French Dilemmas and Strategies in the New Europe

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I. Reaching the goal, and not liking the landscape

The sudden end of the cold war in Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Empire in the Eastern half of the continent and the fall of the Berlin wall put the French government in an awkward and paradoxical situation. It was awkward, because France had been concentrating its attention on Western Europe - on the progress of the European Community; the momentous events in the East risked changing the priorities and delaying the "deepening" of the Community. The relance of 1984-88 had committed France to the ambitious agenda of the Single Market, which meant nothing less than an accelerated dismantling of the neo-mercantilist policies, price controls and dirigiste regulations that had characterized France’s economic strategies and the relations between government and business since the Liberation. It also meant a vast reorganization of private enterprises and a search for corporate partners abroad. Moreover, in the Spring of 1989, the E.C.’s Council had endorsed the first phase of the plan for a European Monetary Union, prepared by Jacques Delors, and the idea of two intergovernmental Conferences that would set up EMU and modify the political institutions. All of these pushes could be
jeopardized by the pull of the events in the East.

The paradox was stark. For almost 45 years, France had denounced the division of Europe, what French leaders from de Gaulle to Mitterrand had called the "order of Yalta" - where, in French mythology, two external superpowers had partitioned the continent and assured their hegemony over its respective halves. And yet, now that the partitions had fallen, French authorities, elites and publics seemed dazed. Not only had the revolutions in the East been unexpected, but the conditions in which Europe was being reunified were quite different from those French leaders had expected. Nobody - not even de Gaulle, the prophet of nationalism's victory over Communism - had expected the disintegration of Soviet power and such a smashing triumph of the U.S. (and the West) over Communism. Those who, like de Gaulle, had deemed German unification likely in a world that would have overcome the cold war, expected it to result from an orderly process firmly controlled by Germany's neighbors and by the major powers. The working hypotheses or imperatives of French diplomacy, which had been remarkably stable (despite secondary changes) throughout the Fifth Republic, had all turned out to be false or misleading - and this explains why, having apparently obtained what French diplomacy had called and worked for, France woke up with a massive malaise.

There had been three imperatives. The first was to maintain
a will to independence in French diplomacy. But independence and effectiveness had not come together. Effectiveness would have required an international system in which military might mattered more than economic power, and in which France would have been a major military actor. But in a world, and especially a continent, where the superpowers' arsenals and forces neutralized one another, the opportunities for French armored might were few, and the fact that France had put so much of its defense money into the nuclear force de frappe, and comparatively little into conventional forces, resulted in providing the nation with an insurance policy in case of a bipolar collision that fortunately never came, and only very little else. Effectiveness, alternatively, would have required great economic power. But in this realm, even though successive Presidents had declared that their goal was to catch up with the Federal Republic, France had remained far behind on practically every count. From the viewpoint of effectiveness, by the end of the cold war, France's strategy of independence, markedly in the military realm (the exit from NATO, the nuclear force) had not paid off better than the very different strategy of West Germany, or the British one.

A second imperative had been the construction of a West European entity thanks to which many of the national objectives France could no longer reach by itself could be met; as one of the most pro European French foreign ministers put it (sitting next to his Belgian counterpart at an IFRI anniversary
conference), for France "Europe was a means". It was expected that French influence would be, if not hegemonic, at least superior to anyone else's in that entity - not only because of France's geographic position in the Europe first of the Six, later of the Twelve, but because of the handicaps that affected the other "big Three" of the Community. The Federal Republic was burdened by its past, by its location and by its division: all three required singular prudence, and the latter two made it deeply dependent on American protection and diplomacy, something which exasperated French officials, yet served, in fact, their interest in being primi inter (not quite) pares in the E.C. Britain was handicapped by the time it had lost fighting rather than joining European integration, and fighting it for ten more years even after the French had finally allowed London to join. Italy - well, it was Italy, hampered, despite its economic performance, by the weakness of its bureaucracy, the paralysis of its eternal yet fluctuating governmental coalition, and its remarkable absence of diplomatic ambition. It is because of these relative advantages that French Presidents, whether they were distrustful or not of the traps of "supranationality", saw no necessary contradiction between a European entity that fell well short of federalism, and the will to national independence. But there was an implicit precondition: the continuing division of Germany (and Europe)...

A third imperative was the preservation of a sphere of
French influence abroad - in North Africa, in the Middle East, in Black Africa, primarily but not exclusively in areas such as Lebanon or Algeria that had been under French control and with which strong cultural ties had been kept. But this influence had eroded, because of the increasing marginalization of Africa in world politics (as well as increasing doubts in France about the cost of supporting often very unattractive regimes) as well as because of the increasing difficulties encountered by France in the Islamic world. Among Western powers, it was not the one most capable of providing economic assistance or investments, or most useful for diplomatic leverage on Israel; and all Western powers found it hard to cope with nationalism and fundamentalism in this part of the world.

It is therefore not surprising that French foreign policy should have appeared somewhat erratic between the middle of 1989 and the summer of 1991. This was so, first because the French President, at first, seemed disturbed by the change in the distribution of power between France and Germany. He "recovered" after a few months, and decided that the deepening of the EC would be the best way of coping with a united Germany. But tensions between the priority given to the Community of the Twelve and the old French quest for independence have remained, and new strains have appeared, between that priority and the French desire to meet the aspirations of East European countries so as not to leave Germany as the dominant player there.
II. A period of trouble

In the Fall of 1989, observers have noticed the following signs of trouble. First, there was the bewildered and bewildering reaction of Mitterrand to the prospect of rapid German unification. In the beginning, he and his Foreign Minister argued that it was still far in the future, and Mitterrand even paid a visit, late in 1989, to the fatally ill post-Ulbricht Communist regime of the GDR. His concern about the rights of the four victors of World War Two, and his shock when Chancellor Kohl announced - out of the blue - on November 28, 1989, his own plan for a speedy reunification led him to Kiev on December 9, for a joint discussion of the issues with Gorbachev - a visit that could not but evoke the ghosts of Franco-Russian alliances against the German danger, and of German obsessions about encirclement. On TV, after his return, he even talked about the centuries-old role played by Russia and France in preserving stability in Europe. Mitterrand also went to London, to consult with the Iron Lady - who had done so much to thwart Franco-German designs for West European integration, but who was even more, and more openly, upset about a reunified Germany. It was not until April 1990 that Mitterrand realized - after the elections that swept the Communists out of power in the GDR - that German unity was a fait accompli for all practical purposes;
the problem for France was accommodation, not prevention.

Secondly, major uncertainties and hesitations appeared in French diplomacy. While celebrating the end of the cold war and the new foreign and defense policies of Moscow, Mitterrand maintained France's preference for a deterrence strategy that relies on the threat of an early use of nuclear weapons, and dissociated France from NATO's decision in July 1990 to treat these weapons heretofore as "arms of final recourse." But planning for the future of the force de frappe turned somewhat erratic - the President vetoed the construction of mobile ground launchers of strategic nuclear weapons, although not that of short range "prestrategic" systems. In the Gulf war, he tried to be altogether a good ally of the U.S., a rigorous defender of the primary role of the Security Council, and a preserver of France's independent "difference" (through a number of peace initiatives up to January 15, 1991) - an acrobatic exercise that often created more bafflement than admiration abroad. In the Yugoslav tragedy, France switched from a strong pro-Federation stance to a call for a European force of interposition which the sole beneficiaries of the Federal state, the Serbs, denounced as a potential enemy army.

Thirdly, there were sharp contradictions. Thus, in his European policy, the language used about the reform of the E.C.'s Community institutions - especially in Franco-German communiqués
- was often federalist, the French proposals at the Intergovernmental Conference on Political Cooperation were decidedly not so. And there was a similar contradiction between the calls for a reenforcement of the WEU, as the E.C.'s pillar of a European security system, and the preservation of French military independence. In Mitterrand's policy toward the U.S., the unprecedented military cooperation in the Gulf war, with French forces under U.S. command, and French participation in the bombing and invasion of Iraq (despite the Defense Minister's objections to any role for French forces outside of Kuwait) was preceded and quickly followed by the usual French exasperation at and attacks on America's defense and political activities as a self-appointed European power. All these contradictions could be explained - as often in the past; but they added to the sense of unsteadiness.

Fourth, and more serious, were some failures. Like many failures in diplomacy, these may turn out to be temporary or reversible; but as of now, they remain on the books. In the quasi-theological debate between the primacy of NATO and an independent role for the WEU, Mitterrand appears to have, during the Winter of 1990-91, rejected opportunities for a compromise. He thus allowed the U.S. to rally both England and Germany behind the reform of the force structure of NATO which was endorsed by the NATO allies in June 1991. French participation in the Gulf war was justified by Mitterrand both in moral-legal terms, and in
power-political ones: France had to fight so as to be a party, after the war, in all the coming settlements (an argument used by de Gaulle, Mitterrand’s lifelong Nemesis and model, in 1944-45). But if France went into battle in order to make its weight felt in peace-making, it was conspicuously ignored after the war ended. A third fiasco was Mitterrand’s project of a Confederation, his attempt to square the circle of "deepening" vs. "opening", and to persuade the East Europeans to accept a half-way house for many years to come. Both in this fiasco (at a meeting in Prague in June 1991) and in the NATO vs. WEU affair a few months earlier, failure resulted in part from an unwillingness to listen to the grievances or desires of others.

These four signs of confusion are not difficult to explain. Partly, they express the felt need to navigate ("biaiser") among options none of which is very satisfactory, and therefore to adopt some elements of each - thus, inevitably, with the risk of tensions, contradictions, setbacks. A policy of strict independence *touz azimuts* is clearly not tenable: not even de Gaulle, the champion of common policies for the EEC, had believed it possible. In the world of 1990-91, independence for France could not but license full independence for Germany... A policy of European Federalism means trouble for France’s residues of independence in defense and abroad, and a risk of German predominance in the Federation. A policy of enlargement, toward a "grande Europe", risked jeopardizing years of efforts toward
"deepening", turning the enlarged Community into a mere free trade area (something France had always resisted, and Britain always desired) and into an amorphous entity where French influence might be irreparably diluted.

Another part of the explanation lies in French foreign policy-making. There is no need for complex theories of decision, for Allison's models II and III here. French foreign and defense policy is the President's domain. It was so - despite the Prime Minister's attempts at power-sharing - even during the two years of "cohabitation" between a Socialist President and a neo-Gaullist Premier. It was a fortiori more so in 1988-91, when Mitterrand, assured of a majority in the National Assembly (where the Socialists, who are just short of it, can find the handful of votes necessary to survive motions of no-confidence) chose Prime Ministers who understood that the President's domain was untouchable. Parties may offer dissents, nationalist Socialists (like the ex-Defense Minister Chevènement) or neo-Gaullists may demand a different kind of Europe, Centrists may plead for tighter federal integration: it does not matter much, except insofar as Mitterrand likes to appear, from time to time, as if he had heard this or that domestic claim. The parliamentary debate, in June 1991, on the ratification of the Schengen agreements that abolish border controls among its six members ended in a lopsided vote for the government: 495 against 61 (including the 26 Communists) in the National Assembly; and
the Constitutional Council later declared that the treaty did not clash with the French constitution because it entails no transfer of sovereignty. It is impossible to understand the course of French foreign policy if one does not focus on the interplay between two factors: the personality of the President, and what could be called the French situation. For the President, who enjoys unshared power, does not have unlimited power at all.

What is the French situation? It is, in part, the product of the structure of the international, and especially the European, system - in the Waltzian meaning of the term structure, or in the Waltzian conception. France’s concern for the balance of power in a continent dominated by the superpowers, or for the reduction of the (very different kinds of) threats represented by these, certainly dictated the mix of search for independence and reliance on institutions capable of providing security from the Soviet threat, characteristic of both the 4th and the 5th Republics. After the failure of the repressive policy of 1945-49, which nobody else supported, the permanent worry about German power led to the highly original strategy of West European integration which I have elsewhere described as balancing through bandwagoning. Another part of the situation was the legacy of the past - a heavy baggage in the French case. Bitter memories of the 1930s, when France behaved as a dependent of Britain, exacerbated the desire for independence, and the humiliations of World War Two and of forced decolonization exacerbated the desire
for activism, for a sphere of influence, as well as resentment aimed at the superpowers.

It wasn’t only the weight of past disasters; it was also that of past choices. The rails that de Gaulle had put down, and on which he placed and drove the train of French policy, have proved extraordinarily durable; the policy mix he devised seemed - because of its ambiguities, which left much room for tactical maneuver - to serve most French interests well, and to preserve what was so dear to so many of the French: French distinctiveness. These ambiguities and that flexibility had allowed for a vague yet potent national consensus - a benefit that had eluded the 4th Republic. De Gaulle’s successors could depart from Gaullist orthodoxy in minor ways - Pompidou could lift the General’s veto on Britain, Giscard agree to a popular election for the European Parliament, Mitterrand embrace qualified majority voting in the Single Act. But the central tenets stood, both because they seemed apt to the situation of France in the cold war, and because they were supported by the public. Now, their adequacy to the new world was questionable, but the consensus was still there - and no President could, by breaking it, undermine his own position or effectiveness, unless he was able to build a new one around a new set of tenets.

Mitterrand, however, was not the man for such a task: to revert to my earlier metaphor, he was better at driving on old
tracks, or at moving them just a shade, than at setting down new ones in new directions. He had, in his slow march to the Presidency, shifted from a left-wing utopia to an unacknowledged acceptance of Gaullism (in foreign as well as in constitutional affairs). He is better at proceeding by small touches, oblique statements, contradictory advances and retreats, than at the bold strokes and grand designs of his august predecessor. Foreign policy had not been his priority before his election in 1981 and in 1981-83. It became his preferred field of action after the fiasco of his Socialist economic program, when the preservation and development of the West European Community served both as a rationale for domestic policy retreat, and as the domain in which he could now make his mark. The earthquake of 1989-90 upset his expectations and calculations; he had to improvise, and it showed. When one writes about a certain marginalization of France in the new European order, one refers not only to the new situation - in which France, having satisfied old anti-Yalta desires, discovered that the hated status quo ante 1989 had been highly advantageous. One refers also to the steps and missteps of a President who simply did not have the General’s ability to make the best of a bad deal, to play even poor cards with a bravado that gave the French the illusion of being the chief actors in the play, and made France’s partners wonder, more or less angrily, whether that supposedly fading ex-great power didn’t exert, if only by obstruction, far more influence than its resources should have allowed. De Gaulle’s deliberate
ambiguities gave France some freedom of maneuver. Mitterrand's ambiguities appeared to be the products of embarrassment, and to restrict this freedom.

III. Integration and Independence

It has been said, by Clausewitz and Aron among others, that the state can be analyzed as a rational intelligence. What follows is an attempt - ex post - to uncover the threads and calculations of a policy whose author has rarely seen fit to present it as a whole.

Since the end of 1989, Mitterrand's policy appears to have been dominated by two concerns. The first is the "German question", acutely revived. A unified Germany, even if its energies and resources were going to be temporarily absorbed by the rehabilitation of the former GDR, broke by its very existence the "balance of imbalances" that had existed among the big three (or four) of Western Europe. The reunification of the continent put Germany, not France, at the center. This was obvious. But the anxieties about Germany were contradictory.

One, French elites worried that a united Germany might embrace the heady virtues of independence (or renationali-
zation") and want to remove or reduce the restraints which the
institutions and rules of the EC had put on Germany's "operational sovereignty" (de Gaulle, after all, had tried to do just this between 1958 and 1966). The nightmare of an unfettered Germany rediscovering Bismarck's Schaukelpolitik, moving away from the West and toward the East, agitated French conversations (as well as Kissinger's columns) throughout the first half of 1990. French policy, in those months, aimed at "smoking out" Bonn, at probing and prodding in order to find out whether the constraints of NATO and, above all, of the EC, were still acceptable to the Federal Republic, and indeed whether Chancellor Kohl was willing to tighten the bonds to the Community and to dismiss any deal that would have loosened the Federal Republic's ties to NATO in exchange for a guaranteed Soviet exit from the GDR and formal Soviet acceptance of German unity. The Franco-German joint message of April 19, 1990, asking the members of the EC to hasten work on the IGC for monetary union and to begin serious work on the IGC for political union, provided partial reassurance.

The negotiation between Kohl - backed by Bush - and Gorbachev, on the issue of Germany's right to stay in NATO, evoked more mixed feelings in France: the outcome was greeted with relief - but the way in which Kohl dealt directly with Moscow, and treated German unification as a matter for Germans alone, whatever rights Britain and France might have still had in Berlin, worried Paris, both because it was so unilateral, and
because it seemed to make of Bonn the privileged partner, and provider, of Moscow. The fear of giving Germany a cause, or pretext, for "renationalization" explains the French decision, announced in the summer of 1990, to withdraw France's troops from German soil - thus depriving Bonn of any reason for asking that they be removed. But this was something Bonn had no intention of doing. The French misstep was in turn misinterpreted in Germany as evidence of France's inveterate nationalism and uncooperativeness in matters of defense.

Two - these relatively good German dispositions fed, however, another fear: that the new Germany might dominate the institutions aimed at containing it. The Federal Republic would have even more economic and financial power in the Community (after the absorption of the GDR); and in a NATO from which American forces and weapons might be partly removed, German influence might rise, even if the limits placed on German forces by agreement with the Soviets were respected. As for the CSCE, which was to be given new importance and functions in the Paris meeting of November 1990, the French had appreciated its usefulness before the earthquake of 1989 because (unlike the MBFR talks) it was not just a confrontation of the two military blocs, and because its existence and the principles of Helsinki gave hope to dissidents in the East. But now France became somewhat apprehensive: this large and amorphous organization simply didn't have the potential for containing Germany that still existed in
NATO and would persist in a "deepening" Community. Genscher’s enthusiasm for the CSCE, and its very composition, suggested that Germany might want to serve as a kind of go-between for the superpowers in European affairs; moreover, the weakness of the CSCE’s powers seemed to explain why German "renationalizers" might prefer it to other forums. There was little France could do, in the short run, about NATO and the CSCE. But in the long run, France could try to prod the Federal Republic away from a NATO Germany might dominate, toward a European security system in which France and Britain would prevent any such outcome; and in the short or middle run, France could press for the kind of European Monetary Union in which the Central Bank would be under joint management by the members, rather than having an EMS dominated by the Bundesbank, and therefore by purely German domestic financial considerations and interests: after all, why should French interest rates be determined by the Bundesbank?

Three, the Gulf crisis made the French acutely aware of a contradiction between their preferred strategy for the containment of German power - the reenforcement and extension of scope of the EC - and France’s push for an active diplomatic role for the EC. Such a role, to be sure, was desired in part as a way of preventing German independent activism in Eastern Europe; but Germany’s unwillingness to play any role in extra-European crises that could entail the sending of forces abroad, even under a UN flag, risked paralyzing the delicate machinery of European
foreign policy cooperation. Germany’s lack of enthusiasm for a Weltpolitik reassured the first of France’s anxieties about its neighbor, but was lamented insofar as it risked anemiating the European "container" of Germany in the crucial domain of "out of area" security and diplomacy. A year later, during the Yugoslav crisis, Genscher’s initial statements in favor of Slovenia and Croatia revived French fears of German uncontrolled initiatives, but when Germany temporarily abandoned both such attempts and the effort to have the CSCE play a major role in the drama, and agreed to have it played by the EC, Franco-German (and Franco-British) divergences about the policies the EC ought to follow made the Community look even more impotent than the situation on the ground obliged it to be. France was reluctant but Germany was eager to acknowledge the break-up of Yugoslavia; France proposed to send a European force but Britain opposed the idea as long as no cease-fire lasted more than a few hours.

Against such Community paralysis, there was only one recourse: French independent action. Precisely, the second major concern of French policy was the preservation of a margin of independence. I have explained why this has not made for maximum effectiveness. But the quest was intensified, rather than reduced; and this was caused by the change in the world balance of power. Yesterday, independence and activism were presented as necessary to save a margin of maneuver between, and to weaken the grip of, the "two hegemonies". Now, they were justified as
indispensable to safeguard French interests in a "unipolar" world dominated by the winner of the cold war. Some day, a united Europe might inherit and carry out this concern for autonomy and play the role, evoked by Foreign Minister Dumas at a Socialist meeting, of "balancer" of U.S. might; but that was in the future; today, it was up to France.

This concern became especially visible in two cases. One was the Gulf crisis. France (like Britain) wanted to play a role, as an ex-Middle Eastern power with memories and interests; but (unlike Britain), it did not want to play this role as a NATO member, and to grant to NATO what Paris had consistently refused to accept from Washington: the idea that NATO could legitimately intervene "out of area". The solution was to demand that every move toward war be approved by the Security Council: the UN appeared as a kind of welcome substitute for NATO. In reality the Security Council turned out to be as dominated by the U.S. as NATO! But it is an intergovernmental, not an "integrated" organization, and thus the appearance of French independence was preserved. During the period of the Gulf war, Mitterrand, for once prodigal in explaining French policy, emphasized France's world role, but rarely mentioned Europe.

The other case is the issue of nuclear reductions, which — after START and the unilateral cuts announced by Washington and Moscow — might affect the independent forces of third parties.
Here, Paris wanted neither superpower deals at its expense, nor too much of a role for a UN that had traditionally been antinuclear; Mitterrand proposed talks by four of the Security Council’s permanent members: those with nuclear forces in Europe (another way of leaving Germany out).

It is the difficult combination of anxiety about Germany and worry about French independence which explains the subtleties and contradictions of France’s European policy. The will to harness Germany and to tie it as tightly as possible to France so as to give to a now relatively weaker France a hold on its united neighbor explains the strong emphasis on "deepening" characteristic of current French diplomacy and the rejection by the French President of the suggestion, made by some leaders of the RPR (neo-Gaullist) party and by members of the nationalist (Chevènement) wing of his own Socialist party, that the new situation in Europe required a looser Confederation of states that would include Eastern Europe, so as not to leave those countries isolated and as not to tie France to a Community Germany might dominate. The compromise that was worked out, during the Dutch Presidency, about EMU, is above all a compromise between French insistence on a full and genuine monetary union, with a central bank and a single currency, and German insistence on a prior rapprochement of economic policies, on an independent Bank, and on some institutional reform. The Kohl-Mitterrand letters of December 6, 1990 and October 14, 1991, reflect the
French objective of extending the functions of the Community, especially in foreign affairs and in security policy.

The old French concern for a "European Europe", i.e. a Europe that would not be dominated by the U.S. accounts not only for France's intransigent stance over agriculture (and Airbus) at the GATT meetings at the end of 1990 and throughout 1991, but also for France's refusal to make of the WEU a "link" between the EC and NATO, or a subordinate of NATO, as in the British proposals. France wants an "organic link" between WEU and the EC (a notion endorsed by Kohl in the joint letter of October 14, 1991), and a "European force" of WEU members that would somehow be distinct from NATO's forces, and could be used "out of area" (i.e. outside Europe or in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) without NATO's consent, beyond NATO's mandate. The British plan that prevailed within NATO last June increased the role of the Europeans (minus France) within NATO, especially through the creation of a Rapid Reaction Force of Europeans, integrated in NATO's Command Structure. France's plan would strengthen ties between Germany and France in the military realm, and thus alleviate two very different fears: that within the post-cold war NATO Germany might become more autonomous (or predominant), and that Germany would put security and defense at the bottom of its list of priorities and become entirely self-absorbed.

Whether Germany's apparent shift, between the NATO Council
meeting in Copenhagen in June 1991 and the Kohl-Mitterrand letter of October 14, reflects a genuine evolution, or a tactical adjustment facilitated by French acceptance, in the letter, of language favorable to the "reenforcement of the Atlantic Alliance" remains unclear. What is clear is that each of the two partners is trying to pull the other. Bonn is trying to push France a little closer to NATO, and France is trying to move Germany closer to the French view about a European autonomous defense system. What has kept Germany from "choosing" the WEU-EC way over NATO's is not only the stabilizing role played by NATO in Europe (and acknowledged by the East European governments which have been eager to cooperate with, and in some cases even to join, NATO, an organization in which Germany is a major force), but also France's own reluctance to abandon its cherished military autonomy, conventional as well as nuclear. The French, in return, explain that they cannot give it up as long as this would merely reenforce America's grip on European security, as long as France's main partners: Britain and Germany remain satisfied with American predominance in this area. This dialogue of the deaf has been going on ad infinitum et nauseam. The compromise formula adopted, about WEU, at Maastricht, remains profoundly ambiguous.

Worry about Germany explains also a great deal of France's policy about Eastern Europe. I have already referred to the Yugoslav crisis and to France's efforts to make it an EC affair,
rather than having Germany or the CSCE play major roles. But it appears that Mitterrand’s opposition to any quick enlargement of the Community, and even to a statement of policy that would guarantee the entry of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary into the EC by a certain date or if specific conditions are met is caused by the obsession with German power. A "deepened" (but not enlarged) EC could take the initiative of aid to the East away from German industry and German public assistance. In this view, an enlarged Community, with new members from Northern and Eastern Europe, would have its center of gravity in Germany, and strengthen the tendency in the Eastern countries to see in the Federal Republic both an economic model and the political model of a successful transition from totalitarianism to democracy. Here we find again the fear of German domination. Such a Community would be so heterogeneous as to be little more than a free trade area - we now find the fear of an unfettered Germany. Whether the Federal Republic’s influence, East of its borders, isn’t actually greater when the three ex-Communist candidates for membership are left out, face to face with German economic power and political influence, rather than brought in so as to be with countries just as unenthusiastic about German predominance as they are, has not really been openly debated.

Mitterrand’s attempts at squaring the circle - at showing French and West European concern for the fates of the East Europeans without however fully opening the EC’s doors - have
been numerous. He got his partners to establish, in London, the BERD, an initiative of his adviser Jacques Attali, and to accept Attali as its head: a Franco-British deal that seemed to move at least part of the effort to help the East away from Bonn. He accepted the negotiation of a "European economic space" with EFTA and of association agreements with the three ex-Communist states. He proposed a "Confederation" that would have included the USSR (but not the US and Canada) and dealt with such issues as energy, transportation systems, the environment, the free circulation of people, and culture. But none of this has really been enough to stop Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary from knocking at the door, or many voices in Britain and Germany from asking that it be quickly opened. The BERD’s means are limited. The association agreements hit a French snag over imports of meat from the East - a small issue, but of symbolic import - before a final compromise was reached, but they are a poor substitute for membership.

As for the Confederation, Mitterrand himself undercut it by objecting to America’s presence, and by declaring shortly before flying to Prague (only for the final session - i.e. his own speech - of a three-day meeting he had more or less imposed on Havel) that it would take dozens of years before the East European states could become members of the EC. Their viewpoint was perfectly expressed by Havel in his opening speech: nothing without the US (especially if it is with the USSR; but then if
it's both, it's the CSCE!); technical issues can be dealt with by existing organizations (such as the Council of Europe, or the Economic Commission for Europe of the UN, etc.); and no half-way house. The fact that the official part of the French delegation failed to get Havel's rather blunt point, and that it did not want to acknowledge the evident opposition of the great majority of the members of the Political Committee of the conference to the French plan, revealed a disturbing degree of high-handedness and insensitivity. France has signed treaties of cooperation with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and these treaties contain a promise to support the eventual entry of these countries into the EC. But there has been little French private investment in them, and public efforts have tended to concentrate on Romania, because of old cultural ties; a treaty of cooperation with Romania (but without any mention of the EC) was signed in November 1991, despite Romania's shaky democratic credentials.

Where the concern for French independence and the desire to tighten the knots on Germany evidently clash, is in French policy on institutional reform of the EC. The Kohl-Mitterrand letter of December 6, 1990, which dealt with the Community's "democratic legitimacy", clearly indicated that diplomacy and security would remain matters to be decided by unanimity; it also mentioned the possibility of qualified majority rule for enforcement measures, but France has shown little enthusiasm for this. France's preference for the intergovernmental method characteristic of the
Fouchet plan of 1961-62 means accepting the risk of a more assertive and unconstrained Germany in this realm. Paradoxically, in the Yugoslav crisis, this method allowed Germany both to bludgeon its partners into endorsing its position in order to avert an ugly split, and to jump the gun on them by recognizing Slovenia and Croatia before anyone else, despite the common agreement.

France hinted at a move toward a power of "co-decision" for the European Parliament, but French proposals have been distrustful of the Parliament, and reluctant to grant a significant role to the Commission in the realms of defense and diplomacy. Maastricht settled for a point close to the French position. In thus braking the strengthening of the more "supranational" among the Community's political institutions, France has been — for once — Britain's ally; Britain's argument is the "sovereignty" of the British Parliament; Mitterrand's concern is both for protecting French autonomy in essential matters, and for protecting his own power: in this affair, Delors has been closer to the German position than to the French one. There is a clear contradiction between the stand of the French President, and his willingness to assert, in the draft of the new treaty on political union, that the Union has a "federal calling" — a sentence that London rejected and that ended up on the cutting floor. The fact that Germany will soon have more representatives than Britain or France in the European Parliament
does not, of course, do much to increase Mitterrand's enthusiasm for this body: here, anxiety about German influence supersedes the fear of an unfettered Germany...

IV. The role of international institutions

This account has been written pretty much in "realist" terms (if we must talk of such things), i.e. in terms of a national strategy by a unified actor who defines interests in terms of power, and whose goals and preferences come from his position in the structure, from past experiences and past choices. What about the role of international institutions in this story? Three points need to be made about their importance.

First, as I have tried to show, they matter greatly to France as precious instruments, as often indispensable means toward goals, as necessary fields of action. France is engaged in complex games with the U.S., the Soviets and now the Russians (whom Mitterrand is determined not to leave in too much of a tête-à-tête with Germany), the British, the Germans, and many others. International organizations are the arenas in which these games are usually played, because they carry out the varied functions of containment, reassurance, assistance and attraction France wants them to perform. The Confederation was supposed to serve as a reassurance to those excluded from the EC; the EC and
the BERD, as assistance agencies while these countries wait; the EC, the most important of all in French strategy, as a tamer of German power, a pole of resistance to American economic pressures, and a magnet for Eastern Europe. Indeed, the EC has become the instrument France needs to exert influence in the directions Paris has set, whenever France needs the support of others in order to be able to move in those directions. The consent of Germany and Britain is necessary to build a European defense system that will remove the continent from under American tutelage, hence French emphasis on the WEU and on making of the latter a branch of the EC. In the Balkans, where the French want both to regain influence and to contain Germany, Mitterrand has pushed for the involvement of the EC in the Yugoslav conflict, even though, on balance, there was little the EC could gain from plunging into the maelstrom, and a strong probability that even a less divided Community would find the Serbs intractable and the war hard to stop.

Secondly, much of French diplomacy focuses, as a consequence, on two issues: on choosing among the existing international and regional institutions in a given field the one most likely to serve French purposes, and on the internal politics of the preferred organizations. For instance, concerning the first issue, Mitterrand has resisted the tendency of the G7 to deal not only with economic but also with security issues; he has resisted any extension of NATO's functions,
especially toward the East; he has opted for the WEU over NATO, and preferred to have the EC and the UN Security Council deal with Yugoslavia, rather than the CSCE or NATO; he has not had much use for the CSCE, and clearly put the development of the EC as a "hegemonic bloc" (through the creation of the European economic space and through a network of association agreements) far ahead of GATT. He obtained Bush’s consent to entrusting the Community and the BERD, rather than "Americanized" institutions like NATO and the World Bank or largely non-European ones like OECD, with economic help to Eastern Europe.

As for the internal politics of international institutions, French strategy is most visible in the one that matters most: the EC. It aims at maximizing the influence of France in it, and at minimizing the risk of France being controlled by it. Delors will not forever be head of the Commission - it will soon be Germany’s turn; in the Council, French diplomacy, and, in the galaxy of Committees around the Council, French bureaucracy have often exerted leadership: French proposals on the institutions of the future Union reflect these facts. French views on the EMU follow from this consideration - here, the purpose is to minimize Bundesbank domination and to have a say in the future Central Bank’s decisions. Since France has little chance of weighing much in NATO, even if it returned to it (and in no case would Paris assign its nuclear forces to it), French policy has been to minimize NATO’s grip on French defense, by staying out and by
refusing any subordination of the WEU to NATO. In the UN, the French have been understandably cool to the suggestion that France and Britain should transfer their permanent seats to the EC, or that Germany join, along with Japan, the original Big Five.

My first two points view the institutions as instruments of policy - another "realist" perspective. But my third point is "neo-institutionalist" (query: why neo?). Indispensable as arenas and tools, the institutions also affect the way in which the French now conceive of their objectives. These are still, in large part, national; but they tend increasingly to be defined in ways that require external participation, support or consent, and therefore accommodation. For a Colbertiste bureaucracy and a business community largely dependent on crutches provided by the state, to endorse the notion of a single deregulated economic market was a real revolution. French monetary policy, applauded by OECD, clearly puts the EMS (ever since 1983) and now the EMU above the interests and clamors of those who, in France, denounce anti-inflationary fiscal rigor as a brake on industrial growth, employment and social policy. The Schengen agreement, opposed in Parliament by the last defenders of an intransigent conception of sovereignty, was declared by the Constitutional Council not to be unconstitutional, because it does not "transfer" sovereignty to a non-French institution; but it certainly entails a "pooling" of national powers in vital matters such as border controls. The
Franco-German list of new areas that the Political Union should cover (environment, health, energy, technology, immigration, etc...) shows that this concept of pooled sovereignty prevails increasingly over older notions of independence. The still fragile signs of evolution in French agricultural policy - a somewhat diminished unwillingness to accept a Community plan that would drastically revise the CAP and amount to an incomes policy for farmers instead of a subsidies policy at the consumers' expense - are significant: here, the long-term interest of France coincides with the preferences of most of France's partners - even Germany has now seen the light - as against the short-term demands of politically potent French peasants.

It is in diplomatic and national security affairs that the clash between the old and the new way of defining the national interest still goes on most vigorously, as we have seen. But even there, an evolution has begun. During the Gulf crisis, the old way prevailed: France acted as an independent ex-great power, but all the alternatives were bad: subordination to a NATO extended "out of area" (an old French taboo) or EC paralysis. The French managed to conciliate their own engagement with a management role entrusted to the WEU, which coordinated the Europeans' sanctions. In the Yugoslav crisis, French temptations of national diplomatic activism were subordinated to EC moves (and the EC ministers did send the head of France's Constitutional Council, Mitterrand's friend Badinter, on an
arbitral mission). The French insistence on making of the WEU the center of a European security system (and Mitterrand’s new willingness, after last winter’s fiasco, to find a formula acceptable to Britain - and to the US - in order to rescue the coming EC summit at Maastricht from deadlock) cannot but gradually erode the old Shibboleth of national military autonomy.

The call for an expansion of the Franco-German brigade, and for other members of the WEU to join in a "corps" that could become "the model of a tighter military cooperation among them" - a call Mitterrand inserted into the Franco-German initiative of October 14, 1991 - is a small first step in this direction. In January 1992, a second step was taken, with his call for a "reflection" on a common European nuclear doctrine.

V. Past and future

The French assertion of independence, which has proved so irritating to France’s neighbors and partners, has had two functions they rarely understood. One was to exorcise a troubled past (this was de Gaulle’s great achievement). The other was to resist external domination, and particularly that of the superpower whose protection was needed - the US - at a time when the idea of a "European Europe" able and willing to resist American pressures was merely a hope and a distant objective. Today, the first function is probably "played out". As for
resistance to the US, as America's role as a tutor of Europe shrinks, as its weight in NATO decreases, as its priorities shift to its own internal problems, this function too will dwindle. This does not mean that the French desire for distinctiveness will disappear quickly. America's resources for external action still exceed those of all other powers; the American role in Europe, America's noisy pride in being number one, and habit of treating partners as junior associates, may remain sufficiently in evidence to arouse the French instinct of resistance.

Moreover, current fears about French national identity focus not only on what Giscard shamelessly called an "invasion" of immigrants, but also on a European Community which - as in a recent Commission decision preventing a Franco-Italian conglomerate from acquiring a British firm - often decides against French interests, which moves toward a concept of European citizenship that goes against the Jacobin strain (and the Constitution of the 5th Republic) by dissociating citizenship from nationality, and whose institutional system is far closer to the German Federal model than to the French unitary one. Above all, no other policy than the current uneasy mix of "Europeanism" and independence seems able to obtain a broad popular consensus - and we all know that even obsolete policies and institutions hang on when no replacement is in sight.

However, in the long run, the changes in France's outlook
are likely to continue, unless the increasingly complex Community fails in coping with its new functions and its probable enlargement, and unless Germany behaves tactlessly within the Community and (or) "renationalizes" its policy. In the past, the EC had provided a field and a shelter for a West German state that was only half a nation. In the new EC of 1992, Germany is, again, a national state. If the French were faced, in the Community, with the paradox of a Germany that begins to behave like one (and no longer like a "post-national" state that pools its sovereignty with its partners and transfers some of it to the common institutions while France's traditional independence fades away), there could be a strong nationalist reaction. However, even now, the foreign "invasion" can be checked only by a common or coordinated European policy, and a "purely French" national identity today means an isolated and xenophobic France. A "return to the past", rashly forecast by some neo-realists, would, on balance, be more advantageous to an unfettered Germany than to France. It is through international institutions - so often treated with contempt or little studied in France - that France can best hope to exert political influence, to promote its economic interests, and to exploit its one military asset, a nuclear force that could serve European deterrent purposes. The malaise about identity results more from domestic politics, and from Mitterrand's failure to articulate clearly enough the new conditions of French action abroad and the new definition of the national interest. Over time, the French search for
distinctiveness and autonomy may transfer its focus from France to a Europe in which France will continue to play an important role. Thus, at last, France would become an "ordinary" European nation, encased in a highly original Community. An unromantic prospect, but a likely fate.

Notes

1. See my contribution "Balance, Concert, Anarchy or none of the above" in Gregory Treverton (ed.), The Shape of the New Europe (Council on Foreign Relations), 1992, pp. 194-220.


3. See Anne-Marie Le Gloannec, "Le sens de la puissance allemande", in ... 

4. I happened to be the rapporteur of this Committee, which attracted a large number of political personalities and of representatives of European and international institutions. In his final speech, the French President, who had only then been informed of his plan's fate, beat an elegant retreat.

5. Ratification of the Maastricht treaties might prove more difficult than that of the Schengen accords. The French Constitution states that treaties that contradict it cannot be ratified until it has been revised. The provisions on a European citizenship require such a revision, and the neo-Gaullists have warned that they objected to allowing non-French citizens to run for office. If Parliament doesn't provide the government with the required qualified majority, the constitutional reform may have to be done through referendum. Elements of the opposition also assert that the treaty on EMU, by transferring monetary power to a European Central Bank, clashes with the Constitution.
