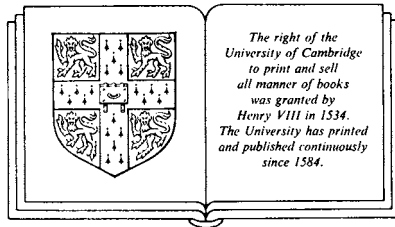


The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945–1954

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Introduction

THE UNITED STATES emerged from the Second World War as the preponderant economic and military power in the world. Western Europe lay weakened and in large part destroyed; the Soviet Union, which suffered enormous devastation itself, shared military hegemony in Europe with the Americans. Under these conditions it was virtually inevitable that the United States would play an enormous role in the process of European reconstruction. American influence in the reshaping of France was correspondingly great. In the absence of serious historical study until recently, the subject has become clouded by political partisanship and mythology. Studies abound with titles that announce their theses: *L'empire américaine* or *La France colonisée*. It is axiomatic in some circles that the United States purged the Communists from the French government in 1947, organized the non-Communist labor union Force Ouvrière, forcefully integrated France into a Western bloc of its own making, and imposed upon the unwilling French its own model of organized, consumer-oriented, capitalism. Whatever the degree of truth in such formulations, the reality was more complex. These conclusions were reached without benefit of government documents, most of which have become available in the last decade up to 1954 and beyond. It is now possible to put them to test. French historians have begun to tap sources available in France; until now virtually nothing has been done with benefit of American sources.

Any study of the American role in France must take into account at least four different, distinct, yet interrelated aspects. There is first the conventional diplomatic record. France and the United States became military allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, cooperated in their policies vis-à-vis the USSR and European integration, and fought together in two wars, in Korea and Indochina. Given the preponderance of American power, it was to be expected that the French role would be one of supplicant and junior partner. Yet the relationship remained characterized by the usual crises,

tensions, and sovereign disputes and jealousies that govern diplomatic relations between nations in the most normal of times. The American and French republics had a 150-year history of troubled friendship upon which they could draw and which continued to shape the nature of their postwar relations. Diplomats of both nations made continued reference to it on any and every suitable occasion.

Diplomacy was complicated by a new and unprecedented economic relationship between the two countries, which took the form of a vast economic assistance program. American aid began with a conventional reconstruction loan in 1946. But with the onset of the cold war and the foreign payments and exchange crisis of the following year, it took the innovative form of the Marshall Plan, which involved sixteen nations in a scheme of reciprocal obligations with the United States and each other. The Marshall Plan put international economic relations on a new level, created a new international bureaucratic framework, and accorded the United States through bilateral treaties and its aid missions, unprecedented means of influencing directly the postwar economic development of the nations of Western Europe. France was the single greatest recipient of Marshall Plan aid, the most important in the American view and even more central in the American military assistance program for Western Europe that followed. Between the Marshall Plan, military aid, direct budgetary assistance, and American help to France in defraying the cost of the Indochina War, American aid approached or exceeded one billion dollars per year for the entire period between 1945 and 1954. Such aid levels, in the context of the extreme penury of the postwar period, could not help but have the most profound effect on French economic development, international relations, and internal politics.

A third level of relations thus involved American intervention in French internal affairs. The political system of the Fourth Republic facilitated external influence.¹ After a brief period of a strong provisional executive power under de Gaulle from 1944 to 1946, the resurgent parties wrote a new constitution that reproduced many of the unstable features of the prewar regime. A largely ceremonial president, elected by the National Assembly and Council of the Republic (Senate) in joint session, enjoyed only the power to select the *Président du Conseil* or premier, who depended upon a majority in the lower house. A multiparty system, in which no party was able to get more than 28 percent of the vote at most, meant the government must be formed by a coalition, in which agreement was of necessity arrived at by hard bargaining and could easily fail at any time, depending upon which issues were paramount. Governments were thus unstable and fell with alarming frequency; and the conflicting ambitions and individual importance of the deputies, whose votes were critical in forming new govern-

¹ The best history of the Fourth Republic is by Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958*, trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

ments, made them individually and in groups unusually susceptible to the appeals of pressure groups of all kinds, both internal and external. The party system was roughly hexagonal, with the two largest parties after 1947 located on the extremes and hostile to the system itself. On the left the Communists retreated into enforced and bitter isolation; on the right the Gaullists took on the appearance of an authoritarian threat to the Republic. The four parties that supported the regime were virtually forced to make coalitions with one another in the hope of preserving democracy, but they reflected deep divisions on the issues. On the moderate left, the Socialists and Christian Democrats (*Mouvement Républicain Populaire*) largely agreed on the construction of the welfare state but were bitterly divided on clerical issues. On the moderate right, the prewar Radical party and Independents were largely driven by ambition for power but reflected the interests of economic groups, both industrial and modernist, and those hostile to modernization, in particular a backward peasantry and urban commercial class of small businessmen.

The issues were complicated by the cold war, Washington's fear of communism, and the cascade of governments in France under the constitution of the Fourth Republic. The Americans hoped for a stable, centrist regime, free of either of the extremes represented by the Communists, dangerously strong in the American view, and de Gaulle, whose political program they tended to equate with fascism. The multiplicity of parties and instability of cabinets afforded astute American ambassadors unprecedented leverage for intervening directly in French political crises. In general the Americans were reluctant about exercising their newly discovered power, and in many cases they found it did not go as far as they might have wished. It is notoriously untrue, for example, that Washington forced the French to get rid of the Communists under the coalition government of the Socialist Paul Ramadier in May 1947. In fact the Americans watched that crisis unfold from a distance, although they were privileged with inside information as it unfolded, and it occurred at a time when Washington was still of two minds as to whether the Communists were not more useful inside the government as a hedge against social instability. But a year later the American ambassador had discovered the extent of his influence and regularly intervened with French politicians to warn them against the return of the Communists to power or the overthrow of governments of which Washington especially approved. In these admonishments economic aid and its possible interruption were regularly brandished as a weapon. Although Washington had influence, however, it rarely could have its way. Rather, U.S. influence became one of the many factors governing the outcome of French political crises and rarely the determining one. The Americans in France became one more pressure group, albeit a powerful one, with which French politicians had to contend.

There was a second realm in which the Americans tried to influence inter-

nal French developments, by the direct influence upon and manipulation of French public opinion. Here the documents available allow some new light to be shed on American activities, although many facets remain shrouded in darkness. The record of extensive American support for non-Communist labor, at least in its formative years until 1950, is now available. What the support accomplished is another matter, for the Americans were never happy with the splintered situation in the French labor movement and their best efforts failed to correct it. French labor leaders took Washington's help but never its orders, and the structure of the French trade union movement remained shaped by indigenous historical traditions. There can be no doubt, however, that American assistance was of critical importance in the survival of Force Ouvrière at a dangerous moment in its early history. A vast anti-Communist propaganda offensive was mounted in France by Washington as well. Some manifestations of it were the sensational Kravchenko case, the subsidization of the anti-Communist peace movement *Paix et Liberté*, and the hidden activities authorized by the Psychological Strategy Board. The extent of American attempts to purchase influence on French publications and the media remains hidden in the archives of the Central Intelligence Agency, which under present law cannot be forced to release the files of its operational divisions.

A final manifestation of American influence lay in the realm of mass culture. Much of what passed and passes for Americanization in France is, instead, modernization. France could not avoid becoming more like America as it adopted the trappings of the consumer society. Americans did attempt to influence directly the shaping of the French mentality by the export of films, the exemplary presence of the American military, and the investments by American businesses in France. But neither the cultivation of the media nor the attempts at the Coca-colonization of French tastes in soft drinks were especially successful or significant. Of greater importance were the export of American methods to increase productivity through technical assistance programs, and the emergence of the American model as one suitable for emulation or imitation by French modernizers. Washington tried to steer French modernization efforts toward its own model of free enterprise. But the French pursued their own efforts in the more structured framework of the Monnet Plan. These issues have been and are being explored in greater detail by other historians.²

The unprecedented extent of American influence occurred primarily be-

² In particular, the work of Richard Kuisel now under way and his *Capitalism and the State in Modern France* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Charles Maier, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and François Bloch-Lainé and Jean Bouvier, *La France Restaurée, 1944-54: Dialogue sur les choix d'une modernisation* (Paris: Fayard, 1986).

cause France was a central battleground in the cold war. France was not, however, despite its aspirations, a focus of strategic decision making in the conflict, a role reserved for Washington. A study of American influence in France therefore inserts itself only marginally into the central questions of cold war historiography. The debate between traditionalists and revisionists has long since been transcended by the appearance of synthetic works that offer a more balanced picture stressing the responsibility of both sides and the limitations of the “mentalités” of politicians of the era.³ Further recent work has gone beyond this to emphasize the European contribution to the outbreak of the cold war.⁴ The present work seeks to reinforce that perspective. For marginal as they may have been to decision making in Washington, French elites needed no tutoring in anti-Communism. Their zeal in this area was homegrown. As a consequence it is necessary to point out the extent to which the United States was drawn into the network of Western institutions and alliances of the postwar era rather than, as is more commonly depicted, its role as a creator or innovator.

This work has further inserted itself into an internal debate between French scholars about American influence in France. The thesis of extensive American interference has been given scholarly formulation in the extensive writings of Annie Lacroix; a counterargument was carefully developed by Jean Bouvier and François Bloch-Lainé. A balanced middle ground may be found in the articles and thesis of Gérard Bossuat.⁵ The French edition of this book has been used to reinforce the theses of both camps. Reviewers in *Le Monde* and *L'Express* have stressed the limited nature of the conclusions reached about what American influence accomplished; those in *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *L'Humanité* have dwelled on the extensive and often heavy-handed American presence and activity in France.⁶ These reviews are not necessarily contradictory; American influence was both pervasive and ineffective at once.

A study of that influence thus invites several reflections. I have eschewed any attempt to characterize American–French relations in the postwar era by a label. France was not a colony or a protectorate, and the use of such terms can only have a polemical intent. Nor is it true, as John L. Harper writes of the Italian case, that the American umbrella brought France a

³ See Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), Daniel Yergin, *A Shattered Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), and Jean Elleinstein, *Goliath contre Goliath, Histoire des relations américano-soviétiques. I: L'Enfance des grands (1941–1949)* (Paris: Fayard, 1986).

⁴ For example, Victor Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War, 1941–47* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), and Terry H. Anderson, *The United States, Great Britain, and the Cold War, 1944–1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981).

⁵ See the bibliography for a complete listing of the works of these scholars.

⁶ See reviews by André Laurens, *Le Monde*, June 18–19, 1989; Jacques Nobecourt, *L'Express*, no. 1986, July 28–August 3, 1989; Paul-Marie De La Gorce, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1989; and Alain Guérin in *L'Humanité*, November 9, 1989.

“parenthesis from history,” or a respite from the trials and rigors of national independence.⁷ France was not Italy, and it could not be so easily manipulated as that defeated and impoverished nation. Nor was France Great Britain, however, where the Americans exercised little influence even in the use of the dollars they so generously infused into the national economy. American influence in France was unusually strong, powerful, direct, felt more concretely from day to day than at any previous time in the national experience or in any period since. American–French relations until 1954 fit into a category of their own, unlike the relationship between France and any other nation, infinitely more important and fraught with consequences. It is no exaggeration to say that the history of the Fourth Republic needs to be rewritten to take that influence into account.

It is one thing to demonstrate influence, however, and another to measure its effect. Influence is not quantifiable. Nor is it ever justified to draw a simple relationship of cause and effect. One can cite many examples of the French doing precisely what the Americans urged them to do, but it was rarely demonstrable that the French were reacting to American pressures rather than those from within their own society, or as the case may be, from other nations. There are also incidents in which American pressures had an effect precisely the opposite from that intended, preventing the French from doing what they freely would have done otherwise, for fear of negative publicity. Writing about French internal politics from the American perspective is an invitation to exaggerate the importance of that perspective, away from which the reader should be forewarned.

Foreign influence on internal French politics, economics, and society has rarely been absent from the French scene, moreover. Allan Mitchell has demonstrated the extent to which Adolphe Thiers ruled France after the Franco–Prussian war by dint of the support he received from Berlin as a guarantor of the terms of the peace; an overt press campaign in Berlin warned the French of the consequences of his fall from power.⁸ Washington never permitted itself so crude a manifestation of influence. In 1938, following Germany’s absorption of Austria, London did not hesitate to inform Daladier that Joseph Paul-Boncour was unacceptable as French foreign minister because of his hard-line attitude toward Berlin. But both of these incidents pale beside the shameful German domination of France during the war and the obsequiousness of Vichy. It is perhaps worth stressing that the emergence of France from such domination, while leading to the proud show of independence of a de Gaulle, nevertheless left most of his countrymen chastened by a demonstration of the opposite, their dependence on a benevolent foreign power in order to maintain their endangered freedoms.

⁷ John L. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁸ Allan Mitchell, *The German Influence in France after 1890: The Formation of the French Republic*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

That dependence was built into the structure of the postwar world, the consequence of a war that impoverished almost all those nations that fought in it with the exception of the United States. At war's end France, like the rest of Western Europe, faced enormous shortages that could be met only from America. France was also strongly influenced by the Soviet Union through the internal strength of the French Communist party. The strength of the French Communists was such that it appeared for a time that no government could be formed without the party's cooperation, and that internal French social stability depended upon its willingness to maintain labor peace. These policies in turn were believed to depend upon the strategic choices of the USSR. The postwar French elite was virtually unanimous in this view, which is mirrored in the American diplomatic documents. It remains today the common belief of most historians.⁹ It is hardly surprising that those same elites turned to American intervention in France as a means of freeing themselves from dependence on the whims of the Soviet Union and Stalin.

Questions of internal French social structure became linked to external geopolitical considerations, but this, too, was built into the structure of international relations in the period. A policy of French reconstruction based on egalitarian sharing of burdens in full independence would have fulfilled the heritage of the Resistance. But such policies were foreclosed to the French democratic left because they implied the cooperation of the Communists, and hence a disproportionate level of Soviet influence in the country if not outright absorption of France into the Soviet bloc. Those on the left who favored such a policy found themselves instead thrown into the arms of the Americans in order to avoid the apparent Soviet danger. American assistance did enable the French elites to dispense with Communist cooperation in the task of economic reconstruction. But it also helped them to carry out that reconstruction on the basis of existing social hierarchies and structures of power. The non-Communist left, faced with a choice between social inequality and Soviet domination, chose inequality because it was tempered by political freedom. Paradoxically, American observers criticized French social inequality and favored a policy based upon the hegemony of the non-Communist left. The Americans could not bring about such a policy, however. Powerful as they were, their choices too were limited by the existing distribution of power and wealth on the French scene.

The peculiarities of American influence do not stop there. Its analysis is made more complex by the nature of the internal American political process. Washington's many bureaucratic agencies did not speak with one voice. The State and Defense departments pursued their own agendas, and each was answerable to a Congress itself deeply divided. When the reconstruc-

⁹ For a contrary view, see Irwin M. Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1962* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

tion of Germany became American policy, the Defense Department wished to rush ahead pell-mell, while the State Department temporized for fear of adversely affecting relations with France. When economic aid to Europe became American policy in the form of the Marshall Plan, Congress put that aid under the administration of a new agency, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), which reflected the financial and fiscal conservatism of the businessmen and industrialists who ran it. While the State Department urged pay increases on the French in the hope of strengthening the non-Communist left, the ECA pressed for higher taxes, restraint on wages, and fiscal conservatism in order to prevent inflation. When one speaks of American influence in the postwar era, it is often appropriate to ask which Americans one means.

There was little the French could do to emancipate themselves from American tutelage during the period of the Marshall Plan, from 1948 to 1950. The issue was the acquisition of essential foodstuffs and raw materials without which the economy would collapse, yet for which Paris did not have the means to pay. The willingness of the Americans to provide these products and the ways in which the French used the products provide a central focus to the first part of the story. A turning point occurred in 1949–50 as economic assistance was scaled down to make room for a military buildup. France appeared as dependent on American military largesse as it had been for foodstuffs and raw materials. But the necessity of military aid was conditioned by diplomatic constraints and the reality of France's insertion into NATO and the Western bloc. Clearly that dependence could be lessened if international relations took a turn for the better and the consequence need for weapons was reduced. From 1950 on, French dependence on the United States appeared less a reflection of painful economic reality than the consequence of cold war policies and unbridled colonial warfare. Consciousness of this emerged in the phenomenon of neutralism and the struggle against the Indochina conflict. With this realization, and the growing ability of France to manage its economy without help, it became possible to foresee an end to the existing subordination to Washington.

France's dependence on the United States was further exaggerated by the colonial consensus of the French elite, the widespread belief that without its colonial empire France faced a future of decadence and decline to the status of a second class power. To fight its colonial war in Indochina France had to convince Washington of that conflict's relevance to the cold war against communism. Here again the Americans discovered the structural limits of their power. They provided the means for France to fight a war they had initially opposed because they favored the independence of colonial peoples. But they could do nothing to force France to grant that independence. The French soon perceived that their dependence on Washington was aggravated by their colonial ambitions and could be lessened by an end to the conflict. At the same time they became aware that they enjoyed a greater

margin for maneuver in East–West diplomacy in proportion to their willingness to sacrifice the enormous amounts of military aid Washington dispensed. This new consciousness came to the fore with defeat in Indochina and the government of Pierre Mendès France. In the events of 1954 one can discern a turning point, in which the unusual dependence of the postwar period came to an end, and more or less normal international relations were resumed.

Within all these constraints there was room for decision. The enormity of American influence was written into the postwar structure; how it would be exercised was not. Washington's relations with specific French elites, groups, parties, and personalities, its subjective appreciation of the purpose and value of each, and its actions consequent upon that evaluation, all remain the subject of analysis. It is with these questions that this study remains concerned.

It is perhaps pertinent to make some remark about the bane of the historian, moral judgment. At every point in this analysis the reader may feel constrained to ask whether this action was proper, or that policy constituted a violation of French sovereignty. The notion of sovereignty as the ultimate value that no action in the international relations of independent states can be allowed to violate was the cardinal rule governing the actions of statesmen. It was no less an artificial concept. Nations sacrifice a portion of their sovereignty every time they make an agreement or sign a treaty or enter into an alliance, indeed every time they act on the international scene. The Americans seemed most aware of this reality in the postwar world – they most fervently propagated the message of global interdependence and argued that the prosperity of all was dependent upon the reconstruction of an international system of trade, payments, and mutual obligation. The specific system they favored may have been the one that most conformed to their subjective appreciation of their interests, but they were perfectly reasonable in arguing that some system was necessary. The same consideration should be brought to bear on the question of less tangible questions of influence, political, economic, or cultural. Such influences are part of the stuff of international relations and occur by virtue of nations and cultures being aware of one another and inhabitants of the same planet. Books will no doubt continue to be written about the perils of “Franglais,” the defense of the *chanson* against the inroads of rock music, and like subjects. They have their place – as descriptions of the natural order of things. Very little of their subject matter is susceptible to analysis in terms of freely made decisions of historical actors.

The focus of this book then is not so much American influence, which is taken for granted, but the constraints within which it operated and how it was exercised and reacted to by the political figures involved. Even within these limits it is a fascinating story.