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France: President Mitterrand's Attitudes Toward the United States

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A Research Paper

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*EUR 84-10053
March 1984*

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Western Europe Division, Office of European
Analysis. [redacted]

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[redacted] Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Central
Mediterranean Branch, EURA, [redacted]

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 March 1984
was used in this report.*

While the Socialist government of Francois Mitterrand has moved toward greater support for the United States in some key areas, it has continued to criticize bitterly US policies in others. This seemingly contradictory approach is rooted at least in part in President Mitterrand's complicated and ambivalent attitudes toward the United States—its traditions, people, and policies. A content analysis¹ of the French President's voluminous and largely autobiographical writings suggests that his ambivalence is deeply rooted. While his attitudes are mostly negative, especially on questions of policy, there is also considerable evidence from these and other sources that Mitterrand harbors a strong, positive attachment to the United States.

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Much of Mitterrand's criticism of the United States is, not surprisingly, concentrated in the foreign arena, especially policy toward the Third World. He has charged that:

- Superpower rivalries and the dictates of multinational corporations have driven the United States to "interventionism" and self-interested "economic imperialism."
- US policies have undermined American political principles and have victimized the people of the underdeveloped world.

He objects not only to the methods used, but also resents what he sees as the arrogance of the superpowers in claiming for themselves the right to force other countries to choose one side or the other. Mitterrand also demonstrates a strong nationalist indignation toward the United States, often claiming that the United States simply ignores France and French interests and does not take France seriously.

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On the other hand, he has voiced high praise of the US political tradition, the Constitution, and the contributions of the founding fathers to democratic ideals.

- His relations with longtime American friends and his reactions to contacts with other Americans—including members of the present administration—have been mostly positive.
- In general, his view of America appears to be that it is a land of vitality and creativity, with an admirable dedication to democratic principles.

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¹ Content analysis presumes that, if the volume of data—in this case, President Mitterrand's journals and essays since 1938—is sufficiently large, calculation of the frequency and character (that is, neutral, negative, or positive) of opinions expressed will yield evidence of the pattern and trend of an individual's attitudes.

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Mitterrand's often contradictory attitudes toward the United States and Americans reflect the variegated influences that have contributed to his intellectual development.

- His progressive father and grandfather engendered in him a reverence for the American past and especially for the founders of the American political ideal.
- His wartime experiences in the resistance reinforced these early impressions and gave him a lasting sense of gratitude for the American role in the liberation of France.
- His postwar drift toward socialism and his growing nationalism, however, added a new and critical dimension to his perceptions, especially of US policies.

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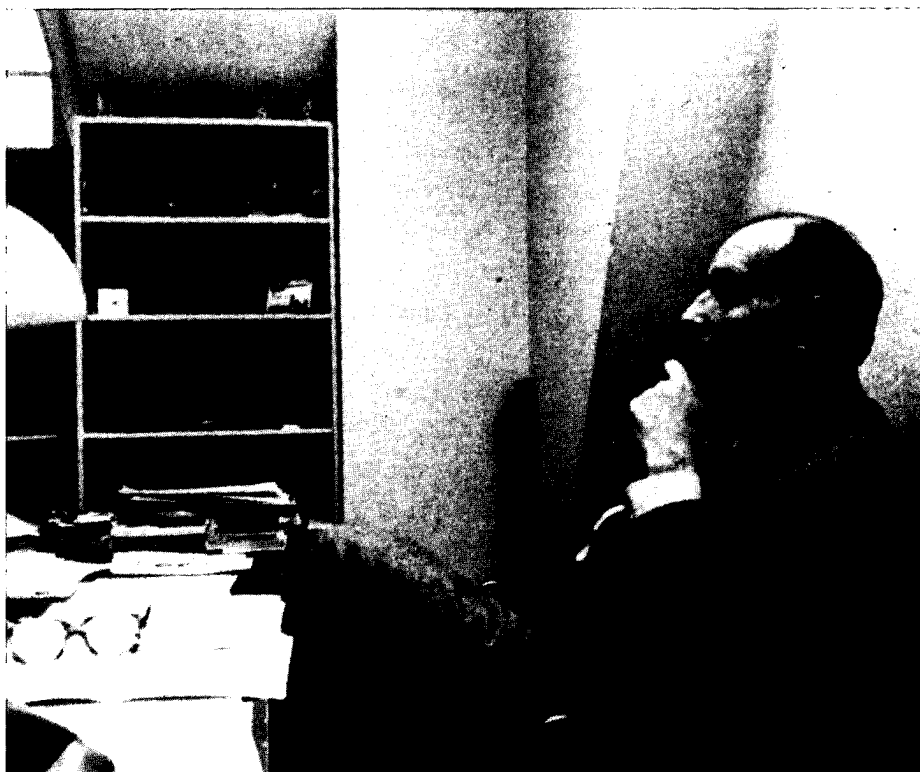
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President Mitterrand in his study.



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France: President Mitterrand's Attitudes Toward the United States

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Introduction

Since coming to power in May 1981, the French Socialists have moved significantly toward greater support for the United States in certain key foreign policy areas. Under Socialist tutelage, for example, France has called for closer cooperation with NATO and followed a much harder line toward Moscow. It has also backed INF deployments and publicly denounced the neutralism implicit in the peace movement. At the same time, Paris has frequently criticized Soviet behavior and has cooled the special relationship with Moscow which previous French governments had touted as a mark of their independence from Washington.

These changes in foreign policy stem in large part from personal initiatives by Francois Mitterrand, who has a long-held conviction that France should support the resolve of the United States and the Western Alliance to resist Soviet intimidation in Europe. The French constitution gives the President virtually complete control of foreign affairs for his seven-year term. Like other French presidents, Mitterrand has had considerable rein to recast French policies according to his own ideas.

The generally positive foreign policy actions stand in contrast, however, to the anti-US rhetoric often associated with Mitterrand. Based on an extensive analysis of Mitterrand's writings, we believe that the contrast reflects a genuine contradiction in his thinking about the United States.

Mitterrand and America

Despite his broad experience in domestic politics and his extensive travels abroad, President Mitterrand has a surprisingly limited view of the world beyond Western Europe, and he probably has a narrower view of the United States than did either President de Gaulle or Giscard. He is well versed in French history and literature and in the modern experience of much of

the Third World—especially Asia and Africa—but he knows and understands little of Anglo-American history prior to World War II. Although Mitterrand suggests in his writings that he has a deep understanding of the US based on extensive contacts here, his direct exposure to people and institutions of the United States is, in fact, very limited, and we believe he probably overstates his experience. US diplomats in Paris have commented that Mitterrand “probably doesn’t understand the United States or how it works.”

In our view, Mitterrand also is clearly of two minds about the United States. His conflicting visions of America—the one rooted in the idealized images of his youth, the other in ideologically influenced perceptions of US policy formed during his mature years—create a contradiction which one observer who knows him well has noted leads often to a profound sense of “disappointment.” As is evident from Mitterrand’s books and interviews, his youthful images form an unrealistically high standard against which he compares his perceptions of postwar US policies. Not surprisingly, this comparison often leaves Mitterrand with the disappointing sense that the US has strayed from its historical origins to pursue policies hostile to its own principles.

American Political System and Traditions

Mitterrand’s views about America—its history, people, culture, and political system—are generally positive. He strongly applauds the US Constitution as based on ideals similar to the French revolutionary republican and democratic traditions of the 19th century.

- The American legal system, he has said approvingly, centers on “the defense of the rights of citizens ... against the arbitrary power” of the State.
- He has also written admiringly of American political institutions, especially of the balance of power between the branches of the federal government.

Mitterrand the Writer

Mitterrand is a well-published author with 11 books to his credit. He has written voluminously about virtually every important issue to affect France in the last 40 years. His books, cast strongly in the French style of intellectual autobiography, trace the evolution of his ideas and attitudes. Some are elaborate expositions of his thoughts on particular issues; others are journals which describe his thinking on various subjects over long periods of time. These "jottings," as Mitterrand calls them, give us an excellent glimpse into the formation of his attitudes and have served as our principal source of evidence.

[REDACTED]

While we understand that Mitterrand sometimes speaks for effect, there are consistencies in his attitudes over the years, and these are evident in the long sequence of his written reflections. The quotes used in this study are representative of these consistencies and are drawn largely from:^a

Aux Frontieres de l'Union francaise (1953), concerning French policies in Asia and Africa, and especially Indochina and Tunisia.

Presence francaise et Abandon (1957); a political commentary on world affairs, but especially on Asia and the Cold War.

La Chine au Defi (1961), on the recent experience of China in world affairs.

^a *Mitterrand has edited one collection of postwar writings by others and has written the prefaces to a number of political tracts, most of them Socialist Party publications. However, only the above are composed exclusively of his own writings.*

[REDACTED]

Le Coup d'Etat permanent (1964), on the French political scene, and in particular on the rule of General de Gaulle.

Ma Part de Verite (1969), political and social commentary on the meaning of the 1960s, including Mitterrand's musings on Vietnam.

Un Socialisme du Possible (1970), more of the above, only more strident on American "imperialism."

La Rose au Poing (1973), election prose and political commentary, including sweeping criticism of super-power relations.

La Paille et le Grain (1975), political and social reflections, from personal journals, 1971-74.

Politique (1977), more political and social commentary from personal journals, 1938-77.

L'Abeille et l'Architecte (1978), more of the same from personal journals, 1975-78.

Politique 2 (1981), reflections on politics and society, from journals kept between 1977 and 1981. (C NF)

Mitterrand has not published since 1981, probably fearing that his candid opinions would complicate French policy.

[REDACTED]

Thomas Jefferson is a personification of American political and intellectual ideals and a link to the values of the French Revolution of 1789. He idealizes and often praises Jefferson as a representative of the humanist and libertarian legacy of the founding fathers and as a direct link to the founders of the French

Republican tradition. "Their teachings," he observed to the US Ambassador shortly after his inauguration, "are etched on our collective memory, where they have been joined by the ideals of the French revolutions of 1789 and 1848."

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**Mitterrand's Published Comments
on the United States**

The last four of Mitterrand's books are published versions of private journals, kept since 1938. In these and his seven lengthy essays, Mitterrand has made only 245 direct references to the United States and Americans: only about 10 percent of them were positive in character, almost 40 percent were neutral, and over 50 percent were negative. Most of the positive statements concern American institutions or people. Almost all of the negative comments, on the other hand, are directed at US policies.

Work	Year Pub- lished	Character of Comments		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
Aux Frontieres	1953	2	5	10
Presence Francaise	1957	0	7	13
La Chine au Defi	1961	0	17	17
Le Coup d'Etat	1964	5	11	2
Ma Part de Verite	1969	2	7	11
Un Socialisme	1970	1	0	5
La Rose au Poing	1973	3	7	11
La Paille et le Grain	1975 ^a	2	10	13
Politique	1977 ^b	2	9	11
L'Abeille et l'Arch.	1978 ^c	3	5	17
Politique 2	1981 ^d	4	16	17
Total		24	94	127

^a Includes journal entries from the period 1971 to 1974.
^b Includes journal entries from the period 1938 to 1977.
^c Includes journal entries from the period 1975 to 1978.
^d Includes journal entries from the period 1977 to 1981.

American People and Places

In general, his contacts with and impressions of the American people have also been positive. Visits to the United States have, as he wrote in 1971, "always confirmed the intuitions I had about them before I went to the country." "I love this country where everyone greets passers-by and opens wide his door," said Mitterrand of his first encounter with America in 1946: "Looking at America, every voyager has the eyes of Christopher Columbus." After several visits Mitterrand was prompted to elaborate in 1969, "It's

the country where I feel most at ease." His attitude toward the American people remained just as positive after his election in 1981. "I have always been happy to visit the US," he said in one postelection interview, "I have a kindred feeling for the American people." As recently as last November, Mitterrand told an American friend that if he were ever forced to leave France, his first choice for a democratic, culturally stimulating exile would be the United States. While the French President admits that his attitudes toward US policies are often negative, he always adds that he has great affection for the nation and its people. "I like Americans," he is fond of saying, "but not their policies."

Perhaps more than most people, Mitterrand values symbols, and no symbol of America causes him to wax so lyrical as does New York. "If the term pure poetry has any meaning," he said in his journal after having viewed the city from atop Rockefeller Center, "it is to be found there." It is a mark of Mitterrand's affection for the city that he takes every opportunity to visit it, and he sent his son, Jean-Christophe, to high school there.

American Political Leaders

Mitterrand's sanguine views of Americans do not extend to most US political leaders. Indeed, he has written that in the aggregate the American system has largely failed to produce "responsible politicians." The system has become "divorced from the values" which previously inspired it, he has said, and it now responds only to clever, self-interested manipulators. He has several times argued that the career of Henry Kissinger—which fascinates him—is a case in point.

Mitterrand's opinions of President Reagan have changed for the better as personal contacts have increased. In the midst of the 1975 presidential primaries, Mitterrand referred to Reagan as "a television master of ceremonies" who had "seduced the old (political) machine that once produced Lincoln."

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Presidents Mitterrand and
Reagan at Ottawa, 1981



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- According to the US Embassy in Paris, Mitterrand was especially impressed by the President's ability at the Ottawa Summit in 1981 to keep the discussions focused on salient issues.
- Mitterrand in 1982 told an American journalist who knows him well that he finds Reagan "a very engaging person" and disagrees with the impression prevalent in France that the President has little command of detail on important issues.
- While admitting a certain amount of impatience with President Reagan, Mitterrand stressed in 1983 that "Personally I have a good understanding with Monsieur Reagan. He's a man with whom one can talk, and he is a well-meaning man, an open man. I'm not saying this on the level of his ideology but, rather, of human contact."

From Mitterrand's own public comments, it appears that he also has a high opinion of Vice President Bush. From Mitterrand's point of view, encounters with Bush have been uniformly positive. Mitterrand said in 1981 that he considers the Vice President "open, sympathetic, constructive," and a man of "real courtesy." Most appealing, says Mitterrand, is the Vice President's instinctive understanding that "there is nothing shocking about one's allies having trouble understanding the reasoning behind one's acts."

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US Policies

In contrast to Mitterrand's generally positive reactions to Americans as people, and his admiration of American political institutions, his attitudes toward the US role abroad are strongly negative (see table 1). In general, Mitterrand has been more critical of US policies toward the Third World than toward France, Europe, or the USSR. He has been particularly critical over the years of US actions in Asia and Vietnam.

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Table 1
Mitterrand's Comments on Specific Subjects
in Relation to the United States

US Policy Toward:	Character of Comments		
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
France	2	18	10
USSR and Soviet Bloc	1	18	18
Europe	3	6	9
Asia and Vietnam	0	10	33
Latin America	0	0	7
Other Third World, including Africa and Middle East	0	10	10
US Domestic Policies and Politics	7	15	10
US Corporations	1	2	12
American People and Culture	5	3	1
US History Before 1946	5	1	0
US Foreign Policy	0	5	15
Other Subjects	0	6	2
Total	24	94	127

Our analysis of Mitterrand's books and journals demonstrates that, if anything, his criticism of the United States has escalated over the last decade. Since 1970 Mitterrand's expressed opinions have become more negative—57 percent for the more recent period to 46 percent for the period before 1970. The trend, moreover, has been toward more positive and negative opinions, with neutral opinions declining by 13 percentage points. Indeed, Mitterrand as a national leader seems less prepared to express positive sentiments about US policy than he was as a private citizen and opposition politician, although he undoubtedly retains a strong positive image of the US in general.

Mitterrand knows that his penchant for criticizing US policies dominates American reporting of his relations with the United States, and he probably believes that this has reinforced a bad impression of him on this side of the Atlantic. From many of his statements it appears that this distresses him because he sees himself as the best ally the United States has ever had in France. His sensitivity in this regard is almost certainly one of the reasons why he so often goes out

Table 2
Trends in Mitterrand's Attitudes
Toward the United States
Before and After 1970

Character	Pre-1970		Post-1970	
	Number	Percent of Total	Number	Percent of Total
Positive	11	9	13	11
Neutral	56	45	38	32
Negative	58	46	69	57
Total	125	100	120	100

of his way to deny "bad feelings" toward the United States. According to columnist Joseph Kraft, Mitterrand assured him three times in the space of a short interview in 1982 that he had no resentment toward the United States. He often says he is irritated by American policymakers who do not accept his notion that friendship involves the willingness to pressure an ally to change for the better.

Toward the Third World. Mitterrand has said often that US policies in the Third World are "self-interested" and "wrong-headed." US foreign policy, he has asserted, is driven toward "interventionism" and "economic imperialism" by blind anti-Communism and the interests of American multinational corporations. The domination of the Third World by "the Russo-American couple" and the progressive division of the world into spheres of influence by "the two empires" have been for Mitterrand the most significant problem "confronting the underdeveloped countries, which are the direct victims of this competition." Mitterrand has not been willing to admit any essential difference between, for example, US intervention in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. "I condemn the one and the other," he declared in 1968, "and for the same reasons." His views do not seem to have changed much over the years. In a 1982 speech, he condemned the US struggle with the Soviets and superpower domination of the structure of international relations as the source of so "much trouble and damage, of which poor countries are always the first victims."

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Mitterrand's hostility toward US policy in the Third World also has a personal dimension. He has blamed the United States in part for the death of Salvador Allende—a close friend and ideological soulmate who he charged was murdered in 1973 because he attempted to “deliver his country from the clutches of the American trusts and Chilean monopolies.” While Mitterrand may not hold the US Government directly responsible, he has sharply criticized, on several occasions, the CIA's presumed complicity with ITT in the affair. In Mitterrand's view, moreover, Allende is only one of several Third World victims of American adventurism. He has pointed to the ouster of Cambodian monarch Norodom Sihanouk as evidence of US “contempt for small nations” and “ignorance of the values and incentives of our times.” (1976) [redacted]

Mitterrand often observes that US policymakers wrongly view every Third World event in superpower perspective. He charges that the US assumes every rebel is a pawn of Moscow, and that this drives independent-minded Socialists and nationalists into the arms of the Soviets. This is especially true in Latin America, where Mitterrand charges that failure to distinguish between democratic and nationalist rebels and authoritarian groups has led the United States to support rightist dictatorships blindly. [redacted]

Mitterrand asserts that socialism offers hope to the Third World, as an alternative to the extreme solutions offered by the Americans and Soviets. In the past, he has largely blamed the United States for socialism's lack of success. “American imperialism” he wrote in 1970, and “the refusal of US policymakers to distinguish between democratic socialism and Communism in developing countries,” have been “major causes of the checks on socialism in the world.” For Mitterrand, this has redounded only to the profit of the multinationals and, ultimately, the Soviet Union. [redacted]

The Multinationals. Many of Mitterrand's harshest criticisms of US policy stem from his view that it operates hand-in-fist with American-controlled multinational corporations. He is suspicious of the potential

which giant companies have to “control all the channels of power,” and warned in 1972 that soon each of the 60 largest corporations would “have a business volume greater than the gross national product” of France. [redacted]

He has expressed fear of the political impact of massive economic investment by multinationals in Europe as well as the Third World. “We know full well,” Mitterrand argued in 1972, “how the relationships of economic inequality are transformed into relationships of political power.” [redacted]

Mitterrand subscribes to the familiar leftist belief that multinational corporations aspire eventually to international “hegemony,” but “meanwhile serve as instruments for American penetration of European” and Third World economies. American “economic imperialism,” promoted largely through the multinationals, threatens to sap France's industrial and agricultural vitality and to absorb the nation's economy into an “international division of labor programmed by big capital.” This drive toward domination, he alleges, has “the clear intention of breaking up the Common Market.” [redacted]

Franco-US Relations. In addition to his suspicions about corporate influence on US policy, Mitterrand criticizes, sometimes bitterly, many aspects of the US relationship with France as an ally. He has complained to interviewers that he believes the United States too often demands conformity as the price of alliance, while it recognizes no similar restraint upon its own “whims.” The United States is quick, Mitterrand has charged, to confuse “friendship” with “subjugation” and to take offense at those who insist upon their right to pursue their national interests. He often cites US insistence that France forgo energy cooperation with Moscow at the same time that American farmers and policymakers sought to revive grain sales to the USSR as evidence of an American double standard. [redacted]

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Mitterrand on the United States

The first time I saw New York it was from the sky. How dazzling! I had flown there overnight, and the rising sun had not dissipated the mist of the early morning. Manhattan, gray and golden in its geometric relief, had a full softness. I have returned there five or six times. By plane I have always experienced the same shock, the same impression of entering the future through the window. (1972)

I harbor a thousand friendly memories of the United States. I can picture the lovely, pleasant evening that my friends from Indianapolis, the D's, must have just spent with their family . . . which gathers to celebrate each Christmas Eve together. They are unpretentious. They use words sparingly, especially those that might betray their feelings. I should have written them. But I shall wait. What can I say to an American, however close, however dear? Above the outskirts of Hanoi, American B-52s wend their way through the night skies. Star, rain of fire, death, silence, they celebrate in their own way the birth of the Savior. . . . (1972)

Speak German to the Germans, Spanish to the Spaniards, and French to the Americans.^a (1964)

America is on the brink of something impossible to imagine. Too many blows received have made her huddle in her corner like a groggy boxer. The questions of yesterday seem to have faded in the daze of a terrible uppercut. . . . But wait till she rises to her feet once more and heads for the center of the ring. Heaven help the cardboard decor and the knick-knacks in the hall. . . . In the entrails of America the pockets of mine gas are waiting to explode. (1975)

^a Agreeing with de Gaulle's view that it is dangerous to deal with Americans on equal terms.

Mitterrand also resents what he sees as American "simplification" of the French political scene and of the Socialists' role. He objects especially to the alleged American view that "if one isn't a Gaullist, one is a Communist." Mitterrand detests Communists

only slightly less than the Gaullists and is therefore quick and somewhat irritated to assure Americans "I am neither." (1967) [redacted]

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Some of Mitterrand's attitudes reflect views commonly held among French Socialists, but others predate his own commitment to socialism. The latter appear to spring from deeply felt nationalism and especially from a natural dislike of subordinating French national interests to those of any other nation. This very likely first struck Mitterrand during the Fourth Republic (1946-58), for he said in 1981 that, as a member of various governments of the period, he was "exasperated by the climate of obedience to America's slightest wishes. I did not recognize their right," he added, "to set themselves up as the gendarmes of the world." More recently, Mitterrand complained to interviewers that the Reagan administration did not take France seriously and sometimes acted as though it was "not an independent country." "The Atlantic Alliance," as Mitterrand put it, "does not authorize the United States to tell us whether or not we can sell green peas to Russia." [redacted]

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For Mitterrand absence of "dialogue" is the single most important indicator that the United States does not take France seriously and does not recognize it as a full partner. As he has said over and over and as French policymakers have repeated to Embassy officials to the point of distraction, France wants most of all to be "consulted." "Franco-American policy is based on dialogue," he told an interviewer in 1981, and he has implied often in his writings and speeches that the health of the relationship at any moment depends on the degree of dialogue. His perception that the US ignores France may account for the often shrill tone of Mitterrand's criticisms. Provincial Frenchmen often defend the violence and boistrousness of their demonstrations by explaining, "If you want to be heard in Paris from the provinces, you have to shout louder." Mitterrand often shouts loudest when he thinks it is the only way to be heard in Washington. [redacted]

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US-USSR. Mitterrand seldom criticizes US policy toward the USSR ² per se, but rather questions the US choice of policies to meet the Soviet challenge. Playing the game on Soviet terms and engaging in superpower rivalry that ignores the interests of other nations, he argues, can only undermine American values and erode the image which the US should project in the world. While Mitterrand generally approved of de Gaulle's increasingly independent attitude vis-a-vis the United States, he nevertheless ridiculed the general's tendency to demonstrate distance from the United States by flirting with Moscow.

The Sources of Mitterrand's Attitudes

Mitterrand's contradictory attitudes toward America and Americans undoubtedly reflect the variegated influences on his intellectual development. These include his upbringing in a progressive, provincial French household, his subsequent experiences in the French resistance during World War II, and as a political figure in the weakened France of the early postwar years, his developing nationalism, and his ultimate conversion to socialism.

According to a leading French journalist who knows him well and has interviewed him many times, Mitterrand's fundamental attitudes toward America are anchored in his boyhood. Born in rural France in 1916, Mitterrand grew to manhood in an era when the memories of the American contribution to France in World War I were still vivid and during which France experienced an unprecedented infusion of American popular culture. Mitterrand makes it clear in his journals that like many other young Frenchmen he was stirred by the daring of American popular idols and adopted Charles Lindbergh as a boyhood hero. From skyscrapers to jazz to films, his early exposure to American culture appears to have given Mitterrand an image of the United States as a place of extraordinary vitality and vigor. Even today, it

² In contrast to his emotionally colored images of America, Mitterrand's writing reveals no comparable visions of Russia or the Russian people. Judging from his books, he does not appear to have shared the romantic sympathy of many youths of his generation for the Russian Revolution. When he writes of the Soviet Union, it is invariably in impersonal terms. He looks at Moscow coldly and, to one degree or another, finds it sorely wanting. He almost never has anything positive to say about the USSR.

appears from Mitterrand's writings and interviews that he has a genuine emotional attachment only to France and the United States.

Mitterrand seems to have drawn his veneration of America's founding fathers and his image of America as a repository of democratic virtues from his liberal father and grandfather. He once commented to Henry Kissinger that in French provincial families Jefferson, Franklin, and Lincoln were revered like "the sages of antiquity." To leave no doubt that he was speaking of his own experiences, he added "that was so in my family and I expect it was the same throughout the Western world." Mitterrand's idealized image of America is typical of the views held by liberal, middle class, provincial Frenchmen in the postwar years.

World War II, of course, also helped shape Mitterrand's world view. Before the war and his experience in the Resistance, he took little interest in world or national issues and was by his own admission apolitical. The war politicized him and riveted his attention

on political struggle. Although the war mostly affected his career in national politics, it also shaped significantly and positively his attitudes toward the United States. [redacted]

Unlike de Gaulle, who emerged from the war filled with resentment toward the United States, Mitterrand still appears to harbor an emotional gratitude for the American contribution to the liberation of France. Mitterrand distanced himself early from the postwar drift of French leftists toward Communism and the Soviet Union. He said in 1973, "while they have opted for the East and the Warsaw Pact, I have chosen the West, the Atlantic Alliance, and the European constitution. I have not forgotten that I owe my liberty to the United States of America." [redacted]

Mitterrand's more negative perceptions about the United States appear rooted in his postwar political experiences and in his gradual progress toward nationalist and socialist conceptions of world affairs. The United States appears to have first engaged Mitterrand's sense of nationalism during the Fourth Republic. As a member of various governments he experienced the period of US dominance in Europe and the demands for allied unity and support which the Cold War and "containment" made the mainstays of US policy toward Europe. It is clear from his writings that Mitterrand was also alienated during this era by what he regarded as a US condemnation of socialism as a form of Marxism. [redacted]

Mitterrand the Man: How To Deal With Him

Even those who know Mitterrand well stress the complexity of his personality and the difficulty of dealing with him on a personal level. His principal and best biographer describes him as "ambivalent" and "enigmatic," "misanthropic and sociable, naive and calculating, sincere and deceitful." Even close associates and aides find him distant and aloof; a perceptive observer once dubbed him "the prince of ambiguity"—doubtless combining criticism of his obtuse and sometimes arrogant manner. Not surprisingly, people who have dealt with Mitterrand say the experience is seldom effortless, nor is it always pleasant or profitable. Yet a keen eye toward certain of his

characteristics, as suggested by US Embassy reporting and our analysis of his writing, can be a useful guide:

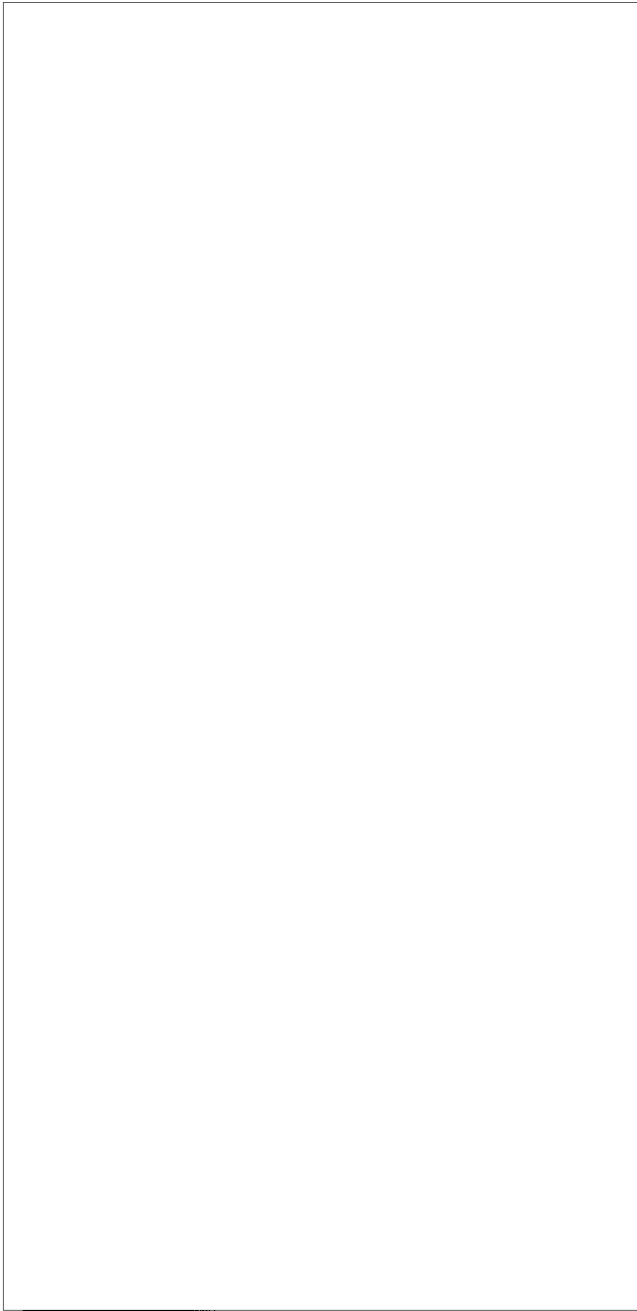
- As he says many times in his journals and political essays, Mitterrand wants mainly to be heard and consulted by the United States. If there is one element of US relations with France and Mitterrand that arouses his ire, it is his conviction that the United States ignores him. Mitterrand has told interviewers that he has little hope of changing US policies with which he disagrees, but he clearly hopes to be understood and to use dialogue with Washington to raise objections and to defend French interests.
- Mitterrand seems to respond best to Americans who are unpretentious, plain spoken, openhanded, and direct. These are all qualities which, our analysis of his writings suggests, he associates with Americans in general. As his writings also make clear, Mitterrand views himself as a simple, even ascetic man—the very antithesis of the Parisian elite. While he does not expect to be fussed over, he is by all accounts quick to take offense if the niceties of protocol are not observed. He is also easily rankled when others challenge his wisdom head-on. This sensitivity may even be accentuated where the United States is concerned, for he already seems to believe that Washington takes him and France lightly.
- Personal relationships probably have the greatest potential for increasing Mitterrand's fund of positive perceptions. While they are unlikely to alter his attitudes substantially, we believe that positive, personal contacts can exert a moderating influence, especially on the public tone of French-US relations.
- Mitterrand is likely to seem guarded and formal in dealing with others. Meeting this style with friendly ease is probably the surest way to make him relaxed and comfortable. If allowed initially to structure the interview or conversation in its most general terms, [redacted] "Mitterrand is usually receptive and flexible to the proposals and considerations of others."

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- For most of his adult life Mitterrand has been in the opposition. Struggling against great odds to get into power taught him, as a close friend put it, that "his great strength is that he knows how to wait." This has made Mitterrand a tough negotiator; he is seldom in a hurry to resolve differences.
- Those who deal with Mitterrand will find that he appreciates foreign recognition of French achievements. Like many Frenchmen, he is sensitive to France's slide from the ranks of the great powers and is quick to resent slights. Mitterrand clearly hopes that his policies will restore a measure of the political and economic effectiveness which most observers believe France has lost

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