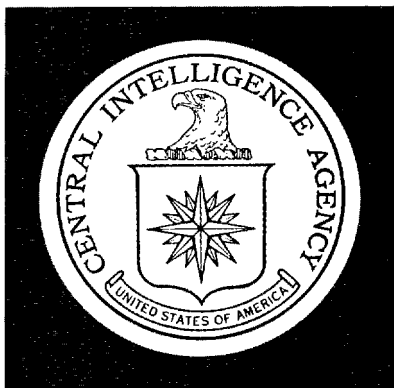


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

De Gaulle and the Fifth Republic, 1958-1968

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DE GAULLE AND THE FIFTH REPUBLIC, 1958 - 1968

The domestic crises that shook France during 1968 have revealed strengths as well as weaknesses in the institutions of the Fifth Republic. Although the May upheaval was comparable in scope to a number of past national crises that toppled the men in power and led to new constitutions, both the Gaullists and the Fifth Republic survived the storm. Even if the present social discontent spirals into a new crisis serious enough to prompt De Gaulle to resign, it is likely that the governmental structure--a strong presidential system--established by De Gaulle and his followers a decade ago will last into a post-Gaullist era.

The constitution of the Fifth Republic gives the president authority to act decisively in the realm of foreign policy. Under De Gaulle, the internal political checks on presidential powers have been virtually eliminated, and only external factors--events in the international sphere--have placed limits on the president's actions. De Gaulle's foreign policy represents less of a break with the past than the style of Gaullist diplomacy might indicate. In some instances, however, De Gaulle has taken advantages of changes in the international situation to make abrupt policy departures. Above all, he has left a unique imprint on all French policies--new and old--because of his style and his philosophical approach.

De Gaulle and the Transformation
of the French Political System

General de Gaulle has played a direct and decisive role in restricting the French political system to shift primary power to the office of the president. When, in May 1958, the National Assembly invested De Gaulle as premier and entrusted him with special powers to deal with the Algerian crisis, it also gave him a mandate to draft a new constitution and submit it to the

people of France for their approval within six months. Unlike the constitution of the Fourth Republic, which was the product of public debate, the new document was drafted behind closed doors by a small group of men seeking to embody De Gaulle's political ideals.

The primary goal of these Gaullists was to rectify the obvious defects of the unique form of parliamentary democracy that had become entrenched in

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KEY EVENTS UNDER THE FIFTH REPUBLIC

- 1958 **May** Military revolt in Algeria paves way for collapse of Fourth Republic and accession of De Gaulle to power
- October** Adoption of a new constitution establishes the Fifth Republic
- 1960 **February** Successful test shots in the Sahara confirm French progress in nuclear research and development
- 1962 **March** Evian agreement grants independence to Algeria after seven-year war
- 1963 **January** Franco-German Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation highlights French desire to achieve independent European grouping within the Atlantic Alliance
- 1964 **January** France recognizes Communist China
- 1965 **July** Beginning of seven-month French boycott of European community bodies in opposition to proposals to "democratize" the communities
- December** De Gaulle re-elected president by small margin for another seven-year term
- 1966 **March** France withdraws from the military organization of NATO and orders all foreign troops and facilities from French soil
- 1967 **March** National Assembly elections assure Gaullists a small working—although not formal—majority



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- November** France again refuses to enter into immediate negotiations on British entry into the Common Market
- 1968 **3 May** Student confrontation with police at the Sorbonne leads to ten days of street fighting—initially students win widespread public sympathy
- 12 May** Communist and non-Communist labor unions join in 24-hour sympathy strike
- 14-22 May** Wildcat strikes sweep the country bringing economy to a halt—more than half of the French workers on strike
- 24 May** De Gaulle's radio and TV call for a referendum on reform fails to restore order
- 30 May** De Gaulle dissolves Assembly and calls for new elections—a turning point toward restoration of order
- 7-16 June** Workers gradually return to work and government takes control of universities
- 23 and 30 June** Gaullist party, taking advantage of reaction against disorder and fears of a Communist takeover, wins massive election majority—296 seats
- 10 July** De Gaulle, in a surprise move, replaces Georges Pompidou with Maurice Couve de Murville as prime minister



- September-October** Government debates and passes major educational reform bill
- November** Government meets financial crisis by refusing to devalue franc and imposing economic austerity measures
- December** Student and labor unrest continues

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France in the late nineteenth century and had continued with only slight modification until the crisis of 1958. The primary problem was to find a solution to the Third and Fourth Republics' most serious flaw: ministerial instability--frequent changes of the government resulting from crumbling coalitions and a loss of a majority in the National Assembly. Between 1876, when the Third Republic took its final political form, and 1958, when the Fourth Republic collapsed, there were 119 ministerial crises, 24 of which occurred during the 12 years of the Fourth Republic.

Chronic governmental instability affected the manner in which French premiers fulfilled their tasks. Because these men were almost certain that they would not be in office for any extended period of time, they tended to concentrate on immediate problems rather than on long-range questions of domestic and foreign policy. The essential task of the cabinet was less to make decisions on the major issues confronting France than to defend itself against attacks of the elected parliamentarians. The more serious the problems confronting France, the more the governmental system acted as a brake on effective action.

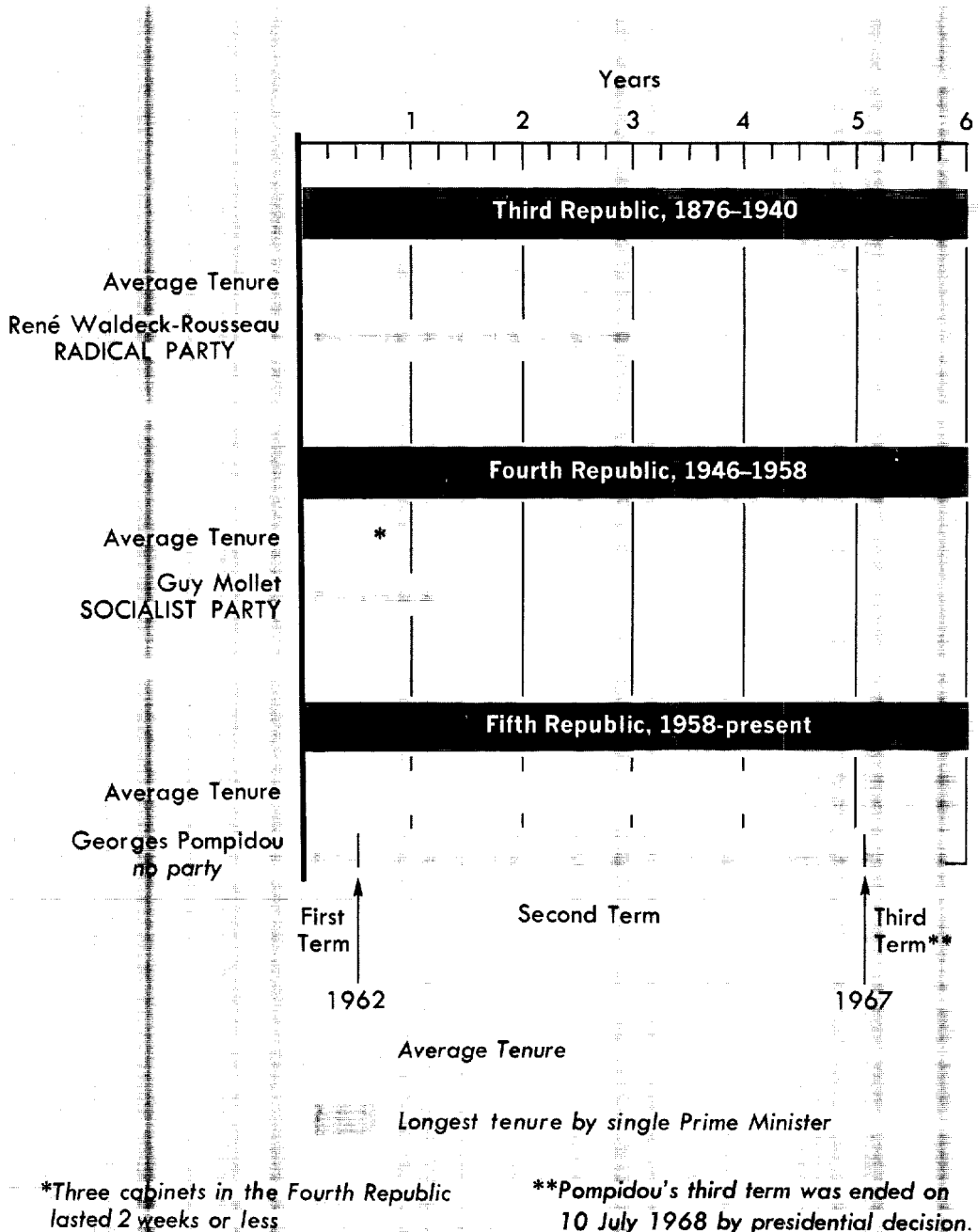
Ministerial instability became an indicator of the gravity of the issues facing France. The average duration of a ministry during the Third and Fourth Republics was one year and five months. Between 1918 and 1940, when France was confronted with the Great Depression and the tri-

umph of fascism in Italy and Germany, ministerial crises occurred on an average of every six months. Following the Second World War, faced with the challenge of Soviet Communism and the crises of decolonization, the average life of a ministry was six months. The most acute problem of decolonization was Algeria, and as the Algerian crisis increased in intensity, so also did government instability: in the year immediately preceding the collapse of the Fourth Republic there was a new government every three to four months. Thus, at precisely those moments in history when France was most in need of decisive leadership, the governmental system proved least effective in solving the nation's problems.

With this history in mind, De Gaulle and his followers moved to design a new political system that would reduce ministerial instability, strengthen the authority of the executive, improve the efficiency of the decision-making processes of government, and provide the executive with reserve authority to deal with national emergencies like those of 1940 and 1958--and 1968.

The most fundamental change that the Fifth Republic's political system instituted was the shift in power from the National Assembly to the President of the Republic. Under the Fourth Republic, both the premier, who was the effective chief executive, and the president, a ceremonial head of state, were chosen by the National Assembly. Under the Fifth Republic, the Assembly's

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**MINISTERIAL STABILITY UNDER THE THIRD, FOURTH, AND FIFTH REPUBLICS,
 1876-1968**

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power has been sharply reduced; the premier is now chosen by the president, and the president since 1962 has been chosen by popular election for a seven-year term. Although the 1958 constitution is ambiguous concerning the respective roles of the president and prime minister, De Gaulle has set precedents in the last decade that are likely to ensure the primacy of the president.

The Political Record of the Fifth Republic, 1958-1968

During the ten years since the Fifth Republic was founded, France has had only one ministerial crisis, and only three prime ministers. This record of ministerial stability--unmatched in the history of French republics--is largely the result of the new institutions of the Fifth Republic. Other factors unrelated to the formal structure of the government, however, have contributed: the prestige and ability of General de Gaulle, the necessity for unity that the Algerian crisis demanded, the emergence of a majority bloc of parties on the right committed to support Gaullist cabinets, and the steady economic growth that, at least until late 1967, had resulted in an almost uninterrupted increase in living standards.

Beneath the surface, however, discontent was growing among the French people, and last May it erupted into a national crisis that led to widespread rioting, closed all of France's universities, spiraled into a

general strike, and eventually paralyzed the economy.

The crisis pointed up shortcomings of the Fifth Republic's system that had previously received little attention. In resolving the problems of instability confronting the Fourth Republic, the Gaullists had created a regime that was stable, but was also inflexible and unresponsive to the demands of a broad sector of society. Under the Fourth Republic the National Assembly had been the center of all political life and the arbiter of the executive branch; under the Fifth Republic the Assembly was reduced almost to political insignificance.

The desire for change ran deepest in the two social groups that touched off the May crisis--students and labor--and in the parties leading the parliamentary fight for reform, the political left. Even after opposition groups had made clear their growing discontent with the Gaullist regime and its policies at the polls--as they did in the parliamentary elections of 1967 when they knocked out the government's comfortable working majority--the government ignored their views.

In spite of its good showing in the hard fought electoral battle of 1967, the opposition could neither overthrow the cabinet nor--more importantly--influence policy. Even on minor issues, such as the government's information policy involving decisions on television advertising, the government made no effort to work

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EVENTS OF THE MAY CRISIS



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out compromises. In vote after parliamentary vote the opposition was defeated.

The political impotence of the opposition not only produced frustration among opposition deputies, but also brought on a growing malaise among those who had voted for those deputies. This frustration was fed by a slowing of economic growth in late 1967 and early 1968. Discontent surfaced in a number of short strikes, but not until students in Paris rioted after clashes with police did this discontent take on the character of a massive protest movement.

During the early phases of the May crisis, there was a groundswell of opposition to Gaullism that would have toppled any cabinet of the Third and Fourth Republics. De Gaulle, however, relying both on his own prestige and the instruments of power given him by the Fifth Republic's constitution, on 30 May dissolved the National Assembly. By this action, he was able to direct discontent into the normal electoral channels of parliamentary elections. After an election campaign conducted in an atmosphere of fear and continued disorder, the electorate showed its concern for stability and order by giving the orthodox Gaullist party an unprecedented 296 out of the 487 seats in the National Assembly. For the first time in French parliamentary history, a single party captured an absolute majority.

With its large parliamentary majority, Couve de Murville's cabinet is in no danger of being overthrown by a motion of censure. The prospects for social peace, however, depend largely on the government's willingness to respond more fully and more immediately to the demands of those segments of the populace that feel alienated from the system and deprived of its benefits. Although the government has made some moves in the direction of satisfying these demands, the latent and powerful hostility that still exists could once again lead to an extraparliamentary challenge.

Continuing Strength of the Institutions

The further the events of May recede into the past, the more clear it becomes that the crisis revealed strengths as well as weaknesses in the Fifth Republic. The May upheaval was comparable in scope both to the revolutionary crises of the nineteenth century (1830, 1848, 1870) and the Algerian crisis of the late 1950s. Each of these earlier crises had not only unseated the men in power, but had also led to new constitutions; in contrast, both the Gaullists and the institutions of the Fifth Republic endured the storm.

The endurance of the Gaullists can probably be attributed to the dogged refusal of De Gaulle to back down in a moment of crisis, but the staying power

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of the Fifth Republic's institutions was largely a result of widespread public adherence to the structure of the Fifth Republic itself. During the crisis, there were chants of "de Gaulle assassin," but no crowds gathered at the Hotel de Ville to proclaim the Sixth Republic. Students defying authority focused on the President himself, not the presidential system; the self-proclaimed Communist spokesmen of the working class were primarily interested in economic gains and in preserving their claim to labor leadership, not in spearheading revolutionary change.

Beneath this consensus in support of the Fifth Republic lies an economic and demographic transformation that began long before 1958, but has had its strongest impact on French politics over the last decade.

With an almost uninterrupted improvement in living standards, labor militancy has decreased. In addition, the traditional militants have been the workers in large factories, who are now declining numerically in relation to the population as a whole. These workers now constitute roughly 30 percent of the total working population; about 40 percent of the work force is now in the white collar and service sectors. Factory workers are likely to continue to demand an increased share in the affluent society. Even if the French economy falters badly in the coming months, however, they are likely to continue to call for economic concessions

rather than alterations in the institutions of the Fifth Republic

by 1972 roughly half the French electorate will have voted only under the Fifth Republic. It seems probable, therefore, that the trend will be toward increased public acceptance of the Fifth Republic in a post-Gaullist era.

Nor is the nation's political elite interested in altering the presidential system. Even though the opposition parties have been denied a substantial role in the major decisions affecting French policy, the leaders of these parties believe that in a post-Gaullist era their power and influence will almost certainly increase. They also reason that in the future they will have a good chance of capturing the presidency, an office promising real power in effecting the social reforms that are their goals. Furthermore, the opposition leaders are disillusioned with the game of constitution-making; changing the form of government, they have concluded, is not an effective method of altering the realities of political and social life.

De Gaulle and Foreign Policy

De Gaulle's success in instituting a strong presidential

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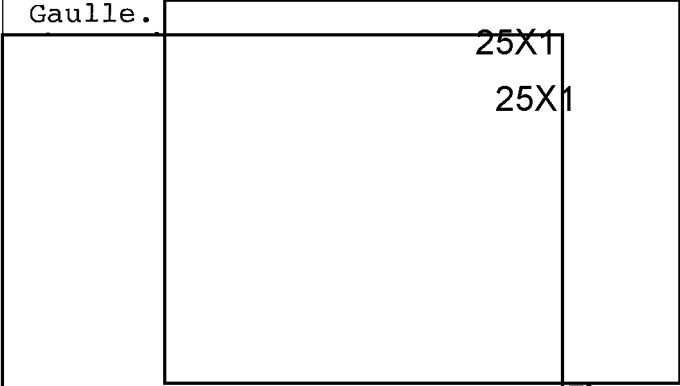
system has permitted him to act decisively in the realm of foreign policy. No longer are foreign policies dependent on a complex bargaining process or influenced by parliamentary debate. In framing the new constitution, De Gaulle made sure that the president was constitutionally endowed with broad authority.

Although the constitutional delegation of powers was the most significant change that has made foreign policy essentially the expression of one man's vision and will, other factors have also contributed. The internal political check on De Gaulle's powers in foreign policy making has been substantially reduced--in fact, almost eliminated--by the extraordinary prestige De Gaulle brought to the office. Moreover, no person or institution--political parties, parliament, pressure groups, public opinion, or individual politicians--has had sufficient power to force him to make basic alterations in his policies.

Opposition political parties, because they have been weak and divided throughout the ten-year Gaullist reign, have been unsuccessful either singly or collectively in marshaling the strength to challenge De Gaulle on any foreign policy issue, although the strong showing of Europeanist strength in the 1965 presidential elections probably was a factor in moderating his attack at that time on Common Market institutions. Nor has the Gaullist party itself had enough unity or audacity to suggest to the General

that some policies might profitably be modified. Moreover, many political figures who might otherwise have challenged him were too discredited by their association with the Fourth Republic to have any stature in the new era. The impotence of the parties, coupled with the cutting back of the constitutional prerogatives of the parliament, have contributed to the decline of the National Assembly as a significant factor in foreign policy decision-making.

Most pressure groups have directed their attention to domestic issues and no longer serve effectively, as they sometimes did under the Fourth Republic, as intermediaries to the established authority. Above all, the public at large, because it pays little heed to foreign affairs and because foreign affairs in general have not also become domestic crises as they were under the Fourth Republic, has placed few restraints on De Gaulle.



The only real limitations that have been placed on De Gaulle in the foreign policy sphere result, then, from external factors, events in the international arena.

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Continuity of Policies

Perhaps the surest guide to what policies might prevail in a post-Gaullist era starts with a recognition that many of De Gaulle's policies had their genesis during the Fourth Republic. Decolonization, improved relations with Germany, and build-up of a nuclear defense policy were policies of the Fourth Republic which De Gaulle accelerated and on which he placed his personal mark. Even in his policy toward Europe, De Gaulle accepted the treaties that set up the European Communities and some of their immediate objectives. He did not, however, accept the objective of a European federal union and has tried to limit further progress toward "supranationality."

In 1958 the burning foreign policy issue was Algeria, where an armed rebellion was climaxing the series of decolonization convulsions that rocked the Fourth Republic and ultimately brought it down. By 1958, France had already liberated its other North African colonies, had withdrawn from Indochina, and had laid the groundwork for an independent status for the African territories. Decolonization, already well under way, was high on the list of priorities when De Gaulle took office.

De Gaulle's unique contribution to the decolonization policy undertaken by the Fourth Republic was his recognition that

close and harmonious ties with France's former possessions, accompanied by efforts to promote French influence in other countries not directly tied to either bloc, could enhance France's power internationally. In effect, De Gaulle transformed the old imperial role and fashioned a new power concept of French dominance in the "third world." To a certain extent, these loose ties have increased French prestige and standing, and De Gaulle has become a kind of spokesman for the smaller countries which want to avoid commitments to the "superpowers."

Only after the decolonization task was completed was De Gaulle able to turn his full attention to other foreign affairs. Again his efforts were often built on policies already initiated by the Fourth Republic. His policy of Franco-German friendship was an extension of pre-1958 efforts to bridge the gap between the two countries, efforts that had already resulted in cordial relations by 1958. De Gaulle, however, took an important step forward when he decided to "institutionalize" the relationship. The result was the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship signed in 1963, the spirit--if not the substance--of which became a major plank in De Gaulle's foreign policy platform. Moreover, De Gaulle saw in the Paris-Bonn axis a potential for increasing France's power without giving Bonn the degree of

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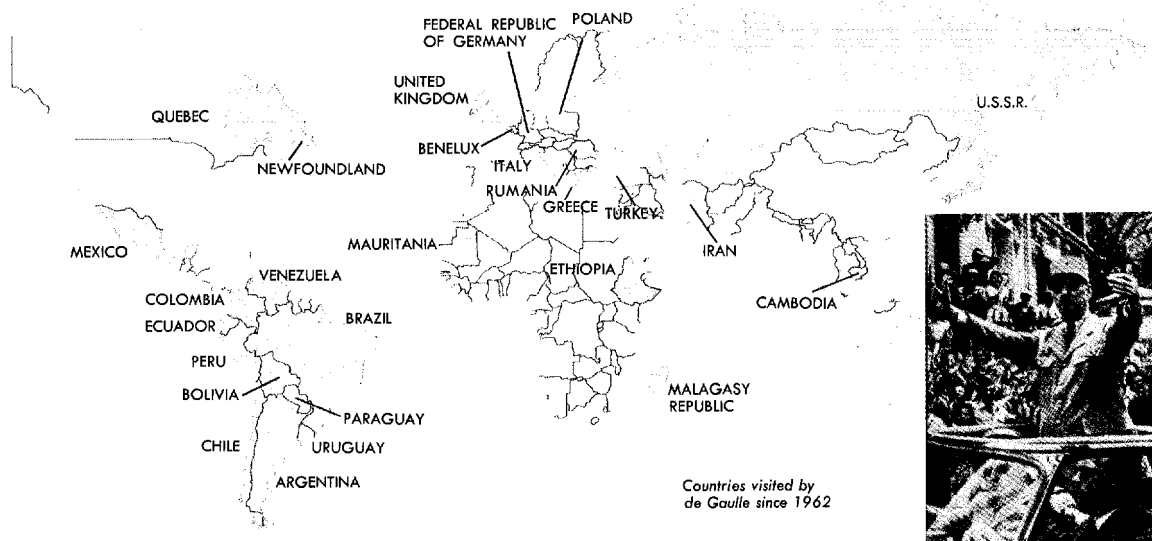
prevent France from playing the dominant role he so zealously sought. He initiated a number of policies aimed at demonstrating that "France, wanting its own independence, doesn't want to be dominated, led by, or integrated into the US system."

The changed conditions in the international sphere also made possible a Gaullist departure in French policy toward Communist countries. In late 1963 and early 1964, De Gaulle began the cautious overtures to the USSR and Eastern Europe that culminated in a Franco-Soviet rapprochement, led to numerous cultural, scientific, and economic ties with both Moscow and Eastern Europe, and catapulted "detente, entente, and cooperation" into a firm policy that has survived the Czechoslovak crisis. His severance of military ties with

NATO facilitated this rapprochement with the East. His recognition of Communist China, too, was a break with the past. Once again, however, De Gaulle perceived--earlier than most--that shifts and changes in the international sphere made possible new initiatives.

De Gaulle's Unique Contribution

The conclusion must be, then, that many of De Gaulle's foreign policies have been only extensions of decisions made by the Fourth Republic. To a number of these policies, however, De Gaulle added a unique contribution of his own. Where more abrupt departures are evident, as in the policies toward the Communist countries and NATO, it was often a major shift in the international sphere that made the continuation of Fourth



De Gaulle in Search of Grandeur

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Republic policies impractical or impossible. De Gaulle's peculiar stamp on French foreign policy has been a change in style, a change in tone, and a change in the "ideological" base.

De Gaulle brought to the presidency certain philosophical attitudes that have had a profound impact on his policies. For him, the nation-state is the fundamental reality of history and any analysis of power must be grounded on this understanding. Insisting that the state is more basic and enduring than any ideology, he sees Communism as a transitory phenomenon only incidentally influencing the international role of countries controlled by the Communists. Believing that the nation-state is the supreme political value, he also believes that its goals must be defined in terms of external ambition. Domestic stability and prosperity are not seen merely as desirable ends in themselves but rather as the means to provide a secure base from which foreign policy aims can be pursued. Almost all internal undertakings therefore have an ultimate purpose in foreign policy.

De Gaulle is a skilled practitioner of the adage that politics is the art of the possible. With only limited material means at his disposal, he is alert to what can be accomplished with what means are available. In seeking to reach his goals, he has pragmatically tried a variety of policies, and sometimes a short-term setback or delay has

only prefaced or prepared a longer range success. Using a number of approaches and sometimes pursuing conflicting goals at the same time, De Gaulle has acted, says political analyst Andre Fontaine, with the "...arrogance of a man who is not resigned to anything that writes finis to a nation about which history has spoken without a break for a thousand years."

That De Gaulle has put his own imprint unmistakably on the shape of French foreign policy is clear. Whether he has succeeded or failed in his primary aims of achieving independent of action and great power status is another question, which perhaps cannot be answered as long as he remains in power. There is little doubt that the Czechoslovak crisis was a setback for De Gaulle's policies, and this has led some observers to conclude that, in terms of objectives he himself set, his foreign policy has failed. De Gaulle, however, judges events in terms of historical perspective and probably thinks it is far too early to assess his policy initiatives, particularly since he still has four more years in office.

Prospects

Certain Gaullist foreign policies are likely to survive the General, particularly those that had their origins in the Fourth Republic. The fact that a number of policies have been supported by both right and left,

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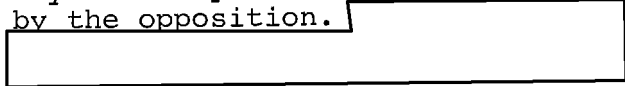
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and occasionally even by the Communists, enhances this prospect. The French nuclear force almost certainly will not be abandoned, as any succeeding government would find it difficult to sacrifice the heavy investment and the status rewards of a nuclear weapons program. Nor is any successor likely to return unconditionally to NATO, although a new government might be more willing to work toward a modus vivendi. A successor government probably would also consider retention of close ties with the former French colonies a useful adjunct to French power, but perhaps would cut back on the amount of money allocated to these countries. Close ties with Germany would remain important in a post-Gaullist era, but perhaps less emphasis would be placed on achieving the dominant position for France.

A future break with De Gaulle in the realm of foreign policy will most probably be an outgrowth of a reduced drive to gain recognition for France as a world power and a decreased willingness to subordinate other policies to achieve that goal.

In terms of specific policies, a successor government will probably be more willing to promote Western European integration and in particular to permit British entry into the European Communities. In addition, a successor is likely to take a more pragmatic approach to relations with the USSR and Eastern Europe, and be less inclined to place the relationships within the framework of "detente, entente, and cooperation."

In any event, any successor--Gaullist or otherwise--will be more limited by domestic political considerations than De Gaulle has been. Freedom to initiate and pursue policies will depend on how much prestige the successor brings to the office and the level of public support he can win. He will also have to take into account the balance of political power in the National Assembly. De Gaulle has been able to rely on a working parliamentary majority throughout most of his tenure, but his successor may face a parliament controlled by the opposition.



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