

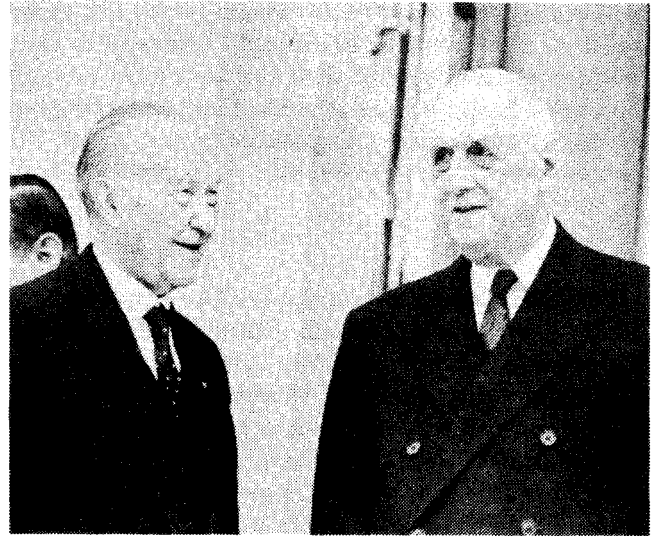
How de Gaulle built the foundation

by Garance Phau

The origins of French President Giscard's design for a Franco-German entente can be found in the political organizing undertaken in the late 1950s and early 1960s by General Charles de Gaulle. It was de Gaulle, the leader and symbol of the French Resistance to Nazism in World War II, who began to reconcile Frenchmen and Germans, and sealed that reconciliation with a treaty between the two nations in 1963. The treaty effectively re-established West Germany's sovereignty, by allowing her a counterweight to Anglo-Saxon control through association with France.

Since his return to power in 1958, de Gaulle had committed himself to undoing the Cold War. His alliance with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer took place at a time when President John Kennedy's advisors argued in favor of a "limited nuclear warfare" stance, much like Carter today, and proposed to install nuclear weapons on German soil through the Multilateral Force, as NATO proposes now. De Gaulle was convinced that the military policy of the Atlantic Alliance, combined with Malthusian attitudes toward the underdeveloped sector, could only turn the Cold War into a hot war—at any time.

The Cuban missile crisis took place in between de Gaulle's tour of the Federal Republic in September 1962 and the signing of the Bonn-Paris treaty in January 1963. De Gaulle thought a Europe modeled on Charlemagne's modernizing impetus would be capable of resisting Anglo-Saxon as well as Soviet pressures and of achieving détente. When the General launched the term détente, it did not have the vaguely pacific connotations it has today. Rather, as he defined it to the American Congress in 1960, United States and Europe to combine their resources to



1958: the first meeting between de Gaulle and Adenauer.

Photo: French Foreign Ministry

effect an industrial takeoff in the underdeveloped sector. That had been the agenda of the 1960 four-power meeting sabotaged by the U-2 incident. For de Gaulle the Franco-German treaty was a tool to impose reason in international politics and economic policies, "because if civilization doesn't develop, it collapses."

Barely six months after his return to power, on September 14, 1958, de Gaulle received Chancellor Adenauer in his private house at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises to symbolize the openness and friendship which was to prevail between the two leaders. There, de Gaulle proposed to Adenauer an alliance between the two countries as the pillar of the new Europe. Adenauer was surprised and delighted, since de Gaulle had been built up publicly as a "revanchard" who would seek to punish Germany for World War II. At a loss for words, he could only tell journalists the next day: "The General is not a nationalist." He added: "We are convinced that close cooperation between the German Federal Republic and the French Republic is the foundation of any constructive work in Europe. It contributes to the reinforcement of the Atlantic Alliance and is indispensable for the world."

In his memoirs, de Gaulle recalled their talks: "I assured the Chancellor that we in France considered it perfectly natural that Federal Germany should adhere unreservedly to the Atlantic Pact. How could she do otherwise in this age of atomic weapons? . . . But in this respect as in others, France was not in the same position. Hence, while continuing to belong to the alliance . . . for mutual assistance in case of aggression, she planned to leave NATO sooner or later, the more so as she intended to equip herself with nuclear weapons which there could be no question of integrating into the system. . . . At the conclusion of our discussions, we agreed to establish

direct and special links between our two countries in every field, and not to limit them to membership of organizations which extinguished their individual personalities. From then onwards we were to remain in close personal contact.”

The grand tour

On September 4-9, 1962, de Gaulle undertook a triumphant tour of West Germany. Greeting President Heinrich Lübke in Bonn, de Gaulle spoke of the tasks of Franco-German unity. His goal, he said, was “a union in the perspective of détente and international cooperation which would allow all of Europe—from the moment that the East relinquished the domineering ambition of an outdated ideology—to establish European equilibrium, Europe’s peace, Europe’s development from the Atlantic to the Urals, provided that there is a lively and strong community in the West, that means essentially a unitary Franco-German policy.”

De Gaulle took great pleasure in directly addressing the German population in half-a-dozen cities. Within five days, he spoke (in German) to crowds in Bonn, Cologne, Düsseldorf, to Thyssen factory workers in Duisburg-Hamborn, to German soldiers in Hamburg, and to the people of Munich, concluding with a moving appeal to West German youth in the industrial center of Ludwigsburg.

The reader should recall that under the joint management of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services and British intelligence, occupied Germany was subjected for 15 years to intense psychological warfare aimed at convincing the population that every single one of them was responsible for the Nazi atrocities, and their nation could never again exert international influence.

De Gaulle cut through this “universal guilt” at one stroke in his Ludwigsburg address. “As for you, I congratulate you! I congratulate you, first of all for being young. . . . I congratulate you, then, for being young Germans—that means the children of a great people. Yes, a great people, who at times during the span of its history has committed great mistakes and caused great calamities, and condemnable ones, but which on the other hand, propagated across the world fruitful waves of thought, of science, of art, of philosophy, one who enriched the universe with the innumerable products of its inventions, of its technologies, of its accomplishments, one who deployed in the works of peace, as in the challenges of war, treasures of courage, discipline and organization. . . .

Finally, I congratulate you for being the youth of today. . . . Your generation sees and no doubt will continue to see the multiplication of combined results of scientific discoveries and technological achievements which deeply modify the physical condition of man. A

new and prodigious field opens up in front of you. . . . It is the duty of those your age to make it the conquest, not of a few privileged ones, but of all our human brethren. Let your ambition be to make progress the common good, so that each individual partakes in it, so that it permits the development of the beautiful, the just, and the good everywhere and especially in the countries which like ours create civilization.

“Let it procure to the billions of inhabitants of the underdeveloped regions the means to conquer in their turn hunger, poverty, and ignorance, and accede to complete dignity.”

Six months later, on January 22, 1963, the Franco-German Treaty was signed in Paris which put into effect the aim of the de Gaulle visit: to tie the closest bonds between the two nations so they might speak with one voice in the international arena. France brought to the alliance its open ties to Moscow based on France’s commitment to détente and industrial exchanges, and its web of influence throughout the developing countries. West Germany was building a formidable industrial capacity. The combination of the two nations could be the heart of Europe’s power.

The treaty mandated regular biannual state summits and ministerial meetings at all levels, including defense, foreign policy education, and culture, at least four times a year to coordinate matters fully. The treaty opened the way for French military weight behind the Federal Republic. In de Gaulle’s mind, the French *force de frappe* deterrent was the kernel of an independent European defense policy, that would make the North Atlantic Treaty Organization an obsolete relic of the Cold War.

The treaty was signed a week after de Gaulle vetoed Great Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community, and indicated that Germany would back France’s efforts to prevent the British from making the EEC into a free trade zone for dumping Commonwealth goods.

Britain and her allies on the continent were displeased. Anglophile Willy Brandt, then head of the SPD opposition to Adenauer, did his best to sabotage it when it came up for ratification in the Bundestag on May 8, 1963. Brandt introduced a rider which specified that the treaty “did not affect the rights and obligations derived from the multilateral treaties concluded by the BRD,” and especially collaboration with Great Britain and the United States. Within a year Chancellor Adenauer was removed from office by way of a Watergating operation known as the “Springer affair.” Nonetheless the treaty has continued to provide a foundation for Franco-German entente on the continent. Giscard’s visit to West Germany last week was the *thirty-sixth* Franco-German summit.