

The Realist Tradition in French Diplomatic History

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ABSTRACT

Contrary to many International Relations scholars, who have tended to ignore France and instead look elsewhere when they seek to discover the sources of realism, the authors argue that historically French policymakers have played a central, role in the development of 'applied realism'. Not only has there been a centuries'-long and fairly consistent adherence of French diplomatic behaviour to realist tenets, but key French figures can even be considered 'defensive realists'. As well, French strategic thought has often been packaged in such a way as to prioritise 'universal' values over narrower 'national' interests. This article demonstrates that the key to understanding French grand strategy is to be found in the study of four principal traditions emanating from its diplomatic history.

Introduction

Any serious commentary or analysis of contemporary French posture in international affairs will necessarily refer to Charles de Gaulle as a foundational influence on France's foreign and security policies from the 1960s onward, even down to our own day.¹ This is with good reason, for de Gaulle undoubtedly personified France's approach to international relations in the post-Second World War era. Moreover, his guiding principles – basically national independence, French exceptionalism or “grandeur”, and strategic equilibrium between great powers – continue to find echo in France's global posture. Indeed, almost all of his successors have emulated the Gaullist ideals, from Jacques Chirac with his opposition to the Iraq War, to Emmanuel Macron and his push for European “strategic autonomy.”² But if one takes a longer-term perspective, de Gaulle's “foundational” reputation looks more uncertain. This is because Gaullism, as we intend to show in this article, is less original than it is often argued to be; de Gaulle may have been in some sense the “futurist” of the republic,³ but if so he was working with a set of very old and well-established traditions and approaches inherited from a more distant past.

How distant? Our claim is that the roots of Gaullism can be traced back through the four-hundred years legacy of French diplomatic history, during

which there appeared a set of traditions that, together, would come to represent the default position of French foreign policymakers, regardless of political orientation. To that default position we can give a contemporary name: defensive realism, upon whose logic we elaborate in the section immediately following this introduction. In making our case, we adopt the concept of “tradition” employed so memorably by Walter Russell Mead in his classic study of American foreign policy, *Special Providence*.⁴ Like Mead, we argue that just as America’s diplomatic ledger – its “strategic culture” – has been enriched by four somewhat distinct foreign policy traditions (he calls them paradigms), so too has French strategic culture borne the heavy impress of four traditions. Unlike Mead, however, who sees his four American traditions as often being in conflict with each other, our application of traditions to the French experience is one that puts the emphasis on continuity. As we will argue, each of the four traditions has made its contribution to an overall French strategic culture that has been *relatively* stable since the end of the sixteenth century – a strategic culture that has been evolutionary not revolutionary.

A foreign policy tradition should include four basic components. To begin with, a tradition should offer a general worldview and the place of one’s state within it, that is, a *Weltanschauung*. Second, it should present a choice of preferred tools and methods intended to help a state attain its desired position in the international system, thus a strategy. Third and very importantly, it should be closely associated with specific “norm entrepreneurs” – individuals who, at key moments in history, were able to impose their vision on their state’s foreign policy. Fourth, a tradition should have a strong resonance and influence over time; it should leave a legacy that transcends the period in and for which it was designed.

Applying the notion of tradition to a country’s diplomatic history implies necessarily a degree of authorial interpretation or even arbitrariness, and our article is no exception. For in these pages, we will concentrate upon only four individuals. They are Armand Duplessis, more generally remembered as Cardinal de *Richelieu*, principal minister under Louis XIII; Charles Maurice de *Talleyrand* Périgord, diplomat extraordinaire at the dawn of the nineteenth century; Théophile *Delcassé*, the longest serving foreign Minister of the Third Republic before 1914; and finally Georges *Clemenceau*, France’s First World War prime minister and architect of the Versailles Treaty.

We base our choice on two criteria. First, all four of these figures left a strong mark on French foreign policy, with consequences detectable down to the present. Second, each lived through a defining moment in France’s long history when the country’s survival lay squarely in the balance. For Richelieu, it was a time in the first half of the seventeenth century when France, badly weakened after fifty years of religious strife, was besieged by the twin Habsburg Empires of Spain and Austria. For Talleyrand, it was at the end of

the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when France was beaten and militarily occupied by the age's four great powers – Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia. For Delcassé, it was in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, when the Third Republic was diplomatically isolated and constrained by the Bismarckian system. And for Clemenceau, it was in the last stages and immediate aftermath of the First World War, when France, exhausted after long years of combat, had to design, along with its allies, the shape of the future international system.

When we state that these four policymakers contributed to a longstanding French strategic tradition, we are hardly claiming that it was an unbroken tradition. To the contrary, there were two epochal French bids for hegemony in the global politics over the long span of time we canvass in these pages: first during the reign of Louis XIV (1665–1714) and again during the rule of Napoleon (1798–1813). Sometimes, these two exceptions to the rule are thought to *be* the rule, with France getting held up to ridicule as a state whose grandiose dreams always end up becoming its own worst nightmares – hence not a “serious” country at all.⁵ Our article take the exceptions as emphatically *not* representing the rule. Both exceptions ended in nightmarish failure, to be sure, but important “lessons” were derived therefrom. France settled into the reality that it was not destined to become a regional or global “hegemon”, and must instead satisfy itself with being one of Europe’s leading great powers – an ambitious aspiration, perhaps, but not an overweening one.

IR realism and France’s ‘Meadian’ paradigms

To claim as we and a few other scholars⁶ do that France has been one of the overlooked sources of IR realism obliges us to say what we think the latter represents. The problem is that, as is well known, there really is no single “version” of IR realism capable of rallying the allegiance of both theoreticians and policymakers. The realist family is nothing if not a disputatious one.⁷ It is as though legions of realists have been taking their marching orders from Walt Kelley’s comic strip character, Pogo, who from his fastness in Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp could rally his comrades around the battle cry, “We have met the enemy, and he is us!”⁸

In this article we argue that realism does possess theoretical prowess, if by this we mean that contained within it are found certain core suppositions, or axioms, rendering themselves valuable for the purposes of generalisation and explanation. Moreover, and this is an important aspect of our argument, France has been and remains much more susceptible to organising its foreign policy according to realist concepts and assumptions than just about any other member of the contemporary transatlantic state system; indeed, French diplomacy has betrayed far more of a realist orientation than the diplomacy of the US itself, for the latter country’s grand strategy had been, until the Trump era, saturated with norms whose ideological roots could more easily be associated

with a “liberal” perspective in international politics that, admittedly, is itself as internally divided as is the realist perspective one.⁹ This is why James Kurth could proclaim that the “liberal tradition is not only *in* America, it *is* America. The realist tradition, in contrast, is not only rarely in America, it is un-American.”¹⁰

So what are realism’s other “realities” – its dispositional and cognitive hallmarks? As a disposition, that is, as an orientation towards the human comedy in general, realism can be accurately charged with inculcating a pessimistic outlook. As Jonathan Kirshner explains, “[i]t is the portion of realism to stare glumly at the volcano (even those that might appear dormant), in grim anticipation of the worst. Part of this wariness is dispositional. Realism tends to have a pessimistic view of humanity.”¹¹ Much of the wariness proceeds logically from some of the core assumptions of realism. First and foremost, realists place great emphasis upon the international anarchy, meaning that they understand that the system of states simply can have no equivalent to what is commonly encountered domestically, that institution we call “government.” From this it follows that realists also stress both the system’s “state-centricity” and the superordinate place occupied by survival on the rank-ordered list of those member-states’ interests. Further, realists assume that war remains the central problem of their IR “discipline,” and to the extent that the latter continues to have anything resembling a mission statement (it may not), they would incline towards the view that it is to foster systematic study into the causes of war and the conditions of peace. Finally, realists are not so lugubrious as to imagine that war must always and everywhere be the fate of the international system’s members, for they believe that the astute and prudential balancing of power can yield some reliable means of keeping the martial beast locked in its cage.

Beyond these hallmarks, realists have been known to differ on other supposedly foundational elements. It might be tempting to think that to the extent (seldom) France is brought into discussions of IR realism, it makes its entrance decidedly and emphatically through the door of classical realism – and this mainly because of an assumption that IR theorising in France remains largely the monopoly of the diplomatic historians, for whom classical realism must be the most “history-friendly” branch of the realist family. So to think would be wrong, however.¹² France’s realist theory, as established much more through its long diplomatic practice than through the labours of its scholars, pays greater homage to Kenneth Waltz’s third image than it does to the other two images.¹³

More than this, to the extent that there has existed a central thread in French realism, it has been an offshoot of what latterly has been considered to be a branch of structural realism – the approach labelled “defensive realism.” This cluster of IR structural realists who are styled as defensive realists really do differ from their structuralist kissing cousins, the “offensive” realists, with

the highlight of differentiation being precisely the nature of the interest that realists think states make it their business to “maximize:” for the defensive realists, the lodestar for navigating the terrain of interest is *security*, while for the offensive realists, it is *power*.¹⁴ In short, while France’s realist paradigms – of which there have been four principal ones – may run the entire gamut of levels-of-analysis orientations, they evince a surprising and enduring reverence for the third image, so much so that we might say of the French diplomatists we cover in this article that they were defensive realists *avant la lettre*.

To clarify what we mean, we turn to Walter Russell Mead. Although not agreeing totally with Kurth on his contention that realism is fundamentally “un-American,” Mead does insist that the kind of folk who in American foreign policy lore would be considered realists have very little in common with the kind of realism theorised – and practiced – in continental Europe. It is clear from his depiction of that latter kind of realism as *Realpolitik*, that Mead has the Prussians or the Austrian Habsburgs in mind when thoughts turn to origins stories. Their continental European, dog-eat-dog (or to use his own zoological metaphor, scorpions-in-a-bottle) behaviour is not at all what he finds to be characteristic of “Anglo-American realism.” Instead, Mead tells us that this latter variant (if that is what it is) of realism has very little in common with European *Realpolitik*. Where the latter is fundamentally concerned with a “high politics” intimately wrapped up in worries about *physical* security, the former is motivated primarily by solicitude for economic security – trade, rather than the clash of armies. “Frederick the Great thought about how to snatch Silesia from Maria Theresa,” Mead tells us, whereas “Alexander Hamilton thought about how to integrate the infant American economy into the British world system on the best possible terms For American realists, getting economic policy right is the grand strategy of the state; if we have the money we will somehow find the ships and men.”¹⁵

So not only is (Anglo) American “realism” such a distant relative in the realist family as almost to be no relative at all, but – and here is Mead’s major contribution to the study of US foreign policy – most of the country’s approach to diplomacy since its very founding as an independent state has featured a reluctance towards, if not an abhorrence of, involvement in the European (and therefore global) balance of power.¹⁶ There have been, he instructs us, four principal traditions, or “paradigms,” that have co-existed as central elements of America’s geopolitical soul, and if the course of the country’s diplomacy can sometimes appear incoherent to foreigners, it is because the ship of state sails according to compasses whose bearings differ depending upon the proclivities of whoever happens at the time to be helming the vessel.

The following four paradigmatic orientations have, sometimes singly, sometimes in combination, served to guide the strategic thinking of those

captains. There are the *Hamiltonians*, stressing the primacy of commercial interests that can best be furthered by working to form regulatory mechanisms, often in cooperation with Britain, to enhance open global intercourse. There are the *Jeffersonians*, whose desire is to have as modest a foreign policy as can be gotten away with, and whose laser-like focus is on the preservation of democracy at home. There are the *Wilsonians*, who doubt democracy can thrive at home unless it is well-rooted abroad, and while they may be the most “internationalist” of the captains, their institutional preference is not so much one that inclines them to participating in the European (or global) balance of power as it does to eliminating that balance of power altogether, either directly through collective security or indirectly through “liberal hegemony.” Finally there are the *Jacksonians*, who like the Jeffersonians would also prefer, if only they could get away with it, to have as minimalist a foreign policy as possible. They might, like Greta Garbo, “want to be alone,” but if pushed by a foreign state, they do not shy from pushing back as vigorously as they can. Because of this, Mead refers to them as America’s “martial caste.”

In keeping with our Meadian motif, in the following sections we will present and analyse our own set of paradigms, intended to enhance our understanding of French foreign policy. Like Mead’s, our paradigms number four. Also like Mead’s, ours are associated with individuals, thus they are eponymous ones. Mead’s eponyms were three presidents and one would-be president. Ours are three foreign ministers (or their equivalent) and one very important prime minister. Accordingly, our paradigms are called *Richelieuvian*, *Talleyrandian*, *Delcasséan*, and *Clemenceauvian*. Though we take our nominative inspiration from Mead, we do differ from him in an important way. Where Mead tells the story of American foreign policy as representing an ongoing struggle *between* the four differing paradigms, in a state of near-permanent, if unequal, jousting for policy primacy, we present a picture of relative (though hardly complete) paradigmatic harmony. We mean that while both America and France have staked out claims for themselves as “revolutionary” states, in the latter country’s orientation to world politics, the operative word is more evolution than revolution, as for the most part French statecraft has been aimed at enhancing rather than overturning the European (and global) balance of power.¹⁷ Our paradigms build upon each other, in contrast to Mead’s, where antinomy rather than accretion remains the rule, with the occasional departure taking the form of temporary marriages of categorical convenience.

France’s Richelieuvian tradition

For those searching for the roots of French realism, Richelieu is a natural starting point. He was, along with his successor Mazarin,¹⁸ one of the architects of the modern international system ushered in by the peace of Westphalia in 1648. He also singlehandedly laid the foundations of the early modern

absolutist state, which would go on to become the building block of the international order throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Richelieu's approach to politics had been shaped by the savage and chaotic political environment of the late 1500s and early 1600s. During those decades, a France already weakened by half a century of civil war was being pulled apart by powerful forces. Richelieu's mission became one of strengthening the only viable unifying political structure: the monarchy. This he was able to do.

How he managed to do this has generated some controversy. Many who examine the Cardinal's approach to politics believe that as a disciple of Machiavelli, Richelieu must have been a *Realpolitiker* to the marrow, only too happy to invoke *raison d'état* as a justification for the most ruthless and cynical of policies.¹⁹ Yet the notion of *Realpolitik* very rarely appears in Richelieu's own writings.²⁰ In fact, the imagery reflects a serious misunderstanding of his character and values. Richelieu was certainly a believer in the power of reason. And he was eminently pragmatic, appreciating that survival was and had to be the overriding interest of any state. Yet far from being the arch-*Realpolitiker* whose only preoccupation was to obtain what he wanted by whatever means available, Richelieu did strive to present both the king and France in the best possible light. It might even be said of him that he was an early practitioner of what is now called "soft power," centuries before Joseph Nye coined the term.²¹

He came upon his defensive realism naturally. By the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the European balance of power was tilting significantly in favour of the two Catholic empires linked by the same dynasty: the Habsburgs, in both Vienna and Madrid. In the east, Ferdinand II was about to win the first round of the Thirty Years' War against the Protestant powers in Northern Germany. In the south and north, Spain, although poorer and demographically smaller than France (with a population of 8 million as against France's 18 million), batted on riches siphoned from its overseas empire in Central and South America, and dominated both the Italian peninsula and Flanders.

France felt itself besieged by this Habsburg dominion.²² Richelieu set out to counter it, replacing it with a stable European order resting on a continental balance of power.²³ His was a defensive-realist vision of order, one in which "no single dynasty or country would exercise hegemony."²⁴ Seen in this light, the Cardinal's foreign policy goals appear to be strikingly prudent. There were no ambitious plans of expansion for France. Nor was there any design for "natural borders," or *frontières naturelles*. Richelieu had no appetite to conquer new territories or to crush or humiliate his enemies. The aim was to position France as the guarantor of the European balance of power and as an arbiter of the new emerging regional order. The question was how this could be managed.

Throughout a third of a century, French diplomacy focused on bringing the envisioned new order into being. As soon as he took office, Richelieu began trying to exploit Spain's vulnerabilities. He intervened in Northern Italy to disrupt Spanish communications without confronting Madrid directly, the ultimate goal being to force Spain to expend money and resources on a second front of little importance, thus weakening its position in Flanders. Gaspar de Guzmán, better known as Olivares, fell squarely into Richelieu's trap and became heavily involved in Italy, inflaming European public opinion (such as it was), antagonising several Italian states, including the papacy, and expending resources otherwise needed for his grand offensive in the north.²⁵ The result was disastrous for Spain.

Nor was the Italian intervention the only arrow in Richelieu's strategic quiver. He also adopted several indirect strategies in his contest against the Habsburgs.²⁶ His preferred policy was to subsidise financially and support politically the Habsburgs' principal foes; these were the Dutch, Danes, British, and Swedes, with whom France concluded dozens of treaties during the Thirty Years' War. In addition to these bilateral pacts, Richelieu fostered the creation of a network of regional anti-Habsburg leagues or alliances destined to balance and deter Madrid and Vienna in Italy and Central Europe.²⁷

Doing this did not come easy to Richelieu, or to his successor. France's bureaucracy was plagued, in almost every area, by corruption and dysfunctional traditions. France's tax system was antiquated and especially punitive for the king's poorer subjects, so it was hardly surprising that the demands of war triggered several revolts around the country. Richelieu, like Mazarin later, had thus to fight on two fronts, domestic and foreign. Despite all these difficulties, Richelieu was able to raise more than 150,000 men in the early years of the war with Spain, deploying them in six armies from Flanders to Italy.²⁸ The contest with Spain turned into a slugging match, so much so that, in J. H. Elliott's words, "by the late 1630s it was an open question as to which country, France or Spain, would be the first to break."²⁹ Ultimately, it was Richelieu not Olivares who prevailed, albeit posthumously, for by the time the famed Spanish *Tercios* suffered their defeat at Rocroi, in 1643, the Cardinal had been in his grave for several months. Mazarin carried on where Richelieu left off, and in 1648 would attain Richelieu's ultimate goal, the conclusion of a general European peace settlement along Richelieuvian lines.³⁰

Those lines were decidedly realist ones, but not in any narrow sense suggestive of what Arnold Wolfers once so memorably called "possession goals."³¹ Rather, the Richelieuvian tradition speaks to "milieu goals," those objectives that transcend narrow cost-benefit analysis. Usually, this point is missed by writers who have sought to define Richelieu's (and, later, Mazarin's) legacy solely in cost-benefit terms. But Richelieuvianism was about more than short-term victories. It was an orientation with a systemic breadth and long-term depth to it, one that continues to

animate French grand strategy. Most importantly, Richelieu possessed, as would Bismarck more than two centuries later, the “gift of the long view,”³² or what would later famously be referred to, by President George H. W. Bush, as the “vision thing.” It was a vision in which collective defence predicated on protective alliances would keep the peace. Above all, it was a defensive-realist vision bent on deterring any potential hegemon on the continent.

The Talleyrandian continuity

Comparisons between Richelieu and Talleyrand do not spring easily to mind. The former was a statesman for most of his professional life. The latter was the quintessential dilettante changing careers as easily as one changes socks: from bishop to revolutionary, speculator, courtier, *homme du monde*, political operator, and sometimes diplomat. Richelieu, like Bismarck, owed his power and status to one man: the king to whom he remained loyal to the end. Talleyrand, meanwhile, described himself as the “man of thirteen oaths,”³³ because of the ease in which he could proclaim his fealty to so many rulers between 1789 and 1830.

Nevertheless, despite their differences, and the century and a half that separated them, Richelieu and Talleyrand had some striking similarities. The latter resembled the former in being of noble birth, educated in the church, extremely well read, and as an intellectual in politics, passionately attached to reason, clarity of thought, and the pursuit of the national interest.³⁴ They did preside over France’s foreign policy in very different eras, of course. In Richelieu’s time, the powers of the king were still fragile, but, on the whole, the centre held. Talleyrand, on the other hand, faced a far more difficult predicament, for starting in 1789, France remained in near-constant turmoil.

Between that year and 1830 it experienced nearly ten changes in regime. Over this span, Talleyrand would hold a variety of governmental posts, very few of which actually accorded him much control over the country’s foreign policy, not excluding the period when he served as Napoleon’s foreign minister (1799 to 1807).³⁵ Chateaubriand, who hated him, dismissively said of Talleyrand that he ratified developments rather than caused them to happen.³⁶ Above all, Talleyrand was a product of the Enlightenment,³⁷ who championed ideals of freedom of speech, press, and religion. All this made him the consummate moderate in politics, *un constitutionnel*, not a revolutionary, someone for whom the ideal regime was that of Britain.

His moderation made him an object of hatred for romantics, Jacobins, ultras, radicals of all stripes, and Bonapartists. This accounts for the *légende noire* hanging over his legacy – that he was the ultimate survivor in politics, bereft of scruples.³⁸ Notwithstanding, Talleyrand, as a diplomat and a politician, did constitute a bridge between French foreign policy traditions

going back to Richelieu and extending forward to the world of modern competitive, not to say cutthroat, politics that emerged after the French Revolution.³⁹

Considering that Talleyrand owes his place in history much more to what he did as a diplomat, particularly during the Congress of Vienna, than to what he thought and wrote, it is unsurprising that so many of his biographers have paid scant attention to his analyses of international relations at the turn of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the wily prince had a particular aptness for diplomatic memoirs and political treatises, and his views of European geopolitics at that time were sophisticated. From the early 1790s until the Restoration, he expressed those views in multiple outlets.⁴⁰ And in stark contrast with his protean political loyalties,⁴¹ those views tended to remain stable and coherent.

In examining the ideas that link Talleyrand to French foreign policy traditions, the starting point is his argument that the political stability of a state and its prosperity should be the primordial objectives of its foreign policy. A state should aim at getting its own house in order rather than meddling in other people's affairs; Walter Russell Mead might call him, were he but an American rather than a French diplomatist, a Jeffersonian. It follows that Talleyrand despised war – especially hegemonic war – as a wasteful and costly enterprise and condemned the pursuit of territorial expansion for its own sake. France should therefore communicate to other European great powers a second principle, that it would stay inside its natural limits and never expand beyond those.

He shared with Richelieu a conviction that there should be an “equilibrium” among continental great powers, a balance not defined solely by their respective military forces, but also by economic and demographic factors and the attitudes and ambitions of the powers in relation to each other. This would insure a stable peace in Europe. Additionally, “legitimacy” should be a foundational element of such a balance, by which Talleyrand understood the abnegation of any right of possession based on conquest alone.⁴²

Talleyrand's thinking about IR clearly informed his actions, on those occasions when he could exert influence over French foreign policy. Contrary to Klemens von Metternich, the Austrian interior minister with whom he is often compared, Talleyrand saw and understood the changes that had convulsed Europe since 1789. He was not stuck in the past like so many of his contemporaries at the time of the Restoration. For him, the only political system that could both preserve the best of the old regime and accommodate the new realities was a constitutional monarchy of the British type. In the bargain, France's becoming a constitutional monarchy would open the way to a natural rapprochement with England, one of Talleyrand's long-time goals. Britain and France could become partners in maintaining a balance of power in

Europe, and perhaps also devise a way to share foreign markets and zones of influence across the world.⁴³

Talleyrand's vision of the international environment and the place of France in it at the dawn of the nineteenth century could fairly be described as prophetic. Although he was unable to put it in practice because of the chaotic context in which he lived, one can see the coherence of his views, and their moderation – traits he manifested throughout his career.⁴⁴ On this score, Talleyrand, certainly deserves a better reputation than the one that stuck to him for over a century, as a constantly shape-shifting devotee of *Realpolitik*.

As for what Talleyrand *did* rather than merely thought and wrote about, it is easy to cite the Congress of Vienna as the crowning moment of his long career. Even if France was still, in late 1814, one of the great powers, it was a beaten one, in no position to make demands. Incredibly, Talleyrand managed to turn this situation into an asset for France. He succeeded in installing himself as a kind of moral referee in the deliberations between the other great powers, becoming a stage-manager of those very deliberations. It was a role that suited him perfectly. Taking advantage of the disputes between Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia regarding Poland and Saxony, Talleyrand succeeded in bringing about an alliance between London, Vienna, and Paris against the two northern powers in January 1815, thus dissolving the four-powers' coalition that had defeated France just a year earlier.

He had reason to be happy with his work, and to announce triumphantly to Louis XVIII that France was “no longer isolated in Europe,” but rather was now allied with two of the greatest powers against the Russian and Prussian threats. His happiness was short-lived, for Napoleon was about to embark on the campaign that would lead to his final defeat, destroying at the same time Talleyrand's carefully crafted diplomatic achievement. Although the work of the Congress would conclude in June 1815, the first treaty of Paris had to be redrawn, and its final terms, in November, were much harsher for France. But this could hardly be blamed on Talleyrand.

Dismissed after Vienna by Louis XVIII, Talleyrand was not done with politics. In the wake of the July Revolution of 1830, at seventy-six, he entered the world of diplomacy one last time, being chosen by the new king, Louis-Philippe, to head a conference convened by London to ward off great-power intervention in the affairs of Belgium, which had declared its independence of the Netherlands in October 1830. He worked closely with British counterparts in bringing Belgium into existence as a constitutional monarchy headed by prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg.⁴⁵

How should we judge his legacy? Some would chalk his accomplishments up to *style* and little else. And when the style is considered to be embodied in and reflective of French culture and “temperament,” it is not difficult to affirm that Talleyrand was mainly concerned with France's status (its *rang*). Seen in this way, there is a direct link between Talleyrand's diplomacy in Vienna and

Charles de Gaulle's rigid diplomatic style in the 1960s.⁴⁶ Still, there was much more *substance* to Talleyrand than can be found in caricatures that reduce him to mere style, all the more so when the caricatures so closely mirror the usual prejudices held in certain precincts of what the French like to call the "Anglo-Saxon" world (presumably meaning denizens of either, or both, of the United Kingdom and the United States).⁴⁷

Talleyrand mattered more for what he thought and accomplished than for his style. He constructed a worldview combining traditional French diplomatic thinking with new perspectives drawn from his readings and his own thoughts. As had Richelieu in his time, Talleyrand adjudged France to be a status quo power whose aim was to effect a stable and balanced order in Europe. He also had a clear sense of the geopolitical challenges facing France and many other European states at the turn of the century, of a half-civilised, half-barbarian Russia and an upstart Prussia, each of whom threatened continental stability, and both of whom required balancing from the remaining members of the great-power club.

The Delcasséan restoration

Only a few decades separated Talleyrand's final mission in London from the generation of diplomats who walked the halls of the Quai d'Orsay later in the century, yet during that relatively brief span of time, European great-power relations reverted to the main features of the Westphalian order. True, some of the mechanisms of the promising Concert system endured, but starting in the 1850s,⁴⁸ and continuing thereafter, the great geopolitical issues came once again to be decided on the battlefield, with conferences and treaties merely ratifying what had already become settled by the force of arms. The statesman who most gave voice to this new age was Otto von Bismarck, famously declaring in 1862 that "[n]ot through speeches and majority decisions will the great questions of the day be decided, but by iron and blood (*Eisen und Blut*)."⁴⁹ While Denmark and Austria-Hungary may have been the first targets of Bismarck's *Realpolitik*, in 1864 and 1866 respectively, France was its ultimate prize, one seized in 1870.⁵⁰

France, for Bismarck, was the *Erbfeind* – the hereditary foe – thus it needed to be stripped of Alsace-Lorraine and made to pay an indemnity precisely calculated to mirror the one demanded from Prussia by Napoleon in 1807.⁵¹ There could be no question of offering France the kind of "soft peace" that Bismarck had concluded with Austria just a half-decade earlier. As well, France needed to be contained by a web of geopolitical understandings, to avoid what Bismarck called the "nightmare of coalitions." The only European great power remaining outside his network was Britain, which traditionally avoided any formal diplomatic engagement and favoured a policy of minimal

involvement in the affairs of the continent under the rubric of “splendid isolation.”⁵²

Nor was Bismarckian containment the sole geopolitical woe to confront the fledgling Third Republic of France, as it emerged from the ruins of the Second Empire in 1870. For starters, precisely because France now *was* a republic (a distinction that, in Europe, it shared with only Switzerland and San Marino), it was bound to be regarded with grave suspicion by its conservative and monarchical neighbours. But more than this were those neighbours’ memories of what France had represented for so much of the nineteenth century – a country that had earned for itself the reputation as the continent’s trouble-maker *par excellence*. Simply put, France lacked respectability among its peers. Bismarck, naturally, took advantage of this. And Delcassé sought to reverse it.⁵³

Did the new Third Republic presage any end to political upheaval? Not that anyone would have been able to notice at the time, given that the average lifespan of a French government in the last quarter of the nineteenth century turned out to be less than a year.⁵⁴ Nor was there to be much improvement in the new century; all told, France was to have more than fifty governments between 1871 and 1914.⁵⁵ The problem from the point of view of any potential security partners of France was expressed succinctly by Lord Lansdowne in 1905: “The instability of French governments is much to be regretted and affords an argument to those who do not believe in the possibility of an enduring understanding with France.”⁵⁶

Also weighing against French foreign and security policy interests after 1871 was the country’s declining relative capability. Between the time of Richelieu and the Second Empire of Napoleon III, France had been among the three top powers demographically, militarily, and economically. After 1871, it had to face a new and not so pleasant reality: it had become a diminished power. Its GDP placed it fourth behind the United States, Britain, and Germany, in that order. Even worse, the population of the latter country, at the end of the century, was 65 million compared with France’s 40 million, a gap that would fuel a persistent phobia, lasting well into the twentieth century, about the security consequences of demographic decline (*décadence*).⁵⁷ Most ominously, Germany’s army, having fully embraced the technological/industrial revolution, had become the strongest on the continent.

France, although determined to defend itself militarily, would be unable to balance Germany’s power unilaterally and would have to seek, through alliances, guarantees for its security that its own strength could no longer ensure. For it, the days were long gone when the dream of “internal balancing” could be held to be its geostrategic *deus ex machina*, as it had been most recently at the time of Napoleon’s bid for primacy.⁵⁸ Henceforth, solace was only to be had from the tried-and-true formula handed down from Richelieu and Talleyrand, of “external balancing.”⁵⁹

Delcassé understood this, and worked to make external balancing a reality.

While it was obviously weakened during the early decades of the Third Republic, the country retained some significant advantages. Most importantly, it could avail itself of a distinguished diplomatic corps as the century drew to its close, and even if between 1871 and 1890 the country's recurrent political crises brought to power no fewer than thirteen ministers of foreign affairs, things started to stabilise after 1890.⁶⁰ From that year until the outbreak of the First World War, a mere handful of officials guided the country's foreign policy. They were an elite comprising Alexandre Ribot (1890–94), Gabriel Hanotaux (1894–98), Théophile Delcassé (1898–1905), Stephen Pichon (1905–11), and Raymond Poincaré (1912–14).⁶¹ Of this group, Delcassé, with seven years in office, was both the longest-serving and, in important ways, the most effective member.⁶²

The group's starting point was a simple recognition of reality: France had been badly beaten and, despite the perceived injustice of the peace settlement imposed by its foe across the Rhine, there was not much to be done about it in the short term. France would simply have to accommodate Germany's preponderance of power – for the moment – during what became known as the phase of *Recueillement* in French foreign policy, lasting from 1871 to 1880. Delcassé, like others of his generational cohort such as Léon Gambetta, Ribot, and Hanotaux, was neither a warmonger nor a rabid partisan of *la Revanche*.⁶³

Bismarck having isolated France on the European chessboard, the best way for the country to reclaim the status of great power, as many Republican leaders saw things, was to look outside Europe and focus on expanding and solidifying France's growing colonial empire. Taking on Germany in Europe was far too risky, so to many (not all) of these leaders colonial expansion became the default option, a necessary step towards France's resurrection as a great power.⁶⁴ Already, starting in 1830, France had begun to amass a colonial empire. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, that empire would double in size, comprising a population larger than France's itself (50 million compared to 40 million).⁶⁵ By the turn of the century, it appeared to many as if France's colonial wager was going to pay off, with the colonial holdings proving themselves economically beneficial to France.⁶⁶

But if France was “back” following its quarter-century of humiliation, the reassertion of status through colonialism brought with it a few worrisome complications. Far from solving the country's “German problem,” the colonial spirit of the young Third Republic could even appear to be a *German*-designed project, one envisioned in Bismarck's Kissingen Diktat of 1877. The Iron Chancellor appreciated that a German strategy aimed at directing the expansive energies of the European powers away from the European metropole and towards the periphery would be bound to be in Germany's interests.

Avoiding this “Kissingen trap” would develop into a challenge for the Quai d’Orsay and the Minister of Colonies towards the end of the nineteenth century. Each new colonial initiative ran the risk of provoking another dispute with competing powers, and as France lacked allies, policymakers often felt they had no choice but to turn, reluctantly, to Germany in order to support their colonial ventures. This explains the short periods of détente between Berlin and Paris in the early 1880s and mid-1890s. However, any lasting collaboration with Germany ran up against a rising French patriotism, which swelled in proportion to the restoration of the country’s status as great power, such that any increase in France’s *rang* could be counted upon to stimulate its nationalist passions.

No one proved to be more adept in escaping the Kissingen trap than Delcassé. One way out of the trap led through France’s using some of its colonial assets as bargaining chips in a bid to bring about strategic rapprochement with other European powers, something Delcassé signalled upon becoming foreign minister in 1898.⁶⁷ If in many respects Delcassé was following the path of his predecessors Ribot and Hanotaux,⁶⁸ he parted company from them in his policy towards Britain, for unlike them, he actually succeeded in making things better, by effecting the Entente Cordiale, which would turn out to be the real game changer for France’s position in Europe. By the time he stepped down as foreign minister in 1905, Delcassé had made it possible for France to break free of the shackles of the Bismarckian system, and to weaken Germany’s alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy (the “Triple Alliance”). He did this by orchestrating a military alliance with Russia,⁶⁹ and especially by achieving the new understanding with Britain that, if not quite an alliance, certainly pointed in the direction of counterbalancing against Germany, thereby setting the stage for our fourth and final eponymous figure, Clemenceau.⁷⁰

The Clemenceauvian completion

At first blush, Georges Clemenceau does not sit very well alongside the above-mentioned trio of diplomatists. Unlike them, he had not been a lifelong diplomat. For much of his career he had not even been part of any national government. Although highly educated, fluent in both English and German, he was like his father, a physician, with little interest in *international* politics. National politics was his forte, as had been the case for three generations of his family, all steeped in republican politicking in their native Vendée. His own developing political ideology placed him squarely on the “radical” republican left, with its core concern for addressing France’s myriad social inequalities.⁷¹ In a word, Clemenceau was a militant, someone who spent most of his early career as a politician fighting against the right wing in the *Assemblée Nationale*, as well as taking on the more middle-of-the-road republicans

who were in power at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷² Few doubted his credentials as a battler, a *tombreur des ministères* (“wrecker of governments”), an activity in which he took great pleasure, all the while making life difficult for those who actually had to run the country.⁷³ That is why he was called, usually affectionately, the Tiger.⁷⁴

Despite these peculiarities, Clemenceau deserves to be included on our eponymous list of French foreign policy traditions. Even more than Delcassé, Clemenceau is the embodiment of republicanism in French foreign policy; as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle put it so well, “la République, c’est lui.”⁷⁵ Clemenceau’s imprint on France’s collective psyche is deep; like Astérix, he remains a symbol of fierce patriotism and indomitable resistance against all odds. Charles de Gaulle could evoke the Tiger’s *esprit de résistance* during France’s darkest hours of defeat, stirringly proclaiming that even though he lay deep in his Vendée tomb, *Père la victoire* was not sleeping,⁷⁶ nor would he sleep until France emerged victorious yet again.⁷⁷ Similar panegyrics have routinely been offered since, by politicians on the right, left, and centre of the country’s political spectrum, down to the present.⁷⁸

Admittedly, because of his brash and abrasive temperament, Clemenceau attracted his share of criticism. Of all the insults ever levelled at him, probably the most unfair came from the pen of John Maynard Keynes, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, who took the Tiger to be simply another Bismarck, devoted to *Realpolitik*.⁷⁹ Nothing could have been further from the truth.⁸⁰ He could never have said, as had Bismarck in 1862, that the great issues of the time would not be decided by votes but with “iron and blood.”

But if he was the antithesis of a Bismarck, what *did* Clemenceau stand for, once he began, in the early twentieth century, to become more involved in foreign policy? No less than other great leaders, he was shaped by events, starting with those of the Franco-Prussian War and its aftermath. As a new mayor of Montmartre in the autumn of 1870, he had witnessed the political chaos following the defeat at Sedan, the first faltering steps of the Third Republic, and the orgy of violence resulting from the Paris Commune the following spring.⁸¹ The conclusion he drew from these events was straightforward: insofar as relations between states are concerned, one should always expect the worst. More than anything, those events of 1870 and 1871 taught Clemenceau why France needed to be restored on the basis of revolutionary ideals of 1789. Only then could it stand its ground against predatory great powers like the new German Reich. This simple lesson of history inspired Clemenceau’s later political career as a warrior willing to do battle against all comers, whether those be monarchists, Bonapartists, the Catholic church, mainstream republicans, or even socialists; all must be combatted in defence of his idea of a “true” republic.⁸²

The myth of *grandeur* being peddled by the likes of Jules Ferry and the colonial lobby struck Clemenceau as fundamentally wrong-headed. That

France might regain its great-power status through colonial conquests he took to be delusory. For Clemenceau, the centre of gravity of French security resided squarely in Europe. The main threat it faced came from Germany.⁸³ Colonialism incurred the risk of France's becoming embroiled in fierce competition for territories in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia and thereby increased the danger of clashes with the very European states that might otherwise become its allies against Germany. Not only did Clemenceau consider France's colonialism to work in favour of *Germany's* interests; he also thought it was a losing proposition for France economically.

But if Clemenceau's opposition to colonialism during the last two decades of the nineteenth century could put him at odds with Théophile Delcassé, there was much less distance between the two political antagonists when it came to the question of French alliances. Each saw merit in external balancing. Where they differed was on the question of the political character of France's would-be allies. Clemenceau, more than Delcassé, thought that it made the most sense for France to strike alliances with fellow democracies rather than with autocracies. He had great admiration and respect for Britain as a parliamentary democracy.⁸⁴ He also viewed the United States, where he had spent four years in the 1860s, in a very positive light. Both were, to Clemenceau, natural allies.⁸⁵

Unlike Delcassé, who also cherished closer ties with Britain – and no doubt if they could be arranged, with the US as well – Clemenceau had few illusions about autocratic Russia. He had been dubious about drawing too close to Russia during his first term as prime minister (1906 to 1909), and he was especially worried about being dragged into the Balkans mess as a result of the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. Clemenceau well understood that while Russia might consider Vienna's action a threat to *its* interests, France really did not have a dog in that fight (to use an expression made famous many decades later by an American diplomat who wanted to minimise the relevance of Balkans controversies to his country's national interests).⁸⁶

As events transpired, France would get dragged into the vortex of war less than a decade later, and for reasons at least partly stemming from that "Balkans mess."⁸⁷ It would be Clemenceau's actions as France's leader in that war and its immediate aftermath that did so much to enshrine the myth that he was fundamentally an amoral cynic. He was, like any good realist, a pessimist when it came to human nature (which he believed needed taming and could, with adherence to France's revolutionary values, be tamed); but this hardly made him the cynic of the caricatures.⁸⁸

Although keen on reinforcing France's defences in case of war, he was never the *revanchiste* Keynes and many others made him out to be. He had not clamoured for war in 1914, nor was he clamouring for vengeance after 1918. That being said, Clemenceau remained only too conscious of German economic and military power, and he well understood France's relative

weaknesses vis-à-vis its neighbour. Much has been written of his wartime record, particularly after he was summoned to direct the country's fortunes in November 1917. For good reason, it is his wartime leadership for which he is mostly remembered today. There can be little doubt that he amply deserved the accolade, *Père la victoire*.⁸⁹

What most sets Clemenceau apart from two of the other diplomatic figures we have analysed here (though not Richelieu), was his hands-on involvement in the conduct of a war. Clemenceau, and he alone, took charge of France's destinies during the final year of the fighting, and did so in a nearly dictatorial manner. He made sure that the allies held together during the German offensives of spring 1918. He supported Foch as supreme commander when it was most needed. He held the unions in check, preventing strikes that could have interfered with the war effort. He imposed his leadership on the French parliament. He broke the back of the defeatist movement. He was on the frontline, with the *poilus*, making sure that they would stand firm.

Hardly less significant is Clemenceau's record at peacemaking. He was one of the principal architects of the post-war international order. Pace the impression left by Keynes and other exponents of what the French consider to be the misguided "Anglo-Saxon" view of the post-war settlement,⁹⁰ he was not bent on the destruction of the recent foe. Instead, he was concentrated on "containing" it. Who could blame him, given what he knew to be the realities of France's predicament, notwithstanding its apparent victory?⁹¹ For Clemenceau understood better than anyone what the fighting had cost France: 1.2 million combat deaths (or 30% of the cohort of young males aged between 18 and 34 years at the start of the war) along with a comparable number of disabled veterans. France had lost 70% of its coal production, 90% of its iron, and 65% of its steel. Its GDP in 1918 was thirty percent lower than in 1914. Its external debt was 600% higher.⁹² The country's already low birth rate had declined a further 40% between the conflict's beginning and its ending.

By contrast, Germany's territory was untouched by war. True, it too had suffered a dramatic economic downturn and would not again match the size of its GDP of 1914 until eight years after the fighting had stopped. But Germany's industries and its cities were intact and its population was still 62 million, despite heavy war losses that were 30% larger than France's own. In sum, following the Great War, Germany would remain atop Europe's geopolitical hierarchy, especially in Central Europe, now that the Austro-Hungarian Empire had fragmented and Russia had become greatly weakened after its revolution. Can anyone be surprised that France would remain obsessed, after 1919, with the fear of future German aggression? If anything, what *is* surprising is that France's war aims turned out to be as moderate as they did.

Although some in France wished defeated Germany to be broken up in 1918 (as indeed it would be after 1945), Clemenceau was not among them; for him,

even before the post-war peace negotiations had commenced, the unity of Germany was a given and should not be questioned.⁹³ Moreover, the merits (or lack thereof) of post-war reparations deserve to be contemplated in a comparative manner. After all, the victorious allies of 1918 did not invent the practice, as unwise as it might have been, of imposing economic penalties on vanquished foes. And even if unwise, in retrospect, can it be claimed that sending a bill to the Germans was, a priori, illegitimate? France and Belgium had been attacked, in August 1914, without any provocation, and the violation of the latter's neutrality broke one of the most basic rules of international law.⁹⁴ But if legitimate, was the bill excessive? Not when compared to the reparations tab the French had been expected to pick up after 1871, given that the indemnity Bismarck imposed upon France represented some 13% of the latter's national income, while that imposed by the allies on Germany never exceeded much more than 8% of national income.⁹⁵

Conclusion

In this article, we have staked out one major claim, derived from our examination of the four historical traditions we think shaped – and continue to shape – French grand strategy. If we set aside the short periods where France attempted to become Europe's hegemon, they paint a pretty consistent and coherent picture of the guiding principles underlying French foreign and security policies, from the time of Richelieu up to the present. Together, those principles testify to the enduring attractiveness of what contemporary scholars would call defensive realism.

Since the time of Richelieu, those who have designed French foreign policies knew that their country was only one of several great powers in Europe. They expected that status to be acknowledged, but did not aim for hegemony, except for the two aforementioned instances when hegemony was disastrously pursued. Instead of hegemony, France for most of its history has prioritised security and a stable balance of power over territorial expansion or conquest. It has aimed traditionally at a general equilibrium between great powers seen as equals; that is to say, it has striven and continues to strive for a system characterised by “multipolarity.”

And this leads us to a second concluding thought, adumbrated early on in our pages but left undeveloped: France's defensive-realist grand strategy has been an important reason why Franco-American relations had so often been troubled by a kind of fractiousness one does not typically associate with the behaviour of allies towards each other. This fractiousness characterised a behavioural pattern so admirably encapsulated in André Kaspi's formulation, “le différend franco-américain.”⁹⁶ It represented a particularly “suboptimal” quality of cooperation between the two countries in their role as *allies of each other*; neither of them related to any of their other allies in matters affecting security and defence quite

the same way as this pair did in their dealings with one another. A major reason for this, ironically, has been France's defensive-realist grand strategy, with its long-standing conviction that security can most effectively be assured through getting "just right" the balance of power. Arranging such a therapeutic balance, it is believed in France, could best – indeed, only – be accomplished in the context of systemic multipolarity.⁹⁷

This is why, when other allies might have wished for an American orientation that was more "multilateral," France so often touted a *structural* remedy to be found in multipolarity. When it dresses up this remedy as "autonomy," it does so *not* out of any far-fetched visions of grandeur but rather because of the deep and strong roots that defensive realism has implanted in French strategic soil. Those roots often generated difficulties in the country's relations with the United States – not because, as is sometimes thought, Washington had been too addicted to "realist" policy formulations, but rather because realism had so customarily played a second paradigmatic fiddle to liberalism in America's own grand strategy in the years since 1945 – until the arrival, that is, of Donald Trump in the White House.

Our essay also made a third point, concerning the degree to which one can and should accord originality to the strategic orientation that in France so often is called "Gaullism."⁹⁸ If what we have argued in these pages makes sense, then Gaullism turns out to be more mimetic than innovative. While de Gaulle may have reconfigured French foreign policy after 1960, he was building upon a foreign policy tradition that extended back through Richelieu, and was carried forward by Talleyrand, Delcassé, and Clemenceau.

If most of the components of our four traditions have found their way into contemporary French grand strategy, it must also be stressed that the evolving international environment poses a formidable set of challenges to their continued viability. To begin with the obvious: for many decades, it has been increasingly difficult for France to claim equal great power status in a world of emerging centres of power. Indeed, by the second half of the twentieth century, France had already become a second-tier power in a world that had grown bipolar. And if bipolarity (albeit, this time with the US and China rather than the US and the USSR) really is ceding place to a new multipolarity, as many argue it is, it does not at all follow that this latter structural arrangement must prove beneficial to France.

Of course, many in France in recent years have appeared to think that the only way to reclaim lost status and influence is to play the EU card, in close partnership with Germany – i.e., to develop strategic "autonomy" in conjunction with its EU partners, under the aegis of Paris and Berlin. This is easier said than done, if only because the broader EU of the post-Cold War era is less easily led by a Franco-German tandem than had been the European Community of the Cold War, and even back then the obstacles facing a Franco-German (or "Carolingian") European pillar of defence

were too formidable ever to be overcome.⁹⁹ The construction of a “Europe of defense” remains an ongoing project, not a reality, and this one reason why some in Paris are starting to imagine that it cannot be an EU project alone, but must incorporate the United Kingdom, for the good reason that the latter country is both in Europe and highly unlikely to rejoin the EU.

The problem with traditions, as has often been remarked, is that they can live on even though the conditions that sustained them have long since passed from the scene. This looks to be, at least in part, true today. France’s foreign policy traditions had stood up reasonably well across four centuries, but they seem to be becoming more obsolescent with each passing year. Still, if not all of the traditions we highlighted in this article retain policy significance, most of them might – especially the Talleyrandian, Delcasséan, and Clemenceauvian ones, with their preference for close cooperation between France and the UK. In a strategic setting made deliberately more confusing by actions and words of the Trump administration, it may well be that tighter Anglo-French strategic cooperation becomes the hallmark of defensive realism in the twenty-first century.¹⁰⁰

Notes

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2. See Michel Fortmann, David G. Haglund, and Jeffrey Rice, “Squaring the Circle? France, the War in Ukraine, and the Delicate Balance between Security and ‘Autonomy,’” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (forthcoming 2025).
3. Régis Debray, *Charles de Gaulle: Futurist of the Nation*, trans. John Howe (London, 1994).
4. Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (NY, 2001).
5. Friedrich Sieburg, *Who Are These French?* trans. Alan Harris (NY, 1938).
6. Andrew J. Williams, *France, Britain and the United States in the Twentieth Century 1900–1940* (London, 2014).
7. Stephen G. Brooks, “Duelling Realisms,” *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997): 445–77.
8. For a brilliant presentation of realism’s Pogo syndrome, see the well-aimed salvoes fired by one classical realist against a bevy of structural-realist targets, in Jonathan Kirshner, *An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 2022).
9. James L. Richardson, *Contending Liberalisms in World Politics: Ideology and Power* (Boulder, CO, 2001); and Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).
10. James Kurth, “Inside the Cave: The Banality of I.R. Studies,” *National Interest* no. 53 (1998): 29–40, quote at 40.
11. Kirshner, *Unwritten Future* 14.
12. Henrik Breitenbauch, *International Relations in France: Writing between Discipline and State* (London, 2013).

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14. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY, 1987); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (NY, 2001).
15. Mead, *Special Providence* 36–38.
16. An aspect of America's diplomatic record that often gets overlooked; for a corrective, see Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World* (NY, 2020).
17. The two exceptions – and they were *big* ones, obviously – being Louis XIV's and Napoleon's catastrophic bids for systemic primacy.
18. Simone Bertière, *Mazarin: le maître du jeu* (Paris, 2007); and Hubert Védrine, *Grands diplomates: les maîtres des relations internationales de Mazarin à nos jours* (Paris, 2024).
19. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (NY, 1994); and Iskander Rehman, "Raison d'Etat: Richelieu's Grand Strategy during the Thirty Years' War," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 3 (2019): 38–75.
20. Henry Bertram Hill, *The Political Testament of Cardinal Richelieu* (Madison, WI, 1964); and Sylvie Taussig, *Richelieu* (Paris, 2017).
21. Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (NY, 1991).
22. Françoise Autrand, Lucien Bély, and Philippe Contamine, *Histoire de la diplomatie française*, vol. 1: *du moyen-âge à l'empire* (Paris, 2015); and Jean-Vincent Blanchard, *Eminence: Cardinal Richelieu and the Rise of France* (NY, 2011).
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24. David J. Sturdy, *Richelieu and Mazarin: A Study in Statesmanship* (London, 2004), 63.
25. John H. Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares* (Cambridge, 1991), 112.
26. Peter Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years' War* (London, 2009).
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28. Georges Duby, *Histoire de la France: Dynasties et révolutions, de 1348 à 1852* (Paris, 1971), 141.
29. Elliott, *Richelieu and Olivares* 141.
30. Bertière, *Mazarin*.
31. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, 1962).
32. Arnold Oskar Meyer, *Bismarcks Glaube: Nach neuen Quellen aus dem Familienarchiv* (Munich, 1933), 7.
33. Philip G. Dwyer, *Talleyrand* (London, 2002), 205.
34. Emmanuel de Waresquiel, *Talleyrand: le prince immobile* (Paris, 2017); Duff Cooper, *Talleyrand* (NY, 2011); and Robin Harris, *Talleyrand: Betrayal and Saviour of France* (London, 2007).
35. But for a decidedly different assessment, cf. David Lawday, *Talleyrand, le maître de Napoléon* (Paris, 2015).
36. Charles Zorgbibe, *Talleyrand et l'invention de la diplomatie française* (Paris, 2012), 54.
37. Emmanuel de Waresquiel, "Talleyrand, homme des Lumières," *Napoleonica: La Revue* 8 (2010): 77–82.
38. Jean Tulard, *Talleyrand: de la douceur de vivre à la légende noire* (Paris, 2002); C. Crane Brinton, *The Lives of Talleyrand* (NY, 1936); and Jack F. Bernard, *Talleyrand: A Biography* (NY, 1973).

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44. Emmanuel de Waresquiel, "Talleyrand, une vision européenne," 2024, <https://www.napoleon.org/histoire-des-2-empires/articles/talleyrand-une-vision-europeenne/>.
45. Raymond Guyot, "La dernière négociation de Talleyrand: l'indépendance de la Belgique," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 2 (1900/01): 573–94; and John Charmley, "Castlereagh and France," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17, no. 4 (2006): 665–73.
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47. Although as one French scholar notes, this linguistic portmanteau in France is often used as a means of criticising not so much the United Kingdom as the United States, for "one can take energetic aim at the 'Anglo-Saxons' while all the time intending to target none other than the Americans." Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi américain: généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français* (Paris, 2002), 237.
48. Arthur Nussbaum, *A Concise History of the Law of Nations*, rev. ed. (NY, 1954), 232.
49. Otto von Bismarck, *Die gesammelten Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Schüssler, vol. 10 (Berlin, 1928), 140; and Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life* (NY, 2011).
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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