Lyndon Johnson and Charles de Gaulle: Clash of Personalities or Structural Divergence?

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The recent release of oral history interviews of former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy has demonstrated that, despite the very distinctive personalities of American president Lyndon Johnson and French president Charles de Gaulle, the two men had at least one thing in common. Neither was, it would appear, particularly liked or trusted by John Kennedy and his wife: Mrs Kennedy refers in her tapes to de Gaulle as an "egomaniac" and quotes her husband as saying, "Oh, God, can you ever imagine what would happen to the country if Lyndon was president."[1]

Johnson did, of course, become president upon Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, and until Richard Nixon's inauguration in January 1969 presided over a difficult period for the United States. The development of a youth counter-culture, urban unrest, and turmoil over Vietnam are all well-established in historiography, but Johnson's European policy is not, save for some notable works.[2] The sense that Johnson was more concerned with events in Asia than in Europe has, perhaps, been at least partly shaped by historians' greater engagement with the war in Vietnam. Yet it was during the mid and late 1960s that several key debates occurred in the field of US-European relations: over European integration and the very idea of 'Europe', the management of détente, and NATO strategies. Such debates were facilitated by the slight relaxation of Cold War tensions, which fostered less of a sense of immediate threat and so created space for substantive discussions of this nature.

At least in part, these debates were the result of two strong and forceful leaders, each with their own ideas. Yet given the historical profession's move away from writing only the history of 'great men' over the past few decades, it would clearly be misguided to see the Franco-American relationship between 1963 and 1969 as determined solely by the activities of two men. This is particularly the case since it is foreign relations under consideration: an area in which leaders typically receive advice and analysis from a range of figures, and in which institutional and domestic constraints to policy-making are also important. Clearly, the idea of clashing personalities is not adequate to describe the very real differences the pair had. It also gives a rather misleading impression of their personal relations, given that the two seem to have maintained relatively cordial dealings with each other.

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[1] J. Scott, *In Tapes, Candid Talk by Young Kennedy Widow*, New York Times, September 11 2011, accessed online at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/12/us/12jackie.html?pagewanted=all].

[2] See in particular T. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: in the Shadow of Vietnam*, Harvard University Press, 2003 and H. Brands (ed.), *The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson: Beyond Vietnam*, Texas A&M University Press, 1999.

Yet it would also be misrepresentative to portray their disagreements as a 'structural divergence', which is here defined as a basic and intrinsic difference over policies or organizations. Crucially, whilst substantive disagreements between the two clearly occurred, the fundamental idea of an alliance between the US and France remained in place. In advancing this argument, this paper will follow the work of Geir Lundestad, who has disputed the 'crisis perspective' from which much of the history of transatlantic relations is written, and argued that if relations are viewed through the fundamental idea of an alliance, they appear to have a more positive history.[3]

After considering the two leaders' personalities and relationship, this paper will use Lundestad's suggested framework to consider three key areas of disagreement between them: the idea and place of 'Europe', the management of détente, and the role and function of NATO. It will make use of secondary literature and primary sources that detail the American and French perspective, including oral histories of those within the Johnson administration, and both leaders' memoirs. Of course, there are clear problems associated with the use of such sources, but they do still give an insight into the thinking of key officials- and de Gaulle and Johnson themselves- during the period. Given language constraints, there is also something of an imbalance between French and American primary sources. Whether this has shaped the conclusions of this paper is, of course, a matter for further debate.

To view the Franco-American relationship in the mid-1960s as merely the product of the clashing personalities of de Gaulle and Johnson would be misleading and undermine the seriousness of their differences. Of course, the issue of the two leaders' personalities should not be ignored completely, especially given that both leaders held executive roles and so had some considerable influence over foreign relations. As Philip Gordon has argued, "to study the ideas of Charles de Gaulle… is not to 'personalize' the policies of an entire nation but simply to recognise the inordinate role of a single individual on those policies."[4] The backgrounds and personalities of the two men can perhaps help us to understand the rationale behind their views and therefore their actions, even if they fail to completely explain them.

De Gaulle came from a military background, and had famously been leader of the Free French forces during World War Two, an experience which had not given him a

[3] G. Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945,* Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 4-6.
[4] P. Gordon, *A Certain Idea of France: French Security and the Gaullist Legacy,* Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 6.

particularly favourable impression of the US.[5] He was a well-read man who had developed what he termed 'a certain idea of France': a belief in the importance and global role of his country. To many, particularly in America, this made him a figure bordering on nationalist. Charles Bohlen, US ambassador in Paris under Johnson, wrote in a 1963 letter to MacGeorge Bundy that "it is important to remember that de Gaulle is distinctly a product of that half of France (or less than one half) which has been, since 1789, and still is, conservative, hierarchical, religious and military."[6] The French leader was also a man unafraid of confrontation, and these aspects of his personality combined to produce a French president who had strong ideas about his country, and who was not afraid to pursue them.

Johnson was a man capable of equal passion and stubbornness. Most notably this took the form of 'The Treatment', a barrage of persuasion and admonition by which troublesome politicians were brought into line. Having had a long political career, in which he had served in various positions, Johnson had a fine political brain. Although he is often considered to have been more interested in the domestic than the foreign, and within foreign affairs more concerned with Vietnam than Europe, recent work has sought to challenge this.[7]. Johnson was perhaps a little less eloquent than his French counterpart, but he was still a man with strong opinions and a determination to achieve his goals.

Given their shared traits of resolve and firm leadership, it should perhaps not be surprising that they came to disagree. Crucially, though, their disagreements were over *issues*: whilst the determination of the two to see through their ideas was important, they ultimately had differing viewpoints on certain questions. Moreover, as previously suggested, the idea of a simple personality clash between the two can actually be disputed. The pair met for the first time at Kennedy's funeral in 1963, and although their meeting was apparently "extremely awkward"- and a misunderstanding over an announcement of de Gaulle's intention to visit the US again caused some red faces- Johnson's aides put this down to such a situation being "out of his experience".[8] Indeed, the president was to come to respect de Gaulle as a leader, writing in his 1971 memoirs that the Frenchman "had not made things easy for the United States or its president. But he had given France an important interval of stability and, we hoped, a time for healing and for gathering strength after all that country had

[5] For a recent biography of de Gaulle, see J. Fenby, *The General: Charles de Gaulle and the France He Saved,* Simon and Schuster, 2010.
[6] C. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, WW Norton and Company, 1973, p. 502.
[7] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe.*
[8] George Ball oral history, LBJ Library (hereafter LBJL), Austin, available online at [http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/biopage.asp].

experienced in the past half-century."[9] De Gaulle's impressions after that first meeting were- privately- a little less favourable, remarking that "I like Johnson. He doesn't even take the trouble to pretend he's thinking."[10] Yet the French leader developed some respect for the Texan, with senior aide Walt Rostow remarking that "I think de Gaulle understood and deeply respected President Johnson's stance toward him".[11]

This respect was perhaps borne out of the fact that the two men had a strong appreciation of politics, and thus understood each other's position. Thomas Schwartz has made this argument with regards to Johnson, describing him as "a politician's politician [who] recognized that the response of other nations to American initiatives would be conditioned, if not determined, largely by their domestic politics..."[12] Certainly, some within the administration felt that domestic French sentiment ran against America, with Rostow commenting that "For his purposes, de Gaulle had to keep this anti-Americanism alive at home and maybe in Europe."[13] Rostow's view here is perhaps a little simplistic, though, especially in light of the changing public reception of de Gaulle's foreign policy that Serge Berstein charts.[14]

Whatever the reasoning, the key point is that the two leaders maintained a relatively cordial relationship in public, suggesting that they knew any public falling-out could have significant ramifications. They were prepared to disagree- and even disagree publically- but not to criticize each other, because to do so would have come too close to harming France and America's basic alliance; something neither wanted. According to Dean Rusk, Johnson "was determined not to be in the position of having a personal vendetta with de Gaulle."[15] Of course, in private things could be very different: MacGeorge Bundy recalls that "The president was sufficiently interested [in not being nice to de Gaulle] so that every now and then he would say, 'I want somebody to make a very long list of all of the things that we can do to General de Gaulle.'"[16] Yet there was something that prevented this from ever happening: the idea of a fundamental alliance and good relations between France and the United States. As Bundy put it: "People would…discover there wasn't all that much we could

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[9] L. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971, pp. 320-321.
[10] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, p. 29.
[11] Walt Rostow oral history, LBJL.
[12] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe*, p. 27.
[13] Walt Rostow oral history, LBJL.
[14] S. Berstein, *The Republic of De Gaulle, 1958-1969*, Cambridge University Press, 1993 (1989), p. 155.
[15] Dean Rusk oral history, LBJL.
[16] MacGeorge Bundy oral history, LBJL.

do to General de Gaulle without harming our own interests or own purposes."[17] Johnson and de Gaulle's personalities perhaps made disagreements more likely, but these differences were primarily centred around substantive issues. Therefore, a study of their personalities does not fully explain Franco-American relations in the period. At the same time, however, the way that they sought to maintain good public, personal relationships hints at their desire not to endanger the fundamental structure on which they agreed: the idea of an alliance.

Given that personality is unsatisfactory as a sole explanation of the Johnson-de Gaulle period, the key issues on which they disagreed must also be considered. The first main issue was that of Europe. As is known, the end of WWII and the beginnings of the Cold War had encouraged the integration of western Europe. The United States, as a post-war economic and military superpower concerned with containing the spread of Communism in Europe, had played a part in this. Yet during the 1960s, many questions over the degree and nature of European integration remained unanswered. De Gaulle and Johnson had conflicting answers to such questions, but ultimately they refused to diverge beyond the basic structure of an alliance between Europe and the US.

The first key question over which Johnson and de Gaulle disagreed was that of how far, and in what way, (western) Europe should integrate. The French president held strong views on this; views intrinsically linked with his conceptions of history and democratic legitimacy. De Gaulle believed the nation-state to be an absolutely crucial element of international relations: according to Charles Bohlen, he saw the nation-state as the only constant in history, and more important than ideology and sentimentality.[18] To Philip Gordon, the French leader saw nation-states as the only structure able to act effectively for the people, given the legitimacy accorded it by its historical role as defender of a nation.[19] In 1965, this viewpoint manifested itself in the so-called 'Empty Seat Crisis', in which France essentially protested over supranational decision-making processes within the European Community. Even earlier, in 1961, France's Fouchet Plan had sought to increase the role of the nation-state at the expense of supra-nationalism.[20] Yet de Gaulle's vision for a less supranational Europe was not just based on his beliefs about the nation-state: there was also a more pragmatic dimension. As the French scholar Serge Berstein argues, "De Gaulle's conception

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[17] Ibid.
[18] K. Weisbrode, *The Atlantic Century,* Da Capo Press, 2009, p. 186; Bohlen, *Witness to History,* p. 512.
[19] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* pp. 9-11.
[20] F. Bozo, *Détente Versus Alliance: France, the United States and the Politics of the Harmel Report, 1964-1968,* Contemporary European History, 1998, (3), pp. 343-360, at pp. 345-346.

of Europe was of an entity independent of the two blocs organised around the United States and the Soviet Union; its independence would enable it to play an autonomous world role and to defend its interests…"[21] To De Gaulle, supranationalism was a process under which individual European states lost their power, thus rendering them liable to domination by extra-European states.[22] As the French president himself wrote, "If the idea of European integration found so much favour with our partners, it was largely because a stateless system, incapable by its very nature of having its own defence or foreign policy, would inevitably be obliged to follow the dictates of America."[23]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Johnson's administration saw matters differently. They viewed an integrated Europe as a pre-requisite for strength and stability in the area. As Dean Rusk told his oral history interviewer, "a unified Europe can play the role of a great power in the world, rather than being dependent upon the actions of individual nation-states."[24] This was a completely different to de Gaulle's conception of increased European unification stripping the area of power and allowing US domination. Johnson publically sought to refute such an idea, stating in 1964 that "the United States has never had any interest whatever in trying to dominate Europe or any other area of the world."[25] Of course, the American president was hardly likely to ever publically admit to having designs on Europe. Yet the administration consistently repeated a rationale for its support of European integration that had a firm reasoning behind it. As Rusk's earlier remark suggests, the US felt that an integrated Europe would be strong enough to take on more global responsibilities. Many feared that Europe was becoming increasingly isolationist,[26] and worried that this would leave the US a sole world policeman. (There is no small irony in the fact that at the same time, de Gaulle worried about a potential US retreat into isolationism, leaving Europe alone and undefended.) As Max Guderzo has argued, "The European governments… were being offered the chance to become an equal partner of the US, instead of an ill-assorted team of quarrelsome supporting riders."[27] To him, the United States' offer of European power through integration was a genuine one which was not taken, at the expense of potentially

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[21] Berstein, *Republic of de Gaulle,* pp. 170-171.
[22] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* p. 12.
[23] C. De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal 1958-1962, Endeavour 1962-*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971 (1970), p. 200.
[24] Dean Rusk oral history, LBJL.
[25] Public Papers of the President Lyndon B Johnson, (hereafter PP), News Conference of July 24, 1964, available online at [http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/#axzz1ah1qgy1p].
[26] Dean Rusk oral history, LBJL.
[27] M. Guderzo, *'Johnson and European Integration: A Missed Chance for Transatlantic Power',* Cold War History, 2004, 1, pp. 89-114, at p. 100.

expanded European power on the international stage.[28] Johnson had tried to infer the sincerity of this offer in an April 1964 speech, in which he stressed the language of 'Atlantic Community', 'alliance', and 'partnership', and referred to European integration as the continent's "manifest destiny"; a phrase particularly associated with American history.[29] In addition to viewing European integration as important for the maintenance of world security, Johnson and his advisers also recognised saw it as crucial for western security. This reflected a feeling that the nation-state system on the continent had been partially responsible for the two major twentieth century conflicts which broke out there. Such an attitude towards the nation-state was becoming increasingly widespread in post-war international relations theory.[30] Yet although de Gaulle and Johnson had some very clear differences on the question of European integration- and in particular what form this should take- it was not enough to challenge the basic idea of an alliance between France and the US, at least in part because the reluctance of other western European nations to accept de Gaulle's ideas never made it a real issue.

The two leaders also differed over how to conceptualise 'Europe'. How was Europe to be defined geographically? Was it an entity that comprised historical and social bonds, or was it more political and economic? For de Gaulle in particular, such questions were intrinsically linked with the issue of outside influence in Europe, most especially that of the United States. Yet whilst their competing visions had the potential to complicate relations, there was no complete structural divergence: simply put, de Gaulle was ultimately unprepared to rid Europe of all American influence, and Johnson refused to allow the issue of British entry to be one which further soured relations. The fundamental conception of a Franco-American alliance remained in place.

Famously, de Gaulle once referred to a Europe that stretched 'from the Atlantic to the Urals'. Such a geographical definition seemed to omit Britain, but include Russia. To him, this would allow Europe to be separate from the US and the UK, two countries he saw as having a 'special relationship' based on their shared heritage. In his memoirs, de Gaulle frequently refers to the 'Anglo-Saxons', and Keiger historicizes this by demonstrating that in France, from the 1870s onwards, such an expression was often used to refer specifically to Britain and America.[31] As well as perceiving the US and UK to be culturally distinct from 'Europe', de Gaulle also viewed them as acting politically in concert with one another,

[28] Ibid., pp. 108-109.
[29] PP, Remarks on Fifteenth Anniversary of NATO Treaty, April 3, 1964.
[30] Gordon, *A Certain Idea*, p. 12.
[31] J. Keiger., *France and the World Since 1870,* Arnold, 2001, p. 160.

particularly over the issue of nuclear weapons, which the US allowed Britain to have, but refused to help France develop. To his mind, as many have argued, this made British membership of the Community a means by which the United States could influence Europe. De Gaulle himself stated this in his memoirs, arguing that Britain could make a choice between Europe and the United States, implying that it could not maintain an equal level of relations with both.[32] Once again, there was a longer-term dimension to such a viewpoint. The 1931 book by French author André Siegfried, *La Crise britannique au XXe siècle*, had argued that Britain would always have trouble balancing relations between the US and Europe, and his work had influenced many French political figures.[33] De Gaulle hoped for a Europe that would counterbalance Britain's relationship with America;[34] for this reason, combined with the idea of a shared Anglo-American culture distinct form that of 'Europe', Britain was not fully a part of his conception of the Community. Russia, however, was, and this was a view that he had long held. As early as 1941, de Gaulle had sent a message to the Soviets stating that France and the USSR did not necessarily share all war goals with the British and the US, the implication being that the French and the Soviets were part of 'Europe', whilst the UK and America were not.[35] Given de Gaulle's belief that the nation-state was more important than ideologies and regimes, the Communist nature of the Soviet Union was something he saw as a phase, and no real impediment to the creation of a Franco-Russian led Europe. Indeed, in his memoirs the French president recounts a meeting with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, and speaks of how he made clear to Khrushchev that he saw him as the present head of the administration governing *Russia*- not the Soviet Union.[36]

Lyndon Johnson's view of Europe was rather different. As a Cold War president, he was perhaps a little less concerned with historical and cultural definitions of 'Europe' than de Gaulle. The administration's go-to man on European affairs, George Ball, later stated that Johnson didn't seem to have any well-defined policy on Europe when he assumed the presidency;[37] but he seems to have developed one throughout his presidency. To some extent, this was shaped by strategic and financial concerns. The main difference with de Gaulle was in terms of Britain, which the Johnson Administration felt should be a part of the European Community. For one thing, any opening of the Community to new members would- it was

[32] De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope,* p. 216.
[33] Keiger, *France and the World,* p. 162.
[34] M. Smith, *The US and the EU* in M. Cox and D. Stokes (eds.), *US Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 239.
[35] Fenby, *The General,* p. 212.
[36] De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope,* p. 225.
[37] George Ball oral history, LBJL.

hoped- encourage economic prosperity, thus facilitating a greater European contribution to the upkeep of US forces stationed in western Europe.[38] This would reduce the pressure that was building on Johnson to bring American forces home from Europe- epitomised in the 1966 Mansfield Resolution- as a result of a growing balance-of-payments deficit. As Rusk stated, Johnson did not wish to do this.[39] Moreover, Johnson seemingly rejected de Gaulle's stance on Britain's position vis-à-vis Europe and the United States, stating in a 1964 news conference that "we have never supposed that any European country should have to choose between its ties to Europe and its ties to the United States."[40] In making such a statement, Johnson both implicitly included Britain in his definition of Europe by making reference to 'European countries' *and* disputed de Gaulle's idea that the UK could not have equal relations with both.

Yet despite these clearly differing geographical conceptions of Europe, the issue was not one which fundamentally damaged the Franco-American alliance. In fact, Johnson actively sought to ensure that no final break between the two occurred, particularly over the question of British membership of the Community. In 1967, as Britain made its second application for membership, Rusk told British officials that the US was not prepared to involve itself, and suggested that the country simply wait until conditions were more favourable: although Britain was part of Johnson's conception of Europe, the president would not allow the potential future of the Community to be harmed.[41]

Quite clearly, then, Johnson and de Gaulle had differing conceptions of Europe and the form that its union should take. In the sense that de Gaulle's conservative, military background had perhaps shaped his views on the importance of France and the nation-state, personality was of some relevance to this. Johnson's political experience also perhaps encouraged his moderate response to de Gaulle's actions. Yet the nature of the pair's differences demonstrates that there was a substantive content to them borne out of more than their mere personalities. However, whilst the two may have disagreed over what 'Europe' was and how it should integrate, they shared a fundamental belief in some kind of European unity and, even more crucially, in the idea of a very basic alliance between the United States and France. Using Lundestad's framework, no structural divergence occurred.

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[38] Lundestad, *US and Western Europe*, p. 135.
[39] Dean Rusk oral history, LBJL.
[40] PP, News Conference of July 24, 1964.
[41] Guderzo, *Johnson and European Integration*, pp. 104-106.

In the context of the mid and late 1960s, in which Cold War tensions appeared to relaxing a small amount from the sense of imminent crisis of the 1950s and early 1960s, the question of how Europe was defined was intimately related to the broader issue of détente. This was the second main area in which de Gaulle and Johnson found themselves at odds with one another, and it was likewise an area in which disagreements provided a challenge to the Franco-American relationship (and, through the related issue of NATO, the broader Atlantic Alliance) but did not completely sour it to a point at which a structural divergence occurred.

As is already clear, de Gaulle saw Russia as naturally a part of Europe. Consequently, he disliked the two-bloc system that had developed in post-war Europe, seeing it as some kind of artificial imposition by the Yalta conference- a conference in which he had not been allowed to take part.[42] As the French political historian Serge Berstein phrased it, de Gaulle had 'Yalta syndrome'.[43] *Le General* was thus particularly concerned with the thawing of East-West tensions. His vision for this took the form of France reaching across the Iron Curtain, demonstrating both its influence in the world and its independence from NATO in foreign policy matters. The most significant manifestation of this was, of course, France's decision to leave NATO integrated military command in March 1966, something de Gaulle justified by claiming that it would aid the process of détente by relaxing tensions across the continent. Such an explanation has been questioned by historians, some of whom argue that de Gaulle was instead seeking to assert French independence and check US influence in Europe.[44] The French president was to follow this move with a visit to Moscow and Eastern Europe, and a direct telephone line was installed between Paris and Moscow, similar to the US-Soviet 'Hotline'.[45] To Berstein, this was again an attempt by de Gaulle to demonstrate France's independence in the field of détente.[46] Whatever the French leader's underlying motivations, though, France was aiming to be an independent actor leading and facilitating the process of détente in Europe. However, as both Schwartz and Bozo have argued, the Soviet crushing of the 1968 Prague Uprising ultimately undercut de Gaulle's apparent belief that eastern Europe was decreasingly controlled by the Soviets and thus open to French overtures.[47] Although this perhaps prevented differences over détente between the US and

[42] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* pp. 218-219.
[43] Berstein, *Republic of De Gaulle,* p. 177.
[44] Bozo, *Détente Versus Alliance,* p. 346.
[45] Berstein, *Republic of de Gaulle,* p. 178.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* pp. 218-219; Bozo, *Détente Versus Alliance,* p. 359.

France from becoming even wider, it was by 1968 already clear that Johnson's conception of détente was very different from that of de Gaulle.

The US was concerned by the French leader's push to make France the main facilitator of détente, particularly when it chose to withdraw from the military sphere of NATO. Many Americans condemned such an action as irresponsible, with ambassador Bohlen worrying that West Germany would feel so frustrated with its position that it would seek to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union itself.[48] Even more serious than this, in American eyes, was the potential challenge that France's push for détente represented to American strategy and to NATO. As Bozo argues, de Gaulle's vision for the management of détente essentially questioned the logic that lay behind US involvement in Europe, and the role of NATO.[49] Could NATO, a defensive alliance, still have any purpose in an age in which East-West relations were improving and the need for defence seemed reduced?[50] Johnson believed that it could, by conceiving of a new role for the Alliance, in which defence and détente would go hand-in-hand. Andreas Wenger has termed this idea the 'multilateralization of détente': whilst de Gaulle seemed to favour a more unilateral, French-led approach to the process, Johnson preferred all of NATO to work towards improved East-West relations.[51]

A key part of how they would work towards this was his idea of 'growing out of the Cold War', or 'bridge-building', which had been alluded to by him as early as December 1964, in a speech at Georgetown University. Johnson remarked that "we have a common interest in building bridges of trade and ideas, of understanding and humanitarian aid to the countries of Eastern Europe. These countries are increasingly asserting their own independence and we will work together to demonstrate that their prospects for progress lie in greater ties with the West."[52] Of course, this was to some extent "a lot of rhetoric", as the George Ball was to describe it: Johnson knew that something substantive, such as an East-West trade bill, was unlikely to be passed by Congress.[53] However, in the context of détente, the importance of rhetoric was not to be underestimated. If, as Wenger argues, Johnson's basic policy was to bring about a change in conditions between East and West- to create less a tense atmosphere that might improve relations- then even the symbolism of Johnson's rhetoric was important. They key point of bridge-building, though, was that it would involve

[48] Bohlen, *Witness to History*, pp. 508-509.
[49] Bozo, *Détente Versus Alliance*, pp. 348-349.
[50] Ibid, p. 346.
[51] A.Wenger, *'Crisis and Opportunity: NATO's Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968',* Journal of Cold War Studies, 2009 (1), pp. 3-27.
[52] PP, Remarks at 175th Anniversary Convocation of Georgetown University, December 3, 1964,
[53] George Ball oral history, LBJL.

all members of NATO working in harmony to reduce tensions, something that, it was hoped, would be a means of keeping the Alliance together as its originally defensive rationale appeared to be fading.[54]

Despite these two very different ideas on how détente should be achieved, there were some areas of agreement. When Johnson had remarked that there was a 'common interest' in bridge-building he was not completely incorrect: there may have been disagreements over the policy, but both presidents shared the basic sense that détente and a new climate for East-West relations was preferable to the fear and crisis that had characterised much of the early Cold War. That they disagreed over how this relaxation of tensions should occur is obvious, but it would be a mistake to see this as a complete divergence. Their fundamental outlook for détente was similar, and despite France's withdrawal from NATO for the purposes of boosting détente, no real crisis between de Gaulle and Johnson occurred. Indeed, France was to largely come to accept the new role for NATO in détente that was outlined in the 1967 Harmel Report, demonstrating that differences over the easing of tensions- and over NATO more generally- were not irreconcilable.

However, this is not to say that there were no differences over NATO. Indeed, this was the third key area in which de Gaulle and Johnson had substantive debates that were to do with more than personality, but still did not represent a complete structural divergence from the basic idea of a Franco-American alliance. Such debates centred around two main themes: the decision-making process and control of armed forces, and the military strategy that was to be employed. Given that France withdrew from the military command of NATO in 1966 and asked that the Alliance move its headquarters out of the country, it would be easy to view Franco-American relations vis-à-vis NATO in this period as crisis-ridden. However, NATO did not fall into disrepair or even fall apart as an alliance, and France did not leave the alliance completely. Both de Gaulle and Johnson seemed to recognise, and spoke either at the time or subsequently, of their hope that positive relations between the two countries would be maintained.

Following de Gaulle's decision to leave the military aspect of NATO in 1966, a sense existed among the Johnson administration that the French disliked the decision-making process within the Organization, feeling that they had too little say in the making of its policy, particularly with regards to the control of armed forces and nuclear weapons. Others

[54] G. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.742.

criticized the way in which the decision was taken, and viewed the French withdrawal as potentially precipitating some kind of crisis. Cold warrior Robert McNamara was especially critical, telling former colleague Walt Rostow in a 1975 oral history interview that the French withdrawal "was a unilateral action by one of the parties of an alliance which could have no result other than to weaken the alliance. I think it has led to other disintegrating actions within NATO. I have no doubt that it was welcomed by the Soviets."[55] Historian Andreas Wenger has even gone so far as to term the decision as "the most serious crisis of NATO since its founding in 1949."[56]

Certainly, the French withdrawal was the most obvious manifestation of disagreements with the United States over NATO's role, its decision-making process, and the control of troops within the Alliance. It did not, however, spell the end of the organization or even alter the idea of a broad alliance between France and the United States. France had been drawing elements of its armed forces from NATO command since 1958 anyway, to the extent that the State Department had been planning for a final withdrawal since the summer of 1965.[57] France was also not contributing a significant proportion of NATO's forces at the time: in 1959, there were only two French divisions in the twenty-one NATO divisions on the central front, compared to seven from West Germany.[58] However, as Gordon rightly admits, the fact that de Gaulle was now making it a policy not to commit French troops, rather than something simply borne out of necessity, still represented an important change.[59]

Yet even in this more symbolic, political realm, the French withdrawal resentment of US control of troops and decisions in NATO was still not a structural divergence. One structure remained intact and actively protected: the basic sense of alliance between France and the United States. From the Americans, this took the form of a refusal in public to condemn France's actions or criticize de Gaulle. Johnson's public papers contain several examples of speeches or interviews in which he strove to demonstrate his respect for French policy, stating shortly after the French withdrawal in March 1966 that "we are hopeful that no member of the treaty will long remain withdrawn from the mutual affairs and obligations of the Atlantic. A place of respect and responsibility will await any ally who decides to return to the common task."[60] It was clear that France was the subject of the remark, and it is important

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[55] Robert McNamara oral history, LBJL.
[56] Wenger, *Multilateralization of Détente,* p. 22.
[57] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* p. 96.
[58] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* pp. 24-29.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Public Papers, Remarks on NATO to the Foreign Services Institute, March 23 1966.

to note that it was still referred to as an 'ally' by Johnson. As Walt Rostow later said, Johnson did not desire to further damage Franco-American relations "because he had a deep faith that America and France would someday come back to a normal relationship."[61] Even in private, the administration sought not to take any retaliatory action, with the White House rejecting one pre-emptive 1965 study which had recommended that NATO strop protecting France in the event that it left the organization's military command.[62] To Johnson, an alliance was something that came naturally to the two countries as a product of their cultural bonds and their historical relationship. De Gaulle seemed to feel rather similar. He wrote in his memoirs that "my aim was to disengage France not from the Atlantic Alliance, which I determined to maintain as the ultimate deterrent, but from the integrated structures within its NATO command."[63] The alliance was the one structure beyond which the two leaders would not diverge. As Gordon has succinctly phrased it, "the real obstacle to a greater French role in European defense in the 1960s was not that France did not want to cooperate with the Europeans but that France did not want to be directed by the United States."[64]

Another measure of the way in which such disagreements did not represent a structural divergence is both parties' acceptance of the Harmel Report, a Belgian initiative which aimed to re-consider NATO's functions and decision-making processes in light of a slowly thawing Cold War. To historians such as Geir Lundestad, the Report effectively solidified American leadership of the alliance, by incorporating its vision for détente rather than the France's.[65] Even more than this, it strengthened consultative structures within the organization, but kept ultimate US control over military strategy, most especially with regards to nuclear weapons. Yet crucially, the report was accepted by both the United States and France. Differences with regards to NATO existed, but they did not destroy the fundamental structure of the Alliance.

Interwoven with these disagreements was the issue of NATO's military strategy and the control of nuclear weapons. This was another source of tensions between France and the US with regards to NATO; clearly more serious than a petty clash between Johnson and de Gaulle, but not a structural divergence either, for two main reasons. Firstly, the French withdrawal from NATO military command in 1966 rendered such disputes essentially academic. Secondly, and more importantly, disagreements over strategy and nuclear weapons

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[61] Walt Rostow oral history, LBJL.
[62] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* pp. 96-97.
[63] De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope,* p. 161.
[64] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* p. 34.
[65] Lundestad, *The US and Western Europe,* p. 131.

were very much not the same as disagreements over whether the alliance should exist as a whole. As has already been demonstrated, even de Gaulle himself made this distinction.[66]

Debates over strategy and military control certainly did exist, however. This was particularly the case with regards to nuclear weapons, and which members of the Alliance could have access to them. To de Gaulle, the Soviet development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of hitting the mainland United States changed the ability and, perhaps, the will of the US to defend the Europeans. He reasoned that as the two superpowers had the ability to attack each other, they would choose not to do so, and thus any conflict would be played out elsewhere: namely, in Europe. This meant that the French needed to take some kind of action to start guaranteeing their own security: the development of their own nuclear weapons.[67] The key part of de Gaulle's thinking in this area was *independence:* a French nuclear arsenal which would be controlled by the French themselves. It was this that brought him into conflict with the US, who were less than helpful in France's quest to obtain nuclear weapons, despite having aided Britain in the form of the 1962 Nassau Agreement. America, as a means to counter French- and particularly West German- requests for nuclear weapons, came up with an alternative solution, known as the Multi-Lateral Force (MLF), in the late 1950s.[68] The basic idea of the MLF was that mixed-nationality crews from NATO member states would man a naval fleet armed with nuclear weapons, thus ensuring America's allies access to them and a role in the decision-making process. Many scholars have doubted the real substance of the proposal, with foreign policy historian George Herring terming it a "gimmick", and Frank Costigliola arguing that it was more a piece of symbolism than a real opportunity for the western Europeans to have access to nuclear weapons.[69]

De Gaulle was certainly unconvinced by the idea, instead preferring an independent *force de frappe*, or nuclear strike force, which would give France some control over its own defence. As Gordon argues, the force which emerged was more of a symbolic enterprise than a real deterrent, but it allowed France to have its own nuclear weapons nonetheless.[70] Yet his challenge to the American vision did not necessarily constitute a major disagreement between the two countries, or even lead to a structural divergence over NATO. Johnson, according to

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[66] See page….
[67] De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope,* pp. 201-202; Wenger, *Multilateralization of Détente,* pp. 25-27.
[68] T. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: Alliance Politics, Political Economy, and 'Growing Out of the Cold War,* in Brands, *Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson*, pp. 44-47.
[69] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 724; F. Costigliola, *'Lyndon B. Johnson, Germany and 'the end of the Cold War'',* in N. Bernkopf Tucker and W. Cohen, eds., *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968,* Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 180.
[70] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* pp. 39-41.

the oral histories of some of his advisors, took some time to come to a final decision on the fate of the MLF. It was only in late 1965 that he fully decided against the scheme, according to George Ball, at least in part because France did not approve of it.[71] Johnson, then, was sacrificing an unpopular idea to prevent any greater disagreement with France. The president preferred a 'software' solution to the issue of nuclear sharing- in which the use of weapons would be discussed with the Europeans- as opposed to one in which the actual physical control of weapons was shared. This would begin to take shape in 1966, with the foundation of the Nuclear Defense Affairs Committee, the movement of the NATO Military Committee from Washington to Brussels, and the replacement of the International Planning Staff by the more participatory International Military Staff, although, as Wenger recognises, the US still retained the ultimate decision over nuclear weapons.[72] Of course, given de Gaulle's decision to leave NATO military command in March 1966, these new bodies did not include France, and the disagreement between the two on the issue of nuclear sharing was essentially rendered irrelevant. Moreover, whilst France maintained an independent nuclear force from the rest of NATO, it remained a part of the overall structure of the alliance. No complete structural divergence therefore occurred over the issue.

Much the same was true over de Gaulle and Johnson's disagreements on NATO's strategy. Since the time of the Kennedy administration, the US had developed a new policy of 'flexible response', as opposed to the 1950s doctrine of 'massive retaliation'. This strategy called for smaller, more proportionate responses to events, thus making the role of conventional forces an important one. Johnson inherited the idea, and for the US it seemed a positive move away from the brinkmanship that had characterised its relationship with the Soviet Union throughout the 1950s. For the western Europeans, however, the new strategy seemed much more worrying, as it seemed to logically imply that they may have to defend themselves using their own conventional forces, rather than relying on American nuclear power.[73]

De Gaulle in particular conceived of defence strategy rather differently, preferring the idea of massive retaliation to any act of aggression towards France: he did not wish a conflict between the two superpowers to potentially involve French soldiers. Thus, the issue became linked with that of nuclear sharing, as the French leader found the idea of an independent French nuclear deterrent even more appealing. As Gordon demonstrates in his study of

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[71] George Ball oral history, LBJL.
[72] Wenger, *Multilateralization of Détente,* pp. 39-40.
[73] Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, p. 724.

French security policy, the strategy employed by France was that an attack from the Soviet Union- even if using conventional forces- would be responded to with its nuclear arsenal.[74] Under this idea, French conventional forces were only to be deployed in order to buy time for the nuclear deterrent to be readied for use.[75] Clearly, this was very different from the Americans' strategy of flexible response. Yet it was not a matter on which differences precluded the alliance between France and the United States from occurring. France was allowed to leave NATO's military command, and its *force de frappe* coexisted with NATO defences in Europe.

Indeed, all of the key debates over NATO- the control of troops, decision-making, and nuclear weapons, as well as defence strategy- did not go so far that they constituted a structural divergence between Johnson and de Gaulle. At the same time, however, they also clearly derived from a combination of personal beliefs and strategic concerns, therefore representing more than a mere clash of personalities. As Lundestad argues, de Gaulle clearly determined a difference between NATO as a broad alliance and NATO's military policies, and ultimately remained bound to the US by a shared fear of Communism.[76] France's 1966 decision allowed strategic matters to be discussed by the organization; but France did not leave NATO completely, as some had feared that it might.

NATO, then, endured as a structure despite Johnson and de Gaulle's key differences. Crucially, so did the basic structure that NATO represented: an alliance between western Europe and the United States, and even more narrowly an alliance between America and France. This is not to diminish the importance of the issues which the two leaders differed on, or even to argue that there were not structural differences. Rather, it is to try and use the framework suggested by Lundestad in order to demonstrate that despite the differences between Johnson and de Gaulle, there was no structural divergence in the sense that one fundamental structure- that of a basic alliance between the two- remained intact.

Indeed, Johnson in particular sought to maintain this most basic of structures by not allowing a personal, public conflict with de Gaulle to develop. Whilst in private he may have termed the French president a "grouchy old grandfather grumbling by the stove", he strove in public to treat de Gaulle, and his policies, with respect.[77] A small example of this policy can be seen from a March 1964 interview, in which Johnson stated that "it is not for me to pass

[74] Gordon, *A Certain Idea,* p. 39.
[75] Ibid., p. 55.
[76] Lundestad, *US and Western Europe,* p. 8; p. 129.
[77] Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe,* p. 94.

judgement on General de Gaulle's conduct… I would like to see him more in agreement on matters with us than he is, such as recognizing Red China…But that is France's foreign policy… it is a matter for him to determine."[78] Such an attitude- at least as displayed in public-represented a conscious attempt not to undermine relations through personal sniping by both parties. In this sense, personality can perhaps be seen to have been partially responsible for differences between the two, as their determination encouraged them to pursue their agendas, but also to have prevented differences from becoming potentially more serious.

Yet as this paper has attempted to demonstrate, the issue of the two leaders' personalities does not explain the substantive disagreements which were a part of Franco-American relations in this period. The three key areas of debate considered here- European integration, the management of détente, and the role and strategies of NATO- were serious issues about which both leaders and their advisers had genuine views and concerns. Too strong an emphasis on personality risks obscuring the interests that both countries perceived to be at stake. At the same time, however, too strong an emphasis on discord and crisis, or 'structural divergence' obscures the areas of agreement and harmony that did exist in the period: namely, the fundamental idea of an alliance between the two nations. Befitting their strong and stubborn temperaments, the final words on this enduring alliance should perhaps be left to Johnson and de Gaulle themselves. To the French leader, the actions taken by his country in the period "…were to earn her a great deal of reproach and invective in many quarters in America, but never led to a rupture or even an estrangement between the two governments."[79] In the final analysis, he seemed to share the view of Johnson on the US and France: that "…there are no irreconcilable differences between us, and we believe when the chips are down that we will all be together."[80]

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[78] PP, Television and Radio Interview, March 15, 1964.
[79] De Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope,* p. 215.
[80] PP, News Conference of March 7, 1964.

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