulle's objective in his larger grand strategy was to direct and control the terms of *international* interdependence. Although he spoke of autonomy and self-sufficiency, de Gaulle was keenly aware that France was a part of a larger community.

De Gaulle's pattern of influence in the international system is best described as "relations of overt manipulation" (Holsti 127). He used tactics of refusal, obstruction and intransigence to reinsert France into the balance of power game. By brokering France's

weaknesses into power and achieving improved independence, he realized the benefits of the NATO alliance without any of its obligations. He attempted to do the same with the Common Market and nearly succeeded (Cook 371). A master of manipulation, his pursuit of separate alliances first with Germany then with East European countries, even his dialogue with the Soviets was part of his larger plan to strengthen Europe, prevent the threat of a new German Reich, and serve as an arbiter between the Soviets and Anglo-Americans (Harrison 64). His efforts to do for Europe however, what he had done for France were not successful.

CONCLUSIONS

In the short run, 1958-1968, Charles de Gaulle's national strategy succeeded in promoting France's independence and grandeur. For this he was exactly the right person in the right place at the right time. The results of his impact during this period in domestic France have already been discussed. In foreign relations, France, vis a vis de Gaulle, came to be recognized as a legitimate player once more in international politics and to some extent was acknowledged as having a central role to play in Europe. France's participation in international politics undoubtedly assisted in eroding the hegemony of the bipolar world of the 1960's and enhancing the detente process (Harrison 68-70).

In the long run however, de Gaulle's domestic regime was so dependent upon his personal strength of character and commitment, little of it survived him (Luthy 18). Likewise, his grand strategy for international interdependence was ironically undermined by his successful promotion of French independence and grandeur. His diplomatic tactics and push for French hegemony in Europe engendered conflict instead of the cooperation necessary to unite Europe (Isenberg 117). In the long run, de Gaulle's view of the world was an anachronism. The strategies and tools that were so effective to set France right at the national level did not transcend to the international community.

As the United States redefines its role in the post cold war international community, it is grappling with a tendency towards neo-isolationism and the issue of national sovereignty as related to international intervention. Our reluctance to forego our ability to act unilaterally or to subordinate control of our military forces to some international organization is a reluctance to cede our independence and power. Yet, the world is far more interdependent today than it was even for de Gaulle.

As we seek to redefine the basis for authority to interact in the world, we must be open to new paradigms. The concept of sovereignty as we use it today may not serve the concerns of the international community for the 21st century. It may be as anachronistic for us as it was for de Gaulle. As our relative power declines, we must ensure we preserve our capability to act. To do so, the tendency towards isolationism must be resisted. As long as we are the world's preeminent power, our leadership must cultivate world economic security and avoid creating new schisms in the international community.

Likewise as we reinvent government and rebuild our domestic institutions, we need to examine our assumptions and paradigms. Leadership has an obligation to educate and involve society in the decisions which shape our domestic future. Otherwise they won't last beyond the administration which created them.

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