

Reviews in History

Published on *Reviews in History* (<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews>)

Kennedy, Europe and the Cold War

Review Number:

341

Publish date:

Thursday, 31 July, 2003

Author:

Nigel Ashton

ISBN:

333716051X

Date of Publication:

2002

Price:

£55.00

Publisher:

Palgrave

Place of Publication:

Basingstoke

Author:

Erin Mahan

ISBN:

333984579X

Date of Publication:

2002

Price:

£45.00

Publisher:

Palgrave

Place of Publication:

Basingstoke

Reviewer:

Kevin Ruane

In October 1957, at the close of bilateral talks in Washington, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan issued a joint Declaration of Common Purpose in which they looked forward to a future of intimate collaboration between their countries in combating the 'danger of Communist despotism'.⁽¹⁾ In addition to this public reaffirmation of Anglo-American unity, the two leaders privately agreed that their governments would henceforward work closely together in defence matters. Coming so soon after Britain's successful test of a hydrogen bomb and in the immediate aftermath of the shock occasioned by the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, this commitment spoke to the Eisenhower

administration's especial desire for collaboration with Britain in the nuclear realm. For the British, whilst they were delighted by this development, the Washington conference also seemed to signify the laying to rest of the ghosts of Suez and the 'regain[ing]' of what Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd called 'the special relationship with the United States which we had formerly enjoyed'.⁽²⁾ Whether in fact Lloyd was correct in this assumption is one of the questions considered by Nigel Ashton in his excellent new study, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: the Irony of Interdependence*. Another is Macmillan's claim in cabinet on his return from Washington that the Declaration of Common Purpose meant that Anglo-American defence relations would now be based upon the concept of 'inter-dependence'.⁽³⁾

Leaving aside for the moment what the term interdependence meant to the Americans, it is evident that Macmillan interpreted it in two complementary ways. First, he viewed it as a partnership (in the truest sense of the word) in the field of defence and nuclear weapons. Second, he hoped that close nuclear collaboration would help cement a wider global Anglo-American partnership based on a congruity of foreign, economic and security interests. What interdependence manifestly did *not* mean to Macmillan was abuse by the US of its position as the more powerful partner to force through its own policy preferences, whilst paying mere lip-service to the principle of consultation. To Macmillan's dismay, however, it was this latter variant that was the more prominent in the later Eisenhower period. The limits and frustrations of interdependence US-style were most clearly demonstrated by the collapse of the Paris summit of May 1960 following the Gary Powers U2 spy plane incident. Unable to bring Eisenhower to make any reconciliatory gesture to Khrushchev in order to save the meeting and with it the chance of détente in Europe, Macmillan, Ashton argues, finally faced up to the fact that Britain on its own could not influence the Cold War policies of the United States, still less the Soviet Union, in any meaningful way. It was this moment of epiphany, Ashton suggests, more than any other consideration, that persuaded Macmillan to seek British membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). Ashton does not see this decision as a move away from the United States, however, so much as 'an exercise in the hedging of bets'. The prime minister did not give up on the Anglo-American alliance: rather he sought an additional prop for Britain's international position in the face of mounting evidence of the 'unreliability' of the United States. (pp. 127-33)

The advent of the Kennedy administration in January 1961 offered Macmillan the chance to re-launch interdependence on British terms, but despite the undoubted closeness of the personal relationship that developed between president and prime minister, the results of Macmillan's endeavours were disappointing. Looking back, Ashton thinks this outcome was inevitable due to the persistent failure of London and Washington to reconcile their conflicting views of what the term interdependence meant. Accepting the oversimplification, Ashton suggests that the Kennedy administration tended to conjure up the image of a US truck and a British/NATO trailer whenever it contemplated interdependence: the trailer would not and could not move unless pulled by the truck, so that when US policymakers employed the language of interdependence, they really meant 'more effective central, and hence, American control'. (p. 16) For the British, interdependence was 'a form of partnership in which both countries would aim to pool their efforts more effectively and consistently, particularly in the field of defence'. (p. 152) Tensions were thus bound to arise in a relationship 'that for one party was one of partnership and equality and for the other one of patron and client', especially when 'both called this 'interdependence''. (p. 223) Here, then, is the 'irony' at the heart of Anglo-American relations in the early 1960s and the explanation for the book's subtitle.

The central thesis of Ashton's study is that there had to be a reckoning 'a point when the US and British perceptions of interdependence were brought fully into the open. That reckoning occurred over the winter of 1962-63 in what Ashton styles the 'crisis of interdependence', reaching its apogee in December 1962 with the US cancellation of the Skybolt missile and the tense Anglo-American summit at Nassau. However, the Skybolt/Nassau conjunction did not on its own make the crisis of interdependence. While conceding that December 1962 was, chronologically, the pivot on which the crisis revolved, Ashton argues persuasively that events both before and after that point need to be examined in order fully to understand the nature and extent of the fissures that opened up in Anglo-American relations. Viewed in isolation, the British reaction to the Skybolt cancellation might seem out of proportion, especially Macmillan's consideration of an 'agonising reappraisal of all our foreign and defence policy' (quoted on p. 172) and his willingness to

countenance the concomitant rupture in Anglo-American relations.(p. 182) But if examined in relation to an accumulation of British doubts and misgivings about American policy over the previous two years, then Macmillan's reaction is rendered more explicable.(pp. 225-6)

Following a lengthy introduction which includes a masterful *tour d'horizon* of the meaning, ironies and historiography of the 'special relationship' Ashton provides a sequence of chapter-length case studies, all of which impact directly or indirectly on the crisis of interdependence. The Laos and Berlin crises of 1961 show the extent to which Macmillan was willing to compromise British policy preferences in order to establish good relations with the new president. On Laos in particular, Ashton thinks Macmillan went too far in all but agreeing to commit British forces alongside US troops in a military intervention to counter the communist Pathet Lao. In the event, Macmillan was not called upon to make good his promise (or renege upon it), thanks to the Bay of Pigs fiasco and Kennedy's subsequent scepticism about military solutions to Third World problems.(p. 4) As for Berlin, the build-up to the crisis saw Macmillan attracted to a negotiated solution and Kennedy, while never ruling out a political initiative, more insistent on sending a firm military message to Khrushchev. In the end, the construction of the Berlin wall not only took the sting out of the crisis, it also 'proved as effective in repairing a breach in Anglo-American relations as it had in shoring up the Eastern bloc'.(p. 63)

If Laos and Berlin offer important contexts in relation to the wider crisis of interdependence in 1962-63 by highlighting how an Anglo-American community of *interests* does not guarantee a commonality of *policies*, the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 showed that interdependence in the sense that the British understood it 'a partnership in and yet transcending defence and security' was more apparent than real. Ashton concludes that 'nothing Macmillan said or did changed the course of the president's handling of the crisis' (p. 86), although the prime minister did offer welcome staunch public support for the US position. In the Middle East too, there were indications that all was not well, or at any rate equal, in Anglo-American interdependence. During 1961-62, the Macmillan government became increasingly concerned about the extension of Egyptian/Nasserite influence in the Yemen and the dangers this posed for the British position throughout the Arabian peninsula. The Kennedy administration believed that these worries were overblown, which was to be expected given that its approach to the Middle East involved cultivating Arab opinion in general and Egyptian opinion in particular, both as ends in themselves and as a means of ameliorating the Arab-Israeli problem. There was thus considerable continuity, Ashton observes, both in the policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and in the strain that pursuing Nasser placed on Anglo-American relations.(p. 91) For the 'key British actors' it was Nasser who remained 'their true enemy in the region' (p. 108), and US pressure on London to accord diplomatic recognition to the pro-Nasser revolutionary government in Yemen was not best suited to promoting Anglo-American harmony.

Nor for that matter was competition in arms sales. In the summer of 1962, British plans to sell the Bloodhound air defence system to Israel were scuppered when the Israelis instead purchased the American Hawk missile. The Kennedy administration had hitherto eschewed arms sales to any Middle East country lest it trigger a regional arms race, and Macmillan had assumed that the Bloodhound deal would proceed without a hitch. When it collapsed, the prime minister instantly assumed foul play. In what Ashton terms an 'extraordinarily vitriolic' message, Macmillan wrote to Kennedy accusing the Americans of a 'disgraceful piece of trickery' and expressing 'disgust and despair' at their behaviour.(quoted on pp. 161-2) On reflection, Ashton believes that the US arms deal was predicated not on base economic motives but on political grounds 'on softening the Israeli stance on Arab refugees' and a somewhat bashful Macmillan subsequently wrote again to Kennedy retracting his criticisms. Privately, though, the British prime minister retained the suspicion that the Americans had 'deceived us all through' and cautioned that Britain should 'always have this in mind in discussing other subjects with them'.(quoted on p. 163)

In building his case for a series of interlocking crises in 1962-63 Ashton also looks at the problem of the Congo, where the US preference for UN police action to bring an end to the Katangan secession came into conflict with British support, albeit subtle, for the independence of the break-away province. The Macmillan government's attitude was conditioned by concerns about the stability of the Central African Federation, British investments in Katanga, and Conservative Party opinion. The danger that the Soviet Union might

take advantage of events to ally with radical African nationalism ?was often lost sight of in the government's framing of its Congo policy? (p. 113), but for the Kennedy administration this Cold War dimension was paramount. The way in which the crisis was eventually resolved in December 1962, with Katanga brought back into the Congolese fold under US-sponsored UN military pressure, represented ?a clear defeat for British policy? and a ?loss of international prestige? for the Macmillan government.(p. 126) At first sight the Congo problem does not seem to have much relevance to the crisis of interdependence, but the timing of its resolution and the scale of the defeat for British diplomacy hardened Macmillan?s conviction that the Anglo-American alliance was beginning to function to the detriment of Britain. It follows that the failure of Britain?s EEC application at the hands of de Gaulle in January 1963 was more than a little ironic, in that it left Macmillan and the British with nowhere to go other than to fall back on the Anglo-American relationship at precisely the moment when the value of that relationship was being questioned in London. In 1960, as already seen, Macmillan saw membership of the EEC as insurance against the unreliability of the Anglo-American alliance. By late 1962, as the crisis of interdependence ? and the related crisis of British confidence in the US as a partner ? came to a head, an additional British power base was arguably more important than ever.(p. 148)

However skilfully Ashton constructs the background to and context of the crisis of interdependence, the fact remains that all roads in the book lead to the Bahamas in December 1962, not least because the nuclear relationship between America and Britain, the number one agenda item at Nassau, was such a ?litmus test? of interdependence.(p. 152) Ashton carefully plots American and British approaches to the nuclear issue, noting the Kennedy?s administration?s early espousal of flexible response as a successor to NATO?s massive retaliation doctrine, and the importance of calibrating with precision the process by which conventional war would give way to nuclear war in the face of Soviet aggression. This was no matter for collective consideration ? no decision to be shared, in Kennedy?s words, with ?a whole lot of differently motivated and differently responsible people in Europe'.(quoted on p. 16) Instead Washington sought the ?Americanization? of decision-making within NATO, which hardly boded well for the British version of interdependence, predicated as it was on ideas of partnership.(p. 156) Equally unsettling for London was the US government?s view that independent nuclear deterrents like Britain?s had no place in the new strategic environment. Yet for the Macmillan government, maintaining Britain?s nuclear independence was ?the key test of interdependence in action?.(p. 152)

The test itself finally arrived in December 1962 when the Kennedy administration cancelled further research and development into the Skybolt missile and in so doing delivered a devastating blow to Macmillan and his government. 'The whole of our defence policy in the strategic nuclear field in the second half of the decade was founded upon availability of Skybolt', David Ormsby-Gore, the British ambassador to Washington, complained to Robert S. McNamara, the US secretary of defence, but to little avail.(quoted on p. 167) The cancellation of Skybolt, Ashton argues, was due to a combination of factors, among them the need to curtail a costly weapons programme that was beginning to exhibit technical shortcomings. For some US policymakers, it may also have been a stratagem for the elimination of the independent British deterrent and its relocation in a NATO seaborne MRBM force of Polaris submarines with mixed manning and multilateral ownership but (crucially) under ultimate American control ? the so-called Multilateral Force or MLF.(pp. 166-7) The British, having recovered from the initial shock of the cancellation, turned up at Nassau in mid-December 1962 determined to play their own version of American hard-ball and to secure both the Polaris missile as a replacement for Skybolt and a US acceptance of the enduring independence of the British nuclear deterrent. On 20 December 1962, Macmillan got a large measure of what he wanted ? but only by threatening to walk out of the talks, and so expose the break-down in relations to the world, unless the Americans dropped their insistence that the Polaris deal was conditional on British adherence to the MLF.(p. 182)

Through a process of diplomatic alchemy, the compromise reached at Nassau offered something to both British and American *amour propre*, with the UK Polaris force committed in principle to NATO, but with an opt-out provision allowing for independent deployment if supreme national interests were threatened. The

question remains, however, as to which version of interdependence, the British or American, the Nassau deal vindicated. Ashton, in attempting an answer, reiterates that the 'whole concept of Anglo-American interdependence was ironic'. The US defence and research budget was ten times greater than Britain's, yet Macmillan looked for 'partnership and equality' in what always appeared a 'doomed' quest. True, at Nassau the British independent deterrent was seemingly preserved. But to the Americans, interdependence still meant 'greater coordination in the Western defence effort and, effectively, the greater centralisation of control in Washington', and in practice there would always be strict limits on the independence of Britain's deterrent. (p. 191) The British had a 'blind spot', Ashton suggests, in that they failed to see the reality of their reliance on the United States, but the Americans had their own 'blind spot' in that they never really appreciated how important the *appearance* of independence was to Macmillan and his government (p. 191) At Nassau, these blind spots gave way to a little clarity of vision; Macmillan got the appearance of independence, Kennedy got the reality of control. All in all, Ashton says, it was still 'one of the more remarkable examples of Anglo-American peacetime cooperation'. (p. 191)

The nuclear test ban treaty negotiations, Ashton's final case study, do not at first sight appear to fit easily with the idea of a crisis of interdependence in the winter of 1962-63, since they came to a conclusion in August 1963, after the crisis had peaked. On closer inspection, however, the linkage becomes apparent. Macmillan, taking advantage of Kennedy's post-Cuban missile crisis willingness to look more positively on détente, was instrumental in the spring of 1963 in reviving a stagnant diplomatic process and helping to push it through to a conclusion. British influence was wielded to good effect on the White House in particular, thanks to Kennedy's appreciation of the value of the Anglo-American alliance (notwithstanding the tensions at Nassau). If the failure of Britain's EEC application forced Macmillan to fall back on partnership with the US as the primary prop of his foreign policy, for the time being at least, so de Gaulle's *double non* to Britain's EEC candidacy and French involvement with the MLF, followed by the conclusion of a Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, caused the Kennedy administration to appreciate anew Britain's virtues as an ally and to question the reliability of its other European partners. Having said this, Ashton regards Anglo-American relations in the context of the test ban issue (like so many other important issues) as 'ironical'. The part played by Macmillan in shaping the US approach to the negotiations was 'special but subordinate, significant and yet limited', and in the final lap, the Moscow talks of the high summer of 1963, Britain was reduced to a 'watching brief' as the two superpowers made the running themselves. (pp. 210-18) Nevertheless the Limited Test Ban Treaty still represented 'one of the few tangible dividends from Macmillan's pursuit of Anglo-American interdependence'. (p. 219)

At the start of his study, Ashton notes the contrast that other scholars have drawn between Anglo-American global cooperation and local conflict. It would be fair to say that this book itself largely, though not entirely, underscores this view of the 'special relationship'. If in Europe, Cuba, the Congo, the Middle East, and in defence and nuclear weapons systems there was a crisis of interdependence in 1962-63 'itself the product of misunderstandings and misperceptions on both sides as to what the term meant' 'the 'picture of Anglo-American relations in general turmoil still needs to be qualified'. (p. 225) At the same time, Ashton makes clear in this elegantly written, deeply researched, thoughtful and insightful study, that there was much more to the Anglo-American crisis of interdependence than a narrow focus on Skybolt and Nassau would suggest. But what of the Anglo-American relationship in general? Here Ashton concludes that neither its 'glib dismissal' as a myth, nor its rosy presentation as 'special', will do. It was simply 'too subtle and complex for either of these characterisations to prove useful as analytical tools'. (p. 222) And in his own subtle and complex study, Ashton proves this point.

The obvious link between Ashton's book and Erin Mahan's *Kennedy, de Gaulle and Western Europe*, apart from the chronological overlap, is the emphasis given to President John F. Kennedy. In trying to identify Kennedy's convictions and the degree to which they shaped US foreign policy, Ashton ran up against 'a remarkably elusive individual' and eventually concluded that 'neither the hero-worship of his acolytes, nor the muckraking of his denigrators, do full justice to this complex, detached, inspirational and cynical individual'. (p. 12) Erin Mahan, who works in the Office of the State Department Historian in America, and whose doctoral research this book represents, is no muckraker or reflex/populist denigrator, but she is highly

critical of what she sees as the Kennedy administration's often inchoate policies for Western Europe. Talk of a US Grand Design for Europe, she suggests, whether at the time or in subsequent historical studies, is rather wide of the mark – at best the term provides a convenient catch-all for a series of inconsistent and erratically pursued policies. The problem began at the top in Washington, where Kennedy's vision for Western Europe "lacked clarity". If US policies were unsatisfactory, it was because they often reflected the President's "indecisiveness", his "tendency to improvise", his "blurred ideas" about European security and integration, his "economic simplicity", and (more charitably) his "overriding Cold War fears".(pp. 167-68)

If Kennedy's performance leaves Mahan underwhelmed, there is no disguising her admiration for de Gaulle who, by 1963, and as a consequence of his *double non* was temporarily "the master of the European agenda".(p. 142) Rejecting the idea that de Gaulle's policies were driven by "irrational impulses or megalomania", Mahan sees them perfectly suited to furthering French economic, geo-political and geo-strategic interests. A practitioner of *realpolitik* who never gave way to "sentimentalism", de Gaulle's "une certaine idée de la France" led to a consistent approach to continental developments which Mahan contrasts unfavourably with the Kennedy administration's uncertain ideas about America in the context of Western Europe.(pp. 167-8)

The Kennedy administration's agenda included *inter alia*: the revision of NATO strategy to accommodate the new doctrine of flexible response; the pursuit of "double containment" of Soviet and German power; the elimination of independent nuclear deterrents, both existing (Britain) and nascent (France), or failing this their re-housing within the MLF; the easing of the United States' chronic balance of payments difficulties by encouraging its allies to shoulder a greater share of the financial burden of defence; and European détente if or when politico-military conditions seemed propitious. The essence of the Grand Design, in theory at least, was US and West European policies "acting in tandem".(p. 17) The problem was that nobody in Washington adequately explained this to the French president. In consequence, on each of these five issues, with "less power, but more skill, de Gaulle battled Kennedy to a standstill".(p. 168)

De Gaulle had help, however, from West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Mahan shows how at various times de Gaulle cynically manipulated Adenauer in furtherance of his own over-arching foreign policy goals – French leadership of Europe and, from this power base, the assertion of French independence in foreign affairs and the destruction of the dual hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union. De Gaulle's cynicism derives from the duality of his diplomacy: while promoting Franco-German amity, he was simultaneously dedicated to the containment of unchecked German power and was in fact just as committed as the United States to the principle of "double containment" of Germany and the Soviet Union. Then again, as Mahan points out, Adenauer was himself a shrewd political operator and was well aware that de Gaulle's courtship rituals were largely self-serving. But Adenauer had his own European agenda to assert West German sovereignty by seeking access to, if not control over, nuclear weapons, a goal that could be advanced through cooperation with France. Moreover, a united Franco-German front could be used to block what Adenauer regarded as worrying American initiatives.

One such initiative was the US plan to make flexible response NATO's strategy of choice. To Adenauer's way of thinking, the idea that Soviet aggression should be met in the first instance by a conventional military response and that the decision to "go nuclear" should be taken in the light of subsequent developments, would invite rather than deter a Soviet move against West Berlin. De Gaulle was happy to fan these concerns, arguing that West Germany would be over-run by the Red Army in the opening phase of war as policymakers in Washington held back from using nuclear weapons. Adenauer's unhappiness with the 'timidity' (quoted on p. 61) of US policy during the 1961 Berlin crisis made him even more receptive to de Gaulle's view that Washington now considered West Berlin – and maybe West Germany itself – to be expendable. At the same time, the French leader's total opposition to compromise over Western rights in Berlin won him Adenauer's deep gratitude. De Gaulle, though, had his own reasons for objecting to flexible response: first, its emphasis on conventional force ran counter to his belief that only nuclear weapons provided a credible deterrent; second, its acceptance would endanger his own plans for a French nuclear *force de frappe*; and third, as the discussion of Ashton's work has shown, it carried with it the likelihood of the "Americanization" of decision-making in NATO, a development that was anathema to the French leader.

This last consideration, together with his unhappiness at US unilateralism during both the Berlin and Cuban crises in 1961-62, encouraged de Gaulle to plan for the day when French forces in Europe were freed from the control of NATO. For Adenauer, the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis showed the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence and he was dismayed that the Kennedy administration did not apply the same logic to Europe. On the other hand, the Chancellor increasingly took heart in the thought that a French *force de frappe* would be employed appropriately in defence of West Berlin and the Federal Republic.

A convergence of interests, not least in resisting US plans for revising NATO strategy, thus brought Paris and Bonn together, the closeness in relations formalised in January 1963 with the signature of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship. This new power configuration did more than thwart US proposals on flexible response, however; it also called into question two other key elements in the Kennedy administration's Grand Design, namely double containment and nuclear sharing in the MLF. In Washington, US policymakers looked on the Franco-German treaty as a Faustian bargain and strongly suspected that de Gaulle would trade German financial and technological backing for his nuclear programme for a say for the Bonn government in how the finished weapons system should be deployed. The whole theory of 'double containment', however, hinged on curbing not enhancing West German power, especially in the nuclear domain. As for Washington's position on nuclear sharing, this was on one level entirely negative - non-proliferation was the ideal. On another level, if this ideal was not attainable, then the MLF was the appropriate home for existing deterrents like Britain's, and a means of satisfying the nuclear ambitions of other powers like West Germany, whilst preserving effective US control of NATO nuclear strategy. But in January 1963, de Gaulle, by way of a prelude to the signature of the Franco-German treaty, rejected French involvement in what he called the 'nuclear farce' (quoted on p. 77) of the MLF.

In Washington, even before the Paris-Bonn axis was formalised, US policymakers had attempted to deal with the greater evil of Franco-German nuclear collaboration (and with it the spectre of German access to nuclear weapons), by accepting the lesser evil of supplying France with the know-how to complete its nuclear programme. On each occasion that nuclear aid was raised with Paris, however, the accompanying US insistence that the French deterrent, when operational, should be given over to the MLF, ran into the brick wall that was de Gaulle's insistence on total French control. The inconsistency of the American position was glaring. Either Washington was for non-proliferation or it was against it; the Kennedy administration was either for the MLF as a fallback or it was against it. In theory, there was no half-way house, but in practice this is precisely where the Americans chose to reside because an overweening fear of future German militarism, buttressed by a nuclear capability courtesy of a myopic and/or self-serving France, was the determining factor in their policy. But what American officials misunderstood, Mahan argues, was de Gaulle's opposition to helping Germany achieve nuclear capability. The General's threats of Franco-German collaboration were a means to an end, not an end in themselves - they were designed to secure US (and British) backing for France's nuclear programme. The independence de Gaulle so cherished 'lay in national control' of the end product, 'not how a *force de frappe* was obtained'. (p. 71) The spectacle of Washington offering nuclear assistance to Paris in 1963 in order to secure France's signature on the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, rather than being a one-off inconsistency, is symptomatic of the contortions of US policy on nuclear sharing. For the record, de Gaulle again spurned this MLF-baited offer. (pp. 157-8)

A particular strength of Mahan's book is the attention she pays to the economic dimension of US policies in Western Europe and to the way that de Gaulle succeeded in countering US economic initiatives, at the same time as he worked to frustrate US security goals. In the early 1960s, the United States might lay claim to the title of superpower, but Mahan's Kennedy worried constantly, lest American economic fragility undermine his foreign and national security policies. Having promised to 'get the country moving again' during his successful presidential campaign in 1960, Kennedy in office was confronted with a 'lingering recession with few economic tools to combat it'. (p. 89) This lack of confidence in US economic well-being helps account for the Kennedy administration's early doubts about British membership of the EEC, which policymakers feared might lead to the raising of barriers to US trade with Western Europe. In the event, Washington felt compelled to accept the potential economic disadvantages of British membership, in return for the greater

political unity of Western Europe in the face of the Soviet threat.(p. 165) But Mahan also suggests that Macmillan's April 1961 assurances that British entry would in itself help in 'orienting the Common Market in a liberal direction' clearly eased the readjustment.(p. 96) Moreover, in anticipation of a new start for US-EEC commercial relations, the administration put a Trade Expansion Bill before Congress which not only 'promised a means of creating an equal playing field with an expanded Common Market', but also reflected the long-standing American commitment to 'a multilateral system of open trade and the promise of Western cooperation or Atlantic community'.(p. 103)

Accordingly, when de Gaulle delivered his veto on Britain's EEC application in January 1963 he also successfully negated the Kennedy administration's immediate hopes for US-EEC trade expansion. For de Gaulle, British entry was not only a political threat to French leadership of Europe, but an economic threat, not least in that a UK-inspired liberalisation of extra-EEC trade relations would undermine the protectionist economic policies, especially the Common Agricultural Policy, that would serve France (if not all its EEC partners and the Anglo-Americans) so well.(pp. 104-05) Nor did de Gaulle feel overly inclined to assist in relieving the US balance of payments problem. This was Kennedy's most persistent economic concern and the cause of anxiety, lest it place limits on US defence spending and the effectiveness of American Cold War policies, particularly in the Third World, where the president was determined to counter the attractions of communism by massive aid packages to raise living standards. In this last regard, Washington tried to recruit its European allies for a concerted, coordinated approach to Third World aid, but France, for one, would have none of it. De Gaulle's objections were based partly on a desire to keep US influence out of France's residual imperial holdings, and partly because French money in effect would be used to buttress US policy in the Third World without a compensating French voice in how that policy should be shaped.(p. 34) But other European powers, including West Germany, expressed a preference for trade not aid, much to Washington's frustration. In the related matter of burden sharing in Europe, the United States succeeded in persuading the West Germans to place large orders for military equipment with American arms manufacturers as a way of offsetting the US financial outlay in NATO.(p. 35) But de Gaulle, who viewed Kennedy's fixation with balance of payments difficulties as a rationalisation for turning West Germany into a US satellite, refused to enter into similar offset arrangements.(p. 35)

By 1963, Kennedy had become angered and exasperated by French economic policy. A number of the president's advisers have testified to his 'twin fears' of nuclear conflagration and American 'loss of gold' (p. 119), and in the latter connection Kennedy came to suspect the French of planning, either alone or with West Germany, to convert their surplus dollars into gold in order to force 'that is to say blackmail' the United States into altering its NATO policies, possibly in regard to flexible response and the MLF. The Kennedy administration considered threatening to withdraw US troops from Europe, both to ease the pressure on the defence budget and to teach the European NATO allies a lesson, but any thoughts of this kind were invariably 'trumped' by the national security imperative of containing the Soviet Union.(p. 121) Yet the fact that US officials in 1962-63 regularly, if privately, talked of troop redeployment as a means of retaliation against the perfidy of its NATO partners testifies not to a Grand Design in full sail but to a singularly strained US-West European relationship.

Even on a subject that might be expected to unite all parties in the Atlantic alliance 'peace' the French and Americans were at cross-purposes. And, once more, it was Paris that prevailed. Following the Cuban missile crisis, the Kennedy administration, encouraged by London, gave increasing consideration to détente in Europe. Adenauer, however, feared that the Anglo-Americans would sacrifice West German interests in pursuit of a security agreement with the USSR and consequently opposed any concessions in the name of détente, particularly the formal recognition of the German Democratic Republic and acceptance of Germany's post-war borders. De Gaulle fully supported Adenauer 'doubtless recognising that his influence on and over the West German Chancellor depended on his rejection of any East-West compact. The French and West German leaders came to a 'tacit understanding', Mahan observes, whereby Bonn would oppose a nuclear test ban treaty, which de Gaulle saw as an impediment to a French *force de frappe*, and Paris would block Anglo-American plans for a non-aggression pact in Europe which could be used by Moscow in the

future to force Western troops from West Berlin.

In conclusion, it is evident that Mahan's claim that de Gaulle 'battled Kennedy to a standstill' in Western Europe is a far from glib one. Rather, it is a judgement drawn from a detailed exploration of the key events and from research based not just on the vast corpus of US primary sources but also in French, German and British archives. Mahan writes in a lean, utilitarian style, without the literary flourishes that characterise Ashton's narrative, but it is well suited to the technical arguments – especially those relating to economic, commercial and monetary issues – that she addresses with such impressively careful logic. Ashton might well argue that Mahan does not give enough prominence to the role and influence of the British in setting the West European agenda. There was, he argues, 'hardly any significant international issue' in the Kennedy years 'that did not have some form of Anglo-American dimension to it'. (p. 222) Hence, by extension, any study of Franco-American relations is incomplete without full acknowledgement of the British angle. Then again, Mahan could well counter that de Gaulle is something of a 'rude mechanical' in Ashton's book – a means of advancing the plot rather than an integral element in the story itself – and that any treatment of Anglo-American relations, whether in Europe, the Middle East, Africa or South-East Asia, is itself incomplete unless it acknowledges the omnipresence of de Gaulle and his capacity for obstructing Anglo-American policies while advancing those of France.

To ask Ashton to deal in detail with the French and Mahan to devote more time to the British would, however, be quite unfair. Historians, particularly in Britain, are hard-pressed enough as it is thanks to the demands of the RAE without having to worry about covering all national archival bases in producing monographs on international history – even supposing that time, money and language skills were present. Instead, both of the books under review can be read with great profit by anyone interested in Anglo-American and Franco-American relations in the early 1960s since they complement each other very well, especially in terms of Western Europe, the Berlin crisis, EEC developments and détente, with Mahan providing a politico-economic counterpoise to Ashton's politico-diplomatic approach. In terms of recent historiographical developments, Constantine Pagedas's *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem, 1960-1963. A Troubled Partnership* (London: Frank Cass, 2000) provides a bridge between Ashton and Mahan, though his treatment of the French dimension is constrained by limited use of available primary sources, while Jeffrey Glen Giauque's *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: the Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) offers a relevant and useful comparative treatment of US, British, French and German policies and relations. A number of the essays in the collection edited by Douglas Brinkley and Richard T. Griffiths (*John F. Kennedy and Europe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999)) stress the genuine predicament Kennedy and his officials faced in formulating a coherent and appropriate set of policies for Western Europe and, in so doing, offer a contrast to Mahan, who is a little lacking in empathy in this regard. Moreover, while Mahan handles de Gaulle's spoiling diplomacy very well, there is occasionally too much stress on the negative without compensating attention to the positive side of his policies, particularly his vision of a genuinely independent Europe and the destruction of the US-Soviet hegemony. These matters provide a *leitmotif* to her study but were perhaps deserving of more extended treatment in and of themselves. (4)

But this is a minor quibble, and in general Mahan succeeds in showing how problems like Berlin, European integration and international finance were all linked in the minds of US and French leaders and policymakers, and that the 'relationships among the issues accentuated Franco-American differences and foreclosed cooperation'. (p. 10) No one issue can be understood in isolation, she asserts, just as Ashton argues that the 1962-63 crisis of interdependence was made up of a series of interlocking crises. For Mahan, monetary problems became enmeshed with NATO strategy, the British application to join the Common Market was entangled with the debate over nuclear sharing in the Atlantic alliance, and the Berlin crisis – an on-going phenomenon rather than an event peculiar to 1961 – provided a permanent backdrop. If anybody supposes that the Franco-American arguments in NATO earlier this year concerning the rectitude of war on Iraq came out of a clear blue historical sky, Mahan's book serves as a reminder that NATO really wouldn't be NATO if it was not periodically convulsed by bitter Franco-American disputes.

Notes

1. Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956-1959* (London: Macmillan, 1971), Appendix III, pp. 756-9. [Back to \(1\)](#)
2. James Ellison, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Community, 1955-58* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.167. [Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Ellison, *ibid.* [Back to \(3\)](#)
4. See in this connection Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance*, transl. Susan Emanuel (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). [Back to \(4\)](#)

Nigel Ashton is pleased to accept Dr Ruane's review and does not wish to comment further.

Erin Mahan is pleased to accept Dr Ruane's review and does not wish to comment further.

Other reviews:

H-Net Reviews

<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php> [3]

Source URL: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/341>

Links:

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/1616>

[2] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/1618>

[3] <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7403>