
The United States and the Political Union of Western Europe, 1958–1963

JEFFREY G. GIAUQUE

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, French President Charles de Gaulle developed an ambitious plan to construct a political union among the countries of Western Europe. He aimed at a confederation of independent states that would work together to form common policies in the areas of defence, economics, cultural affairs, and foreign relations. De Gaulle intended to limit this new political group to the six countries that had launched European integration in the early 1950s: France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, known collectively as the ‘Six’. His basic plan was for the leaders, foreign ministers and other relevant ministers of the six countries to meet several times a year to coordinate all their policies. Intergovernmental study groups that would work to form common positions for the six countries would prepare the high-level meetings. Had de Gaulle’s plan succeeded, his political union would have accorded Western Europe far more political cohesion in the 1960s than the European Union has achieved to this day.

De Gaulle intended his co-operative political union to serve two main purposes. First, it would replace supranational integration – the delegation to an ever-greater degree of political and economic sovereignty to international organisations and authorities, which had led to the existing European communities such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC – the Common Market). De Gaulle had long opposed supranationalism as a threat to the independence and survival of the nation-state, and wished to stop and replace it before it advanced any further. Second, de Gaulle hoped to build a European confederation with the strength to deal with the United States and Soviet Union from a position of equality. De Gaulle’s political union would become a ‘Third Force’ and bring the bipolar international system of the Cold War to an end. Although the political union episode is less well known – particularly in American historiography – than many of de Gaulle’s other European and Atlantic policies designed to make France and Western Europe an independent force in the world, it formed the heart of all his plans for Western Europe.¹

¹ These other policies included, of course, de Gaulle’s demands for the reform of NATO and his efforts to exclude Britain from the European communities. For an excellent summary by the French

De Gaulle's plans presented not only his continental partners but also the other major Atlantic powers with both challenges and opportunities. Many of de Gaulle's partners, including the Dutch and Belgians, feared that his ambitious scheme would damage existing European and Atlantic organisations, such as the Common Market and NATO, and alienate non-members such as Britain and the United States. The Adenauer government in West Germany, a leading proponent of supranational integration and of close European relations with the United States, also viewed de Gaulle's proposals as a potential threat to the existing European communities and the Atlantic alliance. At the same time, however, Bonn felt that if these dangers could be contained, then de Gaulle's confederation would offer an opportunity to strengthen the political cohesion of Western Europe in the Cold War. De Gaulle's political union could theoretically encourage the United States to maintain its role in Europe by providing it with a stronger partner. The political union would also provide West Germany with something to fall back on should the United States ever let it down. The West German government thus co-operated with de Gaulle on the political union, but sought to shape it to prevent the French leader from using it to replace the existing European and Atlantic organisations.² While the Macmillan government in London shared the West German concern that de Gaulle would alienate the United States from Europe, it also shared de Gaulle's hostility to supranationalism and would have been only too happy to see the Common Market and other European communities eliminated. However, British policymakers also feared the creation of any new political group of which the United Kingdom was not a part. For this reason the Macmillan government supported the co-operative mechanisms that de Gaulle sought to establish, but only if the United Kingdom could be a part of them and if the new arrangements were not used to distance Western Europe from the United States, precisely what de Gaulle intended his political union to do.³

Needless to say, de Gaulle's ambitious plan posed a dilemma for the United States as well. Indeed, one of the misunderstood areas of the whole political co-operation debate (1958–1963) is the role of the United States in the affair. Much of the European and US historiography simply ignores the US policy on this particular issue. Because of the open contest for influence in Western Europe that broke out between the United States and France in the early 1960s, most contemporaries and historians seem to have assumed that the United States must have opposed the political union plan, particularly if it were, as is argued here, the centrepiece of de Gaulle's agenda. The fact that Atlantic issues played such a decisive role in the

Foreign Ministry of de Gaulle's grand vision, see: 16 November 1961 Foreign Ministry note, Europe: Généralités (1961–1965), 1955, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter MAE).

² For the basic West German stance on dealing with de Gaulle, see German Foreign Ministry note on European policy, 3 August 1959, MB 50, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes; Foreign Ministry paper on same subject, 5 April 1960 NL 1337/649, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

³ A good example of the basic British stance on the political negotiations is provided by the background notes prepared by the Foreign Office for British conversations with Italian officials in November 1962, FO371/164807, Public Record Office.

failure of the whole plan (see below) only reinforces the evident logic of this assumption. From these basic facts many observers then and now have wrongly assumed that American leaders must have hoped that the French political union effort would fail and must have covertly worked to bring about this collapse.⁴

From the American perspective there was much to be lauded in de Gaulle's ideas on organising the Six, and his proposals could easily be made to fit into wider American plans for Europe. President Eisenhower and his subordinates had long proclaimed their support for a stronger and more independent Western Europe. Eisenhower even spoke periodically of his hope that a strong European 'Third Force', a term which lacked neutralist connotations when Eisenhower employed it, would emerge to act as an American partner in the world.⁵ While President Kennedy and his advisors were more alarmed than their predecessors had been at any hint of Western Europe becoming independent of the United States, they too promoted a nominally more equal relationship with Western Europe and initially believed that de Gaulle's ideas could offer a stronger Western European partner. It also appeared wise to Washington to support the political co-operation initiative, since it seemed the only means available for progress in Western Europe as long as the anti-supranational de Gaulle remained in power. Only political union offered the possibility of new arrangements to link the Federal Republic of Germany more closely with the West – the proverbial American concern in the early Cold War – before the departure of the pro-Western Adenauer from the West German political scene.⁶

The United States and the early French proposals, 1958–1960

The Eisenhower administration's response to the first tentative French steps towards a West European political union was fairly complacent. When the French began to promote regular meetings among the Six to accustom their partners to the idea of political co-operation, these meetings and their implications were rarely dealt with at the highest levels of the administration. American observers paid little attention to

⁴ For a good example of the views of French leaders of the period, see the chapter on Europe in Maurice Couve de Murville [French Foreign Minister 1958–68], *Le Monde en Face: Entretiens avec Maurice Delaue* (Paris: Plon, 1989). For an excellent overview of the current historiography on the political union in general, see the various articles on the subject in *Revue d'Allemagne*, Vol. 29, no. 2 (April–June 1997). It is interesting that in this otherwise excellent (and extensive) collection of articles there is not a single contribution on the American or Atlantic dimensions of the political union episode. Other studies that address the political union episode (but which accord little attention to the American policy towards it) include Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'alliance incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954–1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur: politique étrangère du général de Gaulle 1958–1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993).

⁵ Eisenhower conversation with West German foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano, 7 March 1957, Ann Whitman file, DDE Diaries, box 22, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL).

⁶ Telegram from Russell Fessenden (Director of the Office of European Regional Affairs in the State Department) to W. Walton Butterworth (U.S. representative to the European Communities in Brussels), 8 December 1960, Lot File 65 D 265, box 4, Record Group 59, National Archives (hereafter RG 59, NA).

de Gaulle's political co-operation ideas at all in 1958, since they remained preoccupied with the more general ramifications of his return to power and issues relating to the Common Market and the economic aspects of European integration. When de Gaulle's agenda began to move forward in 1959–60 on the political organization of the Six, it was generally the State Department that formulated the American responses. The State Department, led by Secretaries of State John Foster Dulles (1953–9) and Christian Herter (1959–61), supported greater co-operation among the Six in principle, but since de Gaulle's proposals initially advanced slowly, American officials did not feel constrained to take strong positions. They were well aware that each of the major continental states had its own goals on the political co-operation issue, and felt that the ultimate result of these conflicting views was likely to be either deadlock or some anodyne form of political discussions that the United States could accept without difficulty. State Department representatives simply set out a few basic guidelines that they hoped the Six would follow. They saw no reason why political contacts among the Six should inevitably lead to the formation of a bloc in NATO, but they nevertheless opposed the creation of any formal subgroup within the Atlantic defence organisation. As a longstanding supporter of supranational integration as the only real means of making Western Europe a force in world affairs over the long term, the United States also opposed any arrangement that would weaken the existing supranational communities.⁷ Like the West Germans, US officials hoped that de Gaulle's ideas on political co-operation could be made to serve the wider cause of Western political cohesion by means of a few tactical (short-term) concessions to his conceptions. As for Eisenhower himself, when the Italians informed him in late 1959 that they believed that the United States should support the political meetings of the Six for the sake of containing de Gaulle and preventing him from damaging the European communities, the President accepted this rationale. He stated that the regular meetings of the foreign ministers of the Six would further the general cause of European integration and that they had American support.⁸

The warnings of the principal opponents of de Gaulle's plans at this point, the British and the Dutch, fell on deaf ears in Washington at the end of the Eisenhower administration. Both British and Dutch leaders feared that de Gaulle sought hegemony in Western Europe and to remove the United States and the United Kingdom from continental affairs, and they attempted to convince the Americans of these dangers. Although the American mission to NATO in Paris was swayed by the Dutch arguments regarding de Gaulle's designs against the Atlantic defence organisation, the existing European communities and the US presence in Europe, most State Department officials did not share this view. American diplomats did nothing to encourage Dutch or British opposition to de Gaulle and on several

⁷ For basic US views at this point see the briefing paper on European political co-operation prepared for Eisenhower's September–October 1959 meetings with Italian leaders, White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF) confidential file, box 78, DDEL.

⁸ Eisenhower conversation with Antonio Segni, Italian Prime Minister, 5 December 1959, Ann Whitman International meetings series, box 4, DDEL.

occasions the Americans attempted to blunt the Dutch and British critiques and exhorted them to take a more constructive stance. This American approach did not reflect any blind faith in de Gaulle, but rather the realistic assessment that the Dutch and France's other continental partners would not permit de Gaulle to do anything that the United States could not accept. US officials were well aware that if all de Gaulle's partners followed in his wake and accepted French hegemony in Western Europe, they would provide France with the political weight for a real challenge to the existing structures of the Atlantic alliance and American influence in Europe. However, such a scenario seemed far-fetched at this point. As long as de Gaulle avoided extreme polemics on NATO and as long as his partners insisted on its maintenance as the primary European–Atlantic institution, this American attitude was not likely to change.⁹

The United States began to reverse its benign assessment of de Gaulle's political co-operation proposals after a pivotal summit between the French leader and Adenauer in July 1960. It was at this meeting that de Gaulle proposed moving beyond periodic foreign ministers' meetings to the creation of a formal political organisation for the Six. The new 'confederation' he proposed would be completely free of American influence and would co-ordinate the policies of the Six in all major areas.¹⁰ Eisenhower and Secretary of State Herter now realised that de Gaulle's political ideas were far more sweeping than they had believed and that they offered a completely new departure in Europe. As more and more information on de Gaulle's proposals reached Washington, it became clear that the French leader intended to replace supranational integration entirely. It now appeared that de Gaulle sought to make France the leading European power and representative of Western Europe in the world and that he might be able to exploit Adenauer's fears on the strength of American commitments to Europe in order to persuade the West Germans to follow along. France seemed bent on halting European and Atlantic integration and towing West Germany in its wake.¹¹ Despite the alarming implica-

⁹ Unsigned briefing note for Eisenhower for March 1960 Adenauer visit to Washington, WHCF confidential file, box 80, DDEL.

¹⁰ The French accounts of the 29–30 July 1960 de Gaulle–Adenauer summit are in *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, vol. 19 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1996), 163–79. A memo that de Gaulle prepared for Adenauer during this summit provides an excellent summary of his proposals and explains why the Americans were so alarmed when details filtered back to Washington. De Gaulle note on the organization of Europe, 30 July 1960, in Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets*, vol. 8 (June 1958–December 1960) (Paris: Plon, 1985), 382–3. The note launched a frontal attack on all supranationalism, called for an end to the integrated Atlantic alliance, and suggested that once Western Europe had organised itself, it could dictate new terms of alliance to the United States. De Gaulle initially hoped to have his political union in place by the time a new American president took office in early 1961, in order to present the US leader with a *fait accompli*. Unfortunately for de Gaulle, his proposals were so sweeping that they alarmed the other Europeans as much as they did the Americans and he spent most of the rest of 1960 backtracking in order to persuade his European partners to give his ideas a hearing at all. As a result, formal negotiations on his proposals had not even begun when Kennedy took office in January 1961.

¹¹ Herter conversation with Sir Harold Caccia, British ambassador to Washington, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, 12 August 1960: Records (hereafter WHO-OSSR), international series, box 13, DDEL. State Dept. to Paris, 22 August 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States*

tions of this new assessment of de Gaulle's goals, however, American leaders still felt that they need not move directly against France. Washington counted on West Germany and France's other partners to frustrate de Gaulle's drive for hegemony, and was reassured by Adenauer's obvious doubts on the scheme during autumn 1960 and the criticisms of de Gaulle emerging from the Benelux countries. The United States encouraged such resistance by championing the existing European and Atlantic institutions.¹² The American leadership still hoped that de Gaulle's political union plan could be purged of its negative elements and turned in more positive directions. During autumn 1960, the differences between the views of de Gaulle and his partners seemed so great that American observers concluded that any political arrangement would be a very long time in the making. As before, as long as the ultimate result respected NATO and did not lead to a neutralist Third Force, Washington would accept the outcome.

While the Americans still preferred to remain aloof from the political debates in Western Europe in principle, they now intervened far more directly than they had previously. They were disturbed by reports that Adenauer had initially gone along with many of de Gaulle's more sweeping proposals and wished to remind the Chancellor of his European and Atlantic obligations. In early October Eisenhower wrote to Adenauer and informed him that the United States would have to re-evaluate radically its entire European policy if the Six followed de Gaulle down the path of destroying NATO. He encouraged the Chancellor to defend supranational integration and NATO, and reminded Adenauer that it had been the United States that had blocked de Gaulle's tripartite schemes in the alliance.¹³ American confidence in Adenauer remained fairly solid, but as de Gaulle played for ever higher stakes, it seemed wise to US leaders to hedge their bets. The Americans also intervened with the French, and informed Paris that France could not become the speaker for all of Western Europe and that the American military commitment to Europe gave the United States the right to be involved in European political affairs. The French Foreign Ministry knew that the Eisenhower administration supported European political consolidation in principle and hoped to maintain American support for at least some of de Gaulle's ideas, as a means to persuade France's European partners to accept them. For this reason, French representatives promised their US counterparts that de Gaulle sought only to organize the Six on a more

(hereafter *FRUS*) (1958–60), vol. 7, part I (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 294–5.

¹² Eisenhower letter to Adenauer, 5 October 1960, Ann Whitman International file, box 16, DDEL.

¹³ *Ibid.* In September 1958 de Gaulle had proposed that France, Britain, and the United States form a tripartite directorate for the Atlantic alliance. In this arrangement France would serve as the representative of continental Europe. This proposal would have relegated all the other alliance members, including West Germany, to second-class status. The United States had rejected the idea for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was concern for the reactions of the West Germans and others to such an arrangement. On the Franco-American debates over NATO, see Maurice Vaïsse, Pierre Mélandri, and Frédéric Bozo, eds., *La France et l'OTAN, 1949–1996* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1996).

viable basis and did not plan to form a bloc in NATO. The French also denied any linkage between the political union project and their ongoing tripartite demands in the Atlantic alliance, and asserted that they had no intention of attacking the existing European communities.¹⁴

In late 1960 these American interventions in the political union affair focused entirely on French intentions for the new institution, and did not address the specific means of organization de Gaulle had proposed. On this latter issue the United States continued to leave it to France's European partners, known collectively in Washington as the 'Five', to deal with de Gaulle as they saw best. American policy makers believed that the Five should only support de Gaulle's proposals insofar as these advanced the cause of European integration. However, US officials were not doctrinaire in their support of supranational European unity. They realized that de Gaulle's ideas for a European confederation offered new momentum to Western Europe, an important consideration in the tense atmosphere of Khrushchev's threats to West Berlin (1958–62) and after the U-2 spy-plane incident led to the failure of the Paris East–West summit in May 1960. If this meant that the continent would for some time shift away from supranationalism and towards inter-state co-operation, Washington could accept such a detour as long as it did not prejudice the ultimate destination or endanger the US role in Europe. Any new political arrangements should, however, be linked to the existing European communities, not to subordinate them, as de Gaulle desired, but rather to ensure that they were not neglected and set aside.¹⁵

The Fouchet negotiations, 1961–2

By the end of 1960, a chastened de Gaulle promised the Five that his political union could exist alongside the European communities and that he accepted the Atlantic alliance and the American role in Europe. Through such nominal concessions he persuaded his partners to give his ideas a formal hearing. Whether anything would result would depend largely on his ability to maintain both a flexible approach and a European and Atlantic consensus on his plans. The formal negotiations on the French political union proposals, known as the 'Fouchet' plan after the leading French negotiator, Christian Fouchet, took place between February 1961 and April 1962. The Six were sharply divided throughout over the goals and institutions of the proposed political union. French diplomats, following de Gaulle's orders, worked for a confederation limited to the Six that would co-ordinate policy in almost all international areas, become the main forum for European defence issues (de facto replacing NATO) and control all the existing European communities. Most of France's partners continued to fear that Paris sought to exclude the Americans and the British from any role in Western Europe, break up NATO and establish French

¹⁴ Herter conversation with Couve de Murville, 19 September 1960, *FRUS* (1958–60), vol. 7 part I, 298–300. The Americans feared that the French would attempt to use the confederation to gain the political weight necessary to force the United States to accept their tripartite demands.

¹⁵ Herter to Stations, 20 October 1960, *FRUS* (1958–60), vol. 7 part I, 303–4.

hegemony in Western Europe by replacing the supranational communities with a French-dominated confederation. During 1961 de Gaulle took a relatively flexible and hands-off stance toward the negotiations, and French diplomats found ways to soothe many of the doubts of their partners. However, in January 1962 de Gaulle examined the concessions made by the Foreign Ministry, concluded that his diplomats had been too conciliatory, and hardened the French position on several key points. He feared that too many concessions to the Five would transform his political union into another Atlantic-focused supranational burden on France rather than the core for the independent European Third Force that he hoped to build. This French shift led to the deadlock and collapse of the negotiations in March and April, despite subsequent compromises made by de Gaulle in order to start them moving again.¹⁶

During the final tense months of the negotiations, the deadlock centred on two issues, Atlantic relations and the inclusion of Britain in the political union. The Five insisted on some reference in the political union treaty to the Atlantic alliance as the supreme forum for European defence, but de Gaulle refused to accept such a provision, since it would have voided his entire effort to replace the Atlantic organisation with a purely European one. The issue of British membership also became central to the negotiations, as de Gaulle's chief opponents, the Belgians and the Dutch, insisted that Paris must either accept British participation in the political union or allow a certain amount of supranationalism in the new organization. The Belgians and Dutch believed that either one of these arrangements would prevent French hegemony and make it impossible for de Gaulle to use the political union for dangerous purposes. When no compromise could be reached to settle these and other outstanding issues, the negotiations came to an end. While it was the Dutch and Belgians who torpedoed de Gaulle's proposals, the French blamed the British and the Americans for the outcome. They believed that the United Kingdom and the United States had manoeuvred behind the scenes to divide the Six and encourage opposition to French policy in order to maintain their own influence in Europe.¹⁷

To what extent were the French correct in attributing the failure of the Fouchet

¹⁶ In January 1962 de Gaulle unilaterally revised the draft treaty that had been negotiated by the foreign ministries of the Six. With a few strokes of his pen he eliminated most of the concessions that his diplomats had made to the Five during months of negotiations. His revised draft seemed to threaten the autonomy of the Common Market, end any hopes of future supranational developments, cut any links to NATO and damage Britain's chances of ever joining the political union. Both the previous draft, negotiated by the French Foreign Ministry, and de Gaulle's new draft are found in *Europe: Généralités* (1961–5) 1958, MAE. The French accounts of the final negotiations on the treaty are: foreign ministers' meetings, 20 March 1962 and 17 April 1962, both in *Europe: Généralités* (1961–5), 1962, MAE.

¹⁷ For the French post-mortem on the negotiations and blame of the United States, see: Foreign Ministry note, Europe undated [July 1962]: *Généralités* (1961–5), 1958, MAE. For a good example of the Dutch and Belgian perspective, see the chapter on the Fouchet plan in the memoirs of Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Minister during the Fouchet negotiations and one of de Gaulle's most implacable opponents. Paul-Henri Spaak, *The Continuing Battle: Memoirs of a European, 1936–1966*, trans. Henry Fox (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 436–56.

plan to American actions, whether direct or indirect? The answer to this question is mixed. It is clear that American policy makers never wished to see the negotiations fail. They urged the Dutch and Belgians not to terminate them, even after de Gaulle showed his true hand once again in January 1962, so that the United States cannot justifiably be blamed directly for the failure of the Fouchet plan. On the other hand, the opposition of the Americans (and the British) to both de Gaulle's long-term goals for the political union and his wider European–Atlantic policy did encourage resistance to his ideas among the Five.

Despite its disagreements with de Gaulle on NATO, supranationalism, nuclear policy and other European and Atlantic issues, the Kennedy administration never took as negative a view of the political negotiations of the Six as did some of de Gaulle's other critics, notably the British and the Dutch.¹⁸ During 1961 and the first months of 1962, the Kennedy administration, like its predecessor, judged de Gaulle's various European and Atlantic proposals, including the political union, on their intrinsic merits, rather than on the darker long-term ambitions the French leader might have for them. Washington did not yet view Atlantic unity, as promoted by the United States, and closer European political ties, as supported by de Gaulle, as inherently contradictory. The Kennedy administration always viewed de Gaulle's proposals from an Atlantic perspective and initially found ways to fit the French plans into the wider concept of Atlantic community that it was developing. A political union of the Six could theoretically strengthen both European integration and NATO. As long as de Gaulle did not move directly against these European and Atlantic institutions, the Kennedy administration, like its predecessor, would accord his ideas a fair hearing.

During 1961 State Department officials believed that the political union negotiations were moving in a positive direction. American observers were fairly satisfied with the initial meeting of the government heads of the Six in February 1961. They largely ignored critical accounts delivered by the Dutch and refused to intervene against de Gaulle's proposals as the Dutch desired.¹⁹ They were reassured by the fact that the communiqué of the February meeting mentioned both NATO and the existing European communities, evident signs that de Gaulle had scaled back his original ambitions. Washington understood that these were tactical steps by the French leader and that his ultimate goals remained unchanged, but assurances from the Dutch, Italians, and others that they would not allow de Gaulle to destroy the existing foundations of European and Atlantic relations made US observers confident that he could be contained. Reports of the flexibility of French diplomats in the subsequent negotiations in 1961 only confirmed this confident US assumption. American officials did not believe that de Gaulle could override all five of his partners and they expected that the Six would eventually reach compromises the

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of the wider Franco–American disputes, see Frédéric Bozo, *Deux Stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, Les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique* (Paris: Plon, 1996).

¹⁹ American embassy in the Hague to State Dept. on conversation with Dutch foreign minister Joseph Luns, 14 February 1961; State Dept. paper on Luns' views, 7 April 1961; both in National Security Files (hereafter NSF), box 143, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL).

United States could accept. After all, it seemed that the Five had already succeeded in eliminating the most alarming aspects of de Gaulle's programme.

This confidence in the Five encouraged the United States to refrain from direct intervention in the Fouchet negotiations during the first year of the Kennedy administration. American diplomats limited themselves to general positions already familiar to the Europeans.²⁰ While US officials encouraged the Dutch and others to take a constructive stance towards the French political proposals, they did not hesitate to inform the Five that the US counted on them to blunt the dangerous aspects of the French plans and insist on linking the political union to wider Atlantic co-operation.²¹ The further compromises evident in the so-called 'Bonn Declaration' of the Six on political co-operation in July 1961 reinforced the American conviction that the Five could successfully stand up to the French and channel the political union idea in positive directions.²² The United States gave its official approval to the Bonn Declaration and went so far as to support the inclusion of defence issues in the arrangements of the Six, notwithstanding the fact that this area had been left out of the Declaration as a compromise between de Gaulle and the Five. Attached to such United States statements, however, was the familiar caveat that nothing be done to alter the supremacy of NATO in the realm of defence.²³

The United States did not fully support de Gaulle's opponents on the inclusion of the United Kingdom in the political union negotiations either. As a matter of principle, American officials did not believe that the Six were obliged to involve Britain directly in the negotiations. They generally viewed the British as unready to play a real part in the organization of Western Europe, at least until the United Kingdom applied to join all the European communities in mid-1961.²⁴ Once the British had made their application, the United States supported the French argument that this development was one more reason for the Six to move quickly on the political union and consolidate 'Europe' before it was expanded. The United States did not take an official position on whether or how Britain should be consulted on the political union negotiations once it had made its application to join the communities, but American observers still saw no particular need for immediate British participation in the political meetings.²⁵ This US disinterest in the British role in the political union negotiations reflected both the feeling that the United Kingdom was not needed to contain the French and the fear that the participation

²⁰ State Dept. to Stations, 24 March 1961, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 2–4.

²¹ State Dept. position paper for April 1961 Luns visit to Washington, Lot File 65 D 265, box 4, RG 59, NA.

²² The basic compromises involved setting aside thorny issues such as defence, UK participation and the link between the political union and the existing communities for the moment. The French account of the 18 July 1961 meetings that produced these compromises is in *Europe: Généralités* (1961–5) 1961, MAE.

²³ State Dept. note on the US position on the Bonn Declaration and subsequent developments, November 1961, Lot File 65 D 265, box 4, RG 59, NA.

²⁴ See the briefing papers for US conversations with the Dutch and the West Germans in the spring of 1961 in Lot File 66 D 54, box 2, RG 59, NA.

²⁵ November 1961 draft of State Dept. circular telegram, Lot File 65 D 265, box 4, RG 59, NA.

of the anti-supranational British might prevent the Six from accomplishing anything substantive in the political sphere.

As noted above, during the latter half of 1961 de Gaulle gave his subordinates a relatively free hand in the Fouchet negotiations and rapid progress was made. Not surprisingly, the American reaction to the initial French treaty draft and the subsequent compromises made by French negotiators was quite positive. American observers were even relatively magnanimous in the motives they attributed to de Gaulle at this point. They realised that the French planned to slow or stop supranational integration and shift the European communities towards a new path, and understood that such a change would have sweeping consequences. They also understood that the French aimed at both a stronger and a more independent Western Europe, with France as its speaker in the alliance and the world, but in late 1961 it seemed that the Five had successfully forced the French to drop any neutralist/Third Force dimension from this plan, at least for the short term. As a result, American observers felt that the United States could accept the fundamentals of the tentative agreement reached among the Six in late 1961 and prepare to accord Western Europe a larger voice in world affairs. For the Americans, the crucial point was that Western Europe must play this greater role within the Atlantic alliance. It was because of this perspective that the United States had accepted the inclusion of a defence dimension in the political union. US officials suggested that the role of the political union of the Six within NATO could be analogous to that of the Common Market within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a European grouping within a larger Atlantic organization, but not a divisive bloc. In order to maintain the chances of supranational development in the future, the United States supported the Five in their call for a detailed revision clause in the political union treaty. Such a clause would chart some supranational progress for the future, and even French negotiators seemed to have accepted the idea in late 1961.²⁶

Washington's outlook changed dramatically in January 1962, when word reached it of the new draft of the Fouchet treaty. It now appeared that the previous French willingness to compromise with the Five had been replaced by an effort to dictate to them. US observers began to believe that de Gaulle's ambitions knew no limits, whether in terms of dominating Western Europe or dismantling NATO, and that his previous flexibility had been an illusion. Wider Franco-American disputes over contacts with the USSR and over alliance nuclear policy added fuel to the fire. With de Gaulle suddenly silent on his usual tripartite demands, the Americans feared that he intended either to create a bloc in NATO to force the United States to accept tripartism or to lead Western Europe in a neutralist/Third Force direction.²⁷ American confidence in the ability of the Five to stand up to de Gaulle's pressures also began to waver, despite strong assurances from them that they would not

²⁶ Ambassador James Gavin (Paris) to State Dept., 6 November 1961, NSF, box 70, JFKL. State Dept. to Stations, 3 November 1961, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 48–9.

²⁷ See Ambassador Gavin's 14, 18, and 21 February 1962 telegrams to the State Department on his conversations with de Gaulle and officials of the French foreign ministry, NSF, box 71, JFKL.

surrender to him. De Gaulle's provocative new positions on the political union began to lead Washington to view French and American plans for Western Europe as contradictory in a way that it had not previously. Atlantic community and de Gaulle's political union no longer seemed compatible. The State Department was somewhat relieved by the efforts of the Five to force de Gaulle to backtrack between February and April, and the United States continued to support the idea of a political union of the Six in principle, but now with much less confidence that an acceptable one could be created.²⁸

At the end of the Fouchet negotiations all the participants sought to rally the United States to their side. In the weeks leading up to and following the final deadlock among the Six in April, negative reports regarding de Gaulle's actions and intentions continued to flood into Washington from the Belgians, Dutch, and various American embassies in Western Europe. This litany of warnings insisted that de Gaulle must be prevented from leading Western Europe in a Third Force direction, that Britain must join the Six to prevent such a development, and that the political union idea should be set aside until the United Kingdom was a full member of all the existing European communities.²⁹ On the other hand, the Italians, West Germans, and French, all of whom still supported a compromise to bring the political union about, continued to attempt to convince the Americans of its benefits. The Italians were particularly insistent that the United States must intervene to persuade the Dutch and Belgians to accept further negotiations.³⁰ The French portrayed the deadlock as a tragedy for Western Europe that could endanger existing institutions such as the Common Market. They asserted that the British would attempt to exploit the deadlock to dissolve the Six.³¹ Despite such European pressures and the ever-greater American concerns, the State Department still did not wish to be drawn directly into the political union debates on either side. It took the cautionary position that while the United States continued to view the political union proposal in a positive light and to support the unification efforts of the Six in general, other European and Atlantic co-operative efforts and organisations should not suffer as a result of the isolated failure of the political union. Western Europe should continue to work for the maximum unity possible within the framework of existing European and Atlantic institutions, and it would have to work out the details of anything new on its own.³²

Despite their officially neutral stance, American leaders were alarmed by the ultimate deadlock among the Six. They agreed with the French that the deadlock was not a healthy development for Western European unity. They also feared, but

²⁸ State Dept. paper on European policy, 26 March 1962, Lot File 65 D 265, box 4, RG 59, NA.

²⁹ See in particular, State Dept. to Brussels on conversations between Undersecretary of State George Ball and Belgian foreign minister Paul-Henri Spaak, 23 February 1962, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 65–7.

³⁰ Rome to State Dept. on embassy conversations with Italian officials, 3 May 1962, NSF, box 120, JFKL.

³¹ Gavin to State Dept. on conversations with French foreign ministry officials, 18 April 1962, NSF, box 71, JFKL.

³² Secretary of State Rusk to Stations, 27 April 1962, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 82–4.

did not state publicly, that French frustration on the political union might lead de Gaulle to take an even more nationalistic and unilateral foreign policy course and endanger both the existing European communities and possible future developments. US fears about French policy were now such that they led to a shift in the American policy on British involvement in any further political union efforts. Given the growing American distrust of the French intentions, British participation in the political union took on an importance it had not previously held in American eyes. US leaders finally began to support the efforts of the Dutch and Belgians to ensure Britain's participation in any European political union, even though they still preferred that the Europeans continue to champion this cause themselves rather than have the United States promote it.³³ While some State Department officials still preferred to give de Gaulle the benefit of the doubt on both the political union and his acceptance of British participation in Europe, the French leader's actions were beginning to harden opposition to him at the highest levels of the Kennedy administration. By early May Secretary of State Dean Rusk viewed de Gaulle's European ideas as diametrically opposed to any real integration and his Atlantic conceptions as aimed at the destruction of NATO. Rusk concluded that the United States should openly support the Five in their resistance to the entire Gaullist agenda. When de Gaulle, bitter over the failure of his political union and holding the United States as largely responsible, attacked supranational integration and American involvement in Europe in very blunt terms in a press conference in mid-May, Kennedy and most of his other top advisors quickly came to share Rusk's views.³⁴ They concluded that de Gaulle sought to remove the United States from Europe completely and that his political union proposals had been one aspect of this plan.³⁵

Denouement, 1962–3

After the failure of the Fouchet negotiations in April 1962, de Gaulle shifted tactics in his approach to organising Western Europe. He realized that the Dutch and Belgians were likely to prevent any progress on the political union as long as they

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ It was after the failure of his own European plans that de Gaulle became openly and stridently hostile to the proposals of the Kennedy administration for a more formalised Atlantic Community based on political and economic co-operation. Paris now viewed the United States as at best a 'natural' opponent of French goals and at worst as an active enemy of them. It was from the spring of 1962 onwards that Paris and Washington were divided on almost every major European or Atlantic issue. The French text of de Gaulle's 15 May 1962 press conference is in *Cabinet du Ministre: Couve de Murville*, 147, MAE.

³⁵ Rusk (from Athens) to State Dept., 4 May 1962, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 690–1. Rusk to Gavin, 18 May 1962, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 704. Kennedy speech on Atlantic Partnership, 4 July 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, January 1–December 31, 1962* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 537–9. NSC staff paper for National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy on de Gaulle, 27 November 1962, NSF, box 71a, JFKL. State Dept. paper 'De Gaulle's foreign policy and basic differences with U.S. objectives', 23 January 1963, Lot File 65 D 265, box 5, RG 59, NA.

believed that there were available alternatives to following French policy. As a result, he set aside the political union for the short term and focused on solidifying his entente with Adenauer's West Germany and on containing British and American influence in Europe. In January 1963 he signed a bilateral treaty of co-operation with West Germany that was broadly similar to the political union he had originally planned for the Six. In another press conference that same month he vetoed Britain's application to join the Common Market and did all he could to torpedo the Kennedy administration's efforts to build an Atlantic Community to foster political and economic co-operation among all the NATO countries.³⁶ De Gaulle hoped that by these means he could eventually create a situation in which all five of his European partners would have no choice but to accept a political union on his terms if they wished to make any progress at all in unifying Western Europe. It was for this reason that from April 1962 onward he rejected any efforts by others to revive the political union on any terms other than his own. This stance, combined with the hostility that his undisguised attacks on Britain and the United States provoked among the Five in 1963, ultimately led to de Gaulle's isolation and the end of any hopes for a political union in Western Europe for the foreseeable future.

Between the collapse of the Fouchet negotiations in April 1962 and de Gaulle's frontal attacks on the United States and Britain in January 1963, the Kennedy administration and State Department still hoped that the political union idea could be implemented in some fashion. This position of principle was complicated by the growing American distrust of de Gaulle. If his May 1962 press conference was any indication, the French leader would be increasingly difficult to deal with. It appeared that the end of the Algerian war of independence (March 1962) and the failure of his political ideas for Western Europe had made de Gaulle less conciliatory and more obstructionist on European and Atlantic issues. It was unclear what de Gaulle would do with the political union idea now that it could not be carried out on his terms. Like most of their European counterparts, American leaders did not expect much to happen on political union until the British negotiations with the Common Market and other European communities came to a conclusion. If those negotiations succeeded, then progress on the political union should be possible. De Gaulle would be forced to compromise with his partners once again if he wanted to achieve anything at all. Acceptable arrangements and even some limited supranational steps should then be possible. As their distrust of de Gaulle grew, State Department leaders even came to believe that the French leader might allow Britain to join both the Common Market and the political union in order to make possible the establishment of the latter on his terms and in the hope of winning the United

³⁶ De Gaulle's main move against the Atlantic Community at this point, aside from his veto of UK Common Market membership, was his rejection of the American-sponsored Multilateral Nuclear Force (MLF). The original French text of the 14 January 1963 press conference is found in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, vol. 4 (August 1962–December 1965), (Paris: Plon, 1970), 61–79. The French embassy in Washington provided the Americans with an English-language translation of the conference. This text is found in NSF, box 73, JFKL.

Kingdom away from the United States.³⁷ On the other hand, if the British negotiations with the Common Market failed, American leaders expected that it would mean the end of any hope for a political union until de Gaulle left office, since the Belgians and Dutch would never accept de Gaulle's confederation if he excluded Britain from Europe. The American 'wait and see' stance after April 1962 on the political union was reinforced by de Gaulle's obvious shift from interest in the Six to efforts at a bilateral Franco-German arrangement during the latter months of 1962. Some US observers feared that he hoped to come to an arrangement with the West Germans and then force the other four countries to follow along on his terms.³⁸

When de Gaulle's press conference in January 1963 ended the British application to join the Common Market and cemented the Franco-American conflict over Western Europe in the minds of almost all US leaders, they concluded that the political union idea was dead for the foreseeable future. Judged in the light of his latest attacks on the United States and the United Kingdom, de Gaulle's European confederation appeared to be nothing more than a tool in his grand design to eliminate any American or British role in Europe. Kennedy and his senior advisors spent most of their time after January 1963 attempting to deal with this latter, larger problem, and left the issue of the political union per se to the State Department. US officials did not take seriously de Gaulle's assertion that the Franco-German treaty arrangements were open for others to join, and viewed such statements as pure rhetoric to blunt attacks on the privileged bilateral treaty. In 1963 the Americans were also forced to deny rumours originating in Paris that the United States had been responsible for the failure of the Fouchet negotiations by encouraging the Belgians and Dutch to act as they had. As we have seen, not only was such innuendo false, the United States had in fact attempted to moderate the Dutch and Belgian positions so that something could be achieved in 1962. In response to the French efforts to place the blame on the United States, American officials stated that the real reason for the failure of the Fouchet negotiations was de Gaulle's new treaty draft in January 1962 and the hegemonic ambitions it revealed to his partners.³⁹

From January 1963 onwards, American leaders were dubious of any attempt to revive the political union, and attributed the worst possible motives to de Gaulle whenever the idea came up. Officially they stated that any further political steps were for the Europeans themselves to decide, but in reality any signs of new political initiatives alarmed them. During the summer of 1963 rumours circulated that de Gaulle planned to revive the political union at a meeting with Adenauer in Bonn in July. American observers feared that de Gaulle might make such a move as a means to seize the initiative in Europe once again, now that he had excluded Britain from the Common Market and dealt several blows to American policy towards the

³⁷ Rusk to Stations, 21 June 1962, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 725–7.

³⁸ State Dept. note on French plans, undated [Late December 1962], Lot File 65 D 265, box 5, RG 59, NA.

³⁹ State Dept. memo on the rumors, 9 April 1963, Lot File 65 D 265, box 5, RG 59, NA. Ambassador Charles Bohlen (Paris) to State Dept., 28 May 1963, NSF, box 72, JFKL.

continent. De Gaulle might force the Five to make a stark choice between following his European agenda (and abandoning Britain and the United States) and losing all the existing European communities. US officials were now convinced that de Gaulle aimed at hegemony in Europe and that all his actions had anti-American dimensions. They were also certain of the Third Force nature of all de Gaulle's plans. They no longer believed that de Gaulle's ideas for a European confederation could lead to goals the United States supported, whether further political unity in Western Europe, tighter West German links with the West, a stronger Western European partner for the United States in the Cold War, or a European defence organisation co-ordinated with the United States in NATO. Instead of appearing to be a flexible avenue to greater European unity as they did in late 1960 and 1961, de Gaulle's ideas now seemed a dangerous and doctrinaire dead-end street. United States officials were still prepared to study any new proposals he might make and would not reject them out of hand, but they no longer had any expectation that anything positive would emerge from Paris.⁴⁰ Even when it was the West Germans, under new Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, and not de Gaulle, who actually (but briefly) revived the political union idea in late 1963, most US observers expected little to come of the proposal as long as Britain was excluded and de Gaulle remained in power. Even if de Gaulle were to take a less doctrinaire stance, the Dutch continued to inform American leaders that they would not allow any moves forward in this area as long as they were limited to the Six. Even Erhard himself informed the Americans that he had low expectations for the initiative.⁴¹ By early 1964 it was clear that nothing in the situation had really changed or was likely to do so for a long time to come.

Conclusions

American government observers realised, relatively early on, that de Gaulle's political plans for Western Europe were aimed against US influence on the continent and in the Atlantic alliance. They were never particularly alarmed by any of the specific means de Gaulle proposed to organise the co-operation of the Six, such as regular foreign ministers' meetings or study groups to help the Six form common policies. Their concern was always de Gaulle's wider goals and his ability to implement them. Initially however – between 1958 and early 1962 – both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations generally felt confident that the Five could and would stand up to de Gaulle and force him to make enough concessions to protect in the whole debate the crucial American concerns: NATO, the existing European communities and European links with the United States. Since the Americans trusted the motives of the Five but had little confidence in those of Paris, from beginning to end they viewed the political negotiations of the Six as a debate

⁴⁰ Ball-Couve de Murville conversation, 25 May 1963, NSF, box 72, JFKL. Rusk to Stations, 14 June 1963, *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 202–4.

⁴¹ Erhard-Ball conversation, 26 November 1963, and Rusk-Luns conversation, 14 December 1963, both in *FRUS* (1961–63), vol. 13, 233–41.

between the French on the one side and the Five on the other. The outcome of this struggle was the only issue in the negotiations that really mattered to Washington. American leaders viewed the Five as the defenders of everything in Western Europe that mattered to the United States. Once it became clear that de Gaulle would not bow to the concerns of the Five on the political union, the Americans concluded that it would be best if the whole idea were set aside until French policy changed.

Because the conflict between Paris and its partners was of such overwhelming importance, the issue of British participation was long viewed by American observers as peripheral at best and a distraction and danger at worst. They did not see any particular need for immediate British involvement, at least until early 1962. After de Gaulle's provocative revisions of the draft treaty and the subsequent deadlock, they realised that British participation would be useful as another brake on de Gaulle's Third Force plans, even though adding Britain's weight to that of the Six could make future European demands for a more equal relationship with the United States more effective. As de Gaulle's agenda became more and more openly aimed against both the United States and Britain, this seemed a small price to pay to contain the French leader. This idea of 'containing' de Gaulle brings us to another irony in the outcome of the French leader's European strategy and tactics. While de Gaulle developed the political union idea as a means to free Western Europe from what he viewed as excessive American influence, US leaders hoped to use his own creation to contain him and put 'Atlantic' pressure on him, first via the Five and later by means of the Five and the British together. When de Gaulle chose first to harden his positions and later to abandon the whole project rather than accept such an outcome, American leaders regretted the setback for Western Europe but welcomed the setback for de Gaulle.

Although American resistance to both de Gaulle's policies in other areas and his wider goals for the political union did contribute to the failure of his agenda, the United States never sought to torpedo the efforts of the Six to build a confederation. Rather it was the fault of Paris that the relationship of the United States with Europe became a central factor in the deadlock. It was de Gaulle who failed to solve the internal contradictions in his plans. He wanted to use the political union to combat American influence, but he sought to build it alongside five countries committed to the maintenance of American influence in Europe and he needed American support to overcome their doubts. De Gaulle decried American hegemony in Europe, yet acted in a hegemonic fashion toward his partners and sought to freeze Britain out of continental affairs to preserve French predominance in the European communities. De Gaulle's determination to force his will on his partners gradually made the hegemonic and 'negative' (anti-American, anti-British, anti-supranational) aspects of his political union proposals outweigh the constructive dimensions (such as increasing the political cohesion of Western Europe). It also pushed all the major members of the Atlantic alliance into one degree or another of opposition to his plans.

For the United States, the political union was never a top priority for Western Europe. During the period when the Americans felt that de Gaulle would

compromise to achieve it, they viewed it as merely one step forward for Western Europe among many possibilities. Similarly, when their conflict with de Gaulle heated up, they viewed the political union as merely a symptom of the larger Gaullist disease. By contrast, the political union was a central goal for de Gaulle throughout his first six years in power, and its challenge to the United States was crucial to him. In the end, he was unwilling to drop its anti-American aspects, even though such a shift, combined with some flexibility on its future development and more equal treatment of his European partners, would probably have ensured its success. In de Gaulle's eyes, if the political union could not be used to reduce American influence in Europe in an immediate and explicit fashion, then it served no purpose. Thus, even though the United States was on the sideline of the political union issue throughout, its relations with Europe played a crucial role in the negotiations and in the collapse of de Gaulle's plans. It was for this reason that the episode contributed to the wider Franco-American rift of the 1960s and led Paris to turn completely against the Atlantic community and most other American plans for Europe. The disappointment of French ambitions to build a political confederation among the Six also led de Gaulle to pursue an even more unilateral foreign policy after 1963. This policy focused on the Soviet bloc and the developing world and challenged US primacy in these areas, since his efforts in Western Europe had failed.