

GENERAL DE GAULLE AMONG THE EUROPEANS

Thomas Molnar

One beneficial effect of Charles de Gaulle's memorable declaration on January 14 was that it clarified issues which were badly confused even in the minds of the politicians. The immediate outcry was, of course, tremendous, not only in the American and British press, but in the European capitals as well. Yet, as de Gaulle stuck by his guns and calmly went on to torpedo the Brussels negotiations, it became clear that he meant what he said; as always, one man's firmness—the press pointed out how rare this quality is today—obliges others to accommodate themselves to his views and will.

Two things must be taken into account when we try to understand the present situation. The first is de Gaulle's position within France, the second the question of whether he can enforce his views in Europe.

The pillars on which the General's power rests are prosperity, the contempt of Frenchmen for the parties, and the political vacuum that his autocratic rule has created. He has recently been compared to Hitler: he is no Hitler, but the fact remains that *gendarmes mobiles* with machine guns in hand stop cars and people in the streets of Paris; that more than six thousand men and women are held, often under atrocious conditions, in prison for their opposition to the regime; and that military courts, in violation of the law and citizens' rights, are trying hundreds of new opponents.

Nevertheless, de Gaulle's power is solid and nobody is able to challenge it. This is what he always wanted, this is why he dissolved the Empire (and even the Communauté), and plunged Algeria into horror—in spite of repeated offers of the G.P.R.A. to surrender. He wanted this absolute power in order to carry out his grand design: to cut Europe loose from the United States, to oblige England to choose between the latter and the continent, to build a strong Europe under French guidance and based on Franco-German friendship. Then only would

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Russia understand that her interest is to cooperate and trade with Europe.

• Does de Gaulle have the means of carrying out these plans? Once again, he does, as far as many Frenchmen are concerned. While I was in France in January and February, the State-run television presented a series under the title "They are different from us," "they" being the Anglo-Saxons; the press is encouraged to express alarm over American economic infiltration; men around the General openly voice anti-American feelings. The State-subsidized opera yielded to Soviet pressure in cancelling performances by ballet-dancer Nureyev who chose freedom two years ago. And de Gaulle is regularly closeted for hours with his favorite among foreign ambassadors, Comrade Vinogradov.

All this is to prepare the population for some spectacular modification in the Atlantic Alliance. This alliance is, of course, shaky even without de Gaulle's rocking the boat. Increasingly Europeans think that the United States has taken them for granted, that while it has protected their homelands, it completely disregarded their interests overseas. Now each Western European country feels its pride hurt as the United States, in wooing the Afro-Asian bloc, uses their overseas territories and interests as free gifts. And they say that the American government and labor financially aided the F.L.N. in its opposition to France; American airbase facilities were denied to Dutch planes transporting troops to defend New Guinea against a rapacious Sukarno; Washington did not bat an eye when Nehru gobbled up Goa, and it now keeps in friendly contact with the Angolan rebels; and finally the Katanga operations have destroyed Belgo-African cooperation and enable American business interests to penetrate the Congo basin, displacing Belgian firms.

Even the French Left discovers now that rapid and wholesale decolonization in Africa has had disastrous effects on local conditions. Two sensational articles by Sartre's friend, Jean Cau, in *L'Express* paint Algeria's future as extremely black; *Le Monde's* Jean Lacouture is equally gloomy; and the respected economist, René Dumont (an admirer of Castro) just published a book (*L'Afrique est mal partie*) whose pessimistic forecast is solidly documented. In the present mood of Europe de Gaulle has an easy task in pointing out the cracks in American-European relations.

And in Anglo-European relations as well. Let us bear in mind that since the beginning of the Com-

mon Market the British did all they could to destroy it from within (through the continental business and banking interests devoted to them) and from without, by creating the group of the "Outer Seven." Nor have the French forgotten that at the time of Suez, Guy Mollet vainly begged Eden not to yield to American pressure, and that Macmillan, turning against his party chief at that time, showed complete servility to American demands. They believe they see this attitude now repeated at Nassau, and it is said that if de Gaulle used sharp language on January 14, it was because he saw confirmation of his long-held view about Britain's satellization by the U.S.

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All these factors strengthen de Gaulle's position in Europe. Not only the press favorable to him, but also other European press media, pointed out that if Washington treats Great Britain and Canada without ceremony, what treatment might it reserve for France and the continent? Removal of missile bases from Italy and Turkey (considered as a post-Cuban deal with the Kremlin) also brings grist to de Gaulle's mill.

The very real fear that the United States might abandon Europe any time when the Soviet leaders offer a global deal, including disarmament, is not new but it is becoming deeper with the years. This is why the French *force de frappe* has become a symbol of resistance to eventual Russian attack. American insistence on limiting nuclear weapons to the members of the "atomic club" is judged to be both unrealistic and humiliating. No sovereign power can and will accept such an imposition, not even if the latter is stamped with the approval of so-called world opinion in the United Nations. Secondly, from the existence of a *force de frappe* the integration of European armed forces may receive a psychological boost: today the French and German armies work together on many echelons and numerous common projects, and the visit in Madrid of General Ailleret, French Chief of Staff, is to be noted.

Finally, many Europeans feel that they witness a contest between Kennedy and de Gaulle with the objective of drawing the Kremlin closer to one or the other contender. If true, either design may prove equally fatal for the free world, but the pro-Gaullists argue that they prefer to fix their own price in these negotiations rather than let Washington do the bargaining at their expense. For, they say, the very strength of Germany will act as a check on de Gaulle's ambitions—if it is true that he wants to

reach an understanding with the Soviet Union—while in a U.S.-Soviet deal, Europe would not even be consulted.

But again, things are more complicated than that. In general, no one but de Gaulle speaks for de Gaulle, and the wildest guesses circulate even in circles which consider themselves close to him. I heard from one who for years used to be his closest associate that de Gaulle considers a "Communist phase" inevitable for France. On the other hand, people's instincts if not their convictions tell them that the United States, at the height of its imperial power, cannot and will not abandon the defense of the free world.

The fact is, however, that it is enough to open de Gaulle's *Mémoires* to find his thoughts clearly expressed (the world previously made the mistake of not reading Hitler and Lenin carefully): "For all their differences, the basic thoughts in Washington, London and Moscow are generally agreed that we [France] are to be reserved a place in this world, but they are in no particular hurry to give it to us . . . Whatever France will be in the future, will by no means simply be decided by these allies. Nothing can prevent France from playing a role according to its own discretion, the role it really wants . . . I intend to guarantee the primacy of France in Western Europe . . . by making the States along the Rhine, the Alps and Pyrenees accept the idea of forming a political, economic and strategic bloc; and such organization will be established as one of the three world powers, if necessary by acting as an arbitrator between the Soviet and the British-American blocs. Ever since 1940 every one of my words and actions has been directed towards the realization of this aim."

James Reston may have been right when he wrote on January 21 that the General never did what he promised he would do. But Reston's statement is true only in regard to de Gaulle's tactical moves; his "grand design" is expressed in the quotation, and he definitely acts now in its spirit.

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Thus the real question mark is Kennedy's foreign policy. Is it retreat in Europe, accompanied with a vague offer of reforming, expanding the North Atlantic pact? Lucid Europeans foresee that the United States will be increasingly forced to concentrate on South America's troubles and seek quick "solutions" in Europe, starting with Berlin. In this case, the Gaullist siren's song would not be without attraction.

So far the Gaullist, pro-Gaullist and quasi-Gaullist point of view. The question is not so much its validity as its impact. Against its lure, some of the most intelligent minds and press organs are lined up, and their arguments may be summarized as follows.

I was assured in Germany that the biggest blunder the General may commit is to force the Germans to make a choice: Washington or Paris; because then they will choose Washington which protects them militarily and has made them members of NATO. At the same time Bonn does not want to jeopardize relations with France, which means the hope of a new Europe. However, and this is an important point, these relations are so solid by now that not even de Gaulle could undo them. Thus the latter has made himself dispensable, although in his own mind the General may have the impression that last fall's enthusiastic reception in Germany was addressed to him personally. The truth is, everybody in Germany agrees, it was addressed to France.

As to the other nations of the Common Market, they are frankly apprehensive about remaining closeted with a French-German directorate and a hegemony-seeking de Gaulle. The American orientation of much of their economy, their ties with American businessmen, their interest in wide trade opportunities persuade them that English presence is a good thing. In fact, many Germans (and even Frenchmen) feel the same way: a strictly protectionist Europe is for them a nightmare. And while they do trade with Eastern Europe (both France and Germany have signed trade pacts recently with the Soviet Union and the satellites), they would not like to see Europe, as a "third force," develop wide economic relations with Moscow.

Roughly speaking, the conflict is seen as that between the *political* and the *economic* concepts of a united Europe. De Gaulle wants to use the Common Market as a stepping stone to France's grand role in world politics; his opponents consider Anglo-Saxon presence as a guarantee of stability, growth and liberal economy. Which concept has a better chance of organizing Europe's future? Provided the alternative remains as I have described it, and no additional factor comes to modify it in the near future, the probability is that de Gaulle's star will soon decline. At home he faces real hatred from many circles; and the farther we get from the borders of France, the more apparent it becomes that he has little beyond his powerful personality and eloquence to help him change the destinies of the world.

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