

**Benjamin Martill**

## Center of gravity: domestic institutions and the victory of liberal strategy in Cold War Europe

**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Martill, Benjamin (2018) *Center of gravity: domestic institutions and the victory of liberal strategy in Cold War Europe*. *Security Studies*. ISSN 0963-6412

DOI: [10.1080/09636412.2018.1508636](https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1508636)

© 2018 [Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/90524/>

Available in LSE Research Online: October 2018

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

# Centre of Gravity: Domestic Institutions and the Victory of Liberal Strategy in Cold War Europe

## Author Affiliation

Benjamin Martill, Dahrendorf Postdoctoral Fellow, LSE Ideas, London School of Economics and Political Science

## Abstract

*Cold War strategy in Western Europe almost exclusively followed the US policy of containment. Conventional explanations for this continuity, however, fail to account for both the strategic rationale and the scale of domestic support behind attempts to 'disengage' from the Cold War. This article seeks to explain why containment won out over disengagement in European strategy. By highlighting the underlying liberal tenets of containment, it argues this victory owed more to the advantages afforded the political centre by the political institutions of Western Europe than to the logic of containment strategy itself. The occupation of the centre-ground by advocates of containment afforded them distinct institutional advantages, including an increased likelihood of representation in government, greater bargaining strength relative to other parties, and limited sources of viable opposition. The dependence of containment strategy on centrist strength is demonstrated through a discussion of the politics of strategy in the French Fourth Republic.*

## Introduction

Security in Western Europe after 1945 is associated with the strategy of ‘containment’. Evolving beyond its relatively conservative origins in Kennan’s ‘long telegram’ of 1947,<sup>1</sup> containment identified the nature of the Soviet system itself as an existential threat to the ‘West’, the solution to which lay in the strength and credibility of a united, institutionalised, Atlantic alliance, aimed at the eventual defeat of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Explanations for the embrace of containment in Western Europe emphasise the importance of international structural drivers pushing governments to adopt the strategy, including the proximity of Soviet troops to Western Europe, rising enmity between the superpowers, and the reliance of the Europeans on the economic and military might of the United States (US).<sup>3</sup> But these explanations cannot tell us why alternative strategies that also recognised these constraints – the threat from the East, relative European weakness, rising superpower tension – failed to feature prominently in European security during the period. The principal alternative, termed here *disengagement*, recognised the same premises as containment, but sought to overcome them through de-escalation, diplomacy, and a more ‘independent’ European posture. And yet, whilst *Ostpolitik* and Gaullism both offered glimpses of what disengagement looked like in practice, it was containment that ‘won out’ in the domestic debates over Cold War security in Western Europe.

---

<sup>1</sup> George F. Kennan, ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’, *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (1947): 566-583.

<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 71-72.

<sup>3</sup> Geir Lundestad, ‘Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 23:3 (1986): 263-277; John Lewis Gaddis, ‘The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War’, *Diplomatic History*, 7:3 (1983): 171-190, p. 177; Anton W. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979): 61, 132-136; John W. Young, *Cold War Europe 1945-1989: A Political History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991): 29.

This article seeks to explain why containment dominated European strategy through a detailed examination of the role played by ideology, party politics and domestic institutions in determining West European strategy. By turning attention to the ideological constituencies underlying both containment and disengagement, and the relative power of these distinct groupings, the article locates containment's success not in the internal logics of the strategy itself but rather in the institutional advantages conferred on the parties of the political centre in the parliamentary systems of Western Europe. Containment strategy, I argue, resonated with – and was in part produced by – a distinctly liberal view of international affairs associated with the parties (and party factions) at the centre of West European party systems. This vision of international relations identified illiberal and anti-democratic governments as the primary source of external threats, regarded the institutionalisation of the Western world as the primary means of overcoming these threats, and sought to universalise its individualist values through the ultimate defeat of the Soviet Union. By contrast, disengagement drew support, for different reasons, from socialism *and* conservatism, since both traditions had a tendency to regard the superpowers in equivalent terms, believed the primary goal of security strategy to be coexistence, and found the deep institutionalisation of 'the West' problematic.

The key to understanding the success of containment, I contend, lies in its liberal heritage and, in consequence, the location of its supporters at the centre of West European party systems. This afforded proponents of the liberal view of security distinct institutional advantages over their competitors; namely, increased likelihood of government membership, greater influence in governing coalitions, and increased strength vis-à-vis the opposition. By privileging the political centre, proportional

parliamentary systems afforded increased influence to the liberal strategy of containment over the disengagement alternative endorsed by socialists and conservatives. Thus, containment did not dominate because it was ‘logical’, but because the ideological constituency most supportive of its precepts was empowered by parliamentary institutions of West European states.

To illustrate the argument empirically I offer a case study of the politics of French strategy in the early Cold War period (1945 to 1966). As I shall demonstrate, French adoption of the key elements of containment is made possible only by the emergence of a string of centrist coalition governments, whilst the strategy’s decline from the late 1950s onwards is a direct consequence of the collapse of the political centre at the end of the Fourth Republic. Under the *tripartiste* governments from 1945 to 1947 France failed to develop the clear Atlanticist orientation articulated by other West European states at the time, owing to the presence of the communists in the government. From 1947 to 1951, following the expulsion of the communists, a series of ‘third force’ coalition governments determined French strategy; composed of centrist parties and social democrats, they aligned France firmly with the US in opposition to the Soviets and oversaw the institutionalisation of the country’s Atlanticist orientation. The slow demise of these governments throughout the 1950s, however, heralded the emergence of Gaullism as a political force drawing on support from both left and right, and the subsequent adoption of a strategy of disengagement.

The argument elaborated in this article has important implications for our understanding of both the politics of Cold War security and the domestic sources of international order more generally. With specific reference to the Cold War, by

highlighting the non-linear mapping of ideological traditions to divergent strategies of overcoming the Soviet threat, the argument highlights the importance of ideology and domestic politics in a domain (and period) where these are often thought to have been marginal.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the findings also have implications beyond questions of Cold War security. The curvilinear relationship between the traditional ‘left-right’ ideological spectrum and foreign policy issues, in which both left and right oppose the centre, can be witnessed in a host of contemporary issue-areas, including human rights and intervention, democratisation, trade policy, global governance, and contemporary strategy, including the Western response to the ‘Russian resurgence’.<sup>5</sup> By acknowledging the non-linear politics of international order, we uncover a more significant role for political parties and ideology than has hitherto been acknowledged.<sup>6</sup>

### **Strategies of Containment and Disengagement**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, policymakers, scholars and the general public in Western Europe were forced to acknowledge the altered contours of the international system; the United States and the USSR were now the major global powers, the nations of Western Europe were weak in comparison, and the proximity

---

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Hickson, ‘The Postwar Consensus Revisited’, *The Political Quarterly*, 75:2 (2004): 142-154, 152; Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, ‘The Cold War Consensus: Did It Exist?’, *Polity*, 22:4 (1990): 627-653, 628; Harriet Jones, ‘The postwar consensus in Britain: thesis, antithesis and synthesis’ in Brian Brivati, Julia Buxton and Anthony Seldon (eds.) *The Contemporary History Handbook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 41-49; Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 355.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Heilbrunn, ‘Bernie Sanders is back – and he wants to reshape US foreign policy’, *The Spectator*, 2017, 21 September, <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/09/bernie-sanders-is-back-and-he-wants-to-reshape-us-foreign-policy/>.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Martill, ‘International Ideologies: Paradigms of Ideological Analysis in World Politics’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 22:3 (2017): 236-255, 237; Christian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, ‘Contested roles and domestic politics: reflections on role theory in foreign policy analysis and IR theory’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8:1 (2012): 5–24, 14; Jean-Philippe Thérien, ‘The United Nations ideology: from ideas to global politics’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 20:3 (2015): 221–243, 225.

of the Soviet Union, and the extent of its military capabilities, provided a significant threat to European security.<sup>7</sup> There emerged, accordingly, a political consensus on the salient features of this ‘new’ international order at the domestic level, comprising these three insights. Yet within this consensus significant debate and discussion arose on the question of how the European states could best obtain security under these conditions and what the dictates of the ‘national interest’ demanded in this new order.<sup>8</sup> Two broad strategies for achieving security in this new superpower-dominated international order arose in the late 1940s and 1950s; a strategy of ‘containment’ based on the deterrent value of a strong Atlantic alliance, and a strategy of ‘disengagement’ that sought to reduce tension between the superpowers through arbitrage and the adoption of a more neutral European posture (see Figure 1).

Advocates of containment portrayed the Soviet state as an illegitimate and inherently threatening authoritarian regime, the expansion of which could only be halted through the direct threat of overwhelming force (deterrence), and not by diplomatic engagement or Western concessions.<sup>9</sup> Containment emphasised the ideological nature of the Soviet threat: It was not the power of the USSR alone that created European insecurity, but rather the ends to which this power served; namely, the expansion of the authoritarian, collectivist, internationalist – and fundamentally anti-individualist – ideology of Soviet communism.<sup>10</sup> As a corollary, containment sought to embrace and formalise the ‘Atlantic’ alignment between the US and its similarly liberal and democratic allies in Western Europe as a means of hedging against communist

---

<sup>7</sup> Young, *Cold War Europe*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> De Porte, *Europe Between the Superpowers*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Woolf, *Foreign Policy: The Labour Party’s Dilemma* (London: Fabian Society, 1947): 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> George F. Kennan, ‘The Sources of Soviet Conduct’, *Foreign Affairs*, 25:1 (1946): 566-582, 566-567; Jo Grimond, *The Liberal Future* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959): 151.

domination. Advocates of containment placed significant emphasis on institutionalisation as the optimal means of providing for collective Western security. “Deterrence”, argued Jo Grimond, leader of the British Liberals, “does not mean that each nation must keep up its own nuclear arsenal. Deterrence means having enough nuclear power to deter and no more...and accepting the need for wider groupings and the pooling of national sovereignties”.<sup>11</sup> Only by tying states into an interdependent framework – through NATO, and, to some extent, European integration – could the credibility of the West be demonstrated and its shared capabilities made effective and affordable.<sup>12</sup>

Containment was, however, only one strategy available to policymakers in the immediate post-war world. The primary intellectual challenge to containment may be termed, most broadly, disengagement, since at its core has been the notion of reducing global tension by disengaging from the superpower conflict. Whilst containment has entered common usage as an umbrella term for a number of distinct strategies, attempts to break out of the strictures of Cold War containment have hitherto been described only in terms of their specific manifestations (e.g. *Ostpolitik*, *détente*, Gaullism) and not as examples of a broader alternative to containment strategy.<sup>13</sup> But the various attempts to escape from the strictures of Cold War competition are sufficiently distinct from containment, and have sufficient commonalities between each other, to be usefully considered instances of the same strategy. Efforts at disengagement have sought to reduce tensions between the blocs and to de-escalate the Cold War from the very beginning. A basic commitment of this approach was the

---

<sup>11</sup> Jo Grimond, *The Liberal Challenge* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1963): 246.

<sup>12</sup> DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers*, 135-136; Young, *Cold War Europe*, 8, 30.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, Ch. 2.

assumption of moral and strategic equivalence between the two superpowers. Advocates of disengagement placed the blame for the emerging Cold War on the exigencies of the international system (the absence of trust, the prevalence of misperception under anarchy) rather than the nature of the Soviet state itself. Advocates placed less emphasis on defeating the Soviet Union and did not regard its government as *inherently* illegitimate. Advocates of disengagement also critiqued the institutionalisation of the Atlantic region (through NATO and other US-backed institutions) on the grounds that this crystallised the formation of opposing blocs and stymied the independence and freedom of manoeuvre of the European states. The ‘manifesto’ of the Bevanites in the British Labour party, for example, recommended the ideal of: “Britain holding the balance between the two great power blocs in the world, withstanding the policies of each where necessary, mediating between them, or at least not tipping the balance too strongly on one side or the other”.<sup>14</sup> De Gaulle saw the dictates of Cold War strategy similarly, aiming “to disengage France...from the integration realised by NATO under American command; to establish relations with each of the States of the Eastern bloc, first and foremost Russia, with the object of bringing about a *détente* followed by understanding and co-operation”.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Aneurin Bevan, Harold Wilson and John Freeman, *One Way Only: A Socialist Analysis of the Present World Crisis* (London: Tribune Publications, 1951): 8-11.

<sup>15</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal 1958-62, Endeavour 1962-* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1971): 202.

	<b>Containment</b>	<b>Disengagement</b>
<b>Source of threat</b>	Nature of the Soviet state (anti-democratic, illiberal and protectionist)	Mistrust and insecurity wrought on by anarchic international system
<b>Overcoming threat</b>	Deterrence through a strong Atlantic alliance	De-escalation through European neutrality and diplomacy
<b>Institutional framework</b>	Strong and centralised to aid credibility	Weak and decentralised to maximise independence of action
<b>Endgame of strategy</b>	Eventual defeat of the Soviet Union	Coexistence between the superpowers

**Figure 1:** Principles of Containment and Disengagement as Cold War Strategies

It is well known, however, that in European Cold War strategy, containment won out over its disengagement rival.<sup>16</sup> Containment, as practiced, entailed the provision a strong, collective Western deterrent to defend against the Soviet threat along with efforts to undermine the global prospects of Soviet communism and oversee the defeat of the Soviet government. Although successive governments interpreted the concept somewhat differently, the basic intellectual framework of containment – the anti-communist, Western-centric, institutionalised approach to collective security – remained *in situ* for most of the Cold War. The governments of Western Europe, moreover, generally brought into containment strategy and, with few exceptions, governmental strategies across the continent were explicitly Atlanticist, anti-Soviet, and pro-NATO. Incidences of aberration from the containment norm – such as

---

<sup>16</sup> Young, *Cold War Europe*, 29; De Porte, *Europe Between the Superpowers*, 192.

détente, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* or the security strategy of Charles de Gaulle's France in the 1960s – were the exceptions that proved the rule.<sup>17</sup>

Why containment was so rarely challenged, however, is a question that requires closer examination, since it is puzzling in at least three respects. The first is that both containment and disengagement received substantial support from a diverse range of political constituencies; in the popular and political discourses of security at the time, containment was by no means the only game in town. The second reason is that containment never had a monopoly on the dictates of political realism: Disengagement strategy shared the same sober assessment of the security problematic in Europe and offered, one could argue, a more quintessentially *realist* means of dealing with it, since it emphasised prudence and pragmatism, and sought to downplay the importance of Soviet ideology. The third reason the dominance of containment is puzzling is that the scattered empirical record of strategies aimed at de-escalation and coexistence – core principles of disengagement represented variously by *Ostpolitik* and Gaullism – appeared to serve the 'national interest' just as well, if not better, than containment. We must surmise from the above that, contrary to popular perceptions, the dominance of containment was not a foregone conclusion, either by virtue of the concept's 'realistic' logic or its status as the only popular strategy for dealing with the Soviet threat. The victory of containment, in other words, is a puzzle in itself, one worthy of explanation.

---

<sup>17</sup> Alice Pannier, 'From one exceptionalism to another: France's strategic relations with the United States and the United Kingdom in the post-Cold War era', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:4 (2017): 475-504, 480; Philip H. Gordon, 'The normalisation of German foreign policy', *Orbis*, 38:2 (1994): 225-243, 228.

## Explaining the Victory of Containment

Existing explanations for the continuity of containment are of two kinds. Explanations prevalent in IR theory more generally tend to emphasise the internal logic of the strategy itself, or the validity of the suppositions upon which it was based. Realists have argued that the scale of the threat posed by the USSR created strong pressures for European states to adopt containment strategy to defend against the Soviet threat.<sup>18</sup> As noted by Waltz: “For almost half a century, the constancy of the Soviet threat produced a constancy of American policy. Other countries could rely on the United States for protection because protecting them seemed to serve American security interests.”<sup>19</sup> Liberal accounts have focused more on the institutionalisation of the Western world during the Cold War, rather than balance of power considerations, but in this they too have portrayed key elements of containment, particularly alliance credibility and deterrence, as functional – and therefore as largely self-explanatory – moves on behalf of the US and its allies.<sup>20</sup> Constructivist scholars, meanwhile, have proffered explanations that, whilst affording a greater (initial) role for agency, have also relied heavily on system-wide explanations for the emergence of enmity and the

---

<sup>18</sup> Anne Deighton, ‘The Cold War in Europe, 1945-1947: Three Approaches’, in Ngaire Woods (ed), *Explaining International Relations Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 89-90; De Porte, *Europe between the Superpowers*, 133-134; John Lewis Gaddis, ‘The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System’, *International Security*, 10:4 (1986): 99-142, 107; John Mearsheimer, ‘Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War’, *International Security*, 15:1 (1990): 5-56, 26; Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1979); Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 18:4 (1988): 628.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Waltz, ‘Structural Realism after the Cold War’, *International Security*, 25:1 (2000): 5-41, 28.

<sup>20</sup> G. John Ikenberry, ‘Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 7:1 (2009): 71-87, 76-78; Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 126; John S. Duffield, ‘International regimes and alliance behavior: explaining NATO conventional force levels’, *International Organization*, 46:4 (1992): 819-855; Daniel Deudney & G. John Ikenberry, ‘The nature and sources of liberal international order’, *Review of International Studies*, 25:2 (1999): 179-196; Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane, ‘Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions’, *World Politics*, 38:1 (1985): 226-254; Arthur Stein, ‘Coordination and collaboration: regimes in an anarchic world’, *International Organization*, 36:2 (1982): 299-324.

adoption of hard-line responses.<sup>21</sup> Other explanations – favoured by historical accounts as well as studies of the individual countries concerned – have emphasised the emergence of consensus at the domestic level as the principal reason for strategic continuity. The ‘post-war consensus’ between major political parties in West European democracies over questions of Cold War strategy, on this view, explains the success of containment, since the strategy possessed significant political support throughout the period. Oftentimes these explanations are linked to the logics of the theoretical accounts, resulting in a familiar combined account which argues that it was the requirement of defending Europe from the Soviet Union that led to the emergence of a wholesale consensus at the domestic level on the virtues of containment strategy. It is thus assumption that underlies much of the literature on the politics of both French<sup>22</sup> and British<sup>23</sup> Cold War strategy, for instance.

Yet these existing accounts – and the received wisdom – are not able to fully account for the dominance of containment strategy throughout the Cold War in Western Europe. In particular, they struggle to account for the existence of considerable opposition to containment by supporters of alternative strategies, grouped here under the term disengagement, which sought to manage the Cold War through diplomatic

---

<sup>21</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, ‘Macrosecuritization and security constellations: reconsidering scale in securitization theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 35:2 (2009): 253-276; Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics’, *International Organization*, 46:2 (1992): 391-425, 404.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Grant, ‘French Defence Policy and European Security’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 100:3 (1985): 411-426; P. Hassner and J. Roper, ‘Relations with the Superpowers’, in F. de la Serre, J. Lereuz and H. Wallace (eds), *French and British Foreign Policies in Transition* (Oxford: Berg, 1990)

<sup>23</sup> P. Addison, ‘British Historians and the Debate over the “Postwar Consensus”’, in W.M. Louis (ed), *More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Alan Dobson, ‘Labour or Conservative: Does It Matter in Anglo-American Relations?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25:4 (1990): 387-407, 393; John S. Duffield, ‘Transatlantic Relations after the Cold War: Theory, Evidence, and the Future’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 2:1 (2001): 93-115, 93; John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 14; Joseph Frankel, ‘Britain’s Changing Role’, *International Affairs*, 50:4 (1974): 574-583; David Reynolds, ‘A ‘special relationship’? America, Britain and the international order since the Second World War’, *International Affairs*, 62:1 (1985): 1-20, 3.

engagement with the Soviet Union and by engaging in efforts aimed at bringing about a reduction in tension between the superpowers. According to the logic of existing approaches, disengagement must either be illogical, unpopular, or both. Illogical, from the perspective of IR theory, because systemic pressures did not lead ostensibly rational states to adopt this strategy. Unpopular, from the perspective of the ‘post-war consensus’, because the strategy failed to gain significant purchase within government. And yet the idea that disengagement as an alternative to containment was either of these does not stand up to closer theoretical or empirical scrutiny.

Consider, first, the question of whether alternatives to containment were illogical, and that they failed to fit with the ‘reality’ of the post-Cold War international system. The problem here is that advocates of disengagement started from the same basic diagnosis of the nature of the post-1945 international order as did proponents of containment, accepting as fact the weakness of the European states, the rise of the superpowers, as well as the severity of the threat from the Soviet Union. Proponents of disengagement did not seek to ally with the Soviet Union. Rather, they advocated efforts to ameliorate inter-bloc tension. In doing so they hoped to maintain (or improve) their country’s national security. Ironically, with its emphasis on the balance of power, sovereign independence, and the avoidance of a ‘security dilemma’, disengagement strategy tapped into core ideals of traditional ‘realist’ thinking on international affairs. Moreover, when practiced – as suggested by the examples of Gaullism, *Ostpolitik* and *détente* – disengagement strategies were relatively successful in their aims of maintaining security, reducing global tension, and improving the leverage of the country in question. The singular ‘logic’ of containment appears to have become established, within IR at least, more as a result of its prevalence in

European Cold War strategy than any purported monopoly on the national interest. This is perhaps a consequence of the (problematic) unfalsifiability of core realist concepts – which map onto almost any behaviour or outcome conceivable<sup>24</sup> – which has resulted in a situation in which the continuity of containment in itself becomes a justification for its internal logic. In contrast to the perceived wisdom, containment was not the only logical response to the post-1945 security problematic in Europe, nor was it the only one advocated.

This brings us on to the question of the prevalence of disengagement strategy, which the idea of a post-war consensus in Cold War strategy would seem to deny. In contrast to the widespread notion of consensus, however, support for disengagement came from significant constituencies in West European political systems and among the publics of these countries. Moreover, at times these constituencies were themselves sufficiently vocal that questions of Cold War strategy rose to unprecedented national prominence or incited in direct action on behalf of the population. In spite of the popular – and unfailingly partisan – characterisation of containment’s opponents as far left ‘peaceniks’, support for disengagement – a more independent stance in the Cold War and reduced dependence on the West – came frequently from traditional conservatives on the right of the political spectrum.<sup>25</sup> And, furthermore, the pattern of opposition to containment was not only predictable across the political spectrum, but also reasonably constant across different European countries. Given the prevalence of

---

<sup>24</sup> John Vasquez, ‘The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz’s Balancing Position’, *American Political Science Review*, 91:4 (1997): 899-912; Jeffrey W. Legro & Andrew Moravcsik, ‘Is Anybody Still a Realist?’, *International Security* 24:2 (1999): 5-55, 6.

<sup>25</sup> For country-specific examples see in particular: Michael Creswell and Marc Trachtenberg, ‘France and the German Question, 1945-1955’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 5:3 (2003): 5-28, 11; Sue Onslow, ‘Unreconstructed Nationalists and a Minor Gunboat Operation: Julian Amery, Neil McLean and the Suez Crisis’, *Contemporary British History*, 20:1 (2006): 73-99, 74; Daniel Heidt, “‘I think that would be the end of Canada’”: Howard Green, the Nuclear Test Ban, and Interest-Based Foreign Policy, 1946–1963’, *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 42:3 (2012): 343-369, 343.

support for disengagement from across the political spectrum, it is evident that accounts of the post-war consensus are not so much able to explain popular agreement on the merits of containment, or indeed consensus between parties *per se*, but rather agreement within government and between the governing parties or factions. What is often termed a *partisan* consensus, then, was more akin to a *governmental* consensus. This, of course, begs the question of why parties and factions supportive of disengagement are not represented in the government as frequently of those that support containment.

Put simply, existing explanations of West European Cold War strategy fail to adequately account for the reasons behind the dominance of one particular reading of the dictates of the national interest (containment) over an equally logical and popular alternative (disengagement). While containment ultimately came to characterise the dominant mode of the European response to the Cold War problematic, it is hard to argue this was for reasons of either its functional necessity or its widespread support across domestic party systems. Existing theoretical accounts based on a combination of IR theory and the ‘post-war consensus’ fail to adequately explain the reasons why containment ‘won out’ in debates over European Cold War strategy. Indeed, they leave us with a puzzle: How did containment come to dominate alternative strategies that had an equally logical basis and significant support among important political constituencies? In this article I present an alternative, institutional explanation for the dominance of containment strategy, one that takes seriously the existence of competing strategies for maintaining the national interest in the post-1945 international order. I argue that containment was, first and foremost, a *liberal* doctrine, and that the victory of containment over disengagement owed much to the

institutional advantages conferred on liberals by virtue of their location at the political centre of West European party systems. In other words, the victory of containment is best understood as the product of distinct constellations of domestic support, not as an objective manifestation of the ‘national interest’ in the European context.

The theoretical part of the argument proceeds in two stages. First, I argue that containment and disengagement represent competing logics of security drawn from alternative modes of political subjectivity. Containment, I argue, depends at base upon key liberal commitments, whilst disengagement relies upon underlying values common to both socialism and conservatism. I argue as a result that the pattern of political contestation over Cold War strategy has always been curvilinear, rather than unidimensional. Second, I argue that the (liberal) strategic preferences of the political centre dominated European party systems because of the inherent advantages conferred on centrist parties by the parliamentary institutions in these countries. In particular, I argue that centrist power was bolstered by a greater chance of receiving representation in government, increased influence vis-à-vis non-centrist parties relative to the size of the centre-ground, and the fragmentation of the political opposition whilst in government.

### **Ideology and the Politics of Cold War Security**

The choice between containment and disengagement was not only a choice between two competing ‘options’. The choice of strategies was closely linked to the different conceptions of the nature of the international realm held by policymakers and politicians and of the divergent political traditions in vogue at the time: socialism,

liberalism, and conservatism. These ideological traditions offered a repository of basic ontological and normative claims concerning the nature of the individual, the basis of political authority, and the nature of the international domain.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, they had specific implications for how proponents were likely to view the dictates of the national interest in the Cold War context. Advocates of containment were primarily those who identified ideologically with the tenets of liberalism and supporters of disengagement were to be found within both the socialist and conservative ideological camps. As such, the politics of European security in the Cold War followed a discernible but non-linear pattern distinguished by the distinction between the centre of the political spectrum (liberals) and both of the wings (socialists and conservatives).

The fundamental elements of containment strategy all share a common basis in the philosophical foundations of *liberal* strategy.<sup>27</sup> Several specific elements of liberal international thought resonated with, and indeed informed, containment strategy. The first was the emphasis on the nature of the Soviet Union's domestic regime – anti-democratic, illiberal and protectionist – as the source of insecurity. This aspect of containment, responsible for the sharp distinction drawn by the Europeans between the threat from the US, and that from the USSR, reflected a core liberal tradition of

---

<sup>26</sup> Martill, 'International Ideologies', 236; Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 1; Michael Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997): 18-20.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the ideological underpinnings of liberal international thought see, in particular: Azar Gat, *Fascist and Liberal Visions of War: Fuller, Liddell Hart, Douhet, and Other Modernists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism: Theory, History, Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 20; Beate Jahn, 'Liberal internationalism: from ideology to empirical theory – and back again', *International Theory*, 1:3 (2009): 409-438; Michael Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism: The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

linking external behaviour to internal characteristics.<sup>28</sup> A second link between liberal thought and containment could be found in the moral universalism underpinned the desire to eradicate communist ideology, defeat the Soviet state, and free the citizens of the USSR's satellite states the world over. Third, and finally, the emphasis on a strong and interdependent 'Western' deterrent – to be achieved through the agglomeration of capabilities under a centralised military command, was a product of liberal beliefs in supranational governance and in the functional allocation of authority to the international level.

Disengagement, in contrast, resonated with some core assumptions about the nature of the international system shared by both socialists and conservatives. First, there was the claim that there was little to differentiate the external behaviour of both superpowers. Socialists believed both US and Soviet actions risked misperception and spiralling aggression<sup>29</sup> and pushed for a neutral strategy of mediation to break the cycle of spiralling aggression.<sup>30</sup> Conservatives regarded the superpowers as equivalents because they portrayed the conflict largely in realist terms, associating threat with *power*, and advocating a balancing strategy to offset dependence on either bloc. Thus, for different reasons, socialists and conservatives rejected the core liberal tendency to derive sources of external behaviour from specific regime characteristics.<sup>31</sup> The second shared characteristic was that the primary goal of

---

<sup>28</sup> Michael W. Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', *American Political Science Review*, 80:4 (1986): 1151-1169; Zeev Maoz and Bruce Russett, 'Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986', *American Political Science Review*, 87:3 (1993): 624-638.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004): 20.

<sup>30</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy 1900-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 169.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics', *International Organization*, 51:4 (1997): 513-553, 518; Mark Zacher and Richard Matthew, 'Liberal International Theory: Common Threads, Divergent Strands' in Charles W. Kegley Jr. (ed.)

security strategy should be coexistence. Many socialists ascribed the menacing behaviour of the Soviet Union to insecurity engendered by American aggression. However much they disliked the Soviet system, they believed a reduction in global tension would be accompanied by liberalising tendencies in the USSR.<sup>32</sup> The aim, therefore, was not to wipe the Soviets off the face of the earth. Conservatives, for their part, embraced pluralism as the natural corollary of sovereign independence at home; for many conservatives there was no duty – but also no *right* – to intervene in the domestic affairs of other nations.<sup>33</sup> The Russian political system, however distasteful, was the choice of the Russians, and – so long as domestic security could be guaranteed – saving the Russian people from communism was not an integral component of the national interest.<sup>34</sup> A third claim from proponents of disengagement was that the institutionalisation of ‘the West’ was itself problematic. Socialists argued the move towards supranational governance undermined the capacity of the state to intervene domestically and thereby threatened the redistributive agenda of the left.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, they believed the deepening of intra-Western ties contributed to the crystallisation of the bloc system that was responsible for so much of the conflict in the post-1945 order.<sup>36</sup> Conservatives, on the other hand, regarded transnational authority as an illegitimate encroachment on the independence of the nation state –

---

*Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995)

<sup>32</sup> Andrew J. Williams, *Labour and Russia: The attitude of the Labour party to the USSR, 1924-34* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989): 35.

<sup>33</sup> Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, 57; Klaus Dodds and Stuart Elden, ‘Thinking Ahead: David Cameron, the Henry Jackson Society and British Neo-conservatism’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10:3 (2008): 347-363, 348-349.

<sup>34</sup> Most accounts of conservatives support for détente note the irony of this position given the often fierce anti-communist stance of the individuals concerned, but to find this ironic misunderstands how conservatives view the international system. See for example: Heidt, “I think that would be the end of Canada, p. 343; Asa McKercher, “The most serious problem?” Canada-US relations and Cuba, 1962’, *Cold War History*, 12:1 (2012): 69-88, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Aspinwall, ‘Preferring Europe: Ideology and National Preferences on European Integration’, *European Union Politics*, 3:1 (2002): 81-111, 87.

<sup>36</sup> M.R. Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969): 34.

and its core prerogatives – many were also sceptical of the ability of supranational forms of governance to overcome the role of power in the international system.<sup>37</sup>

Containment, then, was not just a strategic choice, but a political one too, given that that support for the strategy rested on the extent to which individuals endorsed the underlying principles of liberal thought. The explanation for the wholesale adoption of containment in Western Europe, therefore, lies not in the strategy's internal 'logic' (since this is to adopt, *a priori*, the liberal/centrist argument), nor in the background conditions of superpower competition and relative European weakness (since advocates of disengagement shared this diagnosis of the post-war order), but rather in the influence at the domestic level of key proponents of the liberal view of security. In this sense the argument offered here is not dissimilar from accounts of the politics of European integration, which emphasise the crucial role played by specific domestic actors and the specific ideas they held. Craig Parsons, for instance, has contended that: "Only due to certain ideas did leaders interpret the choices leading to the EU as the best way to realize their countries' economic welfare and political strength".<sup>38</sup> The principal theoretical difference lies not only in the claim that such ideational dynamics can be witnessed in questions of Cold War strategy, but that there exists a common structuring of these ideas – albeit in a curvilinear fashion – across the left-right spectrum.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, 'Conservative Idealism and International Institutions', *Chicago Journal of International Law*, 1 (2000): 291-314, 294; Brian C. Rathbun, 'Does One Right Make a Realist? Conservatism, Neoconservatism, and Isolationism in the Foreign Policy Ideology of American Elites', *Political Science Quarterly*, 123:2 (2008): 271-299, 273.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Parsons, 'Domestic Interests, Ideas and Integration: The French Case', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38:1 (2000): 45-70, 51.

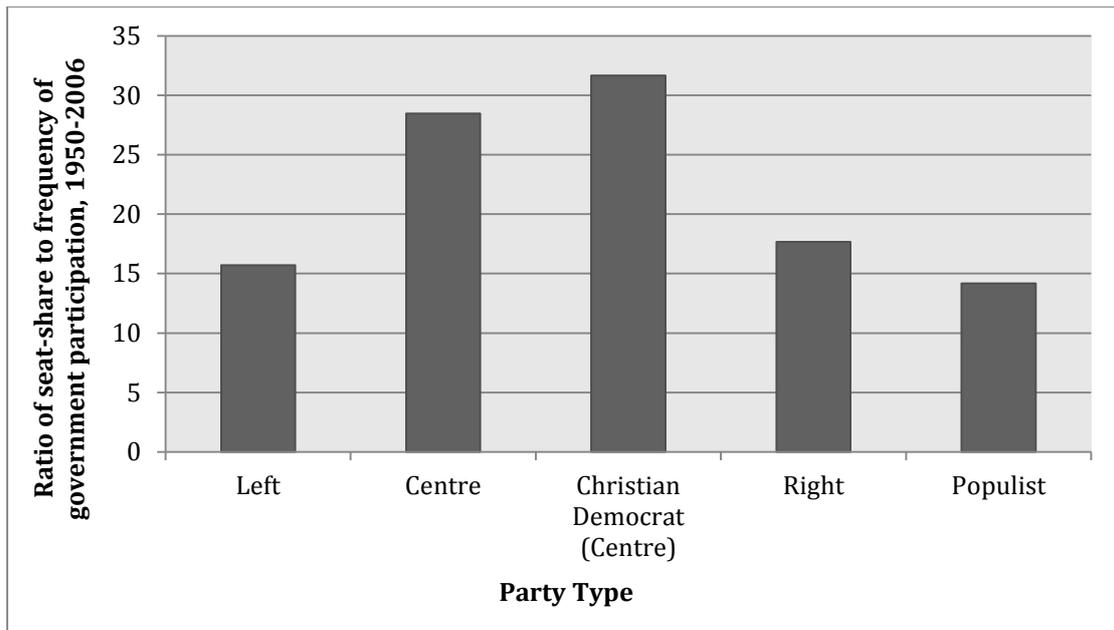
<sup>39</sup> For an account of a similar pattern in relation to European integration, see: Lizbeth Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole J. Wilson, 'Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?', *Comparative Political Studies*, 35:8 (2002): 965-989.

If the decisive factor in explaining the victory of containment strategy in European Cold War strategy is the power of its liberal supporters, then it is necessary to explain also where the strength of the liberal centre comes from. This article contends that, owing to their pivotal location at the centre of West European party systems, liberals are conferred advantages at three key points in the governing process: (1) in the process of government formation, (2) in inter-governmental bargaining, and (3) in executive-legislative relations. Centrist parties, and their specific views on strategic questions, are not only more likely to feature in coalition governments, but also more influential within government, and better able to withstand legislative constraints. I discuss each of these in turn below.

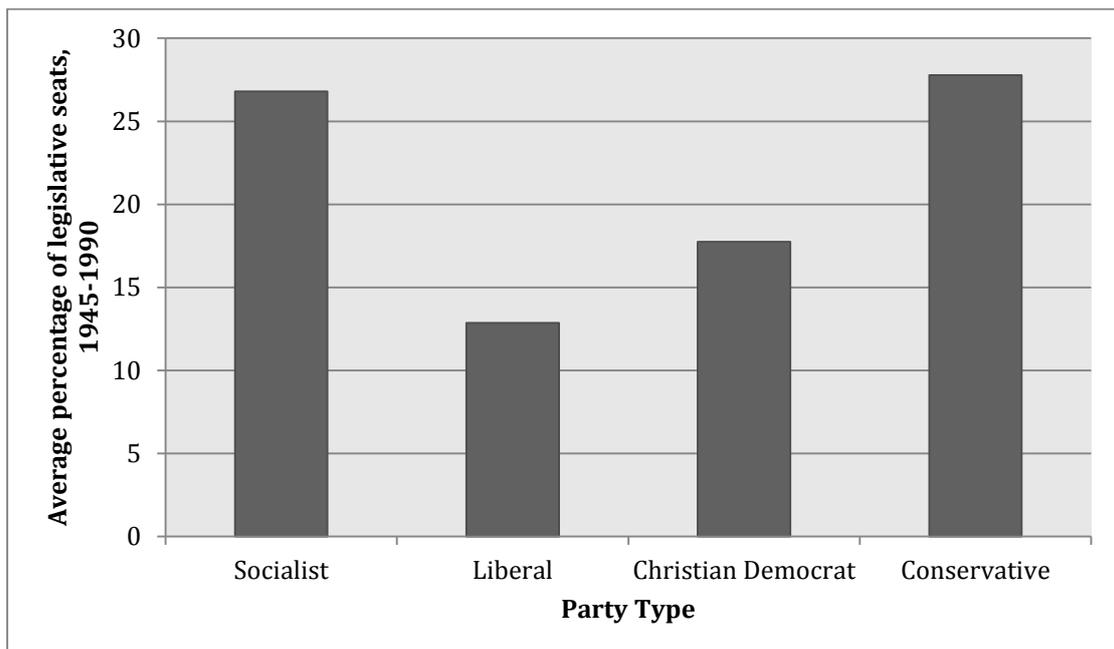
First, centrist parties are more likely to be included in governing coalitions in situations where a single party fails to obtain a majority of seats in the legislature, as is a common occurrence in the proportional parliamentary systems in Europe. The most common method for identifying potential coalition partners, the ‘minimal-connected-winning’ approach,<sup>40</sup> suggests that optimal coalitions derive from the smallest number of ideologically ‘connected’ parties needed to reach the majority threshold. Since the parties of the centre are connected in this manner to the parties of the left and the right, they will feature in almost all potential ‘minimal connected winning’ coalitions, and are therefore highly likely to feature in the government that is subsequently formed. The figures below demonstrate this empirically by showing the frequency of government participation (Figure 2) relative to the size of the party types in the legislature (Figure 3). Despite their relatively small size, over fifty-percent of governments from 1950 to 2006 featured one or more centrist parties.

---

<sup>40</sup> Robert Axelrod, *Conflict of Interest: A Theory of Divergent Goals with Application to Politics* (Chicago: Markham, 1970).



**Figure 2:** The ratio of average seat-share to frequency of government participation by party type, 1950-2006.<sup>41</sup>



**Figure 3:** Average percentage of legislative seats by party type, 1945-1990.<sup>42</sup> Note that the data are arranged differently to the data used for the previous figure, which does not distinguish between centre-right and populist conservatism.

<sup>41</sup> Data are from Duane Swank, 'Electoral, Legislative, and Government Strength of Political Parties by Ideological Group in Capitalist Democracies, 1950-2006: A Database', Department of Political Science, Marquette University, available at <http://www.marquette.edu/dept/polisci/documents/part19502006codeupd.pdf>.

Second, once in coalition with other governing parties, the centre is able to exert a disproportionate influence on the direction of the government's agenda, owing to its pivotal potential.<sup>43</sup> Because centre parties feature in multiple potential coalition scenarios they often hold the balance of power between larger parties and can therefore act as 'kingmaker', selecting the party they would prefer to govern with.<sup>44</sup> In consequence, the survival of the government often depends upon the continuing consent of the smaller centre party. When this situation obtains, the collapse of the government will negatively affect only the larger party, since the centre party will likely continue to govern in coalition with the major opposition party. The credibility of the centrist parties to defect from the governing coalition affords them increased bargaining power within the government relative to their size and enables them to achieve outcomes closer to their preferred position as a condition of their continuing support for the present government.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Data are from Ian Budge, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara and Eric Tanenbaum (eds), *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945-1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Ware, *Political Parties*, 351.

<sup>44</sup> Juliet Kaarbo, 'Power and Influence in Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Role of Junior Coalition Partners in German and Israeli Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40:4 (1996): 501-530, 505; Christoffer Green-Pedersen, 'Center Parties, Party Competition, and the Implosion of Party Systems: A Study of Centripetal Tendencies in Multiparty Systems', *Political Studies*, 52:2 (2004): 324-341, 327.

<sup>45</sup> Joe Clare, 'Ideological Fractionalization and the International Conflict Behaviour of Parliamentary Democracies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 54:4 (2010): 965-987, 981.

Switching Centrist Allegiance	Stable Centrist Allegiance
Finland	Australia
France	Austria
Germany	Belgium
Italy	Denmark
Luxembourg	Netherlands
United Kingdom	Norway
	Sweden
	Switzerland

**Figure 4:** European regimes divided according to whether centrist parties have governed with combinations of leftist and rightist partners (first column) or only with a single partner of the left or right (second column).<sup>46</sup>

Third, governments forged from one or more centrist elements of a given party system are in a stronger position vis-à-vis the legislative owing to the splintered nature of the non-governing opposition. Centrist governments makes coordinated opposition difficult, since opposing coalitions cannot be ideologically connected, making the barriers to collective (and therefore effective) opposition far higher than in cases where the opposition is wholly to the right or left of the incumbent government. In consequence, the non-centre parties of the left and right display “low or negligible levels of coalition potential”.<sup>47</sup> Whilst the left and right may hold similar positions on issues of international security, the extent of their domestic disagreements means that left/right cooperation is rarely durable over the long-term. As a result, whilst the left

<sup>46</sup> Data are from J. Woldendorp, Hans Keman and Ian Budge (eds), *Party Government in 48 Democracies: Composition, Duration, Personnel* (Boston: Kluwer, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Giuseppe Ieraci, ‘Centre Parties and Anti-System Oppositions in Polarised Systems’, *West European Politics*, 15:2 (1992): 17-34, 20.

and right can block specific pieces of legislation, they struggle to demonstrate sufficient consensus for an alternative governmental programme to emerge from opposition (see Figure 5).

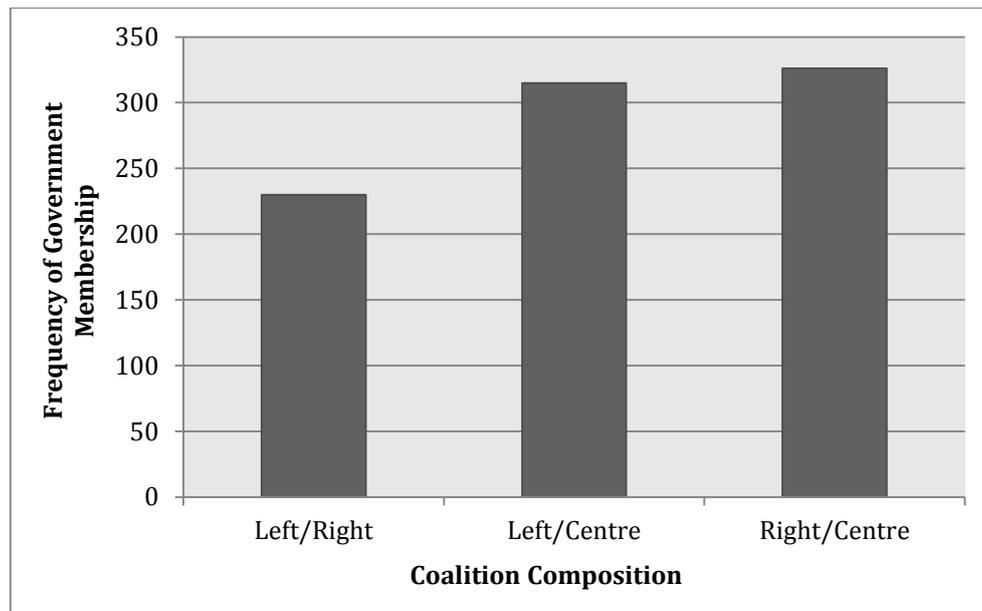


Figure 5: Frequency of governing coalitions by party types represented, 1950-2006.<sup>48</sup>

### Early Cold War France as a Case Study

To examine the proposition that it is the relative strength of the political centre – and not the intensity of the Soviet threat – that has primarily determined changes in Cold War strategy, I examine the politics of strategy in the French during the early Cold War from 1945-1966, including the duration of the Fourth Republic (1946-1958) as well as the first years of the Fifth Republic (1958-1966). Of all the West European countries, France exhibits perhaps the greatest variation in strategy during the Cold War, with important implications for its relations with the US and the USSR.

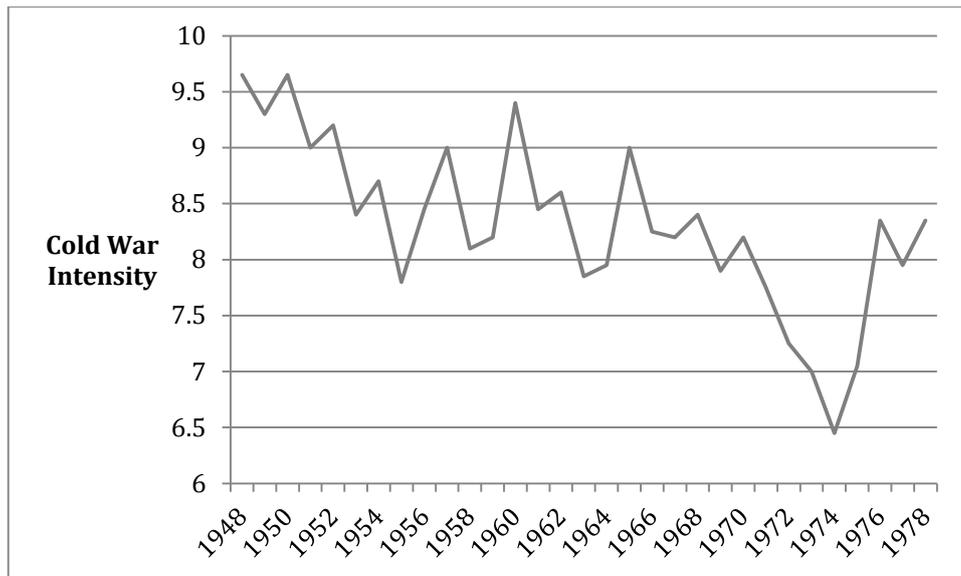
<sup>48</sup> Data are from Swank, 'Strength of Political Parties'.

Moreover, this variation goes against the grain of standard assumptions; as the Cold War intensifies in the 1960s France begins to jettison the principal components of containment (see Figure 6). The collapse of the political centre in France and the rise of Gaullism as a political force – drawing on support from left and right alike – demonstrates the extent to which the archetypal containment strategy depended for its success on the power of centrist elements within the government. The French case thus offers an illustrative example of both the non-linear relationship between political ideology and Cold War strategy and the advantages afforded the liberal parties of the political centre by the institutions of parliamentary governance.

Before we continue, it is worth considering the extent to which the French case is representative of the politics of West European strategy; after all, the perception of Gaullism as a peculiarly French phenomenon leaves the case open to potential charges of selection bias. The assumption of French specificity in this regard, however, is based on a conflation of the idiosyncrasy of Gaullist *ideology* with that of Gaullist *success*. What is unique about the French case is not Gaullism *per se*, since traditional conservatism has been associated with disengagement strategy across a number of other states during the period. Rather, what is unique about the French case is the ascendancy of traditional conservatism to a position of domestic influence that is simply not afforded its proponents in other systems. In consequence, the French case is the exception that proves the rule – in methodological terms, the ‘crucial case’ – insofar as it demonstrates the consequences of centrist collapse for Cold War strategy. Moreover, since the decline in the influence of the French centre is the product of factors largely exogenous to debates over Cold War strategy – specifically, France’s efforts to hold on to its colonies – the case of the Fourth Republic is able to

demonstrate that strategic changes are the product of shifting coalitions at the domestic level rather than any perceived failure in containment itself. The French case is thus representative of the broader phenomenon of the non-linear politics of containment, but unique in demonstrating the strategic consequences of the collapse of the political centre. That the centre ‘holds’ across the rest of the Western world should not be considered evidence *against* the domestic sources of strategy, but rather evidence *in support* of it, since – as I demonstrate below – the dominance of containment is principally the product of the corresponding domestic dominance of the political centre.

In the remainder of this article, I focus on the case of the French Fourth Republic, since it offers perhaps the starkest example of the non-linear politics of Cold War strategy and, more importantly, since the largely exogenous collapse of the political centre from the late 1950s onwards demonstrates well the strategic consequences of the decline of the liberal worldview in government.



**Figure 6:** The intensity of the Cold War, 1948-1978. Data are derived from the average enmity between the US and USSR, measured using the intensity scores from the COPDAB events dataset.<sup>49</sup>

### **Ideology and Party Positions in the Cold War France**

An initial examination of the positions on Cold War strategy of the major political groupings under the Fourth Republic – many of which would continue into the early years of the Fifth Republic – confirms the extent to which the relationship between ideology and Cold War strategy was non-linear. The socialist parties of the left (the communists and the left-wing faction of the socialists) and the conservative parties of the right (the Gaullists) both advocated strategies of disengagement; that is, they viewed the superpowers in equivalent terms, argued in favour of greater neutrality, sought to bring about the conditions for coexistence, and challenged the institutionalisation of the ‘Western’ world.

<sup>49</sup> Data are from Edward Azar, ‘Conflict and Peace Data (COPDAB), 1948-1978’, University of Maryland Center for International Development and Conflict Management, (1993).

The principal exponent of Marxist ideology in France was the *Parti communiste français* (PCF - French Communist Party). PCF policies stressed the importance of central planning and the suppression of market mechanisms, viewing national control of industry and the creation of self-managing workers' councils (*autogestion*) as the most appropriate means of regulating economic activity.<sup>50</sup> The PCF's distrust of the capitalist interests of the Western states manifested itself in opposition to both NATO and the process of European unification, both of which it viewed, with suspicion, as serving the expansionist interests of capital through bellicose means. From the PCF's perspective: "The United States was a capitalist behemoth threatening French political, social, economic, and cultural independence".<sup>51</sup> The dominant *socialist* party in the Fourth Republic, on the other hand, and the partner in many governing coalitions, was the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO - French Section of the Workers' International). The SFIO was divided between a minority leftist faction that espoused a more-Marxist domestic line – and advocated greater levels of state intervention – and a majority faction which was more social democratic and, broadly, social liberal in its orientation.<sup>52</sup> Unsurprisingly this intra-party divide resulted in differing positions on Cold War strategy, with the left wing of the party supporting disengagement (neutrality, coexistence, national independence) while the right wing broadly supported the contours of containment, albeit accompanied by leftist humanitarian rhetoric aimed at the creation of "a peaceful world devoid of political, economic, or social barriers".<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> David Scott Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994): 37-38.

<sup>51</sup> Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (London: University of California Press, 1993): 16.

<sup>52</sup> David L. Hanley, *Keeping left? Ceres and the French Socialist Party: A contribution to the study of fractionalism in political parties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986): 43.

<sup>53</sup> G.A. Codding and W. Safran, *Ideology and Politics: The Socialist Party of France* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979): 119.

The political centre in the Fourth Republic comprised the left-of-centre Christian Democratic party the *Mouvement republicain populaire* (MRP - Popular Republican Movement), along with the non-Gaullist ‘conservative’ parties on the centre-right, the *Centre National des Indépendants et Paysans* (CNIP – National Centre of Independents and Peasants) and the Radicals. These parties, espousing liberal ideology, sought consistently to move France in a more pro-European and pro-Atlantic direction; they were the greatest supporters of containment, NATO and strong Franco-American relations and they all opposed the anti-Americanism and the neutralism of the Gaullists.<sup>54</sup> The MRP in particular, in common with other European Christian Democratic parties, “rapidly developed an Atlanticist orthodoxy and became the staunchest [supporter] of the need to protect western civilisation through the creation of a strong military framework build around the economic and military capability of the USA”.<sup>55</sup> European integration and the Atlantic alliance, as a result, have been described as the ‘twin pillars’ of the MRP’s foreign policy position,<sup>56</sup> although their position on European integration – but not Atlanticism – was more divided than is generally acknowledged.<sup>57</sup>

The Gaullist party, the *Rassemblement de peuple Français* (RPF), emerged in April 1947 following de Gaulle’s return to the political frontline, and comprised the

---

<sup>54</sup> Mario Einaudi and Francois Goguel, *Christian Democracy in Italy and France* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952): 194-195; Francis O’Neill, *The French Radical Party and European Integration* (Farnborough: Gower, 1981): 9-13; Edgar S. Furniss, ‘French Attitudes Toward Western European Unity’, *International Organization*, 7:2 (1953): 199-212, 208.

<sup>55</sup> Linda Risso, ‘Cracks in a Façade of Unity: the French and Italian Christian Democrats and the Launch of the European Integration Process, 1945-1957’, *Religion, State and Society* 37:1-2 (2009): 99-114, 100.

<sup>56</sup> R.E.M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973): 160

<sup>57</sup> Risso, ‘Cracks in a Façade of Unity’, 102-103.

principal traditional conservative force in French politics.<sup>58</sup> Gaullism combined domestic nationalism with an international worldview based on notions of 19<sup>th</sup> century *realpolitik* that sought to promote French interests in a dangerous world of fickle nation states and multiple challenges to the country's independence.<sup>59</sup> De Gaulle believed it was the nation, not the individual, which comprised the principal referent of political concern – “She is a living entity”, he wrote of France – echoing the ‘organic’ conception of society shared by traditional conservative movements.<sup>60</sup> For Gaullists, individuals owed their duties first and foremost to the nation, entailing rejection not only of the atomistic notion of the unencumbered, rational individual, but also of the *laissez faire* conception of the state favoured by many liberals. In terms of Cold War strategy, Gaullist ideology articulated a more independent – French-led – European position as a bulwark against perceived American dominance of the Western world, with the pursuit of détente aiding France's position in the new global order.<sup>61</sup>

### **From Communist ‘Veto’ to Centrist Coalitions, 1946-50**

French strategy in the early Cold War period was determined largely by shifts in the balance of forces within the government during the period and the changing ideological bases of strategy that resulted, as prime ministers adjusted their conduct

---

<sup>58</sup> Young, *Cold War Europe*, 85.

<sup>59</sup> M.M. Harrison, ‘French Anti-Americanism under the Fourth Republic and the Gaullist Solution’ in D. Lacorne, J. Rupnik and M. Toinet (eds), *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism: A Century of French Perception* (London: Methuen, 1986): 175-176; Anthony Hartley, *Gaullism: The Rise and Fall of a Political Movement* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971): 28.

<sup>60</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Philip G. Cerny, *The Politics of Grandeur: Ideological aspects of de Gaulle's foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 97.

of foreign affairs to suit the conditions of possibility established by successive governing coalitions.<sup>62</sup>

Until mid-1947, Communist participation in the government actively hindered the development of an Atlantic security commitment. From 1945 to 1947 the government was comprised a three-way split between the PCF, the SFIO and the MRP, led by socialist and centrist premiers (so-called *tripartisme*).<sup>63</sup> This shaky combination of political forces was characterised by interminable squabbles over both the degree of desirable state intervention in the reconstruction of the French economy and over the extent to which France should remain independent of emerging trans-Atlantic ties.<sup>64</sup> The PCF sought more intervention, and more independence. Any option of allying with the West or participating in the collective management of West Germany was off the table, both because the communists would immediately veto any approach that directly aligned France with the West, and because other countries – particularly Britain – were sceptical of cooperating with a government that featured communist representation.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, in 1947 many in Britain remained of the opinion that France during this period was aligned with the Soviets *against* the West.<sup>66</sup>

Officially, French strategy was neutral between Washington and Moscow, since the four PCF ministers in the government would not countenance anything

---

<sup>62</sup> The position of prime minister was officially styled as the ‘President of the Council of Ministers’ until the advent of the Fifth Republic in 1958, but the post mirrors the competences held by prime ministers in other parliamentary systems.

<sup>63</sup> Young, *Cold War Europe*, 81.

<sup>64</sup> John S. Hill, ‘American Efforts to Aid French Reconstruction between Lend-Lease and the Marshall Plan’, *Journal of Modern History*, 64:3 (1992): 500-525, 510.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Creswell, *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States created Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 9.

<sup>66</sup> Crossman *et al.*, *Keep Left*, 38.

approximating an anti-Soviet alliance.<sup>67</sup> The clauses of the Treaty of Dunkirk, signed with Britain on 4 March 1946, aimed formally at preventing only German – not Soviet – aggression, although these were ‘cosmetic’ clauses in many respects, since it was clear both countries had the Soviets as much as the Germans in mind when drafting the treaty.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, although a series of commercial agreements between the US and France (the Blum-Byrnes agreements) were signed in May 1946, these did not feature any politico-strategic component, nor did they commit France to siding against the USSR in the emerging Cold War. Unofficially, however, many in the French government favoured an Atlantic commitment from an early stage, including Foreign Minister Georges Bidault and Defence Minister Edmond Michelet, both centrist politicians from the MRP. Bidault even made it clear, in a meeting with US Secretary of State George C. Marshall in April 1947, that France could be relied on to counter the Soviet Union, but could not overtly follow the American position lest it provoke political conflict – even civil war – given the domestic strength of the PCF.<sup>69</sup> A majority of the Socialists, meanwhile, supported the idea of a European ‘third force’, rather than an explicit Atlantic orientation.<sup>70</sup> These tensions – between Atlanticist, ‘third force’ and pro-Soviet positions – played out clearly in February 1946 when Michelet, supported by Bidault, announced his decision to send the notable General, Pierre Billotte, to Washington to begin secret negotiations with the Americans regarding an Atlantic alliance, only for the initiative to be vetoed by

---

<sup>67</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, ‘France and the Cold War, 1944-63’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 12:4 (2001): 35-52, 36.

<sup>68</sup> John Baylis, ‘Britain and the Dunkirk Treaty: The origins of NATO’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 5:2 (1982): 236-247, 241.

<sup>69</sup> Creswell and Trachtenberg, ‘France and the German Question’, 9-10.

<sup>70</sup> Martin Marcussen, Thomas Risse, Daniela Engelman-Martin, Hans Joachim Knopf and Klaus Roscher, ‘Constructing Europe? The evolution of French, British and German nation state identities’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 6:4 (1999): 614-633, 619.

Socialist prime minister Félix Gouin, fearful of the effects on the French domestic scene.<sup>71</sup>

French neutrality was to come to an abrupt end in May 1947, when Socialist premier Paul Ramadier dismissed the communists from government following their refusal to support proposed wage freezes and price controls, although the PCF's Cold War neutralism and the perceived risk of domestic communist insurrection were also factors weighing on Ramadier's decision. The PCF, for their part, used the occasion to claim, disingenuously, that the expulsion of ministers had taken place as a consequence of American pressure.<sup>72</sup> Ramadier's decision was based on domestic considerations rather than the perceived need to evict 'neutralists' from the government, although the crystallisation of the Cold War contributed to fears of a left-wing takeover domestically.<sup>73</sup> It is worth noting the role played by domestic factors, however, since it is a helpful reminder that the expulsion of the PCF represented less an example of strategic necessity forcing domestic political change than of exogenous domestic changes in the constellation of domestic forces opening up new strategic possibilities.

In place of *tripartisme*, a series of socialist/centrist coalition governments (SFIO, MRP, Radical) held sway from 1947 to 1951. It was under the centrist coalitions of the late 1940s that France aligned itself fully with the Atlantic community and established the necessary institutional architecture to embed this relationship. Within

---

<sup>71</sup> Jenny Raflik, 'The Fourth Republic and NATO, 1946-1958: alliance partnership or idiosyncratic nationalism?', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 9:3 (2011): 207-219, 208-209.

<sup>72</sup> Bernard B. Fall, 'Tribulations of a Party Line: The French Communists and Indo-China', *Foreign Affairs*, 33:3 (1955): 499-510, 503.

<sup>73</sup> Rosemary Wakeman, 'The Fourth Republic' in Edward Berenson and Vincent Duclert (eds.) *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011): 73-82, 74.

a year of the communists exiting government, France had accepted the terms of the Marshall Plan, agreed to West German unification, requested military alliance with the US, and accepted the principal elements of containment strategy. In June 1947, Foreign Minister Bidault met with his British counterpart, Ernest Bevin, to discuss Marshall's offer of American aid for European reconstruction. The discussions resulted in the establishment of the Committee of European Economic Cooperation, which brought together representatives of sixteen (primarily West) European countries to discuss the terms of European reconstruction, and which reported back to the Americans in late 1947.<sup>74</sup> The acceptance of the Marshall aid triggered opposition from the Communists, who denounced the plan as "a menace to peace, slavery to American capitalism and an abdication of national identity".<sup>75</sup> The Gaullists, meanwhile, whilst not opposing the terms of the Marshall Plan, accused the Americans of being opportunists and exploiters.<sup>76</sup>

Bidault met again with Bevin and Marshall in London on 17-18 December 1947 at the Council of Foreign Ministers' meeting for high-level talks on security with the British, the Americans and the Russians.<sup>77</sup> Although the meeting collapsed as a result of the inability to agree a joint position on Germany, Bevin took the opportunity to propose to Bidault a system for guaranteeing West European security, an idea that Bidault subsequently accepted.<sup>78</sup> With the outlines of an agreement reached, Bidault sent the chief of staff of the French Army, General Revers, to London for detailed

---

<sup>74</sup> Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 51.

<sup>75</sup> Georges Bidault, *Resistance: The Political Autobiography of Georges Bidault* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1965): 152.

<sup>76</sup> Bidault, *Resistance*, p. 152

<sup>77</sup> John Baylis, 'Britain, the Brussels Pact and the Continental Commitment', *International Affairs*, 60:4 (1984): 615-629, 619.

<sup>78</sup> Martin H. Folly, 'Breaking the Vicious Circle: Britain, the United States, and the Genesis of the North Atlantic Treaty', *Diplomatic History*, 12:1 (1988): 59-77, 61.

talks, whilst General Billotte was sent to Washington to discuss a secret Franco-American military agreement<sup>79</sup> (the same General Billotte whose similar initiative had been vetoed in early 1946). At the beginning of March 1948, in response to the growing perception of the Soviet threat resulting from the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February, the French government committed to increase its efforts to establish a defence treaty with London.<sup>80</sup> On 17 March France signed the Brussels treaty establishing the Western European Union (WEU) along with the UK and the Benelux countries, with only the PCF opposing the treaty.<sup>81</sup> Since the WEU did not feature American participation, however, the alliance failed to sufficiently reassure the Europeans about the Soviet threat.<sup>82</sup> As a result, Bidault sought further assurances from the US for a military alliance between Washington, London and Paris, emphasising the necessity of a formal alliance against the Soviets, while shortly thereafter informal negotiations began in the Pentagon between Britain, Canada and the US on the nature of an American commitment to Europe.<sup>83</sup>

An important stumbling block was overcome in June 1948 when – having agreed upon certain specified restrictions on its independence – France acquiesced to the establishment of a West German state,<sup>84</sup> bringing Britain and France more into line, and paving the way for the creation of the Atlantic alliance. French acquiescence in the establishment of the Federal Republic was made possible only by the absence of the Communists from the government by this period and the resulting ability for

---

<sup>79</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999): 83.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Creswell, ‘With a Little Help from our Friends’: How France Secured an Anglo-American Continental Commitment, 1945-54’, *Cold War History*, 3:1 (2002): 1-28, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Bidault, *Resistance*, 155-157; Baylis, ‘Brussels Pact’, 627.

<sup>82</sup> Simon Duke, *The Elusive Quest for European Security: From EDC to CFSP* (London: Macmillan, 2000): 14.

<sup>83</sup> Cees Wiebes and Bert Zeeman, ‘The Pentagon negotiations March 1948: the launching of the North Atlantic Treaty’, *International Affairs*, 59:3 (1983): 351-363.

<sup>84</sup> Young, *Cold War Europe*, 56.

France to publicly accept the American and British position on West Germany.<sup>85</sup> Formal negotiations on an Atlantic pact, this time including France, began in July 1948, following the passage of the Vandenberg Resolution in the US Senate the previous month (thereby enabling the US Government to pursue a binding commitment to the security of the Europeans and others).<sup>86</sup> The London Accords, through which France formally agreed to the early formation of a West German government, marked the final French acceptance of the western position,<sup>87</sup> a concession for which Bidault received substantial criticism from the Socialists and which ultimately cost him his job as Foreign Minister. Bidault's replacement, Robert Schuman, however, was both a fellow member of the MRP and a devout Atlanticist, which ensured ideological continuity in French strategy in the coming years.<sup>88</sup> Indeed it was Schuman who would sign the North Atlantic Treaty on behalf of the government of Radical prime minister Henri Queuille in Washington on 4 April 1949, the culmination of the formal negotiations on an American commitment to the continent underway since mid-1948. The following month, the Basic Law of the new Federal Republic of Germany was approved, paving the way for West German elections in the summer and the advent of a government in Bonn by September 1949.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Creswell and Trachtenberg, 'France and the German Question', 14.

<sup>86</sup> Brian Rathbun, 'The 'Magnificent Fraud': Trust, International Cooperation, and the Hidden Domestic Politics of American Multilateralism after World War II', *International Studies Quarterly*, 55:1 (2011): 1-21, 11; Richard Ovendale, 'Britain, the USA and the European Cold War, 1945-8', *History*, 67:220 (1982): 217-236, 235.

<sup>87</sup> Rogelia Pastor-Castro, 'René Massigli's Mission to London, 1944-1954', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 24:4 (2013): 539-558, 545.

<sup>88</sup> Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO 1948: The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007): 84.

<sup>89</sup> Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 86.

The institutional development of NATO continued throughout 1950 and 1951, spurred on by the shock of the Korean War,<sup>90</sup> and facilitated – on the French side – by the dominance of centrist politicians in successive governments who favoured Atlanticist designs for French security and an anti-Soviet orientation. Between July 1950 and March 1951 the French government was led by René Pleven, a committed Atlanticist and anti-communist, and a member of the small, centrist *Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance* (UDSR). Pleven pushed to increase the American commitment to Europe, calling for the establishment of an integrated defence system and the appointment of an American commander, and noting the “predominant role which it [the US] must play in the Atlantic defence effort”.<sup>91</sup> Pleven was also a staunch supporter of European integration, and it was under his tenure that Foreign Minister Schuman issued his famous declaration of 9 May 1950 – advocating a High Authority over European coal and steel production – which would subsequently set-off the process of European integration.<sup>92</sup>

Pleven’s desire to increase the American commitment to the continent fell on receptive ears, thanks in part to the Korean War – which broke out the month before Pleven took office, on 25 June 1950 – increasing the perceived urgency in the US of consolidating the West European security apparatus and redressing the imbalance in conventional forces, which favoured the Soviets at the time.<sup>93</sup> Realising European force levels could not match those of the Soviet Union without Germany, US

---

<sup>90</sup> Robert W. Jervis, ‘The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24:4 (1980): 563-592, 580-581.

<sup>91</sup> Trachtenberg, *France and NATO*, 185.

<sup>92</sup> Nathan Leites and Christian de la Malène, ‘Paris from EDC to WEU’, *World Politics*, 9:2 (1957): 193-219, 193.

<sup>93</sup> Bradford A. Lee, ‘American grand strategy and the unfolding of the Cold War 1945-1961’, in Williamson Murray & Richard Sinnreich (eds.), *Successful Strategies: Triumphant in War and Peace from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 353-402, 372-373.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson proposed a ‘package deal’ in September 1950 whereby the US agreed to the creation of a American Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR) and to the provision of an additional four divisions for the continent in exchange for European consent to West German rearmament.<sup>94</sup> The broad outlines of this agreement were finalised in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting of 26 September 1950 and by early 1951 the Americans had created the position of SACEUR (and appointed General Dwight D. Eisenhower) and were preparing to send the agreed additional divisions to Europe.

Although France had agreed to the key elements of the ‘package deal’ (i.e. to a rearmed Germany), it was not keen on the overall design.<sup>95</sup> Thus, rather than submit to the American proposals the French government devised an alternative schema – the Pleven Plan – which sought to re-arm West Germany within the framework of a densely institutionalised pan-European Army, thus drawing together the twin Atlanticist and European elements of Pleven’s philosophy. The ideas embodied in the European Defence Community (EDC), as the Pleven Plan became known, were very much the product of the liberal ideas of foreign policy espoused by centrists at the time of its inception, representing a strongly supranational articulation of the European contribution to Western defence.<sup>96</sup> For this reason a majority of the centrist parties supported the EDC from its very inception, and would vote in favour of the treaty when it finally reached the floor of the National Assembly (as discussed in greater detail below).

---

<sup>94</sup> Creswell, ‘With a Little Help from our Friends’, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Rogelia Pastor-Castro, ‘The Quai d’Orsay and the European Defence Community Crisis of 1954’, *History*, 91:303 (2006): 386-400, 388.

<sup>96</sup> Kevin Ruane, *The Rise and Fall of the European Defence Community: Anglo-American Relations and the Crisis of European Defence, 1950–55* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 16.

Overall, the years 1948 to 1951 saw France take a significant and active role in the construction of the Atlantic security architecture, often going beyond even the level of commitment and institutionalisation the Americans were prepared to offer.<sup>97</sup> The enthusiasm France showed for Atlantic solutions during this period owed much to the actions of centrist politicians – among them Bidault, Schuman and Pleven – and the liberal perspective on Cold War security they held, as well as the political conditions which placed them in this position. The MRP was the ‘backbone’ of governing coalitions during the period and held a ‘virtual monopoly’ on those ministries most relevant to the implementation of foreign policy (among them external relations and foreign affairs).<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, centrist dominance of successive governments by definition divided the opposition into ideologically unconnected camps. While opposition to Atlanticism came from both communists and Gaullists during these years,<sup>99</sup> it wasn’t until 1953 (as I discuss below) that these twin movements were able to capitalise on the similarities in their conception of Cold War strategy and form a (temporarily) united opposition.

### **Moving to the Right, 1951-57**

The legislative elections of June 1951 brought about a moderate shift to the right in the overall ideological balance of the assembly, and the move of popular support away from the political centre. Although the electoral law of 1951 discriminated against communists and Gaullists, both the PCF and RPF saw their seat share increase. Moreover, within less than a year of the elections the Third Force itself had

---

<sup>97</sup> Creswell, ‘With a Little Help from our Friends’, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Thompson, ‘Defending the Rhine in Asia: France’s 1961 Reinforcement Debate and French International Ambitions’, *French Historical Studies*, 38:3 (2015): 473-499, 487.

<sup>99</sup> J.B. Duroselle, *France and the United States: From the Beginnings to the Present* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976): 177.

broken down over the question of funding for religious schools. In early 1952 the SFIO withdrew from the governing coalition over the Plevin government's backtracking on an earlier promise to remove state funding for Catholic schools.<sup>100</sup> These exogenous political developments came to have a significant effect on France's role in the world, since they presaged the decline of the centrist coalition that had worked hard over the years to institutionalise France's Atlanticist alignment. The onset of significant opposition to the position France had established in the Cold War order, therefore, was rooted in the politics of the early 1950s, and not in international-structural changes.

In the short term, this rightward shift was not all that damaging for the Atlanticist cause, since the parties of the centrist and moderate-right coalition which resulted from the June elections – led by Antoine Pinay of the (moderate right) CNIP – were proponents of the Atlantic alliance and did not share the nationalism of the Gaullists (whose views would later come to dominate).<sup>101</sup> Indeed, it was under Pinay's tenure that negotiations between France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux states over the form and function of the EDC began in earnest, with eventual agreement between the parties leading to the signing of the EDC Treaty by the Pinay government on 27 May 1952.<sup>102</sup> It was also during this period that NATO's permanent institutions were established in Rocquencourt, near Paris – making France “the centre of gravity of the Alliance, and its defence everyone's concern” – and that a common financing infrastructure was incorporated into the alliance framework, both these proposals

---

<sup>100</sup> Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe: The Politics of a Contested Continent* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 76.

<sup>101</sup> Soutou, 'France and the Cold War', 42-43.

<sup>102</sup> Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Policy for West German Rearmament 1950-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 102.

having come out of the June 1952 NAC meeting in Lisbon.<sup>103</sup> Yet the Gaullist presence in the government was, even at this stage, beginning to affect the direction of French security policy. Pinay, having signed the EDC Treaty in May 1952, chose to delay ratification owing to the presence of a ‘splinter group’ of Gaullists in the coalition.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, not only was the Gaullist grouping opposed to the EDC, they also attempted – unsuccessfully, at this stage – to have Schuman removed from his position as Foreign Minister.

And yet the growth in strength of the nationalist Gaullists and the waning power of the political centre would come to increasingly undermine the liberal worldview institutionalised over the previous years. The increased support for the right ultimately heralded the emergence of a more nationalist discourse, represented chiefly by the Gaullists, whose anti-Atlanticist stance would erode France’s transatlantic ties in the years to come. Although much discussion of French security in the early 1950s centred on the EDC proposals, it was by no means confined to the question of France’s relationship with the proposed organisation. Rather, the EDC Treaty became a lightning rod around which contending views on a host of foreign policy issues converged, including European integration, transnationalism, inter-allied relations, German militarism, and – most relevant to the present discussion – France’s place in the Cold War order.<sup>105</sup> Whilst a majority of the centrists supported the EDC, around a third of the chamber – principally Communists and Gaullists – objected to the treaty.<sup>106</sup> The Gaullists opposed the undue dependence on the US that they believed would result from the treaty, viewing European integration as a US-

---

<sup>103</sup> Raflik, ‘Fourth Republic and NATO’, 213-215.

<sup>104</sup> Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003): 73.

<sup>105</sup> Leites and de la Malène, ‘Paris from EDC to WEU’, 213.

<sup>106</sup> Irving, *Christian Democracy*, 171.

plan to diminish French independence.<sup>107</sup> For the Gaullists, European integration and the Atlantic alliance were inextricably linked; the integration of Europe through supranational means “had become a snare Washington set on France to deprive it of its equality with Britain and the United States”. Communists opposed EDC on the grounds that it forced France to accept US domination and to participate in actions that explicitly threatened the USSR. French independence, they claimed, was threatened by imperialist US policies, which sought to utilise France in service of capitalist aims and undermine the government’s domestic agenda.<sup>108</sup>

Matters became even more challenging for Pinay’s successor. Unable to secure support from the socialists because of continuing disagreements on economic and religious matters, the Radical prime minister René Mayer – who replaced Pinay at the beginning of 1953 – was forced to bring the entire contingent of Gaullists into the governing majority,<sup>109</sup> achieving a moderate consensus on domestic issues at the expense of dividing the government on EDC policy.<sup>110</sup> Mayer also replaced Schuman with Bidault at the Quai.<sup>111</sup> Whilst Bidault was an Atlanticist, he was seen as a more conservative candidate for the Foreign Ministry, and thus preferred by the Gaullists. Since obtaining Gaullist support was instrumental in ensuring passage of the EDC Treaty through the Assembly, successive governments – including those of Mayer and his CNIP successor, Joseph Laniel – procrastinated, delaying submitting the Treaty to the Assembly lest it fail to achieve the necessary support for passage.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Harrison, *French Anti-Americanism*, 173.

<sup>108</sup> Alessandro Brogi, *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958* (London: Praeger, 2002): 139.

<sup>109</sup> Parsons, *Idea of Europe*, 74.

<sup>110</sup> Creswell, *Question of Balance*, 112.

<sup>111</sup> Gilbert, *Cold War Europe*, 76.

<sup>112</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Prime Minister Laniel and MacArthur (State Department), 14 April 1954, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume V, West European Security* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979).

Under Mayer ‘additional protocols’ were added to the Treaty. Aimed at obtaining Gaullist support, they succeeded only in watering down the proposals to such an extent that little remained of the originally negotiated EDC Treaty (as outlined in the Pleven Plan),<sup>113</sup> and were unable, in the end, to bring the Gaullists onside.

More damaging, perhaps, than the presence of the Gaullists in the government, however, was the emergence of a joint Communist-Gaullist anti-EDC platform in the latter months of 1953. It was the PCF who initially sought to enlist Gaullist support, after having decided to place the anti-EDC effort above their other (domestic) goals. In order to make workable the *modus vivendi* with those on the right, the communists scaled back their rhetoric on those policies where they opposed the Gaullists, particularly labour and colonial policy.<sup>114</sup> Joint campaigning began in March 1954, with the launching of an international appeal by both groups for an anti-EDC meeting in Paris. The publicity document noted; “the EDC Treaty will jeopardise not only the national independence of the nations involved, but also the political basis for liberty”.<sup>115</sup> The meeting was held on 20-21 March and attracted around 200 opponents of the EDC, receiving coverage from *Le Monde* and much of the left-wing French press. The meeting resulted in the release of a ‘catch-all’ statement on behalf of the participants, claiming EDC “would provide [a] climate throughout [the] world of increasing tension”.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Telegram from US Ambassador to France, James C. Dunn, to State Department, 15 January 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume V, West European Security* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979).

<sup>114</sup> Francois Fejtö, *The French Communist Party and the Crisis of International Communism* (London: MIT Press, 1967): 35-36.

<sup>115</sup> US Department of State, ‘Telegram from Robert Joyce, Counsellor of the US Embassy in France, to the State Department, 2 March 1954’, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume V, West European Security* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979): 884.

<sup>116</sup> US Department of State, ‘Telegram from Ambassador in France Douglas C. Dillon to the State Department, 22 March 1954’, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume V, West European Security* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979): 910.

The defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May, a galling example of strategic incompetence, and evidence of an ultimately unviable and unjust colonial policy, led to the downfall of the Laniel government on 12 June 1954.<sup>117</sup> The French contingent in Indochina had increased significantly since the sending of reinforcements in April 1951 under the Queuille government, a decision taken with the support of key ministries held by MRP, who believed that “imperial considerations did not contradict European and NATO priorities but rather reinforced them”.<sup>118</sup> Among the many individuals who had criticised the reinforcement of the French position in Indochina, and who later capitalised on the Dien Bien Phu ‘disaster’ was the leftist Radical – and notable EDC sceptic – Pierre Mendès France, who replaced Laniel as prime minister in June. Mendès France promised an end to the war in Indochina and to break the deadlock on EDC by submitting the Treaty to the Assembly (regardless of its chances). The investiture of the Mendès France government reflected the shifting balance of political power in the Assembly, and the weakness of the political centre. Mendès France’s government included CNIP and the Radicals, along with the sizable Gaullist contingent, but excluded – for the first time in the history of the Fourth Republic – the MRP, which had refused to support any government opposed to the EDC.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, both the PCF and the RPF supported the aims of the new government, although Mendès France made it clear he would not rely on the PCF for support, even if it meant losing his parliamentary majority.<sup>120</sup> Whereas Mayer and

---

<sup>117</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 148.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, ‘Defending the Rhine’, 490.

<sup>119</sup> US Department of State, ‘Telegram from US Ambassador in France Douglas C. Dillon, to the State Department, 17 June 1954’, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume V, West European Security* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1979): 973.

<sup>120</sup> Roland Tiersky, *Francois Mitterrand: A Very French President* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002): 85.

Laniel had led constrained centrist coalitions, many in the Mendès France government in the end shared the views of the Gaullists on which its support now depended.

Having failed to reach agreement with the remainder of ‘the Six’ on further ‘additional protocols’ to appease the Gaullist opposition, in August 1954 Mendès France submitted the EDC Treaty for ratification in the Assembly, whereupon it met its untimely demise. Since he had submitted the Treaty for ratification in full knowledge it would likely fail,<sup>121</sup> Mendès France understood that “neither the MRP, nor [SFIO deputy] Guy Mollet, nor René Mayer – nor John Foster Dulles – would ever forgive him for the “crime” of August 30”.<sup>122</sup> In the end, the failure to ratify the Treaty did not dent Atlantic solidarity as much as was feared; whilst European defence may have evolved in a significantly different direction had the treaty been passed, Dulles was not forced to implement the ‘agonising reappraisal’ he had threatened in December 1953. Negotiations began almost immediately, at the suggestion of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, on West German rearmament through the WEU and accession to NATO. The revised Paris Treaty – without mention of the EDC – was signed in October 1954 and came into force in May the following year, formally ending the Allied occupation of Germany.

Moreover, the Mendès France government survived the defeat of the EDC Treaty, which – owing to an agreement with the RPF – was not a confidence motion, and would continue to govern until February 1955. Before leaving office, Mendès France attempted to use his increased stature at home and abroad – gained largely through

---

<sup>121</sup> Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, 123.

<sup>122</sup> Jean Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès France* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1984): 279.

his successful negotiation of the 1954 Geneva Accords – to promote a new direction in French Cold War strategy. The new approach sought to relegate superpower competition from the military to the economic sphere, decrease French dependence on the Americans, and seek new pan-European security arrangements through a summit conference in 1955.<sup>123</sup> Had Mendès France's government not fallen in early 1955 – he was replaced by his right-wing Radical colleague Edgar Faure in February – French strategy would have experienced a turn towards disengagement strategy earlier on, albeit on a more moderate scale than that of the 1960s, and implemented by a leftist rather than a rightist.

The brief successive governments of the Fourth Republic's final years were preoccupied with France's disastrous colonial war in Algeria – initiated by the revolt of November 1954 – and questions of Cold War strategy took a back seat to the more proximate (and less 'cold') colonial conflict. Moreover, since both the US and the Soviets were, essentially, supporting the nationalist FLN, the conflict could not be 'internationalised' in the manner in which the war in Indochina would be. In December 1955, Faure had escalated the conflict by doubling the number of French troops deployed in Algeria,<sup>124</sup> although it was Faure's socialist successor who would find his agenda undermined most by the conflict, as the legislative elections of January 1956 – the first since 1951 – saw the left return briefly to power under a leftist coalition. The 'Republican Front' was headed by SFIO deputy Guy Mollet and comprised the SFIO, the Radicals, the UDSR, and a small contingent of 16 Gaullist deputies.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> Soutou, 'France and the Cold War', 37.

<sup>124</sup> Irwin M. Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 14.

<sup>125</sup> Parsons, 'Domestic Interests, Ideas and Integration', 56; Young, *Cold War Europe*, 88.

Mollet, along with his foreign minister – and fellow socialist – Christian Pineau, sought to promote détente with Moscow and, in particular, to encourage cultural exchanges between France and the Soviet Union. Indeed, both men visited the Soviet Union in May 1956 for a five-day visit at which they discussed, among other topics, disarmament and non-intervention.<sup>126</sup> Mollet's position, and his ability to bring about a change in France's Cold War position, was undermined by the crises afflicting the country in other parts of the world. There was, to begin with, the intensifying conflict with the FLN in Algeria, with the Soviet Union supporting Algerian pleas for a UN discussion on the conflict (even if French attempts to portray the FLN as communist sympathisers were very wide of the mark). More problematic was Mollet's fateful decision – taken at Sèvres in October – to collude with the British and the Israelis in the latter's invasion of the Sinai, a coordinated strategy aimed at punishing Nasser for his nationalisation of the Suez canal.<sup>127</sup> Both examples of French colonial meddling drew opposition from the Americans, and the perceived lack of support from the US for French interests spurred a renewed wave of anti-Americanism, which served only to further constrain Mollet's freedom of action.<sup>128</sup>

Mollet's government eventually fell in June 1957 over proposals to increase taxation for the Algerian war, to be replaced by short-lived cabinets led by Radicals Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury and Félix Gaillard respectively. Relations, however, between France and the Soviet Union were effectively on hiatus throughout 1957-58, since internal problems in both countries distracted their leaders from significant external

---

<sup>126</sup> Herbert Tint, *French Foreign Policy since the Second World War* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1972): 135.

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan Pearson, *Sir Anthony Eden and the Suez Crisis: Reluctant Gamble*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 140.

<sup>128</sup> Soutou, 'France and the Cold War', 38.

engagement.<sup>129</sup> France, along with the other West European states, was on the receiving end of several diplomatic notes from the Soviets in 1957 reminding the Europeans that their ratification of the Rome Treaty would occasion ever-greater ‘domination’ under the US. From January 1958, the Soviets sent a series of telegrams to Paris in an attempt to initiate a programme of commercial exchanges, and suggesting an early summit meeting, the latter suggestion being rejected by the Gaillard cabinet. These exchanges failed to register in the French domestic scene, which was otherwise distracted by the escalation of the Algerian conflict, including the bombing of Tunisia that would lead to the fall of the Gaillard government in on 15 April, one month prior to the collapse of the Fourth Republic itself.<sup>130</sup>

### **The Fifth Republic and the ‘Gaullist Realignment’, 1958-66**

The onset of the Algiers crisis, in May 1958, precipitated the demise of the Fourth Republic and the return of de Gaulle to the political frontline, and in so doing set the stage for a decade and a half of Gaullist dominance of France’s foreign relations. The initial governing arrangements of the Fifth Republic, involving a Gaullist (UNR) coalition with centrists and the moderate non-Gaullist conservatives, initially precluded changes to France’s alignment, even though it was clear this was favoured by most Gaullists.<sup>131</sup> It was the departure of the MRP from the governing coalition in May 1962 – over disagreements with de Gaulle’s designs for Europe<sup>132</sup> – however, and the UNR’s success in the legislative elections of November 1962, which together set the stage for the revolution in Cold War strategy, since these events afforded the

---

<sup>129</sup> Tint, *French Foreign Policy*, 136.

<sup>130</sup> Tint, *French Foreign Policy*, 138.

<sup>131</sup> The Gaullists had, by 1958, re-formed as the Union for the New Republic (*L’Union pour la nouvelle République*).

<sup>132</sup> Einaudi and Goguel, *Christian Democracy*, 196.

Gaullists an unrivalled domestic position, controlling both the presidency and a majority within the governing coalition. French strategy, as a result, underwent a significant – and extraordinarily comprehensive – reorientation from 1963 onwards, in which de Gaulle’s vision of an independent French posture was put into practice.<sup>133</sup>

Gaullist ideology sought to balance perceived American dominance of the West world the articulation of a French-led, and more neutral, European position. It combined realism and balance of power politics with an emphasis on the cultural and political independence of the French nation. Ensuring the security, and independence, of France required a careful balancing act between East and West, aimed both at resisting hegemony and reducing potentially dangerous increases in global tension. Practically, since France was closely tied to the West, this meant reducing French dependence in bilateral relations and promoting closer relations with the USSR as a counterweight to American influence.<sup>134</sup> Since the end of the war, de Gaulle argued, French foreign policy had disappeared “in a system directed from abroad”, as the “pretext of Atlantic solidarity subject[ed] France to the hegemony of the Anglo-Saxons”.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, since de Gaulle believed the nation to be the ‘permanent unit in international affairs’,<sup>136</sup> he regarded Soviet communism as somewhat ephemeral, with a return to “traditional Russian foreign policy” being the most likely scenario in the future.<sup>137</sup> Hence, the desire to seek détente with Moscow

---

<sup>133</sup> Mark Kramer, ‘De Gaulle and Gaullism in France’s Cold War Foreign Policy’ in Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher and Garret Martin, *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969* (London: Rowman & Littlefield): 1-24, 2.

<sup>134</sup> Marc Trachtenberg, ‘France and NATO, 1949-1991’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 9:3 (2011): 184-194, 188.

<sup>135</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 10-11.

<sup>136</sup> Garret Martin, ‘The 1967 withdrawal from NATO – a cornerstone of de Gaulle’s grand strategy?’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 9:3 (2011): 232-243, 233.

<sup>137</sup> Soutou, ‘France and the Cold War’, 41.

to balance American hegemony was rooted in balance of power considerations, wholly dissociated with the nature of Soviet ideology.

European integration, for de Gaulle, was welcomed as counter-balance to American hegemony and a means of exercising French influence in Europe, but it should not be allowed to intrude on the political independence of its member states. When de Gaulle spoke of a “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”, he had in mind not an emergent polity or any form of dense supranational framework – which would, in his words, “liquidate the advantages [of] victory” and “be obliged to follow the dictates of America”<sup>138</sup> – but rather a looser, and not necessarily permanent, assemblage of sovereign states brought together by common interests. Moreover, the question of Europe – and of the core Franco-German axis on which European integration was based – was nested in the broader question of France’s position in the Cold War order. For, as Lacouture has argued, quoting de Gaulle, “Franco-German relations should be organized in such a way that a closer bilateral relationship would be matched by a ‘greater Europe’, that a ‘greater Europe’ would be matched by ‘greater East-West security’ and that ‘greater East-West security’ would culminate in ‘greater independence from the ideological blocs’”.<sup>139</sup>

The twin components of this strategy – independence from existing Western institutions and the pursuit of détente with Moscow – both informed the conduct of France’s foreign relations throughout the mid-1960s, although the writing had been on the wall for many years. Indeed, René Pleven, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1959, had warned that “all is not as it should be in the alliance of the two countries [France

---

<sup>138</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 10, 200.

<sup>139</sup> Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Ruler 1945-1970* (London: Norton, 1993): 334.

and the US]’.<sup>140</sup> The first element of the Gaullist revolution was independence – economic, political, strategic – from the American-led international order. At a press conference on 14 January 1963, de Gaulle outlined the strategic doctrine underlying France’s new independent nuclear deterrent, emphasising that it was aimed against all (*tous azimuts*).<sup>141</sup> That same month he also scuppered – so he believed – US designs for a united Europe by vetoing British entry to the Common Market. Moreover, from 1963 onwards, the government began to restrict purchases of French businesses from companies based in the US.<sup>142</sup> De Gaulle also began to gradually withdraw French forces from NATO command. In 1962 it was announced that French troops returning from Algeria would not be, as expected, integrated into NATO. In June 1963 the decision was taken to withdraw the Atlantic Fleet from NATO command (the Mediterranean Fleet having been withdrawn in March 1959), and in March 1964 it was announced that no French ships would fall under NATO command.<sup>143</sup> Finally, in March 1966 de Gaulle informed the US that France would be withdrawing from the NATO organisational command, presaging the move of NATO personnel in France to new headquarters (located in Casteau, Belgium). De Gaulle also contributed to the undermining of Atlantic solidarity during the mid-1960s through his opposition to the American campaign in Vietnam, which he began to make public from the summer of 1963, calling for the ‘neutralization’ of the conflict (essentially, American withdrawal and the pursuit of a negotiated settlement).<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> René Plevin, ‘France in the Atlantic Community’, *Foreign Affairs*, 38:1 (1959): 19-30, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Philip G. Cerny, ‘European Defence and the New Détente: The Collapse of the Cold War System’, *West European Politics*, 13:4 (1990): 139-151, 148.

<sup>142</sup> Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 159.

<sup>143</sup> Martin, ‘The 1967 withdrawal from NATO’, 238-239.

<sup>144</sup> Fredrik Logevall, ‘De Gaulle, Neutralization, and American Involvement in Vietnam, 1963-1964’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 61:1 (1992): 69-102, 70.

Moves to disentangle France from the US-led Western system were combined with the pursuit of détente with the Soviet Union. Whilst de Gaulle had always sought to increase contacts with Moscow, both as a means of hedging against American domination and as a consequence of his belief that ‘Russian’ interests would ultimately inform Soviet behaviour, opportunities for the pursuit of a meaningful détente did not arise until 1964-65.<sup>145</sup> This was largely owing to the various crisis afflicting East-West relations during the early 1960s – especially the Berlin crisis in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 – which forced de Gaulle to show solidarity with the West.<sup>146</sup> From the mid-1960s, however, de Gaulle engaged in a significant – and unprecedented – effort to increase engagement and cooperation with the Soviet Union. Believing this contact could form the basis for détente in Europe,<sup>147</sup> de Gaulle undertook a visit to Moscow in June 1966, four months after announcing France’s withdrawal from the NATO integrated command. De Gaulle’s visit was not only marked with ‘unusual distinction’ for a Western leader from the Soviets,<sup>148</sup> but also succeeded in establishing significant future working relations through the issuance of a ‘joint declaration’ on areas of Franco-Soviet convergence – notably on the Vietnam War, disarmament, and the normalisation of intra-European relations – and the signing of agreements on technical and scientific cooperation.<sup>149</sup> These agreements were followed up in December of that year with Alexei Kosygin’s visit to Paris, which occasioned de Gaulle to emphasise publicly the importance of

---

<sup>145</sup> Marie-Pierre Rey, ‘De Gaulle, French Diplomacy, and Franco-Soviet Relations as Seen from Moscow’, in Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher and Garret Martin (eds.), *Globalizing de Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010): 25-42, 26.

<sup>146</sup> Maurice Vaisse, ‘De Gaulle’s Handling of the Berlin and Cuban Crises’, in Wilfried Loth (ed.), *Europe, Cold War and Coexistence 1953-1965* (London: Frank Cass, 2004): 67-79, 70-71.

<sup>147</sup> De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope*, 202.

<sup>148</sup> Gadi Heimann, ‘In Search of a Route to World Power: General de Gaulle, the Soviet Union, and Israel in the Middle East Crisis of 1967’, *The International History Review*, 32:1 (2010): 69-88, 73.

<sup>149</sup> Rey, ‘Franco-Soviet Relations’, 34-35.

“détente, entente and cooperation” in Franco-Soviet relations,<sup>150</sup> although in the long-term de Gaulle’s strategy ultimately proved largely unsuccessful in promoting either normalisation in Europe or bolstering France’s global stature.<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> Rey *ibid.* 35.

<sup>151</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, ‘De Gaulle’s France and the Soviet Union from Conflict to Détente’, in Wilfried Loth (ed.), *Europe, Cold War and Coexistence 1953-1965* (London: Frank Cass, 2004): 173-189, 185.

Date	Event	Prime Minister	Party	Governing Parties (Seats)
Oct-45	Legislative election	De Gaulle	n/a	PCF (148) MRP (141) SFIO (134)
Jan-46	Resignation	Gouin	SFIO	PCF (148) MRP (141) SFIO (134)
Jun-46	Legislative election	Bidault	MRP	MRP (160) PCF (148) SFIO (115)
Nov-46	Legislative election	Blum	SFIO	SFIO (115)
Jan-47	Resignation	Ramadier	SFIO	PCF (166) MRP (158) SFIO (90) Radical (55)
May-47	Coalition changes	Ramadier	SFIO	MRP (158) SFIO (90) Radical (55)
Nov-47	Resignation	Schuman	MRP	MRP (158) Radical (55) CNIP (70) RPF (5)
Jul-48	Resignation	Marie	Radical	MRP (158) Radical (55) CNIP (70)
Sep-48	Resignation	Queuille	Radical	MRP (158) Radical (55) CNIP (70)
Oct-49	Resignation	Bidault	MRP	MRP (158) Radical (55) CNIP (70)
Feb-50	Coalition changes	Bidault	MRP	MRP (158) Radical (55) CNIP (70)
Jul-50	Resignation	Pleven	UDSR	MRP (158) SFIO (90) Radical (55) CNIP (70) RPF (5)
Mar-51	Resignation	Queuille	Radical	MRP (158) SFIO (90) Radical (55) CNIP (70)
Jun-51	Legislative election	Pleven	UDSR	RPF (107) SFIO (94) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Mar-52	Coalition changes	Pinay	CNIP	RPF (107) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Jan-53	Resignation	Mayer	Radical	RPF (107) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Jul-53	Resignation	Laniel	SFIO	RPF (107) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Jun-54	Resignation	Mendès France	Radical	RPF (107) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Feb-55	Resignation	Faure	Radical	RPF (107) MRP (82) Radical (77) CNIP (87)
Jan-56	Legislative election	Mollet	Socialist	SFIO (88) Radical (73) RPF (16)
Jun-57	Resignation	Bourges-Maunoury	Radical	SFIO (88) Radical (73) RPF (16)
Nov-57	Resignation	Gaillard	Radical	SFIO (88) Radical (73) MRP (71) RPF (16) CNIP (95)
May-58	Resignation	Pflimlin	MRP	Radical (73) MRP (71) RPF (16) CNIP (95)

Figure 7: Prime Ministers and Government Composition in the Fourth Republic, 1945-58.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Data are from Woldendorp *et al.*, *Party Government in 48 Democracies*.

Date	Event	President	Prime Minister	Party	Governing Parties (Seats)
Nov-58	Legislative election	De Gaulle	Debre	UNR	UNR (198) CNIP (133) MRP (57) RS (23)
Apr-62	Coalition changes	De Gaulle	Debre	UNR	UNR (198) CNIP (133) MRP (57)
May-62	Coalition changes	De Gaulle	Debre	UNR	UNR (198) CNIP (133)
Nov-62	Legislative election	De Gaulle	Pompidou	UNR	UNR (230) IR (18)
Mar-67	Legislative election	De Gaulle	Pompidou	UNR	UNR (191) IR (41)

Figure 8: Presidents, Prime Ministers and Government Composition in the Fifth Republic, 1958-67. <sup>153</sup>

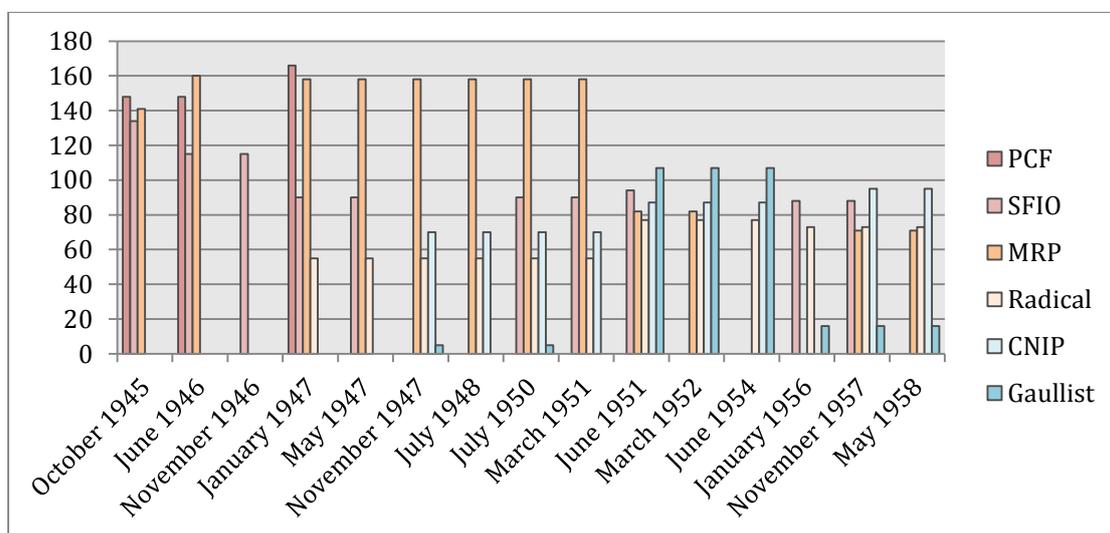


Figure 9: Absolute government seats by party affiliation in the Fourth Republic, 1945-1958. <sup>154</sup>

<sup>153</sup> Data are from Woldendorp *et al.*, *Party Government in 48 Democracies*.

<sup>154</sup> Data are from Woldendorp *et al.*, *Party Government in 48 Democracies*.

## **Epilogue: The Politics of Cold War Strategy outside France**

Given the oft-assumed specificity of Gaullist foreign policy, it is worth briefly considering the extent to which the argument travels to other cases. In this final section I briefly consider three alternative cases – Britain, West Germany, and Canada. These brief vignettes aim to highlight three things in particular. Firstly, that the domestic politics of Cold War strategy across all cases is non-linear, with support for disengagement the preserve of the far-left and the traditionalist right, in contrast to the pro-containment position of the centre-ground. Secondly, that continuity in Cold War strategy in these countries is the product of the domestic strength of centrist elements rather than the ‘logic’ of containment itself or the existence of a genuine consensus at the domestic level. Although preferences on Cold War strategy are channelled through national institutions in different ways,<sup>155</sup> in each of these cases it is the advantages conferred on containment advocates by virtue of their position at the political centre that ensures the victory of their preferred strategy, whether through competition for the median voter (Britain), centrist parties ‘tipping the scales’ between governments (West Germany), or the inability to reconcile domestic disagreements between left- and right-wings of the political spectrum (Canada).

Consider first the British case. British politics in the post-war period was dominated by the Labour and Conservative parties, characterised by considerable ideological heterogeneity in both foreign and domestic policy. In foreign affairs, the Labour

---

<sup>155</sup> A sizable literature exists on the effects of different kinds of democratic institutions on foreign policy. See, for example: David P. Auerswald, ‘Inward Bound: Domestic Institutions and Military Conflicts’, *International Organization*, 53:3 (1999): 469-504; Helen Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Benjamin Martill, ‘Over the Threshold: Rethinking Legislative Seat Share and Executive Autonomy in Majoritarian Parliamentary Systems’, *International Politics* (forthcoming); Thomas Risse-Kappen, ‘Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies’, *World Politics*, 43:4 (1991): 579-512.

worldview pitted centre-left ‘Atlanticists’ who favoured increased military spending, explicit anti-Soviet alignment and strong support for NATO and the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’<sup>156</sup> against the far-left who advocated disarmament, diplomatic engagement with the Soviets, and the de-escalation of the Cold War.<sup>157</sup> The Conservatives also divided on foreign affairs, with moderate (centre-right) Conservatives most supportive of the ‘special relationship’ and its piggybacking on America’s Cold War strategy,<sup>158</sup> and the party’s more traditionalist right-wing demonstrating greater support for resisting American encroachment in Britain’s (imperial) ‘sphere of influence’<sup>159</sup> and a “return to traditional methods of great-power diplomacy”.<sup>160</sup> For all their dislike of Communism, many traditional Conservatives – akin to their Gaullist compatriots across the Channel – favoured a balancing strategy as the best way for smaller states to deal with the realities of superpower conflict.<sup>161</sup> Julian Amery, for instance, poster-child for the traditional right, argued that Britain’s position “power political as well as geographical – [is] between Russia and America, or if you prefer to think ideologically, between Totalitarian Socialism and Liberal Capitalism”.<sup>162</sup> Alongside Neil McLean, Amery attempted to cultivate links with the Soviet Union during the Suez Crisis of 1956, in an attempt to hedge against American

---

<sup>156</sup> Lawrence Black, ‘The Bitterest Enemies of Communism’: Labour Revisionists, Atlanticism and the Cold War’, *Contemporary British History*, 15:3 (2001): 26-62, 26; R. Gerald Hughes, ‘“We are not Seeking Strength for its Own Sake”: The British Labour Party, West Germany and the Cold War, 1951-64’, *Cold War History*, 3:1 (2002): 67-94, 67; Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world: Volume II, Labour’s foreign policy since 1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Mark Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations, 1945-2006* (London: Routledge, 2007)

<sup>157</sup> Richard Crossman, Michael Foot and Ian Mikardo, *Keep Left* (London: New Statesman and Nation, 1947); Woolf, *Foreign Policy*, 17.

<sup>158</sup> Matt Beech, ‘British Conservatism and Foreign Policy: Traditions and Ideas Shaping Cameron’s Global View’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13:3 (2011): 348-363.

<sup>159</sup> Alan Dobson, ‘Labour or Conservative: Does it Matter in Anglo-American Relations?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25:4 (1990): 387-407, 396; Godfrey Hodgson, ‘Anti-Americanism and American Exceptionalism’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 2:1 (2004): 27-38, 30.

<sup>160</sup> Sue Onslow, *Backbench Debate within the Conservative Party and its Influence on British Foreign Policy, 1948-57* (London: Macmillan, 1997): 121.

<sup>161</sup> Andrew Gamble, *The Conservative Nation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974): 163.

<sup>162</sup> Onslow, *Backbench Debate*, 119.

power.<sup>163</sup> Thus, for different reasons, opponents of containment could be found on the fringes of both parties in the early decades of the Cold War. That British strategy throughout this period owed less to an underlying consensus, therefore, than it did to the fact that governments were overwhelmingly drawn from the political centre.<sup>164</sup> In Britain's majoritarian political system the dominance of the centre owes more to the courting of the 'median voter' than it does the power of smaller centrist parties,<sup>165</sup> but the implication for our understanding of the politics of Cold War strategy is the same, in that the source of containment's strength lies in its domestic basis, rather than its functional logic.

Support for disengagement strategies in West Germany came predominantly from the left wing of the Social Democrats (SPD).<sup>166</sup> Prior to the Bad Godesberg conference of November 1959 the SPD promoted neutrality between the blocs,<sup>167</sup> while the post-Godesberg era was defined by party leader Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, an early forebear of détente that sought to pursue a relaxation of tensions with the Soviets and East Germany.<sup>168</sup> Even as the SPD moved to a more Atlanticist orientation under Helmut Schmidt, support for Cold War disengagement grew among the SPD left and the 'peace movement', peaking in the early 1980s as opposition to the NATO

---

<sup>163</sup> Onslow, 'Unreconstructed Nationalists', 74, 91.

<sup>164</sup> Ben Pimlott, Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris, 'Is the Postwar Consensus a Myth?', *Contemporary Record*, 2:6 (1989): 12-15, 15.

<sup>165</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

<sup>166</sup> For a detailed discussion of divisions over Cold War strategy within social democratic parties see, for example: William E. Griffith (ed.), *Security Perspectives of the West German Left: The SPD and the Greens in Opposition* (London: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989); Vickers, *Labour's foreign policy since 1951*; Phythian, *The Labour Party, War and International Relations*.

<sup>167</sup> Gordon Douglas Drummond, *The German Social Democrats in Opposition, 1949-1960* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982): 98-99, 130-131; Wolfram F. Hanrieder, *West German Foreign Policy 1949-1963: International Pressure and Domestic Response* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967): 101; Harold Kent Schellenger, *The SPD in the Bonn Republic: A Socialist Party Modernizes* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968): 41.

<sup>168</sup> Mary E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001): 57; William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): 210-211.

‘double-track’ decision grew.<sup>169</sup> The West German conservative right, however, was noticeably less predisposed to promote strategies of disengagement than their ideological brethren in other countries. Konrad Adenauer pursued a ‘policy of strength’ towards the USSR and threatened to break off diplomatic relations with countries recognising East Germany (the Hallstein Doctrine).<sup>170</sup> This stance, coupled with Adenauer’s staunch support for European integration and the Atlantic alliance, set the stage early on for the CDU-CSU’s embrace of containment. Moreover, West German ‘Gaullism’ – promoted by the CSU’s Franz-Josef Strauss among others – sought to reduce Germany’s dependence on the US, but did not seek a corresponding détente with the Soviet Union.<sup>171</sup> The explanation for this specificity lies in the delegitimisation of the traditional conservative worldview – especially those elements connoting nationalism, independence, the use of force, and anti-Americanism in post-war West Germany, since a commitment to *realpolitik* and nationalism, ideals associated with traditional conservatism, were not acceptable political values in the new Federal Republic.<sup>172</sup> And yet, in spite of the different party positions, the example of West Germany again reminds us of the crucial role played by the political centre in determining Cold War strategy, since it was the small, centrist Free Democrats who determined the direction of Cold War strategy at the critical junctures of 1969 and 1982 when the dominant coalition partner switched from the CDU-CSU

---

<sup>169</sup> Michael Broer, ‘The NATO Double-Track Decision, the INF Treaty, and the SNF Controversy’ in Detlef Junker, Philip Gassert, Wilfred Mausbach & David B. Morris (eds.) *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Thomas Risse-Kappen, *The Zero Option: INF, West Germany, and Arms Control* (London: Westview Press, 1988): 41-42.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas F. Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 27, 40.

<sup>171</sup> Wolfram F. Hamrieder, ‘West German Foreign Policy, 1949-1979: Necessities and Choices’ in Wolfram F. Hanrieder (ed.) *West German Foreign Policy, 1949-1979* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1980): 16; Geoffrey Pridham, ‘The European Policy of Franz Jozef Strauss and its Implications for the Community’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 18:4 (1980): 313-332, 316.

<sup>172</sup> Scott Erb, *German Foreign Policy: Navigating a New Era* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003): 8.

to the Social Democrats, and vice versa.<sup>173</sup> Strategic disagreements played an important role in both elections, although only in 1982 was the consequence of centrist pressures a move away from disengagement.

Finally, let us consider the example of Canadian strategy. While Canada occupies a distinct geo-strategic position, its parliamentary political institutions and the positions of its parties on Cold War strategy offer striking similarities with the European examples. Until the mid-1970s the Liberal Party of Canada was the principal representative of the ‘continentalist’ tradition, emphasising the need for strong economic, social and geopolitical ties to the US, and the Liberal foreign policy platform emphasised liberal themes of interdependence, deterrence and collective Western security.<sup>174</sup> Opposition to the centrist, pro-American line, as may be expected, came both from the New Democratic Party (NDP) (formerly the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) on the left, which called for an “independent socialist Canada”<sup>175</sup> and from the nationalist Progressive Conservative party on the right, which – under the leadership of John Diefenbaker – aimed to wean Canada off its dependence on the US.<sup>176</sup> In government from 1957-63, Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservatives sought to chart an independent course in foreign relations, which included efforts to promote détente with the Soviet Union, with Secretary of State for External, Howard Green, indicated to Dean Rusk that “Canada felt itself positioned

---

<sup>173</sup> Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed*, 122; Juliet Kaarbo, ‘Power and Influence in Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Role of Junior Coalition Partners in German and Israeli Foreign Policy’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 40:4 (1996): 501-530, 505.

<sup>174</sup> Colin Campbell and William Christian, *Parties, Leaders, and Ideologies in Canada* (London: McGraw Hill, 1996): 72-73; Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson. Volume 3: 1957-1968* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975): 116.

<sup>175</sup> The Waffle Movement, *For an Independent Socialist Canada: The Waffle Manifesto* (Vancouver: Canadian League of Rights, 1969): 8-9; Lynn McDonald, *The Party that Changed Canada: The New Democratic Party, Then and Now* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1987): 85.

<sup>176</sup> Jamie Glazov, *Canadian Policy toward Khrushchev’s Soviet Union* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002): 77.

between two nuclear giants and felt [a] special interest in reducing tensions between [them]”.<sup>177</sup> Yet Canada’s Gaullist moment never came about for largely domestic reasons. In the early 1960s as the Diefenbaker government came into conflict with the Kennedy administration over the question of whether Canada would take on US-built Bomarc missiles, precipitating a political crisis in which the NDP voted with the Liberals to bring down the government. The inability to overcome the domestic divisions between the Progressive Conservatives and the NDP – or to ameliorate the competition between the two parties – ultimately lay behind the failure of disengagement in Canada, even though the parties did not differ significantly on Cold War strategy.

These examples demonstrate that, outside of the example of the French Fourth Republic, containment strategy was contested politically to a far greater extent than has often been acknowledged. Challenges to containment in Western Europe and Canada came from both the left and the right, although their respective reasons for advocating disengagement differed. Nevertheless, sizable political constituencies promoted détente, (quasi-)neutrality, and a reduction in superpower tension in the early decades of the Cold War in these countries. These viewpoints often remained politically marginal, however, not because of any underlying fault in their logic or a lack of support domestically, but because of the ability of centrist liberals to stave off the challenge to containment from the left and right domestically. Whilst there is not space here to fully describe the complex political histories of containment and disengagement in each of these countries, a cursory glimpse at the politics of strategy in Britain, West Germany and Canada has been sufficient to highlight the ways in

---

<sup>177</sup> Telegram from Secretary of State Dean Rusk to US Department of State, 14 May 1961 in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume XIII, Western Europe and Canada* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994).

which centrist elements have been advantaged by domestic institutions, to the ultimate benefit of those advocating containment rather than disengagement.

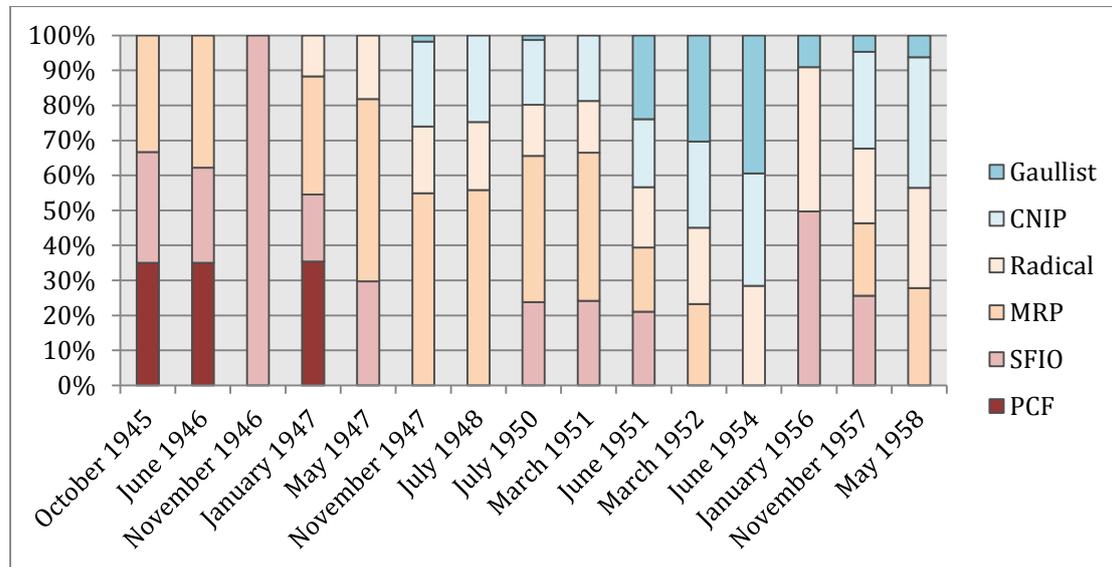


Figure 10: Percentage of government seats by party affiliation in the Fourth Republic, 1945-1958.<sup>178</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has examined the domestic politics of the competing Cold War strategies of containment and disengagement in Western Europe. In contrast to existing explanations, which regard containment as the logical response to the Soviet threat by a weakened Western Europe, this article emphasised the role of domestic institutions in empowering ideological constituencies supportive of containment. Because the precepts of containment strategy resonated with a distinctly liberal view of international affairs, its adherents – centrist parties and factions – were able to benefit from the advantages conferred on the political centre by systems of parliamentary governance; namely, an increased likelihood of governmental representation, greater power over coalition partners, and the ability to split the opposition along ideological lines. The victory of containment over disengagement, therefore, was not a

<sup>178</sup> Data are from Woldendorp *et al.*, *Party Government in 48 Democracies*.

consequence of the internal logic of the strategy itself – which, by extension, offered the most appropriate response to Western Europe’s predicament – but rather the influence afforded key ideological constituencies by these domestic institutions.

To substantiate this claim the article offered an examination of the politics of early Cold War French strategy from 1945 to 1966. The French case illustrates how political support for containment decreases the further governments move away from the political centre. The Communists, the SFIO-left and the Gaullists were the greatest advocates of disengagement, whilst the parties of the centre – the MRP, CNIP, UDSR, Radicals and SFIO-right – were the most enthusiastic supporters of containment. Moreover, the balance of centrist forces in governmental composition during the early Cold War was a strongest predictor of the strength of government support for containment at any given time. The most significant moves towards the goal of institutionalising the Atlantic alliance are made under the centrist ‘third force’ governments of the late 1940s and early 1950s, while periods of significant communist and Gaullist representation in government coincided – as in the pre-1947 Fourth Republic, the latter years of that regime, and the early years of the Fifth Republic – with periods of heightened neutrality and an increase in the rhetoric of ‘independence’.

The theoretical argument developed here offers a competing interpretation of the politics of European Cold War strategy than that which currently prevails in the literature. Rather than viewing ideology and partisan conflict as orthogonal to questions of Cold War security, the argument views ideology as a key determinant of Cold War strategy. And rather than seeing containment as the logical response to the

Soviet presence in Central Europe, the argument emphasises the role of domestic institutions in privileging those key (liberal) constituencies where support for containment was strongest. The argument also has implications beyond questions of Cold War security, since the non-linear pattern of partisan contestation (pitting the centre against both left and right) may be witnessed across a range of different issue-areas and temporal contexts, including the politics of trade, international organization, human rights, economic openness, democracy promotion, and the international legal order. Accounts of the growth of (liberal) international order, both during and after the Cold War, would thus benefit from attention to the role played by specific liberal elements in Western party systems, and the ways in which domestic institutions have channelled liberal beliefs into specific strategic outcomes.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Duncan Snidal, David Sylvan, Martin Ceadel, Karolina Milewicz, Geoff Gertz, Scott Hamilton, Leticia Villeneuve, Licia Cianetti and Lisa ten Brinke for their comments on earlier versions of the text, as well as the Editors of Security Studies and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions on how to improve the manuscript. A particular debt of thanks is owed to Columba Achilleos-Sarll who read multiple drafts of the text and provided supportive feedback throughout the process. Needless to say, all errors are my own.