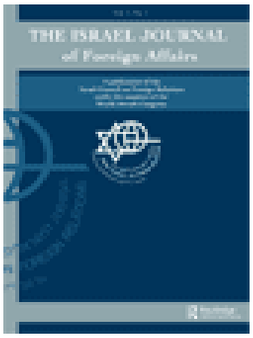

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French Foreign Policy since 1945: An Introduction
by Frédéric Bozo
Translated by Jonathan Hensher
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The appearance of Frédéric Bozo's *French Foreign Policy since 1945* is well timed. France is a key actor in global affairs, but one whose foreign policy can sometimes seem unpredictable and confrontational. In recent years, Paris has taken on a leading role in fighting radical Islam in Africa (Mali) and the Middle East (Syria), and has hosted major international conferences (on climate change in December 2015 and on the Middle East peace process in January 2017). France's foreign policy influences, and will continue to influence, Europe's stance on Russia and the Middle East.

Bozo is an international relations professor at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University (Paris III) and an expert on European history. His book (translated from an earlier French version) will not teach scholars familiar with French foreign policy anything new, but for English readers especially, it constitutes a welcome, up-to-date, and concise contribution. This is so because, unfortunately, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's reference books on French foreign policy have only been partially translated into English, and Stanley Hoffmann's writings on France do not constitute a comprehensive history of French diplomacy.

Bozo correctly argues that one cannot understand France's post-war foreign policy without pondering the lasting influence of Charles de Gaulle. When the French army collapsed in the face of the German *Blitzkrieg* of May–June 1940, de Gaulle immediately foresaw that France had to continue to fight from its colonial possessions or lose its international status after victory. Unlike his nemesis, Philippe Pétain, de Gaulle was convinced from the very beginning that Germany would eventually be crushed by the Soviet Union and the United States.

De Gaulle's achievements were extraordinary—something Bozo does not emphasize enough. From the self-appointed alternative leader of his defeated country in June 1940, by the end of the war he had become the internationally recognized prime minister of a French government invited to join the UN Security Council as a permanent and veto-wielding member. Yet de Gaulle had no illusions about his country's sharp decline or the lasting effects of its 1940 humiliation. He was determined to rebuild French power in the shadow of "Anglo-Saxon" and

Russian domination, and he had an obsession with the danger of Germany's revival and empowerment, as Bozo correctly explains.

To attain his foreign policy goals, however, de Gaulle knew that France needed to rid itself of the Third Republic's unstable and dysfunctional political system. He envisioned a presidential regime with a strong executive shielded from parliamentary intrigues. However, France's political parties had no intention of letting de Gaulle trim their role as kingmakers. De Gaulle resigned in protest in January 1946, mistakenly assuming that he would be begged to stay. From his political exile in Colombey-les-deux-Églises, he lamented what he described as the foreign policy blunders and humiliation of his beloved country. In 1958, de Gaulle was asked to rescue France from civil war and to end the Algerian crisis. He led the country for over a decade until his resignation in 1969, and left a lasting mark on its foreign policy.

After de Gaulle's departure in 1946, France reestablished a multiparty parliamentary democracy (the Fourth Republic) that turned out to be even more unstable than its predecessor. During the twelve years of its existence (1946–58), the Fourth Republic fought (and lost) two colonial wars (in Indochina from 1946–54 and in Algeria from 1954), and was unable to prevent the partial remilitarization of Germany. It was humiliated (together with Britain) by the two superpowers in the 1956 Suez Crisis. De Gaulle was convinced that the Fourth Republic had made a mess of France's interests and honor, and he was determined to restore his country's grandeur.

Yet French foreign policy under the Fourth Republic was not always on the defensive. In fact, it laid the groundwork for what would eventually become the European Union. Robert Schuman (who served as France's prime minister from 1947–48) and Jean Monnet (a French economist and diplomat) initiated a power-sharing model with Germany based on coal and steel, ultimately aiming to replace the traditional nation-state model with a supranational one. Hence, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established in 1951. It included France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg.

The underlying strategy of Monnet and Schuman was to prevent future wars between France and Germany through the aforementioned arrangement and common economic interests. However, with the formal independence of West Germany and the formation of NATO in 1949, the question of German rearmament emerged; there was, after all, a Soviet threat to be dealt with. French leaders, eager to prevent a resurgent German army, proposed a common European army or European Defense Community (EDC). The plan, however, was nixed by the French parliament in 1954. Tellingly, France initiated its own military nuclear program the same year the EDC was abandoned.

Bozo stresses that France's independent nuclear deterrent became even more of a priority after the 1956 Suez humiliation. The military campaign jointly launched by France, Britain, and Israel against Egypt in 1956 ended in a diplomatic fiasco. The Soviet Union threatened Britain and France with nuclear retaliation, and the US did not stand by its Western allies for fear of throwing more Arab countries into the arms of the Soviet Union (Egypt had become a Soviet ally in 1955). France felt betrayed by its American ally, and the scar of Suez never fully healed. Not only did France accelerate its nuclear program; it also started to look at the ECSC as a platform from which to turn Western Europe into a geopolitical counterweight to US dominance. Indeed, the Treaty of Rome signed in 1957 in the wake of the Suez Crisis established the European Economic Community (EEC).

When de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, he took this policy of "weaning" France from US influence a step further. Paris detonated its first nuclear bomb in 1960. In 1963, de Gaulle signed an historic reconciliation agreement with Germany; rejected Kennedy's request to put French nuclear weapons under US control; and vetoed the entry of Britain (a close US ally) to the EEC. In 1964, France recognized Communist China, to the horror of the Americans. Having challenged "Anglo-Saxon hegemony" in the West, de Gaulle went on the offensive both in word and deed. In 1966, he openly denounced US involvement in Vietnam and pulled France out of NATO's military command; in 1967 he provocatively exclaimed "*Vive le Québec libre!*" [Long live free Québec!] in Montréal.

De Gaulle's successors followed his foreign policy footsteps but toned down his confrontational style toward the "Anglo-Saxons." Thus, the UK was able to join the EEC in 1973 without a French veto. But as Paris promoted its economic interests in the Arab world and distanced itself from Washington, French foreign policy in the Middle East was increasingly at odds with both America and Israel. The oil embargo imposed by the Arab states in the wake of the Yom Kippur War enabled France to garner support within the EEC for its Middle East policy. While US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger tried to isolate the Soviet Union's Middle East clients and to reach agreements between Israel and America's Arab allies, France had become an outspoken advocate of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Paris did not welcome the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt (which excluded the PLO from future negotiations over the West Bank and Gaza), and in 1980, it convinced its EEC partners to adopt the Venice Declaration, which openly called for adding the PLO to future negotiations.

France's strained relations with Israel under President Giscard d'Estaing (1974–81) were also exemplified by the release in 1977 of Abu Daoud, the mastermind of the 1972 Munich massacre (a turn of events Bozo fails to mention), and by the construction of a nuclear plant in Iraq in 1980. Paradoxically, it was a Socialist French president, François Mitterrand, who warmed up to the US and Israel.

Mitterrand proved more steadfast than his predecessor in his opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and to Soviet missile deployments in Eastern Europe. Additionally, Mitterrand paid an official visit to Israel shortly after his election, thus changing course from Giscard's haughty hostility.

Mitterrand also promoted the federalization of the EEC in partnership with Germany. In 1983, he abandoned the spendthrift policies of his Socialist government and chose to adopt a policy of fiscal discipline and economic coordination with Germany. The 1985 Schengen Agreement mostly abolished border controls in the EEC, and the 1986 Single European Act established a single market and laid the foundations for a common foreign policy.

Bozo notes that this Franco–German partnership, however, was tested by the reunification of Germany in 1990, which was opposed and feared by France—though Mitterrand would not openly admit to that. Once it became clear that German unification was inevitable, Mitterrand devised a model meant to anchor Germany in Europe: the single currency. In 1951, France tied a newly independent West Germany to Europe via the ECSC. In 1991, it tied a newly unified Germany to Europe via the Euro. Abandoning the Deutschmark was a bitter pill for Germany to swallow, but, as Mitterrand insisted, this was the price to be paid for European consent to German reunification.

Mitterrand also adopted a principled stance after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990—one that took many (including Saddam Hussein) by surprise, given France's past support for Iraq as well as its traditional reluctance to align with the Americans. However, because the invasion of Kuwait was such a blatant violation of international law, Mitterrand sided with Washington from the outset, which eventually brought France to the battlefield.

Mitterrand's successor, Jacques Chirac, tried to revive France's Gaullist foreign policy upon his election in 1995. The end of the Cold War had replaced bipolarity with a US hegemony, which Chirac abhorred. Chirac renewed French nuclear testing and increased France's military presence in Bosnia. His foreign minister, Hubert Védrine, coined the expression "hyper-power" to describe, and lament, America's prominence. But it was American power that put an end to the crisis in Yugoslavia, a European war that France had been unable to stop.

Chirac hoped to transform the EU into a geopolitical counterweight to US hegemony. He tried, and failed, to set up an autonomous European military force. As EU membership grew with the addition of the post-Communist states of East Central Europe, France's influence was diluted, in addition to being overshadowed by Germany's economic leadership. The 2003 Iraq crisis provided Chirac with the ideal opportunity through which to challenge the US and play the Gaullist card. Chirac made a point of opposing the Anglo–American military intervention in

Iraq, and his foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, delivered an impassioned Gaullist tirade at the UN Security Council in February 2003.

Yet France was unable to stop the invasion of Iraq. Chirac's posturing gained him praise among anti-war protesters, but also revealed the powerlessness of French diplomacy. It was a painful reminder to Chirac that de Gaulle's shoes were simply too big for him to fill. The May 2005 rejection of the European constitution by French voters was another blow to Chirac and his attempt to turn the EU into a unified international actor.

Chirac's successor, Nicolas Sarkozy, was also a nominal Gaullist, but his approach to foreign policy was less dogmatic. He mended fences with the US and brought France back to NATO's military command in 2009. But the so-called "Arab Spring" exposed the depth of France's support for Arab dictators (French foreign minister Michèle Alliot-Marie had to resign following the revelation of her close ties with ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia). Accused of siding with repressive regimes, Sarkozy made a U-turn and ordered a military intervention against Libyan strongman Muammar Qadhafi in March 2011.

France continued to use military force abroad under François Hollande; the French air force bombed jihadists in Mali in 2013, and continues to do so today in Iraq and Syria. Ten years after opposing the war in Iraq, France was now at the forefront of military (and mostly unilateral) intervention in Africa and the Middle East (especially after President Barack Obama decided not to use military force in Syria in 2013).

Bozo concludes his book by predicting that "France's future as a relevant international actor seems to be premised on the fate of the European project" (p. 192). What Bozo calls "the European project" was originally conceived by France to reign in German power. With time, however, France's role in the EU came to be overshadowed by German economic strength, while France declined economically. With the enlargement of the EU after 2004, French influence in the EU was diluted. The Euro, which was supposed to tie Germany to Europe, turned Germany into the ultimate arbitrator of fiscal and monetary policy in the EU.

France has diplomatic assets that are unrelated to the EU: its permanent seat on the Security Council, its nuclear status, and the soft power it enjoys thanks to its culture and *La Francophonie*. Its international relevance rests less on the fate of the EU than on its ability and willingness to end its economic decline. As opposed to Britain (under Margaret Thatcher) and Germany (under Gerhard Schröder), France never adapted its expansive welfare state to its aging population and to the realities of globalization. The French state has not balanced its books

since 1974; it overspends and overtaxes, and, consequently, the French economy suffers from low growth and high unemployment. If France wants to be great again, it needs to get its economy in order, regardless of the fate of "the European project."

While Bozo breaks no academic ground (relying as he does almost entirely on secondary sources) and reveals no hitherto unknown facts, his historical account will be useful to anyone interested in understanding post-war France. The new Trump administration and the outcome of France's presidential elections in May 2017 will have a transformative effect on French foreign policy. To evaluate the depth and scope of this impact, one needs to understand France's modern diplomatic history. Frédéric Bozo's book provides a concise and useful introduction to the subject.