

CHIRAC'S GAULLISM - WHY FRANCE HAS BECOME THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE EFFORT TO BUILD AN AUTONOMOUS EUROPEAN DEFENCE

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ABSTRACT. *The author analyses Chirac's European defence policy and how it fits into the Gaullist tradition. He starts by sketching the original Gaullism of General De Gaulle which is based on four pillars: a national industrial policy, an independent foreign policy, the possession of a French nuclear deterrent and the ambition to build an independent European defence. His efforts in the last realm, however, are blocked by the US and its European NATO allies. In the Non-Gaullist Interregnum between 1974-1995 President Giscard d'Estaing jeopardised the Gaullist legacy, but President François Mitterrand became - against all expectations - a 'Socialist Gaullist' and it was he who realised one of De Gaulle's objectives by creating the Eurocorps. His successor, Jacques Chirac has conducted a highly volatile European policy. The author distinguishes no less than six different and often contradictory phases in Chirac's European defence policy. Despite the failures, some successes, however, have been booked, especially after the Saint-Malo Summit with Tony Blair. But much will depend in the coming years on how Chirac will succeed his balancing act between the EU-25, the French-German tandem and the 'Big Three'.*

Introduction

During the stand-off on Iraq between France and the United States many commentators have drawn a parallel between President Chirac and his predecessor General De Gaulle. As De Gaulle before him, Jacques Chirac would have been driven by hidden anti-American feelings, which would have induced him to conduct an anti-US foreign policy. But was De Gaulle anti-American? De Gaulle's son, admiral Philippe De Gaulle, wrote in a recent book on his father:

„Why have they wanted him to be anti-American? He often said: 'Does it mean not to like the Americans when one thinks that they don't have to decide for France? Does it mean to dislike them when one says that what they decide without us is not always good for France?'“ (1)

In the same way, Chirac wrote, twenty-five years ago, that 'our alliance with the United States' was not only 'fundamental', but also 'beyond all criticism'. „But the alliance,“ he continued, „is one thing, subordination is another. The United States tends to exercise a hegemonic power (...). It is not a question of attacking them, but only of confronting them, if necessary, with a friendly and firm refusal.“ (2)

Jacques Chirac considers himself to be the contemporary heir of the Gaullist legacy. To understand Chirac's policies one should, therefore, go back to De Gaulle and have a closer look at the basic principles of his doctrine. What are these principles and how did they influence De Gaulle's defence and foreign policy? And how did they influence non-Gaullist presidents as Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and

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François Mitterrand? Finally, we will turn to Chirac and analyse the six different phases of his security and defence policy. Chirac is known to be a volatile, impulsive and populist politician. There are big differences of temperament and character between him and the General. In how far can he be considered a genuine Gaullist?

I. What is Gaullism?

Let us start with the first question. What exactly is Gaullism? Gaullism has many aspects, but there is one basic aspect without which Gaullism loses its sense. This basic aspect is a *deep belief in a specific historical role of France*.

France is not just a country, but it stands out among the other sovereign nations. This specific role of France is not so much due to the fact that it is one of the oldest independent nation-states in the world, nor that it is an established democracy, or that it is one of the five or six richest industrial countries in the world - although all these factors certainly help. Its unique position is especially due to the fact that France *is a carrier of universal values*. France is a country with a mission. It has a historical role, a *destin* (destiny), which is to share its values with other peoples and nations. The slogans of the French Revolutions: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* were not only meant for French citizens, they were meant for all people, citizens of Europe and beyond. This idea of a French mission is a core belief in Gaullism. We find it also back in Chirac's writings, when he speaks of '*la mission*' and '*la grandeur*' of the French people and of France's 'eternal need of universality' (3)

In order to play this universal role France needed, according to De Gaulle, three things:

- a strong, unified executive
- to be fully sovereign
- to create new vehicles of power in the post-colonial era

The Fourth Republic with its weak, 'Italian-style' coalition governments was in De Gaulle's eyes totally inappropriate for the leading role France had to play in the world. For this reason, immediately after his comeback in 1958, he introduced a new constitution that gave supreme powers to a directly elected President. He also stressed France's sovereignty through an independent foreign policy vis-à-vis the two superpowers, and immediately started to create new vehicles of power. In a period in which France had just lost Algeria after a bloody colonial war, this was of extreme importance.

Building New Vehicles of Power

What were the new vehicles of power, as conceived by De Gaulle? These were fourfold:

- an independent 'national' industrial policy
- an independent foreign policy
- an independent national nuclear deterrent: *the force de frappe*
- Europe

A National Industrial Policy

After a more liberal beginning, a more Colbertist, protectionist national industrial policy was developed in the second half of De Gaulle's Presidency, when, after the takeover of Simca by Chrysler, it became clear that France's industry could become an easy prey for investors from the United States. In 1967 De Gaulle's government, led by Prime Minister Georges Pompidou, introduced investment controls that gave

the Ministry of Economy and Finance two months to forbid foreign investments. (4)

The Philosophical Foundations of De Gaulle's Foreign Policy

De Gaulle's second vehicle of power was an independent foreign policy. But to understand the role which De Gaulle attributed to foreign policy as an instrument of national power, we first need to look at the philosophical foundations of his worldview. These foundations were fourfold:

- the international actors are the nation-states
- the nation-states are led by self-interest and are in permanent competition for power
- a sceptical view of the role of international law and international organizations. International organizations - the UN included - are artificial 'constructs'
- nation-states act on the basis of geopolitical interests which are permanent and are not affected by changing ideologies. Ideologies are only temporary epiphenomena.

De Gaulle's worldview was deeply rooted in an almost Hobbesian, geopolitical *realism*. It is not difficult to recognise similarities with the thinking of Henry Kissinger. With him De Gaulle shared not only a distrust of idealist world visions, but also a deep *historical* understanding of the political realities of his time. The only viable actors in the international arena were for him the nation-states. The UN, therefore, was a mere 'construct', as were ideologically defined states, such as the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union. Behind the temporary and

ephemeral communist ideology of these states loomed the real actors: 'eternal' Russia and 'eternal' Germany. De Gaulle died in 1970. It took only twenty years until history seemed to confirm his worldview. Communism was dead, as were the GDR and the Soviet Union, but 'eternal' Germany - stronger after reunification - and 'eternal' Russia - weakened after the disintegration of the Soviet empire - were still on the world stage.

The only illogical element in his 'Kissingerian' realist world view is the special role he assigned to France, assigning it the role of an unselfish and idealist Jeanne d'Arc in a bad, Hobbesian world that was led by self-interest. This, of course, is the most important flaw of De Gaulle's Gaullism and of Gaullism in general.

De Gaulle's Foreign Policy in Practice

In conducting his foreign policy De Gaulle was led by two basic principles:

- *the complete independence* of French foreign policy vis-à-vis the two superpowers
- French foreign policy had a *global* reach

The independence of the French position was emphasised by De Gaulle in 1966 when he left the military organisation of NATO and when in September of the same year he gave his famous Phnom Penh speech, in which he spoke out in favour of an independent and neutral Vietnam, implicitly criticising the US military intervention in this country. He provoked the Anglo-Saxon world even further, and without doubt unnecessarily, by his 'Vive le Québec Libre' speech when he visited Canada in 1967.

But his critical stance was double-edged: visiting Poland in 1967 and Romania in 1968, he incited the leaders of both countries - at that time the most independent countries in the Soviet bloc - to take an even more independent position vis-à-vis *their* hegemon, the Soviet Union.

The global reach of French foreign policy was clearly expressed by De Gaulle, when he, against the will of the US, recognised Communist China in 1964, and when he visited Mexico and ten other Latin American countries in the same year, making a diplomatic *percée* in what the US considered as its exclusive backyard. The recognition of France as a global power was (not without afterthoughts) given by the Soviet Union during De Gaulle's official visit to Moscow in June 1966, as a result of which a direct *hot line* was installed between the Kremlin and the Elysée - a privilege De Gaulle shared only with the President of the United States.

The Force de Frappe

De Gaulle knew, however, that an independent French foreign policy was not enough. In a Hobbesian world this policy could easily become void and without substance if it was not based on real power. And real power meant nuclear power. The decision to build a French nuclear force was already taken by De Gaulle's predecessors of the Fourth Republic after the Suez débâcle of 1956. But it was De Gaulle who, with great energy, started the build-up of the *force de frappe*. Unlike the UK, which received direct support from the US, the US did not want to help France realise its nuclear ambitions, because of supposed and real presence of communists in the Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique

(CEA). (5) This had two results: first that the acquisition by France of nuclear weapons was much more costly than for the UK, which was able to buy its weapons *off the shelf* in the US. Second that - unlike Britain - France was totally independent as regards the use of its deterrent.

But De Gaulle had to define a philosophy *and* a strategy for this relatively small, non-allied French deterrent.

His underlying *philosophy* may be summarised in two points:

- the force de frappe is by its nature a purely *national* deterrent. It is the ultimate means for *national* survival. No country will risk its national survival for another country. This means that a broader role for French nuclear weapons is not feasible. It means also that the US nuclear guarantee for Europe is a promise which cannot be trusted.
- the force de frappe is a *medium sized* deterrent and cannot match the huge nuclear arsenals of both superpowers. This does not, however, jeopardise its function, i.e. deterrence. Even if the French nuclear force is capable of destroying only ten big cities in the Soviet Union and a quarter of its industrial capability, then this will be sufficient to deter a Soviet attack on France. These principles of *suffisance* and of the *dissuasion du faible au fort* will remain the founding principles of the French nuclear force until today.

The French nuclear *strategy*, as it was conceived by De Gaulle, can, equally, be summarised in two points:

- The French deterrent was not directed against a preconceived

enemy. It was a deterrent against *any* enemy, whoever and wherever he was. This meant that the force de frappe should be capable to strike in *all* directions, or, in French: *tous azimuts*. (6)

- The small size of the French deterrent had a direct strategic implication: it could only play its role in a *all or nothing* strategy. A strategy of flexible response with a gradual escalation was not only beyond the financial means of the French government, it tended to undermine the role of its deterrent. The French official doctrine was, therefore, *massive retaliation*. This remained so, even after the introduction of the tactical Pluton missile. (7)

Europe: A Vehicle for French Power

Europe was De Gaulle's fourth vehicle to strengthen France's power. But, although he considered Europe vital for an enhanced role of France in the world, he still had an ambivalent attitude towards Europe. De Gaulle did not like any policy that tended to build *supra*-national institutions. Not only because such a supra-national entity would be another *machin*, an artificial construct that had nothing to do with the living reality of nations, but especially because in such a supra-national Europe, France would become some kind of a province or, at best, a federal state, which would contradict France's *vocation* to be a leading nation. De Gaulle's European policy, therefore, was based on five pillars:

- Europe is a vehicle for France's *grandeur* and leading role
- To play this role France needs to

build a partnership with Germany

- The Anglo-Saxons should be kept out of the European project
- No supranational Europe
- An intergovernmental European Defence and an intergovernmental European Foreign Policy should be built under French leadership

De Gaulle conducted this European policy with an iron consequence. In 1962 he signed with chancellor Konrad Adenauer the Elysée Treaty, a friendship treaty between the old foes France and Germany. In the same period he came forward with the Fouchet Plan which intended to make an intergovernmental Europe, run by a Council of Heads of States and Government, and which encompassed far-fledged cooperation in the field of defence and foreign affairs. When these plans were blocked by Belgium and the Netherlands, De Gaulle retaliated by vetoing in 1963 British membership of the European Community. In 1966 France left the military organisation of NATO. After having lost the first battle for an intergovernmental Europe with the demise of the Fouchet Plan, De Gaulle prepared - as a good military officer - for the next battle. This battle came in 1965, when he refused to implement articles 145 and 148 of the Rome Treaty to extend qualified majority voting to new areas, something what in his eyes came close to a creeping federalisation. He instructed his ministers to boycott the Council meetings and, finally, had his way when in the 'Luxembourg Compromise' of January 1966 unanimity of decision-making, and thereby a national veto, was maintained.

The balance sheet of De Gaulle's European policy, however, was mixed. He succeeded in building a solid partnership with Germany. He succeeded also in his purpose to give France the leading *political* role in this Franco-German tandem, leaving to Germany the role of economic leader. His two other 'successes': keeping the Brits out and stopping qualified majority voting, had more the character of Pyrrhic victories. Even a second veto in 1967 could not prevent the UK from joining in 1973 - only three years after De Gaulle's death - and QMV became a normal procedure in European decision-making.

His greatest failure, however, and it is certain that he himself has also felt this to be so, was his failure to convince his European counterparts to build a common European defence.

After the demise of the Fouchet Plan and after the French retreat from the military integrated structure of NATO, European defence had become a political *no go zone*. The partners of France were unwilling to discuss defence matters in the framework of the European Community, which, for them, was predominantly an *economic* organisation. Europe's defence was, according to them, best guaranteed under the NATO umbrella. It would take more than a decade before another French president would restart De Gaulle's dream of building a European defence, and, most strange of all, it would not be a Gaullist president, but a Socialist, someone who had been De Gaulle's most ferocious critic during the 1960s: François Mitterrand.

II. 1974 - 1995 The Non-Gaullist interregnum

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing: The Gaullist Legacy Endangered

After Pompidou, who only reigned five years and represented a moderate form of Gaullism, presidential power in France was exercised by non-Gaullists. First by the Centrist Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981), then by the Socialist François Mitterrand (1981 - 1995).

Although Giscard can be placed in the 'right' camp, he was the less 'Gaullist' of these two.

With Giscard, in fact, five cracks appear in the Gaullist legacy:

- the first of these cracks appeared when the Gaullist principle of a strong, unified government was jeopardised. This happened when the first *cohabitation* took place between Centrists and Gaullists from 1974 to 1976. De Gaulle would never have imagined that a Gaullist prime minister (Jacques Chirac) would serve *under* a Centrist president (Giscard d'Estaing). Not only was the place of a Gaullist at the helm of the state, but also his power had to be undivided.
- A second crack in the Gaullist legacy appeared when under Giscard's Presidency a rapprochement took place between France and the United States. President Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger wanted this rapprochement. The first result was that in the Ottawa Declaration of 1974, NATO, for the first time,

openly acknowledged the positive role of the independent French nuclear deterrent. Even more surprising was the hidden support given by the US during this period for the modernisation of the French nuclear 'force de dissuasion' in the form of 'negative guidance' (8).

- A third crack appeared when under the influence of this rapprochement with the US the supreme commander of the French Army, General Méry, wrote an article in the *Revue de la Défense Nationale* of June 1976 in which he proposed to reintegrate French troops into NATO in case of conflict.
- A fourth crack appeared when the Gaullist nuclear doctrine came under fire. On 20 May 1975 President Giscard d'Estaing openly expressed his doubts concerning the first use of nuclear weapons. He proposed a doctrine of No First Use, a proposal that was heavily criticised by the 'father' of the French nuclear strategy, General Pierre Gallois, in his book *Le Renoncement* of 1977, on the grounds that it would jeopardise France's strategy *du faible au fort*.
- And, last but not least, there was the French-German nuclear flirtation of 1979 when General Buis and Alexandre Sanguinetti, who was a former president of the defence committee of the French parliament, both men close to President Giscard, wrote an article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (9) concerning the possibility that Germany would co-finance the modernisation of the

force de frappe in exchange for a French nuclear guarantee - an idea in flagrant contradiction with the Gaullist dogma that a nuclear force could only have a *national* function.

François Mitterrand: A Socialist Gaullist?

Mitterrand's Presidency meant a return to some of the basic principles of Gaullism. This to the great surprise of many political analysts, who had predicted that his Presidency would herald the end of the Fifth Republic. As De Gaulle had done, Mitterrand acknowledged the vital role of Europe as a vehicle of France's interests. And - as De Gaulle - he saw the importance of a strengthened European defence cooperation.

In fact one can discern three phases in Mitterrand's policy to establish a European defence cooperation:

- first, a *multilateral* phase
- followed by a *bilateral* phase
- ending in a *bilateral 'plus'* phase

The multilateral phase began in 1984, when Mitterrand proposed a 'revitalisation' of the Western European Union, at that moment a 'sleeping' organisation with a secretariat in London and a Parliamentary Assembly in Paris. The British government, however, was not very enthusiastic about an upgrading of the WEU, because it feared that it could become a rival to NATO.

Thereupon followed a bilateral phase, when on 12-13 November 1987 France and Germany took the decision to set up the French-German Brigade, a unit that was operational on 12 January 1989 and consisted of 5000 troops: with mixed, as well as with national unities.

The French-German brigade had

primarily a symbolic character. But this changed when President Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl on 22 May 1992 in Rochelle decided to build the Eurocorps, a real army with 50 000 troops and with its headquarters in Strasbourg. The Eurocorps would be operational in 1995 and would be open for other member states.

Belgium, Luxembourg, and Spain joined this initiative. When these countries joined the bilateral phase changed its character and became a bilateral 'plus' phase.

NATO, and especially the United States, was not pleased with this initiative. The US feared that German troops could be pulled out of NATO's integrated command. Germany tried to reassure the US: the Eurocorps would not push Germany out of NATO, but would, instead, pull France closer to NATO.

On 21 January 1993 SACEUR Shalikashvili met with Lanxade and Naumann, the French and German supreme commanders. It was agreed that in case of crisis French unities could be placed under operational *command* of NATO. This was a real breakthrough: since 1966 French troops could only be placed under operational *control* (10). Operational control was only for specific missions, limited in space and time. Operational command gave more power to SACEUR and the time and space limits were less precise.

Mitterrand's Presidency had, therefore, remarkable results in the field of defence: he made a genuine start with De Gaulle's project of building a European defence - but, at the same time, he avoided alienating the United States.

One would have expected that Jacques Chirac, the next French President, who claimed - after two decades of non-Gaullist

rule - to be the only real heir of the Gaullist legacy, would build upon the foundations laid by his predecessor, but, strange enough, this was not the case.

III. Jacques Chirac: A Volatile Gaullist

When Jacques Chirac was elected President in 1995, he was the first Gaullist President in more than twenty years. Jacques Chirac considered himself to be the legitimate heir of Charles De Gaulle. But did he have also De Gaulle's broad historical vision, his consistence and his perseverance? Before he became a President, Jacques Chirac had shown on several occasions that he was a highly volatile politician, who could suddenly change his course if confronted with an adverse public mood. He seemed less to be the man with a vision who wants to educate the public and try to explain his ideas, like De Gaulle before him, but more a follower of public opinion. An example of this populism was, when during the presidential campaign of 1995 he suddenly came up with the idea of organising a referendum on the introduction of the euro - a standpoint totally opposed to international law, because France had already committed itself to introduce the euro when it signed and ratified the Maastricht Treaty.

It is, therefore, not surprising that we find this volatility back in his policies as a President.

In the nine years Chirac has been in power we can discern at least six different phases to further his ambition to establish a European defence cooperation, and, what is more, these phases are often in open contradiction with each other.

Chirac's Six Phases

What are these six phases?

- Phase I: Nuclear Unilateralism
- Phase II: Atlantic Multilateralism
- Phase III: Anglo-French Bilateralism
- Phase IV: EU Wide Multilateralism
- Phase V: French-German Bilateral 'Plus'
- Phase VI: The Formation of a French-German-British *Directoire*

Phase I: Chirac's Nuclear Unilateralism

When Chirac became President of France he neglected the Eurocorps. The Eurocorps was, in his eyes, the creation of his Socialist predecessor and that was a reason not to like it. Chirac did not want to continue the policies of President Mitterrand. He wanted to immediately put his stamp on the world. He did so by starting a series of nuclear tests in the open atmosphere, thereby exasperating public opinion worldwide. This *unilateral* start of a President who later claimed to be a champion of international law and of multilateralism, was, at least, a bit strange.

Confronted with a wave of international criticism, he tried to woo his European critics by coming up with a new concept: *la dissuasion concertée*, which was, in fact, a remake of the 1979 proposal of General Buis and Alexandre Sanguinetti to extend the French nuclear umbrella above France's European partners. As it was already mentioned above, this concept was in total contradiction with De Gaulle's theory that the force de frappe was a purely national deterrent.(11) This shift was all the more surprising, because President Chirac himself had fully adhered to Gallois' theory

at an earlier date, when he wrote: „...the use of thermonuclear weapons causes such tremendous destruction (...), that no country in the world seems psychologically capable to use them, except for its own survival.“ (12)

The discussion on this subject, however, was quickly dropped when Germany did not show any interest in the idea.

Phase II: Atlantic Multilateralism

An even more surprising *tournure* came immediately after Phase I, when Chirac suggested that France was prepared to reintegrate itself into military NATO structures if NATO was prepared to reorganise its command structure. France was especially interested to head the South Command which had traditionally an American commander. This *tour de force* had a certain resemblance to De Gaulle's initiative of 1958, when he proposed that the US, Britain and France would form a *directoire* in NATO - a proposal that was immediately rejected by the US and Britain. The fact is that De Gaulle's proposal came in a time when France was still an important NATO member and when the NATO headquarters were still in Fontainebleau. Chirac's proposal came after a French absence of almost thirty years and he had even less trump cards to put on the table than De Gaulle before him. We all know what happened: after a period of haggling the US was not prepared to give up the South Command in the Mediterranean, a vulnerable and strategically important region, where also the US Sixth Fleet is stationed. Jacques Chirac not only made a highly surprising *tournure*, he also played his - weak - cards badly.

Phase III: Anglo-French Bilateralism with Blair in Saint-Malo

Chirac's Atlantic adventure ended in a *déconfiture*. The way back into an influential position in NATO was blocked. His personal relationship with Chancellor Helmut Kohl was rather cool and the French-German axis seemed to be in shambles. Then he made a new - totally unexpected - move: he turned to Britain, traditionally considered by the Gaullists as the Trojan horse of the US in Europe. In a summit meeting with Tony Blair on 3-4 December 1998 in the French port of Saint-Malo both men discussed the possibility of strengthening European defence cooperation. In their five-point *Declaration on European Defence* they agreed that „the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and the readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises.“(13) They added that „the Union must be given appropriate structures and a capacity for analysis of situations, sources of intelligence, and a capability for relevant strategic planning, without unnecessary duplication (...).“ Immediately afterwards a debate started on the interpretation of the words *autonomous* (How autonomous? Could the EU only act after NATO refused to do so?) and *duplication* (What is unnecessary duplication? No duplication at all? Or could a certain duplication sometimes be necessary?). But this did not take away the enormous importance of this growing convergence of the visions of Britain and France in the field of defence. Saint-Malo meant a real breakthrough and was a triumph for both men, Blair and Chirac.

Phase IV: EU-Wide Multilateralism

The bilateral tête-à-tête of Saint-Malo had a multilateral follow-up. First of all the German government needed to be reassured, because the Germans, having not participated in the summit, could feel excluded. The German Chancellor was informed in the spring of 1999 by the French at the Franco-German summit in Toulouse. Shortly afterwards, in June 1999, was the EU Cologne Summit, just after the Kosovo War which had showed as never before Europe's military impotence: sixty percent of the sorties were made by the US, even eighty percent of the strike sorties. The Europeans had been almost totally dependent on US intelligence, US transport, and US communications and logistics. Not only Germany, but also the other EU partners, including the neutrals, were now a willing audience for the French-British proposals and the decision was made to incorporate the WEU (except its article V) into the EU at the end of the year 2000.

The Helsinki Summit of December 1999 took the build-up of an EU defence identity even further. A Headline Goal was formulated to build a Rapid Reaction Force of 60.000 troops, deployable within 60 days and sustainable for one year. A Capability Goal was added to improve the organisational defence infrastructure by setting up a Political and Security Committee, a EU Military Committee, and an EU Military Staff.

Phase V: The End of Multilateralism: Back to French- German 'Bilateralism Plus'

But this multilateral phase - which had, without any doubt, many positive results - ended suddenly in the summer of 2002,

when the preparations for the War in Iraq already cast their shadows. The US government became more and more suspicious of the French-inspired European defence plans. How 'autonomous' should EU's defence be? Could the EU act on its own without asking NATO first?

The Iraq War seemed for a moment to restore the old 'Gaullist' world: the UK chose the side of the US, France opposed the US-British intervention. The reemergence of the Franco-British rift meant also the end of multilateralism. The EU was divided along the lines of the French-British conflict when Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg took the side of France, and most other EU member states, including the candidate members, took the side of the UK and the US.

On 30 April 2003, the worst possible moment, because just after the end of the War with Iraq, when US-French relations were at their deepest, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, came up with plans for a *European Security and Defence Union* with its own headquarters in Tervuren near Brussels. It meant a return of Chirac to the old French-German bilateralism, with an extension to Belgium and Luxembourg. This 'Bilateralism Plus' meant in fact that Chirac, after eight years, returned to the position of his predecessor, François Mitterrand, the creator of the 'Eurocorps'.

The three countries with which France decided to build a 'European Security and Defence Union' were not only the same countries that formed with France the so-called *camp de paix* during the Iraq crisis, they were also members of the Eurocorps. Only one Eurocorps member: Spain, was lacking, because of the pro-US stance of the Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar.

Phase VI: Building a European Directoire

In the autumn of 2003 Chirac's European Policy took suddenly a new direction, when British Prime Minister Tony Blair was invited for an exclusive summit with Chirac and Schröder in Berlin on 20 September. Healing the wounds was certainly necessary after the Iraq crisis. But the meeting was not alone about mending fences: it was the beginning of a closer institutionalised cooperation between the European 'Big Three' and the other EU members reacted immediately with overt suspicion. This suspicion grew when one month later the foreign ministers of the 'Big Three' visited Tehran in an attempt to persuade the Iranian government to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to carry out unannounced inspections of nuclear sites. This visit, proclaimed a 'success' by its initiators, was not only criticised, with reason, on *material* grounds as a new 'Munich' of three would-be Chamberlains, it was also criticised on *formal* grounds, because this initiative was in flagrant contradiction with the rules of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Irritation of the other EU member states grew further when a new summit of the 'Big Three' was planned on 18 February 2004 to prepare for the 'economic' European Council meeting of 25-26 March. Especially the governments of Italy and Spain, two close allies of Blair, were furious to be excluded. José Maria Aznar took the initiative of the 'Letter of Six' which was sent on 17 February, one day before the summit, to the Irish President of the European Council and to Commission President Romano Prodi. In this letter the

prime ministers of Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Estonia expressed their concern as regards the economic performance of the EU and implicitly attacked France and Germany, that had both escaped sanctions for a repeated breach of the deficit regulations of the Stability and Growth Pact, by stressing that „sanctions must be applied in a consistent manner and on a non-discriminatory basis.“ Although the word 'directoire' was not used in this letter, it was a clear warning shot.(14)

It is, however, still an open question how this new cooperation of the 'Big Three' will develop. Will they be able to overcome their differences of interests and diverging views on the future of Europe or will their alliance only be temporary and occasional in order to defend their - common - big power interests in the debate on the European Constitution? And what exactly is France's position in this threesome? It is quite clear that a European *directoire* that includes Britain is a far cry from De Gaulle's vision of an exclusive French leadership role in Europe. As part of the French-German tandem France has always succeeded to push through its views and interests. In a trilateral group with a pro-Atlantic and free market oriented Britain this will be less evident. Maybe that is the reason why Germany seems to be more positive about the new tripartite cooperation, because it enables it to escape a bit from the tight French embrace. France, on the other hand, seems to be more cautious and might show a tendency to only reserve a role for the 'Big Three' when the Franco-German axis is in need of support.(15)

IV. Conclusion

In how far can one distinguish a clear red line in Chirac's European defence and security policy? We have seen that his odyssey brought him first to the atolls of Polynesia, from which he returned with the idea of the *dissuasion élargie*. An idea, however, that he dropped quickly in order to start a rapprochement to NATO, an organisation dominated by the American *hyperpuissance* and as such suspect to each self-respecting Gaullist. Being rebuked by the US, he made a next, rather surprising, overture when he started bilateral talks on European defence with Tony Blair in Saint-Malo. Strange enough this worked, not only because France and Britain had cooperated closely in the Balkan Wars, but also because Blair was the most pro-European British Prime Minister in years. The Saint-Malo summit resulted in a EU-wide multilateralism at the summits of Cologne and Helsinki. But this multilateral phase ended suddenly in the autumn of 2002 with the preparation of the war in Iraq. This war caused a deep crisis in US-French relations when the French Foreign Minister Dominique De Villepin threatened to veto a Security Council resolution and personally visited some of the African Security Council members in an attempt to actively organise an anti-American coalition in the Security Council. Even De Gaulle, in his time considered an *enfant terrible* by the Americans, would never have gone so far. On the contrary, in the international crises which took place during his Presidency (Cuba, Prague) he was one of the most steadfast allies of the US.

Locked up in 'Old Europe'during the Iraq crisis, Chirac's multilateral approach

was replaced by a new emphasis on the bilateral Franco-German axis, extended with the two other countries of the *camp de paix*: Belgium and Luxembourg. With these countries Chirac launched his project for a European Security and Defence Union.

So at the end of the Iraq crisis, the circle was closed: Chirac arrived in 2003 where Mitterrand had ended in 1994. He concluded that his natural allies were the countries of the Eurocorps.

But not all the countries of the Eurocorps participated in this initiative. Spain did not participate, because of the pro-US stance of Prime Minister José Maria Aznar. (Spain would, however, close ranks with France and Germany in March 2004, after the victory of the Spanish socialists under Zapatero).

The European Security and Defence Union of France with two small countries and defence free rider Germany was not credible as long as Britain was not involved. Not in the least place to save his European defence initiative from ridicule, Chirac, in the autumn of 2003, turned back to his former Saint-Malo ally in a tripartite summit in which also German chancellor Schröder participated. This was the start of a potential *Directoire*.

What steps will follow? Most probably Chirac will continue to develop a three-way approach:

- His first priority is to further strengthen the Franco-German axis.
- His second priority is to enlarge the French-German tandem with Britain into some kind of a *directoire*. The role of this Directory should, however, in French eyes, remain restricted to initiatives in the field of defence and foreign policy and to the defence of

common big power interests in the EU. When German and British positions do not coincide with French positions the Directory has no role to play. Additionally, Britain, for being granted the right to enter (from time to time) the *salon exclusif* of the French-German tandem, has to pay a price and that is to accept some kind of French leadership.

- In case Britain would take a course that is considered by France as too pro-Atlantic, there is still the third option of building a 'core' Europe with Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain and - eventually - other countries.

Like the French nuclear doctrine Chirac's European strategy can be defined as *tous azimuts*. This impulsive and volatile politician seems to move in all directions: he opens doors and closes them, and can suddenly change his tactics, his allies, and even his ideas.

But, nevertheless, his basic driving force and his central aim remain always the same and that is to develop an independent position for Europe in a multipolar world (16), based on military might, with France - and its President - in a leading position. Chirac, therefore, can certainly be called a Gaullist, be it a rather volatile and unpredictable one.

NOTES:

- (1) Philippe De Gaulle, „*De Gaulle mon père - Entretien avec Michel Tauriac*“, Paris 2003, p. 257 (my translation, MHvH).
- (2) Jacques Chirac, „*La lueur de l'espérance - réflexion du soir pour le matin*“, Paris, 1978, p. 224.

- (3) *ibid.*, p. 223
- (4) Serge Berstein, „*Histoire du gaullisme*“, Paris, 2002, p. 301.
- (5) The CEA was led by „Mister Curie“, Mr. Joliot-Curie, who will later be fired because of his public engagement in favour of the French Communist Party. (Cf. François Valentin, „*Regards sur la politique de défense de la France de 1958 à nos jours*“, Paris, 1995, p. 47).
- (6) The term 'tous azimuts' was coined by General Ailleret.
- (7) When the French government introduced tactical nuclear weapons in the 1970s, these were, therefore, not conceived as a weapons system of its own, between conventional and strategic weapons, but as 'pre-strategic' weapons, that were meant to give a 'warning shot' before a massive nuclear attack would be launched.
- (8) Because positive support was officially forbidden, this US support, was given in the form of 'negative guidance'. The French government, confronted with many problems in hardening missile heads, sent a list with questions to the US government. The US government thereupon answered which solutions were not adequate. Cf. Richard Ullman, „The Covert French Connection“, in: *Foreign Policy*, No. 75, Summer 1989, pp. 3-33. In the second volume of his memoirs President Giscard d'Estaing affirmed Ullman's findings (Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, Vol. 2, *L'Affrontement*, Paris 1991, p.179.).
- (9) „Partager l'arme nucléaire avec les Allemands,“, in: *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20 August 1979, pp.26-28.
- (10) The NATO-France relationship was since 1966 regulated by two arrangements : Ailleret-Lemnitzer and Valentin-Ferber. In these agreements was only 'operational control' possible.
- (11) In the words of Pierre Gallois, the main theorist behind this thesis: „No government could take the risks involved in the use of arms of mass destruction if it was not for his own country.“ Pierre Gallois, *L'Europe change de maître*, Paris 1972, pp. 120-121 (My translation, MHvH).
- (12) Jacques Chirac, *La lueur de l'espérance - réflexion du soir pour le matin*, o.c., p. 214 (my translation, MHvH).
- (13) *Declaration on European Defence*, British-French Summit, St. Malo, 3-4 December, 1998, Press office of the British Embassy in Paris.
- (14) In an editorial comment the *Financial Times* of 17 February 2004 urged the 'Big Three' „to tread carefully“. „The big three would (...) be well advised to keep their energies focused on policy areas that are either half-out of the EU's remit, such as labour markets or pension and health systems, or half-formed, such as EU foreign, defence and immigration policies.“ See also André Fontaine, „Le style directoire“, *Le Monde*, 2 February 2004.
- (15) *Le Monde* of 18 February 2004 quotes 'someone close to Chirac' as

saying: „A renewed European dynamism can emerge from this trio, but the 'Franco-German' (relationship) remains for us the basis, the fundamental relationship.“

- (16) For a critique on Chirac's concept of a multipolar world, see my „France: Champion of a Multipolar World“, *In the National Interest*, Volume 2, Issue 19, 14 May, 2003, <http://www.inthe->

nationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue19/vol2issue19vanherpenpfv.html

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