

Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*

In early 1950, just before the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. government began to give financial aid to France in its war against the Viet Minh. Thus, the American commitment in Vietnam began in support of French colonial rule, even though, prior to Franklin D. Roosevelt's death, the United States had indicated opposition to France's return to Indochina. It is true that this decision was taken in order to secure French support for the stillborn European Defense Community (considered indispensable for German rearmament), as well as French domestic stability. However, it was also part of American efforts to demonstrate the credibility of the transatlantic alliance. Also, France was then desperate for American support in the face of its increasingly difficult war in Indochina, especially during the Dien Bien Phu crisis in the spring of 1954.¹

A decade later, however, when the United States was struggling in South Vietnam, French President Charles de Gaulle not only refused to support the Americans but dared to harshly criticize their efforts to turn back "the Communist invasion." Most American leaders were first bewildered by and then furious at the French attitude. De Gaulle proposed a "neutralization" of the region as a path to a peace settlement, but in the American view, this was synonymous with letting the Communists have free rein. The proposal was flatly rejected by America, resulting in a progressively deteriorating relationship between the two countries.² Many asked at that time: was de Gaulle simply

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1. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York, 1986), 35–38; Richard H. Immerman, "Prologue: Perceptions by the United States of Its Interests in Indochina," and George C. Herring, "Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950–1954," in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954–1955*, ed. Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, DE, 1990).

2. On American reactions to de Gaulle's proposal, see Fredrik Logevall, "de Gaulle, Neutralization, and American Involvement in Vietnam, 1963–1964," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (February 1992): 69–102; Charles G. Cogan, "How Fuzzy Can One Be? The American

anti-American? Years later, while not agreeing with this naive impression, historians nonetheless vary as to how to interpret de Gaulle's intentions in his peace initiatives.³

Marianna Sullivan, Anne Sa'adah, and other American scholars tend to see in de Gaulle's criticism another attempt to defy American hegemony in the Western Alliance. By attacking American diplomacy in various ways, de Gaulle was trying to demonstrate France's power and especially its independence from the United States. His criticism of the Vietnam War and his neutralization proposal were just part of this well-crafted strategy. De Gaulle's France was a disloyal ally with a priority for its own interests over those of the alliance. This view was basically held by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.⁴

Viewed from the other side, however, we get another picture. Maurice Vaïsse and Jean Lacouture maintain that de Gaulle's initiatives can be best explained by

Reaction to de Gaulle's Proposal for the Neutralization of (South) Vietnam," in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX, 2004). On the French position toward the Vietnam War, see Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Marianna P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in Franco-American Relations* (Westport, CT, 1978); Cogan, "How Fuzzy?"; Maurice Vaïsse, "De Gaulle and the Vietnam War," and Wilfried Mausbach, "Triangle of Discord: The United States, Germany and French Initiatives for Vietnam," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*; Maurice Vaïsse, "De Gaulle et la guerre du Vietnam: De la difficulté d'être Cassandre," Pierre Journoud, "Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix, 1963–1973," and Vu Son Thuy, "The French Role in Finding a Peaceful Solution to the Vietnam War," in *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe 1963–1973*, ed. Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse (Bruxelles, 2003); Pierre Journoud, "La France, les États-Unis et la guerre du Vietnam: l'année 1968," in *Les relations Franco-Américaines au XXe siècle*, ed. Pierre Melandri and Serge Ricard (Paris, 2003); Anne Sa'adah, "Idées simples and idées fixes: De Gaulle, the United States, and Vietnam," in *De Gaulle and the United States: A Centennial Reappraisal*, ed. Robert O. Paxton and Nicholas Wahl (Providence, 1994), with comments by Pierre Melandri, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, Jean Lacouture, and Bernard Tricot; Claude Chayet and Philippe Devillers, "De Gaulle et l'Indochine," in *De Gaulle en son siècle*, ed. Institut Charles De Gaulle, vol. 6 (Paris, 1991); Jean Lacouture, "De Gaulle et Indochine," in *La Politique Étrangère du général de Gaulle*, ed. Elie Barnavi and Saul Friedlander (Geneva, 1985); Philippe Devillers, "De Gaulle et l'Asie," in *De Gaulle et le tiers monde*, ed. Institut Charles de Gaulle (Paris, 1984); H. W. Brands, "Johnson and de Gaulle: American Diplomacy Sotto Voce," *Historian* 49 (1987).

3. Kolodziei points out that "de Gaulle's anti-American bias can be exaggerated." Edward A. Kolodziei, *French International Policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou: The Politics of Grandeur* (Ithaca, NY, 1974), 55 and passim. In many works on Franco-American relations, especially French studies on de Gaulle, contrary to the stereotypical image, de Gaulle's policy has been explained carefully as not being totally anti-American. See, for example, Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur* (Paris, 1998), 34–52; Serge Bernstein, *The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958–1969*, trans. Peter Morris (Cambridge, England, 1993), 179; Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La France et Les États-Unis, des origines à nos jours* (Paris, 1976), 242; Alfred Grosser, *French Foreign Policy under de Gaulle*, trans. Lois Ames Pattison (Boston, 1977), foreword; Paul-Marie de la Gorce, *De Gaulle* (Paris, 1999), 1153–55; Eric Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle* (Paris, 2002), 785–811.

4. Among scholars, this is a commonly accepted theory on de Gaulle's position toward the United States. For example, Sullivan explains, "The object of his critique was not to influence a change in American tactics which would lead to peace talks. Rather, for de Gaulle, in Vietnam as elsewhere, his critical posture was his policy." Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 88 and passim; Sa'adah, "Idées simples," 298.

France's colonial experience in Indochina and learned from the Algerian War; based on their own painful experiences and their responsibility for Indochina, de Gaulle and the French Foreign Ministry, Quai d'Orsay, were fully aware of how difficult it was to suppress rising Third World nationalist movements.⁵ De Gaulle and his foreign minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, never failed to refer to this point whenever they spoke to the United States about Vietnam. From the very beginning of the American intervention, they were sure that it would be absolutely impossible for the United States to attain a military solution through a military suppression of the insurgency of the Vietcong. Therefore, there should be no other solution but to search for a political settlement centered on the French proposal of neutralization.⁶ Then, in order to bring the Communists both from North and South Vietnam to the peace table, the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops was essential.⁷

According to this account, the French sincerely believed in their own proposition. Far from opposing the Vietnam War simply to attack the American position, the French were giving friendly advice to their principal ally. However unpleasant and critical it was, their advice was well intentioned and honest, and finally turned out to be extremely judicious. Using French archival materials, some recent American literature on the subject, including Fredrik Logevall's *Choosing War*, the landmark book demonstrating the international diplomatic dimension of the Vietnam War, has concluded that the U.S. administration should have examined de Gaulle's idea and approach more seriously, as there was no other plausible solution in sight.⁸

With the recent release (in the spring of 2003) of a massive amount of documents from the Quai d'Orsay, however, this interpretation needs rethinking. Instead of approving either of these opposing views, the new archival evidence tends to prompt us to combine them so as to properly understand the development of de Gaulle's diplomatic strategy on the Vietnam War: at this point in time, we should conclude that through his peace initiatives, de Gaulle

5. Vaisse, *La Grandeur*, 523–25; Vaisse, “De Gaulle and the Vietnam War,” 162; Vaisse, “De Gaulle et la guerre du Vietnam,” 169–70; Lacouture, “De Gaulle et Indochine,” 146; Devillers, “De Gaulle et l'Asie,” 299, 318, 322; Chayet and Devillers, “De Gaulle et l'Indochine,” 472.

6. At an informal meeting with President Kennedy at the Elysée Palace in May 1961, de Gaulle showed the American president his idea for peace in Vietnam for the first time. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, *Documents diplomatiques français 1961* 1:676–79, 701 (hereafter cited as *DDF*); Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir, 1958–1962* (Paris, 1970), 268–69; U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963* 13:663 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*).

7. The first time de Gaulle made a public appeal for negotiations based on the 1954 Geneva Agreement was his press conference on 23 July 1964. Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, tome 4 (Paris, 1970), 234–37. By then, de Gaulle and French officials had often mentioned the French position on Vietnam to the Americans on the diplomatic front. For example, see Entretien franco-américain, Paris, MM. Couve de Murville et George Ball, Télégramme, 5 juin 1964. Entretiens et messages 21 (hereafter cited as *EM*), Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (hereafter cited as *MAE*); *FRUS, 1964–1968* 1:470.

8. Logevall, *Choosing War*, 105–6 and passim.

was pursuing two objectives: an Atlantic alliance more favorable to France and greater support from the Third World and the Eastern bloc for France. Both of these goals were vital for France to achieve its national interests as defined by de Gaulle. He never forgot that his country's security was overwhelmingly based on American military power. In spite of this dependence, he never ceased to aspire to greater independence from the United States. To achieve this goal, he needed to develop a good working relationship with newly independent countries and the Communist bloc. The problem was, however, that these two goals were more often contradictory than complementary, and de Gaulle had to somehow manage to combine them.

The central argument of this article is that de Gaulle's intentions in his peace initiatives (and/or criticism of the American war effort in Vietnam) changed considerably in the course of the conflicts. That is to say, de Gaulle launched his campaign for peace to avoid troubles in the Atlantic Alliance, but with American military escalation, this consideration gradually diminished to be replaced by his aspiration for greater support from the Third World and the Eastern bloc.

In the following sections of this article, I propose to describe how de Gaulle's perceptions and motives evolved incrementally as the international situation deteriorated due to the war.

During phase one, which ended with the first sustained American bombing in February 1965 and the subsequent Marine landing in Danang, de Gaulle hoped France's mediation would contribute to a peace settlement; he took every opportunity to intervene in person, putting forward his neutralization plan.⁹ Although it is certain that he intended to enhance French prestige by interceding between the two blocs, his main objective was to avoid any serious trouble in the Atlantic Alliance. In particular, he feared that if the United States was dragged into a morass of war in Vietnam, American military forces would probably be reduced in Western Europe; this would definitely threaten France's own security.

Phase two covers the period from Lyndon B. Johnson's Baltimore address (with its carrot-and-stick diplomacy) in April 1965 through de Gaulle's Phnom Penh speech in September 1966.¹⁰ With American military escalation, the French finally realized that any peace settlement would not be possible in the immediate future. Therefore, de Gaulle ordered his diplomats to disengage from any mediation, as he was sure it was doomed to fail. Convinced that it would be very

9. The first phase of de Gaulle's peace diplomacy and his proposal for "neutralization" are explained well in Logevall, *Choosing War*, chaps. 1–6, 12; Logevall, "De Gaulle, Neutralization"; Kahin, *Intervention*, 190–92; Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, chaps. 1, 3; Vaisse, *La Grandeur*, 523–29; Vaisse, "De Gaulle et la guerre," 169–72.

10. Compared with the rich literature on the first phase of de Gaulle's peace diplomacy, the second period is not illuminated well enough for us to understand the intent of de Gaulle and the Quai d'Orsay or how they attempted to take a peace initiative. One of the exceptions, written by Pierre Journoud, focuses on autonomy and on how the Quai d'Orsay's position was different from de Gaulle's. Journoud, "Le Quai d'Orsay," 385–400. Others are Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, chaps. 1, 4; Vaisse, *La Grandeur*, 532–38; Vaisse, "De Gaulle et la guerre," 172–73.

difficult for the United States to extricate itself rapidly from the subsequent military stalemate, he now sought to take advantage of the American impasse in Southeast Asia in order to increase France's influence in the world; through his peace initiatives, he successfully portrayed himself as an independent mediator between the two military blocs in spite of his fierce anticommunism. This does not mean, however, that he abandoned his idea to make a real contribution to a peace settlement in Vietnam. While carefully sounding out both the United States and North Vietnam on whether they were ready to change their respective positions, de Gaulle prepared for any good chance to come, by energetically strengthening France's diplomatic channels with the Eastern bloc.

Finally, in phase three, from fall 1966 through May 1968, when the Paris Peace Conference started,¹¹ de Gaulle flatly rejected any idea of a peace initiative, as he could no longer see any room for compromise between the United States and China. He gave up on trying to persuade the Americans in that direction and instead began to blame the United States for its stubbornness in the hope that France's influence and credibility would increase in the Eastern bloc and the Third World. His Phnom Penh speech, famous for its outright anti-American tone, reflected his shift to this bold strategy.¹² Now, not only was he presenting himself as an independent mediator between the two military blocs but also as a champion of the Third World, in spite of the colonial wars France had fought in the not too distant past.

Thus far, few historians have bothered to dwell on the reality of de Gaulle's sustained efforts for a peace settlement in Vietnam, whereas much of the burgeoning literature on the Vietnam War since the 1990s has shed light on the diplomatic efforts for peace by the United Kingdom, the USSR, China, Poland, Czechoslovakia, India, Sweden, Canada, Italy, Germany, and even Japan.¹³

11. The third phase is also not well explained, although there are a few works: Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 89–116; Pierre Journoud, "La visite du général de Gaulle à Phnom Penh, Entre mythes et réalité," *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* (Paris, 2001); Pierre Journoud, "Des artisans de paix dans le secret de la diplomatie vers un règlement pacifique de la guerre au Vietnam, 1967–1973," *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* (Paris, 2002); Vaisse, "De Gaulle et la guerre," 173–78.

12. Yuko Torikata, "The Vietnam War and de Gaulle's Phnom Penh Speech in 1966: De Gaulle's Challenge to the United States or Search for Peace in Vietnam?," paper presented at the 2006 SHAFR conference.

13. It is natural that scholars have begun to pay much more attention to the development of these individual peace efforts, as many countries, including the former Communist ones, have gradually declassified their archival documents since the early 1990s. Many papers on these peace initiatives are published in the following books: Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace*; Goscha and Vaisse, eds., *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe*; Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cambridge, England, 2003); Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, eds., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station, TX, 2000). On individual countries' peace efforts, see Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT, 2004); Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996); Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Qiang Zhai, "Opposing Negotiations: China and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965–1968," *Pacific Historical Review* 48 (February 1999); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC,

Therefore, this article will aim to directly contribute both to a grasp of the international relations surrounding the Vietnam War and to a better understanding of de Gaulle's diplomacy.

PHASE ONE: DE GAULLE'S "GRAND STRATEGY" FOR VIETNAM
AND HIS "NEUTRALIZATION" PROPOSAL

At the end of the 1950s, when de Gaulle set out to restore French diplomacy, France was suffering from two major disadvantages: a highly visible dependence on the United States in both economic and military terms, and a colonial war in Algeria widely viewed as unjust. De Gaulle successfully ended that war in 1962, and his drastic economic reforms also allowed the French economy to climb out of crisis. However, the country's tarnished reputation had not yet been rehabilitated.¹⁴ Instead of compensating for these weak points, de Gaulle chose to tackle these issues head on and launch offensives.

First, he tried to demonstrate France's military independence of the United States. Although keenly aware of the country's fundamental dependence on American forces in Western Europe and on American nuclear weapons, he did not hesitate to defy the American hegemony, especially in relation to NATO.¹⁵ Second, in spite of his fierce anticommunism, he made vigorous efforts to establish diplomatic relations with the Eastern bloc.¹⁶ Third, in order to escape

2001), chap. 8; James Hershberg (with the assistance of L. W. Gluchowski), "Who Murdered 'Marigold'? New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland's Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966," Working Paper no. 27, *Cold War International History Project* (Washington, DC, 2000); Margaret Gnoinska, "Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the Maneli Affair," Working Paper no. 45, *Cold War International History Project* (Washington, DC, 2005); James Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy during the Vietnam War, December 1965-January 1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 2 (2003); Fredrik Logevall, "The Swedish-American Conflict over Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 3 (1993); Andrew Preston, "Balancing War and Peace: Canadian Foreign Policy and the Vietnam War, 1961-1965," *Diplomatic History* 27, no. 1 (2003); Andrew Preston, "Operation Smallbridge: Chester Ronning, the Second Indochina War, and the Challenge to the United States in Asia," *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 3 (2003). As to the literature on the Vietnamese side, the following are notable. Jayne S. Werner and Luu Duan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (Armonk, NY, 1993); Robert K. Bringham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, NY, 1999); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1 (2006). On the American side of the peace efforts, see, for example, George C. Herring, *LB7 and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (College Station, TX, 1994).

14. Berstein, *The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958-1969*, 101-9.

15. Frédéric Bozo states that the purposes of de Gaulle's policy regarding the United States were the politico-strategic construction of Europe (an East-West or Pan-European dimension) and the rebalancing of the Atlantic Alliance (the West-West dimension). Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe, de Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'alliance atlantique 1958-1969* (Paris, 1996), 16-17.

16. For example, Marie-Pierre Rey, *La tentation du rapprochement, France et URSS à l'heure de la détente 1964-1974* (Paris, 1991); Maurice Vaisse, ed., *De Gaulle et la Russie* (Paris, 2006), 125-38, 181-252.

from the superpower dominance in the Cold War and to rival the United States and the Soviet Union, he needed to secure wider and deeper support from Third World countries. However, memories of the Algerian War were too raw for virtually every leader of these countries.¹⁷

In all three of these initiatives, contradictions were apparent, and de Gaulle's diplomatic positions were untenable in the view of some countries, especially the United States, which saw in them sheer deceit or total confusion. But it is also true that this strategy gained France some support from Communist and Third World countries. In considering the international situations, the rise of the Third World, and the impact of the Vietnam War on world politics, Franco-American relations can be more systematically explained by considering de Gaulle's position on the Third World, especially on France's former colony, Vietnam.¹⁸ The three aspects of de Gaulle's "Grand Strategy" were reflected most typically in his peace initiatives for Vietnam, and so these peace initiatives can be called the ideal type of his diplomacy.

AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM AND FRENCH SECURITY IN EUROPE

De Gaulle's first "advice" to the U.S. government about the Vietnamese conflict came during President John F. Kennedy's visit to Paris in May 1961 (see Figures 1 and 2). De Gaulle became concerned about being informed that the U.S. administration was considering reinforcement of the American military advisers in South Vietnam as well as in Laos. In a private conversation with President Kennedy, de Gaulle warned him in strong terms that America would end up being caught in an endless morass. Because of the French experiences with the Viet Minh and the Algerian nationalists, he was firmly convinced from the outset that the Americans would never be able to beat the Vietcong through military force, especially because Southeast Asia was not a good terrain for the West to fight on.¹⁹

17. There are only a few studies on de Gaulle's policy on the Third World. The most comprehensive work is Institut Charles de Gaulle, *De Gaulle et le tiers monde*.

18. Some scholars, such as Nicholas Wahl, point out that de Gaulle saw the Third World as a means for reducing American influence and increasing French (and European) power, prestige, and legitimacy, in order to place France beyond the two blocs' confrontation without any risk of losing its position. Nicholas Wahl, "De Gaulle et le tiers monde: une alliance de raison," in Institut Charles de Gaulle, *De Gaulle et le tiers monde*, 383; Vaïsse, *La grandeur*, 452; Edmond Jouve, "Attitude et politique du général De Gaulle à l'égard du tiers monde," and Paul-Marie de la Gorce, "Trois changements essentiels," in Institut Charles de Gaulle, *de Gaulle en son siècle*, 6:70-75.

19. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, 268-69; *DDF 1961*, 1: 676-79, 701; De Gaulle said to Kennedy that compared with India and Japan, Southeast Asian countries were not realities but only nebulous or legalistic entities. Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Visit," Wednesday Afternoon Talks, 31 May 1961, Box 233, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as JFKL).



Figure 1: President Kennedy's meeting with French President Charles de Gaulle at the Elysée Palace, in Paris, on 31 May 1961 (John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts).

Unlike his later attack against America's war in Vietnam, this time his tone was very friendly.²⁰ It would be naive, however, to assume that de Gaulle was just giving "advice," like a father teaching his son the lessons of life. As with all his other diplomatic activities, his warning on Vietnam was motivated by a desire to further French national interests. De Gaulle then feared that the American commitment in Vietnam would lead to a reduction in the number of American troops in Western Europe. This concern was far from groundless. A few years later, after 1966, liberal Democrats in the U.S. Congress began to lobby for such a reduction as a way to stop the American escalation in Vietnam.²¹ Therefore, we can say that de Gaulle's opposition to war in Vietnam and then his peace initiatives were mainly inspired by his preoccupation with France's security in Western Europe.²²

20. De Gaulle entirely agreed with Kennedy not to publicize France's position on the Vietnamese problem. Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Visit to de Gaulle," 2 June 1961, Box 233, JFKL.

21. Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield, The Extraordinary Life of a Great American Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington, DC, 2003), 311–13; *New York Times*, 1–2 September 1966.

22. When the two leaders had heated discussions on how to strengthen the unity of the West during Kennedy's visit to Paris, one of the most important issues was the nuclear deterrent, especially the raising of the threshold for the use of atomic weapons; the United



Figure 2: President Kennedy with President de Gaulle at the conclusion of their talks at the Elysée Palace on 2 June 1961 (John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts).

Unfortunately, it is very difficult to provide direct evidence for this claim, because de Gaulle would never even privately mention his concern about the size of the American military presence in Germany. This is because at exactly the same time, France was claiming its military autonomy from the United States. Although he was absolutely aware of the French dependence on American troops and nuclear weapons, he could not admit it by expressing his wish that American forces in Europe not be reduced. How could he retain the American forces in Europe while denying France's dependence? In bilateral discussions about NATO, de Gaulle and the French diplomats attempted the impossible by claiming the right to participate in any decision making about the use of

States tried to do so, whereas de Gaulle wanted to maintain the status quo. Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Visit," Thursday Afternoon Talks, 1 June 1961; Telegram, Department of State, from Paris to Secretary of State, no. 5011, 16 May 1961, Box 233, JFKL. The issue of the French troops expected to return from Algeria also came up for discussion, but de Gaulle said he did not yet know where to put those forces. Indeed, the U.S. administration hoped France would play a great role in West European security when French troops in Algeria returned to French Metropole. Telegram from Paris to Secretary of State, no. 4522, 20 April 1961 (Memorandum for the president and secretary from Dean Acheson), Box 70, JFKL.

American nuclear weapons.²³ Although it was never announced, the French opposition to American involvement in Vietnam was another hidden way to prevent the reduction of American forces in Europe.

DE GAULLE'S "NEUTRALIZATION" PROPOSAL

In the spring of 1963, as the Ngo Dinh Diem government became increasingly unpopular and corrupt, de Gaulle became convinced that the American government no longer had any feasible solution to the Vietnamese conflict; in this, he saw an excellent opportunity to intervene.²⁴ On 29 August, his minister of information, Alain Peyrefitte, criticized American attitudes and proposed the neutralization as a realistic alternative.²⁵ This was the beginning of de Gaulle's attempts to gain a peace settlement, in which he would be an impartial mediator between the warring players.

"Neutralization," as defined by de Gaulle and the Quai d'Orsay, meant ensuring that the Vietnamese people could make their own political choices free of any foreign interference. It was to ensure the right of national self-determination by securing from each of the foreign powers, especially America, a troop withdrawal and a pledge of nonintervention.²⁶ De Gaulle expected that once this could be realized in Vietnam, neutralization would bring about détente, not only in Southeast Asia but ultimately also in the whole world.²⁷

23. For example, when President Kennedy asked General Charles Alliert about the possibility of reducing the number of American conventional forces stationed in Germany, Alliert responded that American forces in Europe could be cut back so that those relocated could be utilized for a limited war in another region of the world (implying Vietnam), but only on the condition that an automatic threshold for using nuclear weapons be set. *DDF, 1963* 2:255–56, 371; Memorandum of Conversation, "Franco-American Relations and Europe," 7 October 1963, Box 73, JFKL. On France's negative reaction toward the flexible response, see *DDF, 1963* 2:442–43, 576. The Americans were well aware that de Gaulle did not, for the foreseeable future, favor any kind of removal of U.S. forces from Europe. *FRUS, 1961–1963* 13:791.

24. *DDF, 1963* 1:313; Extrait d'une communication en date du 28 Janvier 1964, Série Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam (hereafter cited as CLV), sous-série Sud-Vietnam 94 (hereafter cited as SV), MAE.

25. Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, tome 2 (Paris, 1997), 649; *FRUS, 1961–1963* 4:55; *Le Monde*, 31 septembre 1963.

26. Note au sujet des négociations éventuelles sur la neutralisation et l'unification du Vietnam, 4 mars 1965, Série Asie-Océanie, sous-série Conflict Vietnam 314 (hereafter cited as AO, CV), MAE; Reunion franco-vietnamienne à Saigon, Compte-rendu, 20/21 février 1964, CLV, SV 92, MAE; Note et annexes sur "la position de la France au sujet de la neutralité du Vietnam," 1 avril 1964, Entretien entre le général de Gaulle et M. Bohlen, ambassadeur des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, Paris, 2 avril 1964, 5AG 1-201 (5AG is the Presidential Archival Materials of the Fifth Republic), Archives Nationales (hereafter cited as AN); Politique française au Vietnam, schéma d'intervention, 19 octobre 1965, AO, CV 162, AME; Note pour le ministre, 12 décembre 1968, Entretien entre Michel Debré et M. Le Doc Tho, conseiller spécial de la délégation nord-vietnamienne aux pourparoles de Paris, Compte-rendu, 12 décembre 1968, EM 35, MAE.

27. Schéma de la position française au sujet du problème vietnamien, 27 mai 1965, Fond de Jean Sainteny, 1SA20 DR1, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.

The Quai d'Orsay service first mentioned neutralization as the basis of French diplomatic mediation in the spring of 1963. Although North Vietnam also proposed a peace plan based on neutralization, the French version emphasized that neutralization should contribute to a containment of any further growth of Chinese influence in Vietnam and Southeast Asia as a whole.²⁸ The bottom line in the French proposal was to ensure that the whole territory of Vietnam, including North Vietnam, would be more independent of China. By making the five Great Powers participate in a peace conference and assume responsibility for implementation of neutralization, de Gaulle felt China could be engaged in the neutralization process.

By late summer 1963, even the Saigon leader Ngo Dinh Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, through the "advice" of the French ambassador to Saigon, became open to approaching North Vietnam.²⁹ The French were then ready to accept even the communization of Vietnam as a whole, if it could mean the birth of "another Yugoslavia," a very nationalistic and highly independent socialist state, in Southeast Asia.³⁰ Behind this premise lay the French belief, acquired through their own experiences, that Third World nationalism, especially that of Vietnam, would be much stronger than any Communist ideology, particularly when national independence was in question. Although there were some dissenting voices inside the Quai d'Orsay against de Gaulle's position, which emphasized the nationalist character of the war, this unique understanding of Vietnamese Communists was the secret to his successful diplomacy in Vietnam.³¹ But this was also the most unbridgeable difference between de Gaulle and first the Kennedy and then Johnson administration, which would never accept any neutralization because, in its view, neutralization equaled communization.³² Actually, it was this perception gap that would prove fatal for de Gaulle's mediation efforts.

28. *DDF, 1964* 1:107-8.

29. Logevall, *Choosing War*, 6-7, 14-15; *FRUS, 1961-1963* 4:326; *New York Times*, 5 September 1963.

30. Entretien à la maison blanche entre Président des Etats-Unis et M. Couve de Murville, 19 février 1965, EM 24, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 2:335.

31. Note no. 233/AS, "Conditions et cadre d'une éventuelle initiative française au sujet du Vietnam," 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162, MAE. This document was written by Manac'h, the director of Asia-Océania, who asked Jean Brèthes, the director of Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam, to comment on it. Brèthes responded critically to him in the following paper: *Commentaires (Conditions et cadre d'une éventuelle initiative française au Vietnam)*, 16 août 1965, AO, CV 162, MAE. Showing strong anti-Communist sentiment, Manac'h was inclined to focus on the international aspect of the war.

32. On American reactions to de Gaulle's proposal of "neutralization," Kennedy said to Walter Cronkite, "It doesn't do us any good to say, 'Well, why don't we all just go home and leave the world to those who are our enemies.'" *FRUS, 1961-1963* 4:93-94, 388-89; As for the Johnson administration's view, see *DDF, 1964* 1:321; Entretien Président des Etats-Unis et M. Couve de Murville, 19 février 1965, EM 24, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 2:335-36; Entretien de M. Goldberg, envoyé spécial du président Johnson avec M. Couve de Murville; audience au palais de l'Élysée par le général de Gaulle, 31 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 3:758-60.

ESTABLISHING CHANNELS WITH COMMUNIST CHINA AS A TOOL FOR THE FRENCH PEACE INITIATIVE

So that de Gaulle's mediation diplomacy and his neutralization proposal could work as expected, it was essential to establish successful communication channels with Communist China.³³ It is clear that Washington was also well aware of the increasingly important role China played in the Vietnamese problem, as China's influence over North Vietnam now exceeded that of the Soviet Union.³⁴ But the French considered China so important that any solution to the Southeast Asian problem would be hard to contemplate without Chinese commitment, especially from the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split.³⁵

Accordingly, France recognized Communist China on 27 January 1964. Although the French Foreign Ministry had been examining the reopening of diplomatic relations since 1962, when it became possible with the end of the Algerian War, the timing must have been chosen in close connection with the Vietnamese problem.³⁶

The Johnson administration was bewildered by this move and issued a strong protest, though the French had informed the Americans of their decision, in advance, on 15 January³⁷; it was convinced that French recognition would only encourage the Chinese and thus make the solution to the Vietnamese conflict more difficult.³⁸ However, America itself badly needed diplomatic channels with the Chinese Communists. In fact, in July 1964, Secretary of State Dean Rusk officially asked the French government to persuade Hanoi and Beijing to pull out of Vietnam.³⁹ The French replied that they could not honor this request, because such a mediation attempt would have no chance of success without American consent to the neutralization plan.⁴⁰ While waiting for a concession from the American side, the French began to talk to China and North Vietnam in early 1965, and won an important concession from them: the North Vietnamese would no longer demand a unilateral pullout of American troops as

33. Logevall, *Choosing War*, 95–96, 103–6; Thi Minh-Hoang Ngo, “De Gaulle et l’unité de la Chine,” Société d’histoire générale et d’histoire diplomatique, *Revue d’histoire diplomatique*, tome 112 (1998).

34. *DDF*, 1963 1:363; Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy from Chester Cooper, special assistant to the Deputy Director (Intelligence) (DDI), Central Intelligence Agency, “Gaullist France and Communist China,” October 24, 1963, Box 73, JFKL.

35. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, 4:180–81; *DDF*, 1964 1:45–46, 86–87; Hervé Alphand, *L’étonnement d’être: journal 1939–1973* (Paris, 1977), 419–22; *FRUS*, 1964–1968 15:6. The French government had studied how to handle Sino-Soviet confrontations and regarded the split as very important to develop French diplomacy after the Cuban crisis. For example, see *DDF*, 1962 2:499–500.

36. *DDF*, 1964 1:106–8.

37. Alphand, *L’étonnement d’être*, 421; Télégramme de Washington, 15 janvier 1964, AO, Sous-série Chine 525, MAE; *FRUS*, 1964–1968 15:1–3.

38. *DDF*, 1964 1:44–48, 84–87; *FRUS*, 1964–1968 15:5–8.

39. Even before the French recognition of China, the U.S. Department of State had sounded out its French counterpart on its willingness to relay American messages to China and North Vietnam. *DDF*, 1963 1:363, 2:213–14; *DDF*, 1964 2:54–55; *FRUS*, 1964–1968 1:535.

40. *DDF*, 1964 2:79; *FRUS*, 1964–1968 1:556.



Figure 3: Meeting between President Johnson and French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville at the White House on 19 February 1965 (Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas).

a prerequisite for peace talks.⁴¹ In February, Foreign Minister Couve de Murville visited the United States with this gift in hand (see Figure 3). Offering to give the Americans access to France's useful connections with the Vietnamese and the Chinese, he pressured the U.S. government to make concessions in return, especially by accepting neutralization. Of course, President Johnson and the Department of State rejected this offer, replying that neutralization would be nothing but communization. They complained that they absolutely could not understand why the French were so eager to criticize their principal ally in favor

41. *DDF, 1965* 1:98–102, 126–27; *FRUS, 1964–1968* 2:352–55. On French peace initiatives from December 1964 through 1966, see “The American Escalation in Vietnam and de Gaulle’s Secret Search for Peace,” in *International Perspectives on de Gaulle’s Foreign Policy*, ed. Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher, and Garret Martin (Lanham, MD, forthcoming).

of siding with the Communists.⁴² De Gaulle and his diplomats persisted with the demand for an American concession; they indicated that after the collapse of the Diem regime, the United States had no other choice but to accept neutralization or face an extension of warfare into North Vietnam.⁴³ In early 1964, even the option of an American attack on China had been mentioned in the course of French-U.S. contacts.⁴⁴ Well aware of this possibility, de Gaulle nevertheless maintained his tough stance against the United States.

PHASE TWO, PART ONE: DE GAULLE'S REACTION TO AMERICA'S
COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

As explained in the Introduction, in this transitional stage of his peace diplomacy, de Gaulle was pursuing two different objectives. On the one hand, his vigorous approaches to the Communist countries were supposed to contribute to achieving peace in Vietnam, even if not in the immediate future. At this time, he still nourished the hope of ending the war in Vietnam fairly quickly, as the more protracted the war became, the greater the risk of a destabilization of France's security against the Soviet Union. On the other hand, de Gaulle surely expected that his *ostpolitik* would advertise France's independence of the United States and enhance its international prestige as an independent intermediary between the two military blocs. In fact, as the war escalated, the second objective would gradually prevail over the first in de Gaulle's approaches to the Eastern bloc.

DE GAULLE'S REACTION TO JOHNSON'S BALTIMORE SPEECH ON
7 APRIL 1965

In March 1965, de Gaulle became furious at the sustained American air strikes on North Vietnam and the Vietcong-controlled areas of South Vietnam; this American escalation made negotiations impossible and broke the diplomatic stage de Gaulle had painstakingly prepared.⁴⁵ At a cabinet meeting on 18 March, he admitted that his efforts to avoid war had failed and predicted that the war would drag on for a long time. De Gaulle said, "Difficulties in Asia always continue for a very long time. They involve the whole people, they are not at all like a Franco-German war; they contrast clearly with a lightning-quick war."⁴⁶

42. Entretien entre Président des Etats-Unis et M. Couve de Murville, 19 février 1965, EM 24, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 2:335-36; "French discussions with Hanoi and Peiping," 23 February 1965, National Security File, Country File France, Box 170 (hereafter cited as NSF, CF), Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter cited as LBJL).

43. For example, Compte rendu de l'entretien entre MM. Couve de Murville et Dean Rusk, 12 avril 1964, EM 21, MAE; Audience accordée par le général de Gaulle à M. George Ball, 5 juin 1964, AO, CV 313, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 1: 234-36, 465-69.

44. Compte rendu de l'entretien entre le général de Gaulle et l'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis, 2 avril 1964, AO, CV 313, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 1:218.

45. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, 2:683.

46. *Ibid.*, *C'était de Gaulle*, 2:684-85.

Faced with military escalation, international opinion became more and more critical of the United States. In early April, UN Secretary General U Thant and the seventeen nonaligned nations respectively issued calls for peace negotiations; these caught the world's attention. In reaction to this criticism, President Johnson gave an important address at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore on 7 April to declare that the United States would "remain ready for unconditional discussions with the governments concerned."⁴⁷

In fact, what he proposed represented nothing but "carrot-and-stick diplomacy." On one side, he declared that the United States would never stop bombing nor withdraw its forces until it had achieved its objective of "an independent South Viet-Nam . . . free from outside interference," including, of course, that of North Vietnam. Evidently, he was aiming at imposing his own solution on the Vietnamese Communists.⁴⁸ On the other side, he urged the North Vietnamese to gain the material affluence they wanted "far more readily in peaceful association with others than in the endless course of battle." In effect, Johnson offered a \$1 billion program for the development of the Mekong River area, which was expected to work on the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong as an inducement to make generous concessions.⁴⁹

Naturally, de Gaulle reacted strongly to these U.S. government moves. To his way of thinking, Johnson's peace call was a farce, as it was paired with ongoing bombing; the American coercive diplomacy would be totally ineffective. At a cabinet meeting on 14 April, he said, "If the United States does not decide now to withdraw from Vietnam, the war will last ten years. And the war will never end without the Americans losing face, unlike the Algerian war, which ended with France's honor intact." According to Information Minister Alain Peyrefitte, de Gaulle had revised his prophecy after the beginning of the American bombing, increasing his expectation for the length of the war from five years to ten.⁵⁰

Accordingly, de Gaulle never committed himself to any kind of peace mediation after this American bombing; he told Ambassador Charles Bohlen that in his view, there was no possibility of success.⁵¹ However, while he seemingly limited himself to calls for peace, he nonetheless took vigorous diplomatic

47. *Public Papers of the Presidents, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965* (Washington, DC, 1966), 1:396.

48. Kathleen Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War, Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago, 1985), 124. David Kaiser also explains that "unconditional discussion" meant Johnson's expression of willingness to talk without indicating any willingness to negotiate any of his objectives. David Kaiser, "Discussion, Not Negotiations, The Johnson Administration's Diplomacy at the Outset of the Vietnam War," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 52.

49. *Public Papers of the Presidents, 1965* 1:397; Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War*, 127-28.

50. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, 2:687. The Quai d'Orsay, on the other hand, examined Johnson's speech, to some extent positively, saying, "The French government is only too pleased with the Johnson administration's intention to participate in discussion without requiring as a precondition the cessation of North Vietnamese aggressions against the South." But, in the French view, the other more serious obstacle was that the Americans did not want to recognize the NLF as a negotiating partner. *DDF, 1965* 1:430-33.

51. Entretien entre le Général de Gaulle et M. Bohlen, 4 mai 1965, 5AG 1-201, AN.

initiatives to prepare for future peace mediation.⁵² His subsequent deliberate approaches to the Communist countries tend to be forgotten too easily even in recent literature. With that in mind, they will be focused on in the following sections.

FRANCE'S ADVANTAGEOUS POSITION FOR PEACE MEDIATION

As de Gaulle judged that there would be, for the moment, no hope of a peace settlement, he told the Foreign Ministry to no longer make any peace initiatives. In May 1965, when the American embassy in Paris asked France to feel out North Vietnam on the new concession it was said to be ready to make, Etienne Manac'h, director of Asia-Océania, flatly refused.⁵³ It was, however, the Quai d'Orsay itself that informed the Americans of the new Vietnamese offer.⁵⁴ At this moment, in the face of the Vietnamese problem, France was the only actual Western power with (unofficial but substantial) diplomatic relations with North Vietnam; France viewed both the Soviet Union and Britain as subsidiary powers.⁵⁵

As this episode shows, de Gaulle and the Foreign Ministry were firmly convinced that France was in a more advantageous position than any other to mediate peace.⁵⁶ Before and after the start of the American air campaign, some countries, including the Soviet Union, Britain, and Canada, as well as UN Secretary General U Thant, demonstrated a great deal of interest in each peace initiative. De Gaulle was sure, however, that there was no need for France to rush to participate in this mediation contest.⁵⁷

In accordance with de Gaulle's directive, Manac'h analyzed a potential French peace initiative in a memorandum. "First, as long as there is no direct agreement between Washington and Beijing, action should be taken by an independent big power who inspires respect both in the United States and China," he wrote. He continued:

Neither Britain nor Russia is in a position to take such action. The former is, perhaps unwillingly, constrained by the American will and does not have

52. Alphand, *L' étonnement d'être*, 460, 469; Note no. 233/AS, 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162, MAE.

53. *DDF*, 1965 1:667–68.

54. *FRUS*, 1964–1968 2:673, 682–83, 686–87; *DDF*, 1965 1:605–6; George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, 1983), 89–90.

55. Note no. 233/AS, 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162.

56. *Ibid.*; Vietnam—positions des principales puissances, Note CLV/No160, 22 mars 1965, AO, CV 314; Vietnam—positions des principales puissances, Note CLV/No221, 23 avril 1965, AO, CV 314, MAE.

57. De Gaulle was very proud of France's advantageous position for a peace initiative. On 24 July 1965, he told the French ambassador to the United States that behind the scenes of the Vietnamese problem, the French could probably play a useful role because they had kept good relations with Beijing, Moscow, Hanoi, and Washington and not become American agents. Alphand, *L' étonnement d'être*, 459–60.

sufficient freedom of maneuver; the latter does not have sufficient freedom of action, either, as it fears that China would denounce and condemn before the international audience of the international Communist movement and Third World countries. The reasons why all the recent initiatives failed are the following: The Gordon Walker Mission was and could be related only to one of the two poles [the United States], and we [the French government] never thought that the mission could build a bridge of understanding between the two poles. With the Commonwealth Mission: the same thing.⁵⁸

Manac'h continued:

The mission [of peacemaking] requires both some moral superiority and a capability of synthesis [of the two poles' positions]. In other words, [a mediator] has to be listened to by the two poles, and have possible leverage with both. Only France is strong and independent enough to have the capacity to synthesize and to impose, if necessary, a certain coercive action, based on an objective investigation of the facts and the mobilization of international opinion. One of our diplomatic resources over the United States is the fact that we have functioning diplomatic relations with China, and the Chinese know our friendly independence from the United States. The United States has to consider that if France takes a reasonable initiative on the Vietnamese problem, it will be supported by the greater part of the world and especially by the vast majority of Asian countries.⁵⁹

This long memorandum shows how confident the French were of their diplomatic superiority; knowing no one else could bridge the two blocs so effectively and gather so much support from the Third World, they were sure that France could wait for the right moment to mediate between the Free World and the Communists. In the summer of 1965, preliminary secret contacts were made in Paris between Washington and Hanoi. It was Manac'h who acted as liaison between an informal American envoy, Edmund Gullion, and North Vietnam's commercial representative, Mai Van Bo, but this was the limit to his mediation.⁶⁰

The French government was not just boasting of its advantageous position as a mediator. It was also making vigorous efforts to play its own diplomatic cards; this is emphasized by the timing of the initiative.

58. The French government was also convinced that neither Tito (an ideological rival of China) nor Shastri (whose country had just agreed to a tentative cease-fire with China) could assume a role in peacemaking. Note no. 233/AS, 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162.

59. Ibid.

60. This peace initiative, code-named "XYZ," started because of French information. The French informed Ambassador Bolen that just before the end of the bombing pause, Mai Van Bo had made a pressing approach in which he emphasized that Pham Van Dong's four points were not to be considered as preconditions for negotiations but rather as "working principles" toward an ultimate settlement. *FRUS, 1964-1968* 2:686-87, 3:312, 334. Herring describes the XYZ contact as one of the most fascinating and least known of the numerous peace initiatives of the Vietnam War. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 74, 89-90.

Manac'h explained:

The timing of the French initiative can be chosen only according to the evolution [of the conflict]. But the situation may move very fast, and it would be appropriate that we be available [for a mediation activity] from now on. In effect, it is not impossible that the political and military framework of South Vietnam would collapse rapidly.

To be available means ensuring in advance that we will be able to quickly contact not only Washington but also Beijing, Hanoi and the National Liberation Front as to the essential parts of the mechanism, and then Moscow and London as to the "administration" of the Geneva Accords, and finally the member states of the International Control Commission, the big countries in Asia, Prince Sihanouk, U Thant in a private capacity, and so on, in order to create favorable international support. The maximum efficiency of these approaches will be assured by their rapid simultaneity.⁶¹

According to this principle, de Gaulle and the Foreign Ministry worked hard after the American military escalation to develop more extensive and closer diplomatic connections with Communist countries, while patiently urging the United States to withdraw.

To begin with, France exchanged visits with the Soviet Union and China at the ministerial level to establish more cooperative relations. In April 1965, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko made an official visit to Paris, and a half-year later French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville reciprocated with a visit to Moscow.⁶² With China, Cultural Minister André Malraux flew to Beijing in midsummer 1965 and met Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai privately.⁶³

61. Note no. 233/AS, 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162.

62. The main issues in the series of Franco-Soviet high-level meetings in 1965 were the Vietnam War and the German problem. Regarding the Vietnamese problem, the two countries basically agreed on convening a Geneva-type conference and on neutralization as the means for peace. Entretien franco-soviétique, Paris, Le général de Gaulle et M. Gromyko, Comptes-rendus, EM 24, MAE; Entretien franco-soviétique, Moscou, MM. Couve de Murville, Gromyko, Kossyguine et Brejnev, Comptes-rendus, EM 25, MAE. On Moscow's position toward de Gaulle, Gaiduk demonstrates that Moscow attempted to make use of de Gaulle's "special position," an aspect of his anti-American attitude inside the Western bloc, in order to promote Soviet and North Vietnamese interests. Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996), 77–78.

63. Malraux proposed a neutralization of Indochina to Chinese leaders but the Chinese rejected it, manifesting their strong rejection of any negotiations and their strong interest in supporting Hanoi. Entretien de MM. Malraux et Chen Yi, Pékin, 23 juillet 1965, Entretien de M. Malraux avec M. Chou En-Lai, Pékin, 2 août 1965, Entrevue de M. Malraux avec le Président Mao Tse-Tong, Pékin, 3 août 1965, AO, sous-série Chine 532. On Chinese policy on the Vietnam War, see Qiang, "China's Response to French Peace Initiative," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 278–91; Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 162; Qiang, "Opposing Negotiations," 29. Interestingly, however, China did not decide to use France as the most reliable channel of communication but rather Britain instead. See James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965," *International History Review* 27 (March 2005).

What was of more importance is that in July 1965, Manac'h met Huynh Van Hieu, representative of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Algiers, and agreed to have a regular secret dialogue.⁶⁴ From the beginning, France considered the NLF to be an important Vietnamese nationalist actor, and judged that the war could not be ended without its commitment.⁶⁵ In de Gaulle's view, after the demise of Ngo Dinh Diem, successive South Vietnamese governments had already lost the power to rule.⁶⁶ During this talk, Hieu and Manac'h agreed that neutralization would be the most suitable solution in terms of domestic politics and diplomacy.⁶⁷ In addition, the NLF offered a new concession: it would not require a prior withdrawal of American troops, but rather would accept the beginning of peace talks in exchange for a simple pledge of withdrawal, once the U.S. government recognized the representativeness of the NLF.⁶⁸

PHASE TWO, PART TWO: FRANCE'S DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE:
FROM THE CHAUVEL MISSION TO DE GAULLE'S VISIT TO
PHNOM PENH

As the next step in de Gaulle's diplomatic efforts with the Asian Communists, two French diplomats with extensive experience in Indochina were sent to China, North Vietnam, and Cambodia in order to gather information about their internal political situations as well as their attitudes toward the Vietnam War.

THE CHAUVEL MISSION IN DECEMBER 1965: IN-DEPTH SURVEY
OF CHINA AND NORTH VIETNAM

In early December 1965, de Gaulle sent Jean Chauvel as an informal presidential envoy to Beijing and Hanoi. Chauvel was an experienced Gaullist diplomat famed for having participated as French representative in the Geneva Conference in 1954. The purpose of this mission was to discover how ready the two countries were to begin peace negotiations. France was very worried that China and North Vietnam were both shifting toward an increasingly harder line. Chauvel's task was to examine the reasons for their toughening positions. In order not to lose his prestige as interceder, before beginning any mediation activity, it was absolutely necessary for de Gaulle to know whether the situations in those countries were ripe for his peace initiatives.⁶⁹

64. *Compte-rendu* Alger, 29 juillet 1965, AO, CV 29, MAE.

65. *DDF*, 1965 1:431; Audience de M. Goldberg par le général de Gaulle, 31 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE; Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, 2:687.

66. Audience de M. Huang Chen, ambassadeur de Chine, par le général de Gaulle, Paris, *Compte-rendu*, 16 mai 1966, EM 27, MAE.

67. *Compte-rendu* d'un entretien de 27 août 1965, Alger, AO, CV 29, MAE.

68. *DDF*, 1965 2:170-71.

69. Note de la direction d'Asie-Océanie pour M. Alphand, Secrétaire Général du Ministère, 22 novembre 1965, EM 26, MAE.

According to Manac'h's note of 22 November to Hervé Alphand, general secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, the French government had already concluded that, for the moment, France could expect only a few benefits from any kind of intermediary diplomacy. The French government therefore decided that this mission ought to be strictly private. It had to be carried out in absolute secrecy, not only for the sake of French prestige but also to protect its possible successes; if the mission were revealed to the public, both China and North Vietnam would turn a deaf ear to any French initiatives.⁷⁰

Chauvel found that China was holding to an extremely uncompromising position. The Chinese, he learned, were expecting the United States to weaken because of the endless war of attrition and wanted the Vietnamese to continue to fight. It was true, according to his report, that the Chinese government would never attempt to fight the United States, but even Zhou Enlai, known as a soft-liner, did not want to negotiate with the United States on Vietnam.⁷¹

In his visit to Hanoi, however, Chauvel found a tiny ray of hope. In his interview with the North Vietnamese leaders, he proposed a three-phase plan for a peace process: discuss a cease-fire; achieve a careful political settlement; and withdraw the American troops and close bases in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese prime minister, Pham Van Dong, accepted this proposal in its entirety, and expressed his expectations for France's mediation diplomacy: he said that it was natural that France take the peace initiative because of its important presence in the world and its important interests in that area of the world.⁷² In Paris, however, Manac'h analyzed the political dynamics in Hanoi in more detail and concluded that Chinese influence was increasing among the Vietnamese leaders, making a peace settlement more difficult to achieve.⁷³

The French immediately conveyed these findings to the Americans.⁷⁴ At a meeting at the Matignon Palace on 13 December, French Prime Minister George Pompidou explained that every time the French found a small but encouraging sign of North Vietnam's willingness to negotiate, the Chinese always applied pressure and it quickly disappeared. Secretary of State Dean Rusk showed an interest in the nuances behind the North Vietnamese declaration. He added that, due to U.S. relations with Taiwan, whenever the U.S. administration

70. Ibid.

71. Télégramme, no. 3367-86, Pékin, 1 décembre 1965; Télégramme, no. 3406-12, Pékin, 2 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE.

72. Télégramme, NR 1630/44, Vientiane, 11 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE.

73. Manac'h explored the confrontations between pro-Chinese and pro-Soviets inside the North Vietnamese Politburo, as this information was important to estimate the possibility of political settlement. Télégramme, NR 1630/44, EM 26; télégramme, no. 1647/52, Vientiane, 12 décembre 1965, Série Amérique, Sous-série les Etats-Unis 611 (hereafter cited as AEU), MAE; Alphand, *L'étonnement d'être*, 470.

74. Entretien entre MM. Couve de Murville et Rusk, 13 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE. In late November 1965, Rusk showed his interest in Chauvel's information to French Ambassador Lucet. *DDF*, 1965 2:664.

tried to reestablish contact with Beijing, the initiative always became deadlocked over American recognition of Communist China.⁷⁵

JOHNSON'S PEACE APPEAL AND DE GAULLE'S APPROACHES
TOWARD THE COMMUNISTS

At the end of December 1965, the Johnson administration stopped aerial bombings so as to appeal for peace. President Johnson dispatched presidential envoys all over the world to advertise, both at home and abroad, his willingness to search for peace. Johnson sent Arthur Goldberg, American ambassador to the United Nations, to Paris. He met de Gaulle on 31 December. De Gaulle repeatedly told Goldberg that he had explained many times to American officials, including President Kennedy, how futile any Western involvement in Vietnam would be, even with the enormous strength of American military power there. De Gaulle commented on the attitudes of China, the Soviet Union, and North Vietnam, and confirmed what his foreign minister had explained to the Americans about the French position: if the United States planned a withdrawal of its troops and announced that intention, France would be absolutely ready to provide complete support for a peace conference and a peace agreement with conditions most favorable to the United States. But he added that as the United States was not ready to do so, the time had not yet come for any active French involvement.⁷⁶

Finally, this meeting resulted in nothing more than another exchange of views between the two governments. Just as in the past, a decisive gap existed between them, both on how to understand the Vietnamese Communists and how to let the South Vietnamese choose a political system. Shortly after this meeting, Johnson and de Gaulle exchanged letters on these points,⁷⁷ but they could not close this gap.

75. Entretien de M. Pompidou avec M. Rusk à l'hôtel Matignon, 13 décembre 1966, EM 26, MAE. Because the Johnson administration wanted to get information directly from Chauvel rather than through the filter of Manac'h or others in the Quai d'Orsay, they discussed sending a U.S. official to Paris. Telegram, Department of State, for the secretary from the acting secretary, 15 December 1965, NSF, CF, France, Box 172. Taking Rusk's suggestion, Johnson sent Harriman to Paris in late January 1966 to get Chauvel's full report on Hanoi's and Beijing's positions. *FRUS, 1964-1968* 3:671, 729; Telegram, Department of State, for Ambassador Paris 3379, 20 January 1966, RG 59, Department of State Central File (hereafter cited as CF), France, Box 2817, United States National Archives (hereafter cited as NA). The Americans suspected that Couve de Murville instructed Manac'h to "say nothing to Western representatives that will sound in any way encouraging. The only way to end this silly war is to make the Americans think that they cannot win it militarily." CIA Intelligence Information Cable, "Comments on the Chauvel Mission to China and North Vietnam by Chauvel and Couve de Murville," 22 December 1965, NSF, CF, France, Box 172, LBJL.

76. Audience de M. Goldberg par le général de Gaulle, 31 décembre 1965, EM 26, MAE; *FRUS, 1964-1968* 3:758-59.

77. Lettre du général de Gaulle au président Johnson, 5 janvier 1966; Letter from Johnson to de Gaulle, 31 January 1966; Lettre du général de Gaulle en réponse au message du président Johnson, 5 février 1966, AO, CV 162, MAE.

In 1966, the escalation of events in Vietnam was increasingly threatening, not only to Franco-American relations but also to the Atlantic Alliance. In March, de Gaulle gave unilateral notice to Johnson that France would withdraw its forces from the NATO military command.⁷⁸ In a press conference on 21 February, de Gaulle explained that France was in danger of getting involved in the hostilities in Asia.⁷⁹ As is well known, he distinguished the treaty's military apparatus from the alliance itself.⁸⁰ While trying not to damage the substance of the alliance, in which he intended to remain, de Gaulle was cautiously approaching the Eastern bloc.

In mid-May 1966, Couve de Murville and de Gaulle had consecutive talks with Huang Chen, the Chinese ambassador to Paris, who then planned to see Mao and Zhou. The latter greatly appreciated the French withdrawal from NATO, while both French leaders made it clear that France would never break its alliance with the United States: "France has never denied the alliance, just accused it of depriving our nation of its sovereignty."

In terms of Vietnam, when the Chinese ambassador expressed the fear that the Americans would expand military action to China, Couve de Murville retorted that the Americans knew very well how dangerous this option would be, and that it was his firm conviction that the United States would never want to run such a high risk. In turn, de Gaulle expressed his strong wish not to see the Chinese involved in the Vietnamese conflict, as this might lead to a world war. In order to achieve peace, he explained, France had to persuade the United States to withdraw its forces and urge China to conduct itself reasonably. According to de Gaulle, peace really depended on the United States' and China's stances. Therefore, France had always worked on them and appealed to them for peace. In addition, de Gaulle talked candidly about the limits of France's diplomacy: France had no direct leverage on the evolution of the conflict except in its influence on Cambodia and in its encouragement of Vietnam's aspiration for independence.⁸¹ This was a roundabout way to urge the Chinese to contribute to the peace process.

De Gaulle then flew to Moscow on 20 June. This was the first official visit to the Soviet Union by a Western chief of state since the end of the Second World War. At his meeting with the Soviet leaders, one of the issues de Gaulle addressed was the Chinese position on the Vietnam War, a sensitive issue for his

78. De Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, tome 10 (Paris, 1970), 261–62; Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe*, 152–55. On Johnson's reaction to de Gaulle's decision to withdraw from NATO, see Thomas Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 100–102.

79. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, 5:18.

80. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, 225–26; Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, tome 3 (Paris, 2000), 187; Visite au général de Gaulle de M. Lucet, ambassadeur de France aux Etats-Unis, avant son départ pour Washington, Note d'entretien, 12 novembre 1965, EM 26, MAE.

81. Entretien entre MM. Couve de Murville et Huang Chen, ambassadeur de Chine, Paris, Compte-rendu, 12 mai 1966, EM 27; Audience de M. Huang Chen par le général de Gaulle, Paris, 16 mai 1966, EM 27, MAE.

interlocutors because of the confrontations between the Soviet Union and China. De Gaulle suggested that China should be involved in the peace process, and expressed his hope that France's diplomatic relations with China would contribute to bringing Beijing to the peace table, although it might take a long time. But he was not so optimistic about the current circumstances. Not only was there no current hope of peace, but a clash might become inevitable between the United States and China, leading to an expansion of the conflict, if the United States should go beyond acceptable limits. The Soviet leaders basically agreed with de Gaulle's analysis and responded that they were ready to make every effort to prevent the conflict from escalating into a full-scale war (between the Great Powers).⁸²

THE SAINTENY MISSION AND THE DISCUSSION WITH THE NLF IN JUNE–AUGUST 1966

As for North Vietnam, in late July 1966, France's relationship with Hanoi was "not close but very stable, and gradually more established."⁸³ On 24 February 1966, de Gaulle invited Jean Sainteny to the Elysée Palace and asked him to visit Beijing, Hanoi, and Phnom Penh to sound out the real intentions of these countries' leaders.⁸⁴ Since the period of the Free France movement, Sainteny had been profoundly trusted by de Gaulle and had been appointed minister and special envoy several times. In 1946, just after the outbreak of the French Indochina War, he had served as the representative of the French government at the Fontainebleau Peace Conference. Since then, he had won profound confidence from many Vietnamese Communist leaders, who called him a "good Frenchman."⁸⁵

The Sainteny mission was given a warm welcome in Hanoi in early July. Its objectives included reconstructing the two countries' relations, which was actually not so difficult to achieve. But as for another of its objectives, namely to inquire about the Vietnamese leaders' intentions regarding the war, the prospects for a peace settlement turned out to be less optimistic.⁸⁶ On 7 July, when he saw Ho Chi Minh and Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, Sainteny urged them to move toward negotiation, saying frankly that the war would finally destroy Vietnam. The North Vietnamese president replied: "We will never give up and we will never surrender even if the United States might be able to annihilate us." Although Ho did not deny negotiation as a path to peace, he claimed categorically that it would make more sense for the Americans to retreat from Vietnam.

82. Voyage du général de Gaulle en URSS. Projet d'allocation pour l'arrivée à l'aérodrome; projet de discours pour le dîner officiel au Kremlin; projet de discours pour la réunion plénière; message des dirigeants soviétiques; entretiens: le général de Gaulle, MM. Couve de Murville, Brejnev, Kossyguine, Podgorny, Gromyko, Comptes-rendus, EM 27, MAE.

83. Rapport de la mission de Jean Sainteny au Nord-Vietnam, 5AG 1-240, AN.

84. Claude Dulong, *La dernière pagoda* (Paris, 1989), 138–39.

85. Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York, 1970), 348.

86. Rapport de Sainteny au Nord-Vietnam, 5AG 1-240, AN.

Ho insisted on the “Four Points” as defined in April 1965 by Pham Van Dong as conditions for peace, and showed his determination to spearhead a do-or-die resistance.⁸⁷

In the meantime, Hanoi came to trust de Gaulle and the French government, and asked them to persuade the British to stop supporting the United States. The North Vietnamese leaders also asked them to urge the Americans to understand the Vietnamese determination to resist. Sainteny then took up the problem of American prisoners of war, a critical issue for the United States, and demanded improvement in their treatment and conditions.⁸⁸ Hanoi willingly accepted this request and asked him to inform the Americans of this concession. Effectively, North Vietnam stopped bringing these POWs to military trial.⁸⁹

On the other side, the Johnson administration came to consider Sainteny a reliable bridge between Washington and Hanoi; some American officials, such as Ambassador-at-Large W. Averell Harriman, carefully examined the information received from him.⁹⁰ On 21 July, Sainteny made Charles Bohlen, American ambassador to Paris, aware of his belief that Hanoi was actually searching for a path to peace while fiercely withstanding American military attacks.

However, according to Sainteny, the problem was China; it would be much more difficult to persuade Beijing to accept peace talks, because, in the French view, the protracted conflicts in Vietnam offered too many advantages for China: whereas the war was seriously damaging American prestige, the Chinese had increased their influence in Vietnam through both military and economic aid.⁹¹

Therefore, Sainteny affirmed that the French saw no hope of peace for the moment and would not engage in any mediation in the immediate future.⁹² His declaration was based on the information from the Chinese that Ho Chi Minh

87. Jean Sainteny, *Ho Chi Minh and His Vietnam, A Personal Memoir*, trans. Herma Briffault (Chicago, 1972), 161–64.

88. *Ibid.*, 163–64; Rapport de Jean Sainteny sur sa mission, 5AG 1-240, AN; Procès-verbal des entretiens du 4 juillet 1966, Dulong, *La dernière pagoda*, 263, 269.

89. Rapport de Jean Sainteny au Nord-Vietnam, 5AG 1-240, AN; Entretien entre le général de Gaulle et M. Lucet, ambassadeur de France aux Etats-Unis, Paris. Note d’entretien, 25 juillet 1966, 28 EM, MAE.

90. *FRUS, 1964–1968* 4:554, 567, 586; Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 348. The Johnson administration sometimes sent Kissinger to Paris to see Sainteny and seek information. Memorandum of Sainteny’s visit to Hanoi, from Leonard Unger to Ball and Rostow, 30 June 1966, NSF, CF Vietnam, Box 143–144, LBJL. Henry A. Kissinger, “Derniers efforts pour la paix,” Institut Charles-de-Gaulle, *Espoir* 24 (1978): 50.

91. Rostow informed Johnson of Sainteny’s report. Rostow’s memo to the president, 22 July 1966, NSF, CF France 172, LBJL; *FRUS, 1964–1968* 4:508–10; Note, Hanoi, 27 juin 1966, AEU 612, MAE; Voyage de M. Sainteny en Chine (Aspects chinois du conflit), 5AG 1-226, AN. Although France viewed the Chinese impact on the war as more important than the Soviet, Moscow had drastically strengthened its influence on Hanoi since 1965 by increasing its military aid. Hanoi decided to rely more on Moscow for air defense. Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 135; Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 230–33; Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, 58–72.

92. *FRUS, 1964–1968* 4:508–10.

had recently gone to Beijing twice to ask for either cooperation in bringing peace or additional support. As the Chinese had rejected the former, Ho had no option but to continue the war with renewed determination.⁹³

At almost the same time, in early June 1966, the Quai d'Orsay resumed its approaches to the NLF. Manac'h flew to Algiers to have two talks with the representatives of the NLF mission.⁹⁴ Subsequently, at the end of June, Sainteny met NLF officials in Phnom Penh on his way to Hanoi.⁹⁵ Finally, on 28 August, Manac'h discussed issues with Nguyen Van Hieu, a member of the NLF's Central Committee, when he accompanied de Gaulle on his trip to Cambodia.

In these successive talks, France and the NLF agreed to strengthen their existing *de facto* relations, although it was difficult for France to grant the NLF diplomatic recognition and to allow them to establish a permanent mission in Paris. Finally, the French discovered that the NLF had considerably different ideas from Hanoi about how to proceed to a peace settlement, especially on the conditions for the American evacuation, the path to neutralization, the relations between the NLF and North Vietnam, and the path to unification of the two Vietnams.⁹⁶

PHASE THREE: FROM THE PHNOM PENH SPEECH TO THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

As de Gaulle finally realized that it would be impossible to persuade the United States to change its approach to seeking peace, he concentrated on his so-called *omni-directional* diplomacy. In particular, he worked enthusiastically on the Communists, including Hanoi, the NLF, China, and the Soviet Union.

In late summer 1966, de Gaulle made an official visit to Cambodia.⁹⁷ It was the first visit of a French president there since France's withdrawal from Indochina. Its symbolic impact was considerable, especially in relation to de Gaulle's Third World diplomacy. In effect, although he explained his trip was just to reciprocate

93. *FRUS, 1964-1968* 4:510.

94. Note du entretien à Alger entre MM. Manac'h, directeur d'Asie, et Huynh Van Tam, chef de la mission permanente du Front National de Libération du Vietnam à Alger, 6-7 juin 1966, EM, 27.

95. Sainteny reported to de Gaulle and the Quai d'Orsay that the NLF was rather pro-French while he avoided commenting on relations between the NLF and Hanoi. Voyage de M. Sainteny au Cambodge, juillet 1966, Entretiens avec MM. Tran Buu Kiem et Pham Van Huyen, 5AG 1-222, AN.

96. Note du entretien entre Manac'h et Huynh Van Tam, 6-7 juin 1966, EM, 27; Entretien avec le FNL, à Phnom-Penh, Entretien entre M. Manac'h, directeur d'Asie, et M. Nguyen Van Hieu, membre du Comité Central du Front National de Libération du Vietnam, Phnom-Penh, 28 août 1966, EM 29.

97. Journoud, "La visite du général de Gaulle à Phnom Penh." Although she discusses de Gaulle's purpose in visiting Cambodia, the consequences of the Phnom Penh Speech, and Franco-Khmer relations, the author would like to add, by way of explanation for de Gaulle's visit to Cambodia, the diplomatic interaction between the United States and France and the role of French missions to China, Hanoi, and the NLF. For more details on French diplomatic actions before and after the Phnom Penh Speech, see Torikata, "The Vietnam War and de Gaulle's Phnom Penh Speech."

for the visit of the Cambodian prince to France,⁹⁸ he took advantage of this stopover in Phnom Penh to publicize his position on the Vietnam War. On 1 September, he delivered the “Phnom Penh speech” in front of one hundred thousand people. It received remarkable attention from the world and is remembered as the climax of his anti-Americanism.⁹⁹ In this address, de Gaulle described the battles in South Vietnam as a war of “national resistance” and asserted that “France is totally confident that the United States will not be able to bring about a military solution.” In addition, he declared that France would not attempt any mediation at that time, because, in de Gaulle’s view, “the possibility of negotiations depends on America’s willingness to make a prior commitment to withdraw its troops within a suitable and definite time-limit. There is no doubt that the time is not ripe at all for such an outcome today.”¹⁰⁰

The Americans were furious and made a strong protest to the French ambassador, Charles Lucet, a week after the speech,¹⁰¹ and then to the French foreign minister, Couve de Murville, in early October.¹⁰² There was another reason the U.S. government was so deeply offended by de Gaulle’s declaration: on 24 August, Secretary of State Rusk sent a letter to Couve de Murville, asking France to convey an American message to the Communists: “We have repeatedly stated our intention to withdraw our forces once this [North Vietnamese] interference is at its end. This intention is categorical. . . . It is of course always possible that the result might be achieved simply by *announced reciprocal actions*, made known between ourselves and Hanoi *through secret channels*.”¹⁰³ It should be noted that it was highly unusual for the Johnson administration to send a letter of this kind to France.¹⁰⁴

98. Note d’entretien entre le général de Gaulle et M. Lucet, ambassadeur de France aux Etats-Unis, Paris, 25 juillet 1966, EM 28, MAE.

99. At that time, many countries’ newspapers covered de Gaulle’s speech on the first page. For example, *New York Times*, 2 September 1966; *Le Monde*, 2 septembre 1966; *The Times* (London), 2 September 1966; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 September 1966.

100. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, 5:74–78.

101. Télégramme de Washington, NR 5153/55, 3 septembre 1966, AO, CV 162, MAE; Telegram, Department of State 44624, 9 September 1966, NSF, CF, France, Box 172, LBJL.

102. Entretien entre MM Couve de Murville et Rusk, Compte-rendu, 3–4 octobre 1966, EM 28, MAE. The Johnson administration judged that “the French position has moved from an initial critical but neutral attitude to one of open public opposition to us. We therefore have little to consult about with France.” Memorandum for the president, “Call by the French Foreign Minister,” 1 October 1966, NSF, CF, France, Box 172, LBJL.

103. Telegram from Rusk to Embassy Paris, Department of State, 23 August 1966, NSF, CF France, Box 172, LBJL; Rusk’s letter, AO, CV 162, MAE (author’s emphasis).

104. As Rusk instructed Bohlen to get more information from Sainteny in early August, he was enthusiastic about the possibility of negotiation. Telegram, Department of State to Embassy at Paris 20305, 2 August 1966, NSF, CF Vietnam, Box 143–144, LBJL. However, Bohlen’s response is still not declassified. It would be very important to verify whether Bohlen’s answer was positive about a chance of negotiation, in order to examine Rusk’s real intention in the letter to the French minister. Meanwhile, French diplomats and Gaullist journalists, including Jean Lacouture and Bernard LeFort, predicted de Gaulle’s speech in Phnom Penh in advance. Telegram, Department of State Paris 2212, “de Gaulle’s Trip to Cambodia,” 11

Why did de Gaulle not respond to this request? As no document on the matter has yet come to light, one can only speculate. On 25 July, about one month before his speech, de Gaulle told Lucet: "The time for France has not yet arrived; the moment will perhaps come when the Johnson administration finally declares itself prepared to fix the date for its troop withdrawal." Therefore, according to his analysis, a successful mediation would depend largely on American attitudes.¹⁰⁵ Did the French consider the American concession offered in Rusk's letter insufficient? It seems so,¹⁰⁶ although we do not know whether the French quizzed the Vietnamese on this American proposal in a series of meetings they had in Phnom Penh.¹⁰⁷

But why did de Gaulle have to attack the United States so violently in his speech? From the evolution of de Gaulle's strategy as we have presented it in this article, we may infer that, at that moment, he decided to follow through on his Third World and Communist bloc diplomacy, without caring any longer about its negative fallout on the Atlantic Alliance. If de Gaulle attacked the United States' inflexible attitudes, France's ties with the NLF and North Vietnam would be strengthened. International opinion would also actively support de Gaulle's "impartial" position.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the choice he made for his Phnom Penh speech was simply rational for him.¹⁰⁹

August 1966, RG 56, Box 2174; Telegram, Department of State Paris 2212, "de Gaulle's Trip to Cambodia," 12 August 1966, RG 56, Box 2053, NA.

105. Entretien entre de Gaulle et M. Lucet, Note d'entretien, 25 juillet 1966, EM 28, MAE. Although no document sheds light on de Gaulle's reaction to Rusk's letter, a note written by Jean Brethès, chief counselor of Indochina affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, revealed the French government's evaluation: "Supposing the message were communicated to Hanoi, would it be sufficient to lead Hanoi and the NLF to change their attitude? That would be impossible." Note, "Lettre de M. Rusk au sujet des problèmes cambodgien et Vietnam," 25 août 1966, AOCV 121, MAE.

106. According to Jean Brethès, all information obtained by French diplomats, such as Couve de Murville in Eastern Europe and Chauvel and Sainteny in Asia, indicated that conditions had not yet ripened enough for such an initiative. Telegram, Department of State Paris 2212, "De Gaulle's Trip to Cambodia," 17 August 1966, RG 56, Box 2174, NA. After his visit to Phnom Penh, Manac'h personally indicated de Gaulle's intention to the FLN. Note d'entretien avec M. Tran Buu Khiem, Président de la commission des relations extérieures du FNL, AO, CV 29, MAE.

107. De Gaulle himself had an informal meeting with Ngyuen Thuong, chief of North Vietnam's diplomatic mission to Cambodia, on 31 August. Unfortunately, the archival document about this talk is still classified. Therefore, all we know is that during this thirty-five-minute meeting, de Gaulle expressed his hope that there would be no further expansion of the conflict, as this could, according to him, trigger another world war. North Vietnam's representative informally let de Gaulle know about Hanoi's analysis of the development of the war. *DDF*, 1966 2:562; *New York Times*, 1 September 1966; *Le Monde*, 1 septembre 1966.

108. De Gaulle, the Elysée Palace, and the Quai d'Orsay kept a cautious eye on any reaction from the world. Télégramme de M. Burin des Roziers pour M. Galichon, (undated) septembre 1966, 5AG 1-431, AN; Note no. 500, "Les réactions dans le monde au discours prononcé à Phnom-Penh par le Général de Gaulle," 21 septembre 1966, AO, sous-série Cambodge 302, MAE.

109. As French diplomats and high-ranking officials knew how important Franco-American relations were, they informed the American embassy in Paris several times of de Gaulle's intention to condemn the U.S. position on Vietnam during his coming stay in Phnom

After his Phnom Penh speech, he was never again so harshly critical of the Americans on the subject of Vietnam, except in a speech on 21 June 1967, in which he criticized the Vietnam War in relation to the Six-Day War.¹¹⁰ Even in this third phase of his Vietnam diplomacy, however, French diplomats continued to refer to the issue of Vietnam, although their tone had visibly softened. Until May 1968, when the peace talks started in Paris, de Gaulle seems to have been vigilantly waiting for the right moment to resume his mediation, hoping that some day the belligerents would start to seek a peace settlement more seriously under the pressure of war-weary public opinion.

De Gaulle consistently stayed in the background, however; when Chester Cooper, Asian specialist and member of the National Security Council, delivered Ambassador Averell Harriman's letter asking Sainteny to convey American messages,¹¹¹ de Gaulle flatly rejected the American request, saying that it was Harriman's letter, not Johnson's, and that the Americans had not yet withdrawn from Vietnam.¹¹² Meanwhile, however, in the summer of 1967, he tolerated the involvement of Raymond Aubrac (socialist engineer at the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome; a personal friend of Ho Chi Minh's, as well as one of de Gaulle's close and faithful allies during the resistance against Nazi occupation) in a peace initiative code-named "Pennsylvania," in which he acted in a private capacity.¹¹³ As long as his mission was kept private in the context of the scientists' "Pugwash" peace movement and did not involve the French govern-

Penh. Telegram, Department of State Paris 1254, 27 July 1966, RG 59, Box 2188; Telegram, Department of State Paris 2212, "De Gaulle's Trip to Cambodia," 17 August 1966, RG 56, Box 2174; Telegram, Department of State Paris 2514, 24 August 1966, RG 56, CF, Box 2174, NA. Therefore, it may be said that although the French made the diplomatic etiquette, de Gaulle did his best to vigorously pursue French interests.

110. De Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, 11:119–20. After his Phnom Penh speech, although he spoke again of Vietnam, for example, on 28 October and 31 December 1966, these addresses were drastically toned down and showed nothing new.

111. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 334–35.

112. Dulong, *La dernière pagoda*, 175–77. To make sure of his order, de Gaulle even gave Couve de Murville and Georges Pompidou, his prime minister, an instruction that the French government should declare itself against Sainteny's action if he happened to go to Hanoi at the American request. De Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, 11:66. Sainteny told Kissinger that he was disappointed with de Gaulle's rejection of Harriman's request, and also suggested that if the Americans, especially Johnson himself, had approached de Gaulle first, he might have agreed to let Sainteny go to Hanoi. "Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Henry Kissinger," 9 February 1967, Harriman Papers, Box 520, Library of Congress.

113. Raymond Aubrac, *Où la mémoire s'attarde* (Paris, 1996), 255–57; Author's interview with Raymond Aubrac, 29 September 2001; Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 521–22, 717; Journoud, "Des artisans de paix dans le secret de la diplomatie," 71–80. His main focus is on the role of secret French diplomacy, code-named the "Pennsylvania" peace initiative. But the author would like to make special mention of de Gaulle's connection to Aubrac in this peace effort. On the Pennsylvania peace initiative in detail, see Robert Bringham and George Herring, "The Pennsylvania Peace Initiative, June–October, 1967," in Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam*, 59–72. The American government had also paid attention to Aubrac's ties with Ho and asked him to serve as liaison between Washington and Hanoi in the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. Author's interview with Etienne Burin des Rozières (19 March 2002, Paris).

ment, de Gaulle tolerated Aubrac and his colleagues' visit to Hanoi.¹¹⁴ Indeed, de Gaulle expected to have indirect contact with the Communist belligerents without assuming any responsibility for the consequences.

THE OUTCOMES AND LIMITATIONS OF DE GAULLE'S DIPLOMACY

De Gaulle had been well aware of France's structural inferiority in military and economic power, so-called hard power, which is essential in world politics. He therefore tried to compensate for and overcome this weakness by mobilizing so-called soft power, that is, influential power and prestige. According to our analysis, de Gaulle did, to a certain extent, achieve this objective through his Vietnamese peace initiatives.

We may take the view that it was unreasonable for de Gaulle to claim the status of champion of the Vietnamese and other Third World peoples when, until just a few years earlier, his country had been waging a relentless colonial war against Algerian nationalists. And it may be said that it would be unfair for de Gaulle to criticize the war into which the French had dragged the Americans during the First Indochina War. It is no wonder that all this sounded absurd and deceptive to the Americans. It is also true, however, that both North Vietnam and the Vietcong expressed their gratitude for de Gaulle's peace initiatives, in spite of their memory of their own recent war of liberation against the French military. In addition, de Gaulle's outright criticism of the American position won him praise from other Third World countries for his independence and courage. All these successes greatly helped France heal the wounds it had suffered in its difficult decolonization process.

Above all else, because France was repeatedly asked by the U.S. government to serve as liaison with the Asian Communists, we can say that de Gaulle realized, to some degree, his aspiration to act as an intermediary between the two military blocs. Of course, it was true that the Americans sometimes asked other countries to build bridge between themselves and the Communists, but there was no other country that enjoyed comparable relations with all the actors directly involved in the Vietnam War. The global influence and prestige he thus gained masked, at least partially, the reality of French dependence on American military power. Furthermore, this status served as one of the main levers when de Gaulle claimed equal political footing with the United States within NATO.

The most decisive factor in de Gaulle's diplomatic success was his distinctive worldview and historical perception, in particular his belief in Third World nationalism. As he was firmly convinced from the beginning that the United States could never defeat Vietnam by military force, de Gaulle's positions on Vietnam remained consistent throughout the war, and therefore became more

114. Author's interview with Raymond Aubrac (29 September 2001, Paris).

persuasive, even if not from the American point of view. Moreover, as he was also convinced that because of their fierce nationalism, the Vietnamese would never be a satellite obedient to the Chinese or the Russians, even if the country as a whole were communized, he audaciously approached the Vietnamese and Chinese Communists; this placed France in a decisively advantageous diplomatic position compared with the United States, which could not do so due to its anti-Communist position.

In the way that he consistently and rigorously pursued the French national interest, de Gaulle was a hardheaded realist. His diplomacy was always motivated by his long-cherished desire to restore France to the status of world power. But his strategies to attain this objective were fundamentally molded by his peculiar belief in the supremacy of nationalism in Third World politics. In the sense that he was always trying to compensate for France's weak power resources through the force of this conviction, we must call him an eminent idealist. This duality was the essence of de Gaulle's diplomacy. His genius was fully demonstrated when he managed to mask the numerous apparent contradictions between these two aspects of his policies.