



FPRI How the West Was One: France, America, and the “Huntingtonian Reversal”

August 2018

By David G. Haglund and Maud Quessard

David G. Haglund is Professor of Political Studies at Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada. **Maud Quessard** is a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM), at the École militaire, in Paris.

Abstract: Samuel Huntington was such a prolific scholar that it is sometimes difficult for researchers to keep up with his many policy analyses and recommendations. This article deals with one important Huntingtonian thesis, of the late 1990s. The thesis appertains to Huntington’s worry about the US becoming a “lonely superpower” due to a French-led campaign to drive a wedge between America and its transatlantic allies. The authors detail the current irony inherent in what they call a “Huntingtonian reversal.” Today, unlike in 1999 when Huntington propounded his “lonely superpower” thesis, it can appear as if it is America that seeks to drive a wedge between itself and the European allies. Moreover, should the West become “one” again, it will in part be due to French efforts to revive transatlantic solidarity.

To say that the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States has introduced an element of renewed uncertainty in transatlantic relations is to invoke the geopolitical equivalent of what grammarians know of as “meiosis,” a form of expressive understatement.¹ Of late, more than a few analysts have begun to speculate on what heretofore had been largely, though not entirely, unthinkable throughout the long post-Second World War era: a strategic divorce between America and its transatlantic allies.² Some go even further, and wonder whether, should the transatlantic alliance sunder, it would be possible to isolate Western Europe itself from the growing pressures of institutional erosion. If

¹ H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, 2nd ed., rev. Ernest Gowers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 356-357.

² Kori Schake, “NATO Without America?” *American Interest*, July/Aug. 2017, pp.54-61. There had been occasional writers, even during the Cold War, who foresaw a transatlantic divorce, but their views were hardly taken seriously on either side of the Atlantic at a time when there still was a Soviet Union. For examples of Cold War prophesies of dissolution, see Mary Kaldor, *The Disintegrating West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Melvyn Krauss, *How NATO Weakens the West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); and John Palmer, *Europe without America: The Crisis in Atlantic Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

such isolation proves to be impossible, they fear, the entire community known as the Western “zone of peace” risks becoming unraveled, with security implications best glimpsed not by looking to the future, but rather to the dismal past, and in particular to the twentieth century, which did so much to turn Europe into the “dark continent.”³

Although there is clearly a basis to these presentiments of impending strategic rupture, founded upon perceptions of the quixotic nature of decision making in the Oval Office during the past year and a half, we still regard them as being overblown. In some ways, surprising as it may appear at first blush, we think the Trump administration’s security and defense policy is likely to end up looking decidedly more “traditionalist,” at least with respect to transatlantic relations, than many currently believe possible.⁴ For instance, the administration’s National Security Strategy, unveiled in mid-December 2017, contained little evidence of any major departure from what has been the transatlantic norm in recent years, even though the document included a reiteration of U.S. displeasure over the “burden-sharing” issue, but this concern is not new.⁵

Still, some interesting developments are afoot in this arena—developments that we argue will put into a very different context one bilateral relationship in particular, that between the United States and France. We do not claim that the transatlantic dimension in U.S. foreign policy is uncontentious these days. Far from it; there is a widespread sense in Europe certainly, but also in America, that the contemporary policy horizon has become vastly more complicated than it has ever been since the Western alliance formed in 1949, even if not always—or even chiefly—because of problems linked directly to the Old Continent; more often than not, the complications stem from other regions of the world, the Korean peninsula being one such instance, and Iran being another.⁶ While the Western allies have known their share of internecine strife over the years, frequently associated with rancor in Franco-American relations, the current transatlantic predicament is held to be different from NATO-related tensions of the past, if for no other reason than that it does not fundamentally seem to have its roots in the Franco-American relationship. It may, however, have its resolution in that relationship, a possibility we explore in this article, which seeks to probe whether France’s Emmanuel Macron might

³ The reference here is to Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1999). The recent fear of an eroding Western European security community began to manifest itself in some quarters during the Obama years, for reasons we explain below; for one such expression of pessimism, see Erwan Lagadec, *Transatlantic Relations in the 21st Century: Europe, America and the Rise of the Rest* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 18.

⁴ Elliott Abrams, “Trump the Traditionalist: A Surprisingly Standard Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2017, pp. 10-16.

⁵ Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, “Mixed Signals as Trump Sets Security Policy,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2017, pp. A1, A6.

⁶ On this latter, see “Rencontre avec Pierre Razoux sur l’Iran,” *Défense*, Nov.-Dec. 2017.

somehow be able to put Humpty-Dumpty back together, and make the West “one” again.⁷

For sure, there is little agreement among policy analysts as to whether Donald J. Trump is the *cause* of today’s transatlantic funk, or merely a reflection of a more generic rejection, by publics in Europe and America, of the galloping phenomenon of “globalization” over the past three decades. Might the entire postwar liberal order that America did so much to construct and to sustain for more than seven decades come crashing down?⁸ It makes a difference how the president is viewed. If he truly is the agent of worrisome change—either as the leader of, or simply the willing subaltern in, a radical program intended to demolish the geopolitical status quo—then the remedy to the problem would seem to be at hand, perhaps no further away than the 2018 midterm elections or the 2020 presidential election, at the latest. But if President Trump is merely the logical outcome of a growing “populist” challenge to the postwar liberal order—a challenge, say some, that has been building to a head over the past 15 or so years⁹—then solutions are less readily glimpsed, if that which is to be preserved is the liberal order of the postwar world. For whatever else populism these days is supposed to represent, no one holds it to be a mandate to bolster *liberal* democracy.¹⁰

To those who sense that the problem is larger than simply the occupant of the Oval Office, whom they regard to be more consequence than cause, the solution is to be found in putting the *liberal* back into that postwar liberal order. Now, liberal is hardly an uncontentious or unambiguous category, as witnessed by the divergence in the way it is understood in the two countries focused upon in this article. In France, liberal has often taken on an unpleasant, sometimes even sulfurous, odor; it is regarded as being too much of a *right-wing*, pro-business, orientation to hold out much appeal in a society that routinely genuflects before the altar of collective rights and “solidarity.”¹¹ In the United States, by contrast, liberalism can easily be confused

⁷ See, for this sense of great expectations, Emile Simpson, “Macron the Conqueror,” *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 18, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/18/macron-the-conqueror/>.

⁸ Celeste A. Wallander, “NATO’s Enemies Within: How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2018, pp. 70-81. For another worried perspective, also see G. John Ikenberry, “The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 2-9. Contrast this with the author’s celebratory assessment of that same liberal order, published nearly two decades earlier, “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order,” *International Security*, Winter 1998/1999, pp. 43-78.

⁹ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition*, Sept. 2004, pp. 541-63.

¹⁰ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy*, July 2016, pp. 5-17. Also see Robert Mickey, Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Ahmad, “Is America Still Safe for Democracy? Why the United States Is in Danger of Backsliding,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 20-29; and Francis Fukuyama, “The Populist Surge,” *American Interest*, March/April 2018, pp. 16-18.

¹¹ Christian Julien, *Le Diable est-il libéral?* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001). Also, see Vincent Chirqui, *À qui profite le libéralisme?* (Paris: Édition 1, 2003); Georges Burdeau, *Le Libéralisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1979); and, testifying to the rather lengthy pedigree of this tropism, Émile

with socialism by those who interpret it as a decidedly *left*-wing, and menacing, orientation to public affairs, while for those who like it, liberalism is regarded as synonymous with progressivism, even social democracy.¹²

The terminological divergence is important, especially if one takes seriously the claim that President Trump represents merely the symptom, not the cause, of the current uncertainties swirling about the future of transatlantic strategic affairs. For to those who do take this argument seriously, what needs to happen is nothing less than to “de-rig” the postwar liberal order, which they see as requiring a rebalancing within Western economies so as to arrest recent decades’ drift away from the welfare state in favor of the interests of corporations and the rich.¹³ This drift is sometimes conceptualized as representing the triumph of “neoliberalism” over “embedded liberalism.”¹⁴ Arresting it, at a time when U.S. leadership of the liberal order can no longer be considered axiomatic, is thus seen to require finding new champions of a globalized economy, who understand the virtues of more equitable distribution of wealth and income, as well as of openness to the world. Over the past year, the searchers have ranged far and wide, often focusing upon German Chancellor Angela Merkel or Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,¹⁵ but sometimes alighting on Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.¹⁶ Or, for those whose understanding of the

Faguet, *Le Libéralisme* (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et librairie, 1903). A good critical summary is Thierry Leterre, *La Gauche et la peur libérale* (Paris: Presse de SciencesPo, 2000).

¹² The starting point remains Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955). Also see Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and John A. Hall, *Liberalism: Politics, Ideology, and the Market* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

¹³ Edward Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017); Bill Emmott, *The Fate of the West: The Battle to Save the World's Most Successful Political Idea* (New York: PublicAffairs Press, 2017); and Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, “The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It Wither,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 36-44. The former term, neoliberalism, is considered to be a recent qualification of liberalism so as to emphasize the virtues of a relatively unconstrained market, but in fact in France its use predates World War II; see Gaëtan Pirou, *Néo-libéralisme, néo-corporatisme, néo-socialisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939). The latter term, “embedded liberalism,” places the behavioral and normative stress on constraining the market, in the interests of redistributive policies; it was coined by the Austrian-born political scientist, John G. Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization*, April 1982,” pp. 379-415. Also, see Hanns W. Maull, ed., *Auflösung oder Ablösung? Die internationale Ordnung im Umbruch* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, Dec. 2017).

¹⁵ Ikenberry, “Plot Against American Foreign Policy,” p. 3.

¹⁶ Ian Austen, “A Growing Global Role for Canada,” *New York Times International Edition*, June 14, 2017, p. 3.

meaning of liberal-democracy is a peculiarly capacious one, China's President Xi Jinping is nominated.¹⁷

In the aftermath of the two French elections held in the first half of 2017 (one for the presidency, the other for the national assembly), another champion of the Western liberal order has been touted. It is France's youthful president, Emmanuel Macron, who if his leading cheerleader in the English-speaking world, the *Economist*, is to be believed, looms as *the* single policymaker most capable of restoring harmony within the Western order.¹⁸ If Macron is to emerge as a unifying factor in the transatlantic arena (and he may well do so, if only by default, especially given the recent weakening of Chancellor Angela Merkel's grip on her country's politics),¹⁹ it will not be without two ironic touches. One relates to the above discussion of embedded liberalism, for it is at least mildly discordant to find hopes being pinned, outside of France, on a French leader whose economic reforms have seen him, *inside* of France, being pilloried by his critics on the left as the "president of the rich."²⁰

However, there is a second, more intriguing irony. It is summed up in this article's subtitle, the "Huntingtonian reversal." In the section immediately below, we explain what we mean by that figure of speech. The two sections that follow this analysis cover, in turn, the recent evolution in U.S. transatlantic policy during the Obama administration's infatuation with the uncertain promise of "smart power," and our preliminary assessment of Macron's foreign policy, including his stance toward the United States and the transatlantic alliance, which as one commentator notes, "will defy old categories," because the French president is an Atlanticist who is

¹⁷ As one observer shrewdly notes, "Xi's goal appears to be to overthrow the regional order while pretending to be the protector of the global order. Under his rule, China has pursued mercantilist economic policies much more in line with Trump's worldview than with the principles of an open global economy. And yet Trump's folly allows Xi to portray himself as the champion of globalization." Thomas Wright, "Trump, Xi, Putin, and the Axis of Disorder," *Brookings Brief*, Nov. 8, 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/11/08/trump-xi-putin-and-the-axis-of-disorder/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=58294742.

¹⁸ Between mid-June and late September 2017, this journal twice accorded cover-page treatment to the French political *Wunderkind*, first on June 17, with an editorial titled "Europe's Saviour?"; and then again on Sept. 30, headlining a special nine-page report on France bearing the hopeful title of "Regeneration." This publication closed the year with its holiday double issue featuring France as its "country of the year," thanks chiefly to the reforming zeal of Macron; see "Formidable Nation," *Economist*, Dec. 23, 2017- Jan. 5, 2018, p. 16. Also, in an exuberant mood of expectation is Sylvie Kauffmann, "With U.S. Retreat, E.U. en Marche," *New York Times International Edition*, June 19, 2017, pp. 1, 16.

¹⁹ Melissa Eddy and Katrin Bennhold, "Merkel in Crisis, Unable to Form New Government," *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 2017, pp. A1, A12.

²⁰ Adam Nossiter, "6 Months In, France's Leader Gets an Unwanted Title: 'President of the Rich,'" *New York Times*, Nov. 2, 2017, p. A6; and Idem, "Macron, in Visits to Depressed Areas, Tries to Shed Image as Leader for Rich," *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2017, p. A7.

“fully committed to NATO and knows that the United States is France’s and Europe’s natural ally.”²¹

The “Huntingtonian Reversal”

Andrew Moravcsik, commenting upon a recent book detailing how Iraq-related issues had plunged Franco-American relations into such a trough of despond between 1991 and 2003, offered the kind of judgment that few, if any, observers of the bilateral relationship would have thought possible to advance, a decade and a half ago. At that time, the fabled “oldest allies” were so clamorously acting as anything *but* allies, much less friends. “Today,” observed Moravcsik, “Paris may be Washington’s most constant ally in the fight against terrorism, spearheading pressure for decisive military action in Libya, Mali, and elsewhere.”²² Although the comment seems more than apt, it is useful to reflect upon just how different things appeared in the period before, during, and shortly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. At that time, it was apparent to many that Paris and Washington really *had* come to a parting of the ways,²³ from which there could be no going back, either for their own bilateral relationship or, more ominously, for that broader geostrategic construct that had become known as the West.²⁴

What Samuel Huntington had been warning about just a few years earlier now looked to be coming to pass. Although nearly all those who recollect the scholarly and policy-relevant writings of Huntington will have uppermost in mind his controversial “clash-of-civilizations” thesis,²⁵ it is a very different claim of his that leads us to discern and analyze the “reversal.” For what appears, of late, to have been happening in transatlantic affairs is an unmistakable reversal in what had been a

²¹ Ronald Tiersky, “Macron’s World: How the New President Is Remaking France,” *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2018, pp. 87-96.

²² Andrew Moravcsik, reviewing Frédéric Bozo’s *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, the United States, and Iraq, 1991–2003*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Washington and New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Columbia University Press, 2017), in *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, pp. 162-163.

²³ See Jacquelyn K. Davis, *Reluctant Allies and Competitive Partners: U.S.-French Relations at the Breaking Point?* (Dulles, VA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis/Brassey’s, 2003); and especially John J. Miller and Mark Molesky, *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America’s Disastrous Relationship with France* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); and Kenneth R. Timmerman, *The French Betrayal of America* (New York: Crown Forum, 2004).

²⁴ See William Hopkinson, “La fin de l’Atlantique Nord,” *Critique internationale*, April 2002, pp. 129-42; André Glucksmann, *Ouest contre Ouest* (Paris: Plon, 2003); and Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, *An Alliance at Risk: The United States and Europe since September 11*, trans. George A. Holoch, Jr. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49; and Idem, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). For critical assessments, see J. Paul Barker, ed., *The Clash of Civilizations: Twenty Years On* (Bristol, UK: e-International Relations, Oct. 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/wp-content/uploads/Clash-of-Civilizations-E-IR.pdf>); and David A. Welch, “The ‘Clash of Civilizations’ Thesis as an Argument and as a Phenomenon,” *Security Studies*, Summer 1997, pp. 197-216.

regular pattern, one that had seen France distinguishing itself from America's other NATO allies, by situating itself as the most errant pupil in the transatlantic classroom. It was this tedious pattern that Huntington had in mind when, in 1999, he penned an assessment of intra-Western strategic relations that seemed to contradict his own recently promulgated "clash" thesis. That thesis has been widely interpreted as signaling Huntington's conviction that the Cold War's ending also marked the end of an era in which the "main fault lines of world politics were fault lines within the Western world—in effect, 'Western civil wars.' Non-Westerners were either uninvolved, colonized, or bit players in Western dramas. But with the collapse of communism, there were no longer any significant cleavages within 'the West.'"²⁶

If this *is* what the celebrated Harvard professor truly believed, then it is difficult to understand how, a mere six years after he unveiled the clash thesis in *Foreign Affairs*, he could have once more taken to the pages of that journal to, in effect, propound a counter-thesis. This new thesis questioned the strength of his own belief in the clash as delimiting the new "fault line" of world politics. For it now looked to him as if the Western civil wars had not, after all, come to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. If anything, they had become even more of a problem, with America facing the prospect of its primacy being challenged by what Huntington labeled an "antihegemonic coalition." True, *some* potential members of this nascent group lay far outside the confines of Western civilization as he understood those to be, and therefore they were clearly outside the West. But one significant country was *inside* the civilizational pale. It was France. And, argued Huntington, the means of preserving civilizational unity required the blunting of France's repeated "anti-American" sallies, for if those could not be rebuffed, then America would increasingly find itself in an isolated position. All rested, he thought, upon a country that, today, hardly seems to be the champion of American interests.²⁷ That country was *Germany* because the "relation with Europe is central to the success of American foreign policy and given the pro- and anti-American outlooks of Britain and France, respectively, America's relations with Germany are central to its relations with Europe. Healthy cooperation with Europe is the prime antidote for the loneliness of American superpowerdom."²⁸

Although his promulgation of the antithesis of the clash thesis, coming so quickly on the latter's heels, had to rate as a surprise to Huntington's readers, there was very little that was truly surprising in his observation that France-U.S. relations

²⁶ David A. Welch, "Enemy Wanted: Apply Without," in Barker, *Clash of Civilizations*, pp. 14-19.

²⁷ Melissa Eddy, "In Era of Trump, Germany Seeks a Stronger Role Abroad," *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2017, p. A9. Also see Laura von Daniels, "Trumps Wirtschaftspolitik im Zeichen der Midterm Elections: Konflikte mit der EU und Deutschland zeichnen sich ab," *SWP-Aktuelle* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, Dec. 2017).

²⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999, pp. 35-49.

were plagued with a great deal of bad blood. As things stood by the final year of the twentieth century, the old allies really had become a fractious couple, with no reason for Huntington, or anyone else, to imagine bilateral bliss becoming restored anytime soon. It is frequently imagined that if only it had not been for George W. Bush and his decision to invade Iraq, ties between Paris and Washington would have remained close as the twenty-first century began. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth; the strains were already apparent before the Bush administration, and they were growing. Obviously, the Iraq war did not make for happier bilateral relations between France and the United States, at least not immediately. But it is wrong to imagine that the period preceding that war could in any way be characterized as a cooperative highpoint in the bilateral relationship.

Yet one might well have expected, at the beginning of the 1990s, warmer bilateral relations to be the norm in the new, “post-Cold War,” era, if for no other reason than the U.S. and other allies’ reduced level of anxiety about France’s willingness to honor its collective-defense obligations, a matter that had been of intermittent concern during the Cold War.²⁹ Instead, what the surprise ending of the Cold War did was to introduce a new, “structural,” fault-line in transatlantic relations. To many in the United States, and elsewhere in the alliance, it emerged as if, in the absence of the erstwhile Soviet foe that had done so much to bind them in common cause, there was a prospect of centrifugal forces sundering Western solidarity. Soon, the strains became evident, with both France and America indicating they had found a surrogate adversary for the departed Soviet foe: *each other*.

During the closing years of the George H.W. Bush administration quite a few policymakers convinced themselves the France of President François Mitterrand would henceforth oppose America. This opposition was captured in the French leader’s figurative assertion that “we are at war against America.”³⁰ It was hardly surprising, in this environment, that an American secretary of state could bluntly put to his French counterpart the not-so-diplomatic question, “Is France for us or against us?”³¹ It was not just James Baker who wondered about the orientation of Paris; the belief was current in Washington (and several other NATO capitals) that France could scarcely be regarded as a reliable, much less as a close, ally. Thus, Thierry de Montbrial could be pardoned in 1992 for wondering, with only a trace of exaggeration, whether his country had suddenly emerged as America’s new “public enemy number one.”³²

²⁹ As reflected, for instance, in Michael M. Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Edgar S. Furniss, Jr., *France, Troubled Ally* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Charles G. Cogan, *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends: The United States and France Since 1940* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994); and Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne, 1992).

³⁰ “Nous sommes en guerre contre l’Amérique,” quoted in Pierre Melandri and Justin Vaïsse, *L’Empire du milieu: Les États-Unis et le monde depuis la fin de la Guerre Froide* (Paris: Éd. Odile Jacob, 2001), p. 455.

³¹ James Baker to Roland Dumas, quoted in Emil Bölte, “Zwischen Paris und Washington geht zur Zeit kaum etwas,” *General-Anzeiger* (Bonn), May 30, 1992, p. 2.

³² Thierry de Montbrial, “La France est-elle l’ennemie numéro 1’ des États-Unis?” *Le Figaro*, June 16, 1992, p. 3.

To many American policymakers and some theorists of international relations, who canvassed the prospects of the West hanging together in the absence of its erstwhile Soviet foe, it was never difficult in those pre-9/11 years to see trouble ahead, and to single out France as the chief troublemaker. It is no secret that the personality and policies of George W. Bush had much to do with the considerable uptick in anti-Americanism a decade and a half ago.³³ But even before Bush succeeded Bill Clinton, it was obvious that animosities were continuing to grow between Paris and Washington, and not just because of their differences over the crises in the former Yugoslavia, as important as those differences were.³⁴ This unmistakable chill in bilateral relations was captured well in the title of a book that appeared at the time of the Kosovo war, depicting the United States and France as the “world’s worst friends.”³⁵

Some policy analysts (and policymakers) in France had clearly been made restive by the Cold War’s ending and the U.S.’s status elevation to “sole surviving superpower,” in an international system suddenly, at the start of the 1990s, become “unipolar.”³⁶ It was this structural malaise that led many French observers to profess a desire to see American power “balanced” and the system somehow made more “multipolar.”³⁷ And it was this structural malaise that led to one high-ranking French policymaker memorably labeling America as a “hyperpower.”³⁸

A variety of sources played into Franco-American discord, but power differentials were at the center of the difficulty, along with the attendant status anxiety in France.³⁹ Admittedly, this was not the first time that considerations of relative capability were known to play a prominent part in conceptualizations of the transatlantic “Other” that France had been for the United States, and vice versa. But it was new to discover allies expressing discontent with one of their set being thought too *powerful*, rather than too weak. In the early days of NATO, for instance, U.S.

³³ Thierry Tardy, “France and the U.S.: The Inevitable Clash?” *International Journal*, Winter 2003-2004, pp. 105-126.

³⁴ Ronald Hatto, *Les relations franco-américaines à l’épreuve de la guerre en ex-Yougoslavie (1991-1995)* (Paris: Dalloz, 2006).

³⁵ Jean Guisnel, *Les Pires Amis du monde: Les relations franco-américaines à la fin du XX^e siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1999). Also, see Catherine Durandin, *La France contre l’Amérique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994).

³⁶ William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security*, Summer 1999, pp. 5-41; and Stephen G. Brooks and Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³⁷ Edward Behr, *Une Amérique qui fait peur* (Paris: Plon, 1995); Michel Bugnon-Mordant, *L’Amérique totalitaire: Les États-Unis et la maîtrise du monde* (Paris: Favre, 1998); Dominique David, “Pourquoi sommes-nous ‘anti-américains?’” *Études* 398, Jan. 2003, pp. 9-20; Vincent Michelot, *L’Empereur de la Maison Blanche* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004); and Richard F. Kuisel, *The French Way: How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³⁸ That official was Hubert Védrine, foreign minister from 1997 to 2002; see Védrine’s *Les Cartes de la France: À l’heure de la mondialisation* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), p. 50.

³⁹ Romain Gubert and Emmanuel Saint-Martin, *L’Arrogance française* (Paris: Balland, 2003).

analysts who turned their attention to France and its relative capability had been known, paradoxically perhaps, to highlight the country's strategic importance precisely because it was deemed not powerful *enough*. This was the gist of the thesis advanced in the closing days of the Fourth Republic by American political journalist David Schoenbrun, who proclaimed France to be *the* Western European country of greatest geopolitical import to the United States, as well as the keystone to the arch of European, and by extension global, security. There was a sound strategic rationale, said Schoenbrun, in America's having selected the country to host the NATO headquarters, "because geographically, politically and strategically France is the linchpin of any Continental coalition." Admittedly, France was "sick" beyond dispute, but that is what made it so important. Failure to keep it from falling into a totalitarian embrace would signify nothing less than the inability to safeguard America's own political and civil liberties. After all, combating a Soviet empire that included France would require the United States to establish a virtual garrison state for the foreseeable future. Thus, proclaimed Schoenbrun, "as France goes, so go the plans and hopes of many other nations, for the case of France is a case of world concern."⁴⁰

By the early 1990s, many in Paris were returning the back-handed compliment and imagining the case of America being one of world concern, but for the opposite reason. Now, France began to stir up disquiet in some transatlantic quarters because it was propounding a desire to cut America down a peg or two, and encourage multipolarity, helped along by a phenomenon dubbed "soft balancing."⁴¹ NATO had managed to ride out the tensions between Paris and Washington during the Cold War—tensions that often centered on the personality and policies of President Charles de Gaulle.⁴² However, that conflict's fortuitous outcome might have led some to conclude that Franco-American strife was irrelevant to the functioning of the transatlantic alliance and to the broader community known as the West. After all, had not that broader community prevailed over its ideological foe, irrespective of tensions between Paris and Washington? This must have been, for a while at least, Huntington's own conclusion, else the clash thesis would have become vastly more complicated for him to propound in 1993. But by the end of the 1990s, he and other observers of the bilateral relationship adopted a decidedly less sanguine perspective on intra-Western conflict—and they did so largely for reasons that had to do with France.

Particularly bothersome, for those who continued to take inspiration from a common set of "atlanticist" values held to incarnate liberal-democracy's creedal and

⁴⁰ David Schoenbrun, *As France Goes* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 9, 15-16.

⁴¹ On the latter concept, see, T. V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Summer 2005, pp. 46-71; and Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States," *ibid.*, pp. 7-45.

⁴² On the crucial part played by de Gaulle in transatlantic disputations, see Maurice Ferro, *De Gaulle et l'Amérique: Une amitié tumultueuse* (Paris: Plon, 1973); Philip H. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security Policy and the Gaullist Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, les États-Unis et l'alliance atlantique* (Paris: Plon, 1996); and Philip G. Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological Aspects of de Gaulle's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

normative foundations, was the suspicion that solidified during the 1990s that France was hell-bent upon defecting from universalistic Western undertakings it had once played a prominent role in sponsoring. Further, some feared that France would spearhead the project of building an exclusionary Europe, primarily for reasons related to ontological, rather than physical, security.⁴³ This Europe, once constructed, would be bound to widen the distance separating France from America.⁴⁴ As Marisol Touraine explained, French policy was being guided more by “the concern for affirming what France ‘is’ or should be,” than by a focused emphasis upon its security and other tangible interests. In other words, France was now conceiving of its problems not in terms of challenges to its physical security but rather to threats to its international stature—quite a different thing. The net result had been prickliness regarding U.S. power and above all to American claims to lead the Western alliance.⁴⁵

In sum, by the close of the 1990s, Huntington and other champions of Western solidarity were glimpsing the imminent demise of what just a few years earlier Huntington had been conceiving as a vibrant “Euroamerican” civilization.⁴⁶ Now, even *prior* to the Iraq war and at a time when Clinton not Bush sat in the Oval Office, the solidity of Western civilization itself was in question, due to France’s apparent determination to forge an antihegemonic coalition to balance American power. Sounding a decidedly Huntingtonian note of his own, Charles Kupchan could foresee the West’s approaching collapse, proof positive that “the coming clash of civilization will not be between the West and the rest but within a West divided against itself.”⁴⁷

Yet, in less than a decade, the 1999 Huntingtonian antithesis to the clash thesis would itself be reversed, as a new era in bilateral relations set in, for reasons discussed in the section below.

From “Smart Power” to America First? The Mixed Legacy of the Obama Rapprochement

Even before Barack Obama’s presidency, it was possible to detect a return to what can pass as “normal” transatlantic relations—relations that, to be sure, were and

⁴³ Christopher Coker, *Twilight of the West* (Boulder: Westview, 1998). For this variant of security, see Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁴ For example, see Pierre Biarnès, *Le XXI^e siècle ne sera pas américain* (Paris: Éd. du Rocher, 1998).

⁴⁵ Marisol Touraine, “La Représentation de l’adversaire dans la politique extérieure française depuis 1981,” *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 43, no. 5 (1993), pp. 807-822.

⁴⁶ Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, p. 308: “If North America and Europe renew their moral life, build on their cultural commonality, and develop close forms of economic and political integration to supplement their security collaboration in NATO, they could generate a third Euroamerican phase of Western economic affluence and political influence.”

⁴⁷ Charles A. Kupchan, “The End of the West,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 2002, pp. 42-44.

are often inflected with the usual and unavoidable differences in national interest among key members of NATO. These relations, nonetheless, were characteristic, in *most* senses, of a transatlantic status quo that had lasted from the formation of NATO in 1949 until the Cold War's end at the start of the 1990s. But if today's NATO mostly resembles, qualitatively,⁴⁸ yesterday's NATO, there is one big difference: France no longer stands out as the exception to the rule of reasonably "cooperative" allies. One would have to go back to the very earliest days of NATO to find a comparable moment of Western unity, a time when it credibly could be maintained that the West truly *was* "one" (albeit, on a considerably smaller scale than today, for at NATO's founding, it would not have been easy for anyone to regard countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Germany included, as being noticeably "Western").

It would be tempting to chalk up the rebound in Franco-American cooperation entirely to the early 2009 arrival of Obama in power. In truth, however, the repair of the bilateral relationship was underway prior to the Obama Administration, during the second term of George W. Bush. The Iraq war did not turn out to be the mother of all crises many thought it was going to be. But NATO's "near-death" experience⁴⁹ served to inject a healthy dose of prudence into the manner in which Washington and Paris dealt with each other. Mindful of the pitfalls of analogizing, we might even say of this bilateral crisis that it played a role not unlike that of the dispute over Venezuela between the United States and Britain back in 1895. This "therapeutic" crisis at first nearly brought them to blows, over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana, but is now seen to have ushered in a new era of Anglo-American strategic cooperation.⁵⁰ Similarly, it did not take long for passions aroused by France's and America's own "Venezuela" crisis—the Iraq war—to subside, and to do so for reasons identical to those that earlier had calmed troubled Anglo-American waters: the prospect of grave harm that would result from the failure of successful remediation.

It also helped that in France, attention shifted from foreign policy to domestic socio-economic problems;⁵¹ while in the United States, public opinion quickly started to entertain the possibility that France's president, Jacques Chirac,

⁴⁸ The alliance now has a membership of 29 states, instead of the 16 at the Cold War's end.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Pond, *Friendly Fire: The Near-Death of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Pittsburgh: European Union Studies Association; and Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ See Marshall Bertram, *The Birth of Anglo-American Friendship: The Prime Facet of the Venezuelan Boundary Dispute—A Study of the Interrelation of Diplomacy and Public Opinion* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992); Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); and Kori Schake, *Safe Passage: The Transition from British to American Hegemony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁵¹ For a good overview of what was ailing France at the time (and since, we might add), see Timothy B. Smith, *France in Crisis: Welfare, Inequality and Globalization since 1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Survey data, then and in subsequent years, revealed a prolonged malaise among the French public, reflecting a series of tenacious socio-economic challenges, including persistently high unemployment. One spring 2008 poll found nearly half the respondents (47 percent) thinking they might one day end up homeless! Jean-Louis Andréani, "Trente ans de blues français," *Le Monde*, April 1, 2008, pp. 16-17.

might actually have made sense in opposing the rush to war back in late 2002 and early 2003. And though U.S. history, like that of other countries, has featured a set of states and societies against whom it has been possible to craft “enemy images,” it has been a very long time since Americans could entertain seriously that France might actually be their foe.⁵² Gallup, asking them whom they considered to be the chief enemy of the United States, found a mere three years after the Iraq war began that nearly a third (31 percent) of Americans selected Iran, while at the other end of the scale only 1 percent chose France (the same percentage of Americans who adjudged the United States *itself* to be their country’s single most important adversary).⁵³ A little over a year after the appearance of this poll, Washington would vibrate with enthusiasm for a visiting French president, Chirac’s recently elected successor. Nicolas Sarkozy, who in November 2007 would be cordially greeted by Congress and the White House alike, each delighted to find in the new French leader such an apparent friend within the very heart of what had only a few years earlier been dismissively branded the “Old Europe.”⁵⁴

What had begun under the George W. Bush Administration intensified under that of Barack Obama. Relations between Paris and Washington not only grew warmer—helped along by President Sarkozy’s decision to “return” to NATO in 2009 (from which it really never *had* decamped)⁵⁵—but did so in a manner that led some American observers to reassess their formerly jaundiced views on France, in ways that were little short of startling. One such reassessment came from Robert Kagan. During the Iraq war, he had developed a sinister reputation in France as the evil genius who best exemplified what had gone wrong in the unipolar era, in the process exacerbating France’s aforementioned structural neuralgia. He had accomplished this by publishing a small and widely commented book entitled *Of Paradise and Power*. This 2003 tract is mostly recollected today because of Kagan’s planetary imagery. As he wrote, “Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus: They agree on little and understand one another less and less.”⁵⁶ Yet a mere decade later, it appeared even to their author as if those words had never been written. In the wake of the French decision to intervene against Islamic terrorists in Mali in January 2013, Kagan lavished praise upon the country that had once been the

⁵² Regarding U.S. contemplation of the hostile “Other,” see, Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase and Ursula Lehmkuhl, eds., *Enemy Images in American History* (Providence: Berghahn, 1997).

⁵³ Paul Koring, “Iran Seen as Worst Enemy of U.S., Poll Shows,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), Feb. 24, 2006, p. A17. The list of Americans’ self-declared other top four foes included Iraq (22 percent), North Korea (15 percent), and China (10 percent).

⁵⁴ Natalie Nougayrède, “Sarkozy célèbre à Washington la réconciliation avec l’Amérique,” *Le Monde*, Nov. 2007, pp. 1, 4.

⁵⁵ See David G. Haglund, “Happy Days Are Here Again? France’s Reintegration into NATO and Its Impact on Relations with the United States,” *European Security*, March 2010, pp. 123-142.

⁵⁶ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 3-4.

target of his a wrath and that of so many other Americans.⁵⁷ To Steven Erlanger, Paris bureau chief of the *New York Times*, Kagan gushed in admiration for his quondam French adversaries, and offered this innovative comment on leadership: “I have a new philosophy: If the French are ready to go, we should go.”⁵⁸

Exemplifying the reconciliatory mood would be the reappearance of the “oldest allies” imagery whenever American and French leaders got together. President Obama, on a trip to Europe in the spring of 2009, welcomed France’s “return” to NATO, by appealing specifically to the trope.⁵⁹ So, too, did his Secretary of State, John Kerry, four years later, when expressing gratitude for President François Hollande’s support. The comment was interpreted as a “not so subtle dig” at the British, for refusing to endorse a military strike against Syria in retaliation for Damascus’s use of poison gas on August 21, 2013.⁶⁰ More of a surprise, given his normal desire to distance himself from anything his predecessor in the Oval Office had ever said or done, was President Trump’s invocation of the old-ally symbolism, on a Bastille Day 2017 visit to Paris.⁶¹ There can be no question that Europeans, in France as elsewhere, had a favorable opinion of Barack Obama, never more so than when he was contrasted with his immediate predecessor (or immediate successor).⁶² But it became obvious that, with the passage of time, European policymakers, if not their publics, were beginning to show signs of concern about U.S. policy even under the popular Obama, sometimes for reasons that were 180 degrees removed from the animus of a decade earlier: the belief in that earlier time that America had become too powerful. In this respect, the Obama administration’s refusal to employ force in

⁵⁷ One example of this wrath being Richard Z. Chesnoff, *The Arrogance of the French: Why They Can’t Stand Us—and Why the Feeling Is Mutual* (New York: Sentinel, 2005). For a worried summary of the altered American mood at the lowest point in the bilateral relationship, immediately prior to the invasion of Iraq, see Simon Serfaty, *La France vue par les États-Unis: Réflexions sur la francophobie à Washington* (Paris: Centre français sur les États-Unis/Institut français des relations internationales, Nov. 2002).

⁵⁸ Quoted in Steven Erlanger, “The French Way of War,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2013, Sunday Review section, p. 5. Also see, in this same vein, Roger Cohen, “French Muscle, American Cheese,” *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2013, p. A25.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Haglund, “Happy Days Are Here Again?” p. 132.

⁶⁰ Mark Mazzetti and Michael R. Gordon, “Support Slipping, U.S. Defends Plan for Syria Attack,” *New York Times*, Aug. 31, 2013, pp. A1, A7. Also, see, Steven Erlanger, “In Turnaround, It’s France Backing Arms While Britain Sits on Syria Sidelines,” *ibid.*, p. A6.

⁶¹ Maggie Haberman and Mark Landler, “In Paris, Trump Stands by His Son, and Praises Macron,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2017, p. A15.

⁶² In a German Marshall Fund poll in July 2009, 77 per cent of Europeans (as opposed to 57 per cent of Americans) had a favorable opinion of Obama, even if some disquiet was expressed by European leaders about the new administration’s foreign policy; see J. C. Casanova, “Le temps est venu pour l’Europe de s’émanciper des États-Unis,” *Le Monde*, Nov. 17, 2009, p. 21; and Roger Cohen, “Obama in His Labyrinth,” *International Herald Tribune*, Nov. 24, 2009, p. 9.

response to the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons in 2013 is considered especially telling.⁶³

Remember that what lay at the root of the U.S. reassessment of French strategic virtue was often a disenchantment with President Obama. Complementing this was France's willingness to deploy force and take risks. American critics, thus, began to disparage their own country's leader, whom they regarded as being much too hesitant to mount military interventions, and too feckless to steer the ship of state through choppy waters. In the sarcastic words of one supporter-turned-critic, America by Obama's second term in office had become the "dispensable nation."⁶⁴ Again, as was the case a decade and a half ago, at the epicenter of the controversy was American "hard" power. In 2003, it was thought to be worrisome, in France and elsewhere, because an administration sought to wield it too easily, and with too little regard for the preferences of allies, or for the costs of intervention. During the Obama years, it appeared virtually the reverse: U.S. power posed a problem because it was considered unavailable for uses to which certain allies might otherwise like to see it put.

One aspect of the Obama grand strategy, or if one prefers, the "Obama Doctrine,"⁶⁵ was a metaphorical accompaniment to the conceptual innovation dubbed "smart power."⁶⁶ This accompaniment was the celebrated, but widely misinterpreted, "pivot to Asia." In Europe, it sometimes looked as if the pivot constituted evidence that the United States was losing interest in the transatlantic alliance⁶⁷ and that the Obama administration had thought it wise to disengage from Europe and concentrate instead upon the twenty-first century's new epicenter of power, the Asia-Pacific region. The European worries were not without some basis, for when Barack Obama arrived in office he certainly indicated that America's greatest challenges in future would have a different geographic locus than those of the twentieth century, which had most urgently been centered upon the Old Continent. Still, it was not *primarily* Europe from which Obama hoped to disentangle the United States; it was the Middle East. Europe was considered to be mainly a success story, and far from wishing any strategic divorce, Obama hoped that America might reduce its "strategic footprint" there, so as to effect a relative redeployment of

⁶³ See Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer and Martin Quencez, "The U.S.–France Special Relationship: Testing the Macron Method," *GMF Policy Brief 6* (Paris: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2018).

⁶⁴ See, Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (New York: Doubleday, 2013). "America stands alone as the world's indispensable nation." President Bill Clinton, quoted in Robert J. Lieber, *Power and Willpower in the American Future: Why the United States Is Not Destined to Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 67.

⁶⁵ Colin Dueck, *The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ See Maya Kandel and Maud Quessard-Salvaing, eds., *Les Stratégies du Smart Power Américain: Redéfinir le leadership dans un monde post-Américain*, Études de l'IRSEM, no. 32 (Paris: Ministère de la Défense/Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire, 2014).

⁶⁷ Roger Cohen, "Europe and Benign Neglect," *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 7, 2010, p. 6.

American military assets to where they were more likely to make a difference. This implied that certain interventions, such as that against Muammar Gaddafi's Libya in 2011, could be mounted under European initiative (Libya, after all, being in Europe's immediate neighborhood), albeit with American backing.

Some chose to stylize the new U.S. grand strategy as one of "leading from behind" (LFB). Often this label was applied by administration critics to highlight what they considered to be wrong, craven, and dangerous. It was not difficult for the swelling number of Obama's opponents to lay various misfortunes at the president's doorstep, all traceable to his fondness for this method of leadership. One seasoned American "Europeanist," John Kornblum, former U.S. ambassador to Germany, even suggested that it was Obama who paved the way for the June 23, 2016 British vote to leave the European Union. The charge might seem odd to those who knew how much Obama preferred that Britain *stay* in the EU, but Kornblum was convinced that Brexit was the logical sequel of a "steady, unplanned, but nonetheless consequential 'Amerexit'—the erosion of active American engagement in Europe and the Atlantic world— [that] has contributed to the breakdown of consensus and trust. It is ... possible that, had there been no Amerexit, there would have been no Brexit either.... The 'Brexit effect' invalidates the claims by both the Bush and Obama Administrations that they had somehow found a new paradigm for America's role in the world, one that can somehow pivot away from Europe to somewhere else – the Middle East, Asia, wherever."⁶⁸

Notwithstanding the controversial, and even pejorative, implications of "leading from behind," the concept itself enjoys a reasonably respectable scholarly cachet, usually only when it gets expressed in different words.⁶⁹ For much of what was implied is nothing other than the logic contained in the familiar notion of "offshore balancing." As Christopher Layne, one of the leading exponents of this logic, puts it, offshore balancing seeks to transfer as much responsibility as possible to America's partners, if necessary by prodding them into assuming a greater share of the collective-defense burden even if that implies American "buck-passing" behavior.⁷⁰ Stephen Walt continues this thought by suggesting that offshore balancing "husbands the power on which U.S. primacy depends and minimizes the fear that U.S. power provokes."⁷¹ For some time, offshore balancing had been rumored as a replacement grand strategy for America after the Cold War ended. Under Obama, it *became* the grand strategy.⁷²

⁶⁸ John Kornblum, "Amerexit," *American Interest*, Sept./Oct. 2016, pp. 32-39.

⁶⁹ But for a rare linkage of the Doctrine explicitly with the LFB label, cf. Owen Harries and Tom Switzer, "Leading from Behind: Third Time a Charm?" *American Interest*, May/June 2013, pp. 7-15.

⁷⁰ Christopher Layne, "From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America's Future Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Summer 1997, pp. 86-124.

⁷¹ Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), p. 223.

⁷² For a stout endorsement of the concept, see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2016, pp. 70-83.

Its critics notwithstanding, it must be emphasized that offshore balancing *is* an “internationalist” grand strategy, although one predicated upon the expectation that maintaining a foreign presence need not be as expensive an undertaking as some other internationalist grand strategies (*viz.*, selective engagement, or primacy) suggest it must be.⁷³ As such, offshore balancing stands in contradistinction to what many sense to be taking shape with the Trump administration’s grand strategy, which as of this writing, remains very much a work in progress. Some analysts think it will constitute nothing other than a reversion to a stance characterized by “isolation” (at least from the European balance of power), and their forebodings are bolstered by the frequency with which the president himself appears to relish injecting “America First” phraseology into his speeches on foreign policy, the most illustrative of which coming at the unveiling of the National Security Strategy. This slogan, although first introduced into public discourse by Woodrow Wilson (hardly an isolationist),⁷⁴ is primarily associated instead with the America First Committee that militated against American involvement in the war that had begun in Europe in September 1939.⁷⁵ Other critics concentrate not on the presumed anti-interventionist proclivities of the 45th president but on their absence. They worry that Donald Trump will recklessly plunge his country and the international system into war.

All of this is to say that the *relative* period of transatlantic tranquility of the Obama era may be coming to an end. The Huntingtonian reversal—*i.e.*, that span of years during which it looked as if the “lonely superpower” was not going to be so lonely after all, in no small measure because of the Franco-American rapprochement—could itself become a relic of new transatlantic dynamics stemming from the November 2016 U.S. election. Now, we earlier tipped our hand and suggested that Trump policy toward the transatlantic arena will likely end up looking more “traditionalist” than revolutionary. We have further hinted that France under Macron might become a more central player in the alliance than it has been at any time since the earliest days of NATO. In effect, Macron would be a “go-to” guy in Europe for the U.S. president, who has been known to contact Macron (*viz.*, over the decision to move the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem), even if he does not necessarily heed his advice. Below, we sketch the case for this mooted centrality,

⁷³ For a suggestive effort to catalogue American strategic options (during the Clinton administration), see Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *America’s Strategic Choices* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

⁷⁴ Wilson invoked the concept during a speech in Philadelphia in June 1916. As he explained to his audience, America First meant the “duty of every American to exalt the national consciousness by pacifying his own motives and exhibiting his own devotion.” Quoted in A. Scott Berg, *Wilson* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2013), p. 397.

⁷⁵ See, in particular, two books by Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention, 1940-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953); and *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974). Also, see Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

focusing upon what it appears that Emmanuel Macron wants to see happen, and how he thinks France might help convert the wish into the deed.

What Does Emmanuel Macron Want?



French President Emmanuel Macron

Despite the uncertainty of anyone's knowing too much about the future, we begin this section with an assertion likely to withstand refutation: the time when French foreign policy could be characterized by a Gaullist (or even a Mitterrandist) oppositional stance in transatlantic relations is long past. Rather than being guided by a reflex reaction against the perceived preferences of its key (i.e., "Anglo-Saxon") allies, as often occurred in previous decades, French policy today is inspired by a pragmatic recognition of the need to solve a range of problems that extends from the realm of commerce to that of geostrategy. This list includes extra-European issues associated with China's rise, Russia's re-emergence, and the ongoing need to combat climate change. These will continue to figure as major agenda items for France's foreign policy, as well as for that of some of its important European partners.⁷⁶ Addressing these and other problems will require facing up to the likelihood that the American relative disengagement from Europe begun under Obama will continue under Trump. Indeed, French leaders, along with many other European leaders, are convinced that the distancing trend of recent years will continue, irrespective of the duration of the Trump administration. In effect, they believe that "Trumpism" will survive Donald Trump, and Europeans will simply have to adjust to this new transatlantic reality.⁷⁷

The U.S. posture toward "Old Europe" has not gone unremarked by the two chief members of the European Union. France under Macron and Germany under Merkel have staked out a renewed claim to co-leadership of the bloc, at times to the

⁷⁶ Justin Vaïsse, "Le passé d'un oxymore: Le débat français de politique étrangère," *Esprit*, Nov. 2017, pp. 76-91.

⁷⁷ Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, "L'Europe doit l'admettre, le Trumpisme survivra à Trump," *Le Monde*, Nov. 2017, p. 2.

annoyance of other EU members. Macron in particular raised hackles in some parts of Europe because of his ambitious agenda to, in effect, “re-Europeanize” French grand strategy⁷⁸ In his New Year’s televised address to the French public, he asserted that 2018 would be a decisive year for Europe. “We must rediscover our European ambition,” he told a nationwide audience on New Year’s Eve of 2017, “because Europe has been good for France. We have to stand fast against the nationalists and the euro-skeptics, and to do this I am going to need your support.”⁷⁹ But if both Merkel and Macron agree on the need to build “more” Europe, they are on different pages when it comes to squaring their common European ambitions with their respective policies toward Trump’s America. For Merkel, wisdom is to be found in a relative separation from Washington whereas for Macron, leadership on the European scale requires maintaining a good working relationship—even if one between “frenemies”—with the president, but also with other governmental and business leaders.⁸⁰

To understand how important the relationship with the United States is for Macron’s European vision, we need to revisit the first transatlantic summits that followed his election in the spring of 2017. The NATO summit in late May was marked by discussions concerning the allies’ collective-defense obligations (their “article 5” commitments), suggesting to the European leaders that President Trump might be less than fully committed to their security and defense, not least because he is seen to regard the EU as something of a rival to America.⁸¹ The same sense of American “disengagement” was perceived at the G-7 summit, which took place shortly thereafter in Taormina, Sicily. Helping to fuel the European disquiet was the administration’s failure to name an ambassador to the EU prior to the autumn, as well the relatively tardy arrival on post, in August, of the new U.S. ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison. Some Europeans were starting to conclude that the Trump Administration’s transatlantic policy reflected not just a lack of interest in European integration, but an actual disdain toward it.

Though, as argued earlier, Europeans had begun to fret (with some justification) about a relative diminution in U.S. attentiveness to European interests

⁷⁸ “Le discours de Macron sur l’Europe divise la presse européenne,” *Libération*, Sept. 27, 2017, http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/09/27/le-discours-de-macron-sur-l-europe-divise-la-presse-europeenne_1599294.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Arthur Berdah, “Ce qu’il faut retenir des premiers vœux aux Français d’Emmanuel Macron,” *Le Figaro*, January 1, 2018 ; <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/2017/12/31/25001-20171231ARTFIG00096-ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-des-premiers-voeux-aux-francais-d-emmanuel-macron.php>.

⁸⁰ Natalie Nougayrède, “France’s Gamble: As America Retreats, Macron Steps Up,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2017, pp. 2-8; Célia Belin, “The Macron/Trump Co-Dependency,” Sept. 18, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/09/18/the-macrontrump-co-dependency/>.

⁸¹ Jeremy Diamond, “Trump Scolds NATO Allies over Defense Spending,” *CNN Online*, 27 May 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/25/politics/trump-nato-financial-payments/index.html>.

during the Obama years, no one at that time would have considered this to be a product of suspicion about European integration. Indeed, Obama was, as noted above, well-known for being committed to the UK's remaining in the EU, to the annoyance of Brexiteers such as Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage.⁸² Moreover, relations between the American and German leaders were cordial, notwithstanding a brief tempest in a teapot over American electronic eavesdropping on the chancellor; and Obama clearly believed that the important job of maintaining stable transatlantic relations could and should be entrusted to his German interlocutor.⁸³

Trump's arrival in power changed things dramatically, as relations between Washington and Berlin nosedived. Following the two summits in spring 2017, Merkel began to speak in a way that few if any of her predecessors since 1955 had ever talked, stressing the urgency of Europeans taking their destiny in their own hands, a comment made in the heat of the German federal election campaign of 2017.⁸⁴ If this were a comment simply intended to win public approval, then it looked to be well-timed, with the Germans registering to pollsters their substantial distrust of Donald Trump—a level of disapproval that reached, according to Pew Research, 70 percent by the middle of the year.⁸⁵ However, Merkel would find, in the September election, that it would take more than a distancing from Trump for her to retain a strong grip on power. And even though she finally managed to cobble together another “grand coalition” with the Social Democrats, the chancellor's poor electoral showing has clearly diminished the stature she held during the Obama years.

The partial European integrative vacuum associated with the chancellor's political problems has been filled by Macron, who may officially lament the weakening of the Merkel brand. Yet, he nevertheless has shown himself interested in exploiting it. By the same token, the Brexit vote has also opened space for Macron to assume greater leadership of the European “project.” The conjuncture of weakened German leadership over, and impending British disappearance from, the EU has coincided with the rise of nationalism and “illiberal” democracy within much of Europe (and not just the continent's easterly reaches). All of this has led to what some have dubbed Macron's “moment.”⁸⁶ If it *is* such a moment, then its success depends on the cultivation of the newest transatlantic “special relationship,” that

⁸² Michael D. Shear and Steven Erlanger, “Obama Warns Britain That Trade Might Suffer if It Leaves European Union,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2016, p. A9; and Estelle Shirbon, “Brexit Figurehead Johnson Under Fire for ‘Part-Kenyan’ Obama Comment,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), April 23, 2016, p. A9.

⁸³ See, Benjamin J. Rhodes, *The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House* (New York: Random House, 2018); and Peter Baker, “How Election Shook Obama,” *New York Times International Edition*, June 1, 2018, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Samuel Osborne, “Angela Merkel Again Says ‘Europe Must Take Fate into Own Hands’ and Step Up as Diplomatic Player,” *Independent* (London), May 30, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/angela-merkel-europe-donald-trump-us-germany-ties-eu-india-a7762811.html>.

⁸⁵ “U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership,” June 26, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/>.

⁸⁶ Tiersky, “Macron's World.”

between France and the United States. It is in this environment that Macron's wooing of Trump must be understood.

Macron knows fully well that it cannot be in France's or any other European state's interests that the United States once more becomes truly isolated from the European balance of power. And this recognition had a great deal to do with the invitation that he extended to President Trump to join him in Paris to mark Bastille Day in the summer of 2017. The timing was especially fortuitous, with July 14, 2017 serving as the centenary of the sealing of the First World War alliance between the United States, France, and Britain. At a time when few other European leaders were evincing any desire to get close to Trump, Macron seized the chance to work some personal diplomacy with his American counterpart,⁸⁷ though not because he was any less committed than other European heads of government to the vision of greater European autonomy in security and defense.

In his Sorbonne speech of late September, Macron outlined that vision, but in a manner that must be considered realistic and pragmatic (some held, opportunistic). Reforming Europe and reforming France—Macron considers these as two sides of the same coin. There can be little hope of Europe's moving forward on deepening defense integration and getting its fiscal house in order without France's being able to register progress in liberalizing its economy.⁸⁸ Macron believes in a "two-speed" Europe, the hard core of which is composed of the member-states sharing the euro. On the commercial scale, he wants Europe to stand on an equal footing along with such trading and financial powerhouses as China and the United States. For this to happen, there simply must be some partial delegation of member-states' sovereign powers to the European level. He wants a strong Europe, and he is betting that citizens of this Europe will go along with the necessary transfer, in certain key sectors, of sovereign powers from their own national governments to the EU.

If Macron's France has conceded partially the logic in much of the U.S. demand for greater burden sharing within the alliance, it is because doing this is necessary to stimulate further European defense cooperation. The uncertain European context, marked as it has been in the past four years by the return of "power politics," has made it ever more imperative that Europe get its defense act together.⁸⁹ There is, first of all, the re-insertion of Russian power, on display most dramatically with the interventions in Ukraine since 2014. This alone has made the refurbishing of European defense cooperation a renewed priority, and while it is true that NATO and not the EU remains the most relevant institution for dealing with

⁸⁷ Tara McKelvey, "Trump and Macron: An Unlikely Friendship Is Born," *BBC News Online*, July 14, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40613719>.

⁸⁸ Benjamin Haddad, "The Education of Emmanuel Macron," *The Atlantic*, Sept. 13, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/macron-populism-le-pen-france-immigration/539688/>.

⁸⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Russia, the latter country's aggressions have reinforced the goal of greater European defense cohesiveness.

Were Russia's resurgent appetite for extending its influence all that troubled European security planners, it would be trouble enough. But there is more to worry about. This second source of upset is the challenge posed by migration flows, even when these do not happen to have a link with terrorism, as they frequently do. Given the proximity to the Middle East and the Maghreb, some of Europe's leaders understand only too well that security is not simply a matter of arranging things better on the European continent. There needs to be some meaningful European "forward presence," a point that is not lost on French officials, even if a few of their European partners do not seem fully to grasp it. Progress on this front, however, is getting registered, especially when measured by a hitherto recalcitrant Germany's willingness to respond positively to French "coaxing." Berlin has become part of the Mali mission, and it has recently boosted its defense spending by eight percent. Both of these measures indicate a willingness to try to bring German defense perspectives more closely in line with French ones.

The third source of upset is Brexit. With the impending prospect of one of Europe's two most capable military powers departing the EU, there is all the more reason for those who remain to seek to coordinate their security and defense initiatives more closely. Besides, Brexit will provide some benefit for the integrative project, as it will remove the very important veto London once exercised, all too often, over tighter European defense cooperation.⁹⁰

The fourth development pushing European defense policy closer together, somewhat counterintuitively, is the budgetary crisis affecting several EU member-states. As noted, the United States wants European countries to increase their defense spending. But the straitened fiscal situation of many obliges them to seek a different route to greater defense output than simply more spending: greater "Europeanization." This stance assumes that cost-savings will follow upon rationalization, which may turn out to be the case.

The fifth factor returns us to where we began, with French and European assessments of U.S. policy. President Trump's earlier declarations about NATO, in particular the oft-repeated claim that it had become "obsolete," merged with those uncertainties discussed earlier regarding the Obama pivot to feed European worries about "abandonment"—worries that were in a few respects similar to the anxieties felt by Europeans in the early 1990s. However, today, compared with the transatlantic debate of the 1990s and early 2000s, there is one huge difference: it inheres in the "Huntingtonian reversal," which is another way of phrasing the Franco-American rapprochement. Earlier, being abandoned would not necessarily have represented, at least to France, an entirely bad thing; Europe's new-found "autonomy" (should it have been achieved) would have provided psychological comfort and reduced status anxiety at a time when grave security challenges did not seem so apparent as they do today. Similarly, at the start of the 1990s, it appeared that greater European defense and security cooperation must inevitably come at

⁹⁰ See Daniel Keohane, "EU Military Cooperation and National Defense," German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Policy Brief*, Washington, Jan. 2018.

NATO's expense; today, this zero-sum aspect of European defense no longer applies.

Considering all of the above, we can recapitulate what Macron wishes to see transpire in his "Europeanizing" quest. There are two main components. First, there is the European defense fund, launched in 2016, which aims to stimulate greater EU investments in research, development, and acquisition of military assets. The reality is that while the Europeans spend 210 billion euros annually on defense and maintain uniformed forces totaling a million and a half soldiers, they do not get as much bang for their defense buck as they might, the result of too much duplication and not enough interoperability. The new fund seeks to remedy this handicap by fostering greater defense-industrial cooperation as well as more coordinated armaments acquisition policies.

The second component of the Macronian vision is permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). Some twenty states united around France and Germany have signed onto the idea of establishing a common program of "reinforced cooperation." The idea itself is not such a novelty, as French policy analysts have been bandying around the idea of *la coopération renforcée* for many years. What *is* new is that the participating states have committed to fulfilling certain criteria, notably being able and willing to participate in combined military operations in the future. To this end, Macron has called for the creation of a European intervention force, so as to make certain operations, say in Africa, easier to mount in the future. He also urges greater exchanges of personnel among European militaries, to foster a common strategic culture.

Certainly, Europe has been down a similar road before, at the start of the previous decade, only to see hopes of greater Europeanization fizzle out. Now, many are expecting a different ending, because of a greater commitment to do the things required to assure the common defense, and to undertake to do them over the long haul.⁹¹ All of this, if accomplished, must logically imply more autonomy to devise solutions to European security challenges. But this does not mean that a strategic "divorce" from the United States lies at the end of this road, if for no other reason than that both sides of the Atlantic share and will continue to share one very important security objective: tightening their military and intelligence cooperation in response to the ongoing challenge of combatting terrorism.

Looking Back and Ahead

It is hard to overstate the significance of the terrorist challenge for the future of France-U.S. relations. During the initial years of the global war on terrorism, the initiative looked more likely to drive a wedge between the two transatlantic partners, rather than drawing them closer together. True, France rallied quickly to America's side following the attacks of 9/11, and for a brief while it was possible to believe that the French were in fundamental agreement with the

⁹¹ Daniel Fiott, Antonio Missiroli and Thierry Tardy, "Permanent Structured Cooperation: What's In a Name?" *Chaillot Paper*, Nov. 2017.

then-current expression that “we are all Americans now.” But this mood of solidarity was soon tested. Failure came, in part, because many in Europe questioned whether Americans’ worries about homeland security might not be greatly exaggerated, and in part because of Washington’s efforts to connect al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, which was felt not just to be fallacious, but reckless, as it contributed to the rush to war in 2003.

Today, the mood in Europe—and especially France—has changed a great deal. This change stems from being more on the receiving end of the attention of Salafist jihadis, homegrown ones especially. What looked once to be an American tendency toward alarmism now appears in a different light. Moreover, the “insurance” against terrorist attacks that many in France believed would be theirs if they vigorously opposed the Bush administration’s war against Saddam Hussein has proved to be a will-o’-the-wisp. Salafist jihadis do not really care much about what France was doing at the UN in late 2002 and early 2003; what counts for them is that France is as good a target as any, and likely better than most, in Europe. The result is that extra-European security cooperation on the terrorism file now looks to be an element cementing transatlantic cooperation, even if this time, unlike in the immediate post-9/11 period, it is France more than the United States that emphasizes the terrorist challenge.⁹² For the latter country, it is more security anxieties stemming from Asia (in the short term North Korea, in the longer term China) than it is terrorism that garners the attention of security and defense officials. Still, counterterrorism remains an important U.S. interest.

Consider what has been taking place in the African theater of counterterrorism. France’s military effort in Mali symbolizes more than any other single development its determination to counter extremists. In so doing, it has provided opportunities for greater Franco-American military cooperation and intelligence sharing. American logistical backing for French military action remains indispensable, just as it was seven years ago in the Libyan intervention, at a time when the Obama administration was determined to maintain a “light footprint” there, as well as in certain other parts of the world. More recently, French and American security interests have run in a common channel in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, such as Chad and Niger, where Boko Haram has been active, though there may be differences emerging as a result of France’s pressing for a UN Security Council initiative to aid the African counterterrorist force (G-5 Sahel) mounted by a group of five regional countries (Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, and Burkina Faso).⁹³ It remains to be seen, now that President Trump has discarded

⁹² Helene Cooper, “Military Shifts Focus to Russia and China, Not Terrorism,” *New York Times*, Jan. 19, 2018; https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/us/politics/military-china-russia-terrorism-focus.html?emc=edit_th_180120&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=62171838.

⁹³ Agence France Presse, “La France demande à l’ONU d’aider la Force G5-Sahel sans frais,” Nov. 30, 2017, http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/la-france-demande-a-l-onu-d-aider-la-force-g5-sahel-sans-frais-30-11-2017-2176433_24.php.

his predecessor's aversion to more direct military involvement, whether there will be an increase in attention and assets devoted to Africa.⁹⁴

What is more certain is that Emmanuel Macron's "Europe solution" will not resemble earlier French initiatives, most notably those of Charles de Gaulle and many of his successors. Most of these leaders tried in their various ways to scratch that old "ontological" itch that required such differentiation from the United States. Macron's policy depends not on pushing the United States away, but on holding it closer. This is so, even though on many issues (climate change being one, albeit a conspicuous one) there *is* and will remain divergence between the two countries, and that the harvest of tangible outcomes has, so far, not been a very abundant one as far as France is concerned.⁹⁵ In addition to climate change, there have been major reversals recently regarding the Iranian nuclear deal and protectionist measures directed at steel and aluminum exports to the United States from European and other friendly countries.⁹⁶ For the time being, it is hard to argue, *faute de mieux*, with Macron's personal approach toward Donald Trump, and more broadly with Americans, even if there is a growing chorus of French detractors.⁹⁷ The Macron "moment" may not turn out to be another "Casablanca" moment in Franco-American relations, but for the present and for as far into the short-term future as our vision permits us to glimpse, if there is going to be continuing substance to transatlantic solidarity, it will depend more on Franco-American cooperation than on the kind of German-American cooperation that Huntington imagined to be so essential. And, who can say: if the West truly *is* to be one again, it might even entail a new transatlantic special relationship, between France and the United States, to share the spotlight with the more tried-and-true Anglo-American special relationship.

Could anyone, after all, imagine Jeremy Corbyn being able to try managing the mercurial American president with anything like the aplomb demonstrated so far by Emmanuel Macron, even if the French and American leaders do resort, at times, to speaking "frankly" with each other?



⁹⁴ Maya Kandel, "Les Etats-Unis en Afrique: le prisme croissant du contre-terrorisme," *Le Monde*, Nov. 10, 2017, http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/11/10/les-etats-unis-en-afrique-le-prisme-croissant-du-contre-terrorisme_5213403_3212.html?xtmc=maya_kandel&xtr=1.

⁹⁵ For a critical perspective, see Marc Semo, "Macron, les limites d'une diplomatie jupitérienne," *Le Monde*, May 20-22, 2018, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁶ Steven Erlanger, "Humiliated, E. U. Looks for Antidote to Trump," *New York Times International Edition*, May 11, 2018, pp. 1, 6; Jennifer A. Hillman, "New Tariffs a Danger to U.S. Security," *ibid.*, June 2, 2018, pp. 1, 11. On Iran, it could turn out that Macron will emerge as a more central figure than before the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – i.e., the "Iran nuclear deal." See "Avant le G7, Macron et Trudeau louent de concert un 'multilatéralisme' fort," *Le Monde*, June 7, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2018/06/06/avant-le-g7-macron-et-trudeau-louent-de-concert-un-multiculturalisme_fort_5310794_3210.html.

⁹⁷ Adam Nossiter, "Trump's Best Buddy? It Doesn't Play Well in France," *New York Times International Edition*, May 19-20, 2018, p. 3.