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“Forum: De Gaulle, French Foreign Policy, and the Cold War” in the *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:1 (Winter 2012): 48-98, which included commentaries by Irwin Wall, Andrew Moravcsik, Edward A. Kolodziej, and Marc Trachtenberg on a collection of essays edited by Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Garret Martin, *Globalizing de Gaulle. International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

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Review by **Mark Sheetz**, Visiting Professor of Government at Wesleyan University

Two of the submissions for this forum on “De Gaulle, French Foreign Policy, and the Cold War,” namely, those from Marc Trachtenberg and Andrew Moravcsik, are substantial and provocative. They deserve extended discussion, but space does not permit a proper critique of both. Moravcsik’s argument is largely a restatement of his thesis, elaborated over ten years ago, that de Gaulle’s European policy was motivated by economic, rather than geopolitical concerns.¹ It received a great deal of attention at the time and has already been the subject of extensive and withering scholarly criticism.² Hence, this essay will focus on the submission from Marc Trachtenberg.³

Did Charles de Gaulle ever accept the notion of a German atomic bomb? Marc Trachtenberg thinks so. He makes the astonishing claim that from roughly 1960-1964 de Gaulle became reconciled to a nuclear Germany and to the idea that a nuclear-armed Germany would join a nuclear-armed France as the twin pillars of an independent European defense (85-86). At the same time, he acknowledges that both before and after

¹ Andrew Moravcsik, “De Gaulle between Grain and *Grandeur*: The Political Economy of French EC Policy, 1958-1970, Parts I and II” *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Spring, Fall 2000).

² See commentaries on Moravcsik by Stanley Hoffmann, John Keeler, Alan Milward, John Gillingham, Justin Vanke, and Marc Trachtenberg in *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Fall 2000) <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/jcws/jcws2000.html> ; and additional commentaries in the “Moravcsik Forum” in H-Diplo, January 2001, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/moravcsikforum.htm> .

³ Marc Trachtenberg, “The de Gaulle Problem,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:1 (Winter 2012): 81-92.

this period de Gaulle was unalterably opposed to a nuclear Germany. Quite apart from the question of an abrupt about-face not once, but twice, why would de Gaulle accept this notion? Trachtenberg believes it is logically consistent with de Gaulle's fundamental philosophy of the state (82-83). But if so, then wouldn't his views prior to 1960 and again after 1964 have been inconsistent with that philosophy?

I am not persuaded that de Gaulle changed his mind about the German bomb. It seems capricious that de Gaulle would change his mind about the German bomb in 1960 and then change it back again in 1964. This is a man who had a long-standing and comprehensive vision of European politics and a sophisticated understanding of Europe's role in the world. He was not known to be fickle when it came to strategic visions of a European future. Is it not more likely that he maintained the same position all along? My view is that de Gaulle was never ambivalent about a German bomb. Rather, he assumed that Germany would have to settle for a 'European' (French or Anglo-French) bomb and that, for 'historical' reasons, Germany could not claim a bomb of its own.

Trachtenberg argues that de Gaulle's political program was inconsistent and that his geopolitical concept was incoherent (91-92). He bases this claim on the assumption that a 'European' Europe had to be built around a Franco-German partnership, that the partners had to be equal, and that this meant a nuclear Germany. A 'European' Europe would then constitute a third pole in world politics, independent of the power blocs of East and West and capable of defending itself.

Certainly, de Gaulle believed in a 'European Europe,' a Europe that could stand on its own, and balance Soviet power without direct American support. Germany was certainly part of that Europe, as were nuclear weapons. This does not mean, however, that de Gaulle assumed a nuclear Germany. A German bomb, like death and taxes, might be inevitable, but de Gaulle did not have to accept it willingly. He was acutely aware of Germany's interest in an independent nuclear deterrent. The FIG episode, in which France and Germany agreed to produce nuclear weapons together, came to an abrupt end at his insistence.⁴

Certainly, a strong Europe that could defend itself was a necessary fallback position in case of an American withdrawal. That is why France developed an independent deterrent in the first place. But de Gaulle's vision of an independent Europe based on a Franco-German entente does not imply a nuclear Germany. There was no thought of including Germany in French nuclear war plans, just as there was no thought of including France in

⁴See Colette Barbier, "Les négociations franco-germano-italiennes en vue de l'établissement d'une coopération militaire nucléaire au cours des années 1956-1958," *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, No. 1-2 (1990).

American nuclear war plans. As far as I know, de Gaulle never even went so far as to suggest German participation in a French nuclear force.⁵

Trachtenberg argues that de Gaulle's rhetoric cannot be taken at face value, and that he was not serious when he spoke of a 'European Europe' (88, 91). Indeed, professional historians and political scientists take little at face value; they have to be persuaded by logic and evidence. Trachtenberg offers a plausible logic, but what about his evidence?

Trachtenberg believes that in weighing competing arguments, it is important to examine the evidence the author presents, and "if even the evidence that the author himself cites fails to prove the basic point, maybe that point does not really rest on a firm evidentiary base at all."⁶Fair enough. What evidence does Trachtenberg present to support his thesis? He relies heavily on two key conversations between General de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer, at Rambouillet in July 1960 and again at the Elysée palace in January 1963. Let's take a look at the evidence of this archival record.

At Rambouillet, de Gaulle was trying to convince Adenauer to leave a loveless marriage with the United States and run away with France. He wanted to propose a political, economic, and military union that would embrace a common foreign and defense policy.⁷But de Gaulle was put in a very delicate situation. Adenauer was furious at a prior suggestion by Premier Michel Jean-Pierre Debré that nations without nuclear weapons are mere satellites.⁸ De Gaulle had to placate Adenauer's pique. He had to convince Adenauer that by joining a partnership with France, Germany would not be a satellite and would not be without nuclear weapons. It would have recourse to French nuclear weapons.

He had to reassure Adenauer that French and German interests were one and that America did not share these interests. The defense of Europe would be assured by German conventional forces as the first line of defense (battle of Germany) and French nuclear forces as the second line (battle of France). The American nuclear guarantee was dubious now that the Soviet Union could retaliate against the continental United States. "Perhaps

⁵ Trachtenberg alludes to the possibility that de Gaulle offered Germany a share in the *force de frappe* during a meeting with Karl Carstens in July 1964. But the offer is all smoke and mirrors. See Helga Haftendorn, Klaus Hildebrand, et al, eds., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1964*, Band II (Munich: OldenbourgVerlag, 1995), 768.

⁶ Trachtenberg, "De Gaulle, Moravcsik, and Europe," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Fall 2000), 116.

⁷ It was at Rambouillet that de Gaulle presented Adenauer with his proposal to add a political-military dimension to the Common Market, later known as the Fouchet Plan, that would rival NATO.

⁸ For a complete record of the conversations, see "Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Rambouillet," 29-30 July 1960, *Documents Diplomatiques Français (DDF) 1960*, Tome II, 163-179.

she will wage war for Europe, but where, when, and to what extent? We do not know.”⁹ On the other hand, we know that France and Germany would be fully committed, and that France was committed to Germany, because their battle was one and the same.¹⁰

De Gaulle insisted that Europe must be able to defend itself independently of the United States and that this meant a European nuclear deterrent. Did he therefore propose that Germany obtain nuclear weapons? No, he did not. The farthest he went was to speculate that at some point Germany might have them as well. Trachtenberg puts a lot of stock in this remark, quoted by Georges-Henri Soutou in an article on Franco-German strategic cooperation. But Trachtenberg pushes the inference well beyond Soutou, since Soutou himself could not be sure whether this was merely “a tactical maneuver to convince Adenauer to break with the USA.” All he acknowledged is that such a remark demonstrated “how far de Gaulle went to win Adenauer over to his concept (of Europe).”¹¹

Adenauer observed that the rival Social Democrats were opposed to a nuclear Germany. But then, he complained, the German army would be nothing more than a troop of auxiliaries. He called de Gaulle’s bluff and suggested that France and Germany produce weapons together. This recalled the FIG proposal for joint production of nuclear weapons, but de Gaulle backed off and declared that such an initiative would have to await a suitable European institution that replaced NATO. There was clearly no enthusiasm for a German bomb and no encouragement for such a German program on de Gaulle's part.

Trachtenberg argues that de Gaulle was ambivalent about German nuclear weapons in the early 1960s. But the Germans were not ambivalent. They had been interested in acquiring nuclear weapons ever since the prospect of nuclear cooperation with France emerged in 1957. Although de Gaulle ended that cooperation in 1958, German defense officials continued to search for a way to renew that cooperation. After lofting several trial balloons, Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauss made a proposal to his counterpart, Pierre Messmer, in January 1962. Germany was prepared to agree to a common defense policy with France, based on the production of nuclear weapons in France that would be

⁹ “Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Rambouillet,” 29-30 July 1960, *DDF*, 175.

¹⁰ De Gaulle repeated this again and again, even after Adenauer had left power. See Maurice Vaïsse, *La Grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 9-10.

¹¹ Georges-Henri Soutou, “De Gaulle, Adenauer und die gemeinsame Front gegen die amerikanische Nuklearstrategie,” in E.W. Hansen, G. Schreiber, and B. Wegner, eds, *Politischer Wandel, organisierte Gewalt und nationale Sicherheit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 499. Pierre Maillard referred to this remark as a “coquetterie” of the general. According to Vaïsse, de Gaulle was “resolutely hostile to a German nuclear deterrent,” Vaïsse, *La Grandeur*, 237-238.

available to the German army as well as the French army in the event of conflict. But the French defense minister rejected the proposal.¹² There would be no such cooperation.

Surely if de Gaulle were reconciled to the concept of a nuclear Germany, there would have been some sympathy for Franco-German collaboration. But French rejection of any such project indicated the lack of any interest whatsoever in a nuclear-armed Germany. If the Germans somehow managed to develop a nuclear deterrent independently, there was little the French could do about it. But there would be no assistance from France.

The matter came up again in conversations surrounding the signing of the Elysée treaty in January 1963.¹³ The treaty signaled a milestone in Franco-German rapprochement. After a century of enmity, French and Germans would at last be partners in a 'community of destiny' within the European Community.

At the Elysée de Gaulle was again trying to woo Adenauer away from the United States. He was trying to organize a European alternative to NATO, starting with a Franco-German political and military union. He insisted that France and Germany were in the same strategic boat and that France (unlike the United States) would use its nuclear weapons for the defense of Europe "without delay and without exception." "The defense of Germany is linked to our defense," he continued, "because there would be no chance for France after Germany is taken."¹⁴ The all but explicit point was that the French nuclear arsenal would protect Germany. It might be smaller than America's, but it was more certain. These would be French, not German, weapons.. There was no need for a separate German deterrent.

Adenauer then asked de Gaulle what he thought about potential German research on missiles. De Gaulle took this as code for a German nuclear deterrent and conceded that one day Germany would want to produce its own atomic bombs, but that the consequences would be "*extremely serious*" (italics mine).¹⁵ It would accelerate the withdrawal of American forces from Europe. And any chance of a settlement with the Soviets would be lost. There was no mention of any cooperation with Germany on the subject of atomic weapons.

¹² See Georges-Henri Soutou, "Adenauer et la coopération stratégique franco-allemande (1956-1963)," in *La République Fédérale d'Allemagne et la Construction de l'Europe, 1949-1963* (Paris: Editions du Temps, 1999), 265.

¹³ For the French record, see "Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Paris," 21-23 January 1963, *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1963*, Tome I (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2000), pp 89-119; for the German record, see "Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Adenauer mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle in Paris," 21-22 January 1963, in Hans-Peter Schwarz, et al, eds, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1963*, Band I (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994), 111-148.

¹⁴ "Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Paris," 21 January 1963, *DDF*, 95.

¹⁵ "Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Paris," 21 January 1963, *DDF*, 96.

In fact, de Gaulle and Adenauer discussed other possibilities for cooperation in that same conversation. Missiles came up for discussion. No problem, said de Gaulle. “This is an area where direct collaboration between France and Germany is perfectly possible.” Adenauer then raised the subject of biological weapons. Again de Gaulle replied, “This is an area where France is ready to cooperate with Germany.”¹⁶ But the unstated assumption -- the *éléphant* in the room -- was that there would be no such cooperation in the area of nuclear weapons. If de Gaulle really thought that the development of German nuclear weapons was best undertaken in a context where France could control and influence their development, why did he not suggest the joint production of such weapons, just as his predecessors in the Fourth Republic had proposed?

The reason, and the reason for de Gaulle’s predecessors as well, was that nuclear weapons would give France an advantage over Germany. The possession of nuclear weapons would make France the de facto leader of the new strategic partnership.¹⁷ Trachtenberg asks what kind of Europe could be built without a nuclear Germany. The answer, and one that is entirely consistent with de Gaulle’s political philosophy, is – a French Europe. That was the aim of French foreign policy under de Gaulle: an independent (‘European’) Europe under French leadership.¹⁸ And that was the reason de Gaulle never seriously contemplated the acceptance of a nuclear Germany.

De Gaulle was just stringing the Germans along. His real attitude was revealed in a meeting with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard in Bonn. Erhard asked de Gaulle flat out whether, in his concept of a Europe that was both independent and strong enough to defend itself, nuclear weapons were a French force or a genuine European force. De Gaulle replied that the day would come when Europe would be sufficiently organized, politically and militarily, to have its own nuclear deterrent. But that day had not yet arrived. In the meantime, there would be separate British and French nuclear weapons. But Europe would in effect possess a nuclear deterrent, because these national deterrents would be automatically employed for the defense of Europe.¹⁹

Bertrand Goldschmidt, a nuclear chemist who worked on the Manhattan Project and then headed the International Relations Division of the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), tells a story about de Gaulle. As President, de Gaulle would visit him at the CEA from time to time. Each time he would ask Goldschmidt the same

¹⁶ “Entretiens Franco-Allemands de Paris,” 21 January 1963, *DDF*, 96-97.

¹⁷ Soutou, “Adenauer et la coopération stratégique franco-allemande (1956-1963),” 271-272.

¹⁸ See Vaisse, *La Grandeur*, 233-234.

¹⁹ See “Gespräche des Bundeskanzlers Erhard mit Staatspräsident de Gaulle,” 4 July 1964, *AAPD* 1964, 775.

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question. He wanted to know “when, how, at what pace, and how soon the Germans could acquire an atomic weapon if, reneging on their international commitments, they decided to do it.” As Goldschmidt observes, “In spite of an integrating Europe and the new bonds created, the General had not forgotten.”²⁰

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²⁰ Goldschmidt, *Pionniers de l'Atome* (Éditions Stock, 1987), 267.