

# French Negotiating Behavior



Marianne, French symbol of liberty and republican pride. In this representation from 2000, Marianne is modeled on the actress Laetitia Casta, who was elected by the mayors of France from among five candidates. *Photograph by Laurent EAU, reprinted with permission of Dexia Crédit Local de France, Association des Maires de France.*

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### A PRICKLY RELATIONSHIP

It has long been no secret in Washington that France is considered the most difficult of the United States' major European allies. Beneath the rhetoric about France and the United States being the oldest allies among the major Western powers and the mantra that France, difficult though it is, generally sides with the United States in a major crisis—from the Berlin airlift to the Cuban missile crisis to the attacks of 9/11<sup>1</sup>—there is an almost universal irritation with the French in official Washington. Since the winter of 2002–03, when France refused to back U.S. demands for UN authorization of a war on Iraq, that irritation has spread from the U.S. government to substantial sections of the U.S. public and media, who have indulged in vocal Francophobia. (Witness the popular currency of such phrases as “cheese-eating surrender monkeys,” an inane insult but one that strikes the French at that most repressed of their bad memories, the rout by the Germans in 1940.) British writer Timothy Garton Ash, after a tour of Boston, New York, Washington, and the “Bible-belt states of Kansas and Missouri,” remarked that he “had not realized how widespread in American popular culture is the old English pastime of French-bashing.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the mantra of France siding with the United States in a major crisis now has to be revised: the West-West consensus broke apart in March 2003. This was the worst rupture among “the world powers of the West,” to use the phrase of General Charles de Gaulle, since World War II.<sup>3</sup> For in 2003, as back then, the issue was a matter of life and death. Here it was a case of two of the major players in the Western defense community taking up arms against Iraq and the two other major players refusing to. This is bound to have a profound effect, especially over the long term.

Garton Ash has also observed that the French “give at least as good as they get.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in Paris, anti-Americanism has long been practiced as a sort of art form; as French intellectual Philippe Roger, author of *L'Ennemi américain*, notes, “It is almost a professional obligation (*obligation de service*).”<sup>5</sup> And in France as a whole, as in the United States beyond the Beltway, this strain of xenophobia resonates with much of the public, who decry “American imperialism” of both the geopolitical and the cultural kind. Jean Birnbaum, writing in *Le Monde*, notes the “obscure satisfaction” in France to which the events of September 11 gave rise, and he cites another expert on the United States, Denis Lacorne, to prove his point: “There has been a rise in this phenomenon [of anti-Americanism since these events], and even if one rarely dares to put it on paper, you hear it said in words to the effect, ‘they had it coming.’”<sup>6</sup>

As Tony Judt, a leading British specialist on France, points out, this disdain and distrust do not date from the moment the United States emerged as a superpower: “America is solidly organized egoism, it is evil made systematic and regular” is a phrase that dates from the 1840s and comes from the pen of French socialist Pierre Buchez.<sup>7</sup> We will return to “egoism” later in this work, as it encompasses a French view of the United States that is ideological as well as moral at its roots. But although anti-Americanism was detectable in France before the middle of the nineteenth century, as Judt and others point out, it did not become firmly anchored in elements of French society until the period between the two world wars.

France and the United States have been dealing with each other for more than two hundred years but not, let us face it, very successfully. The paradox of French-U.S. history is that it began with an

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alliance that was vital to the creation of the United States and yet it became in the twentieth century the most prickly relationship among the major Western allies. As Alfred Grosser writes, “the most acute transatlantic antagonisms (*malentendus transatlantiques*) were and still are those between the French and the Americans.”<sup>8</sup>

The alliance between monarchical France and revolutionary America was an unnatural one from the start and had been preceded by a long period of seething incompatibility between French and English settlers in North America. The French monarchy wanted to take revenge for having lost in 1763, at the end of the Seven Years’ War, its possessions in Canada and India; and so it supported the English colonists in their dispute with the Mother Country. French support was key in the victory of the American revolutionaries, although it left the French treasury virtually bankrupt, which in turn helped to stoke the discontent that fired the French Revolution and destroyed the monarchy.

Once the French revolutionaries gained power, relations with the United States began to sour: diplomats from the United States were treated with disdain, and French ships (as well as English ships) began harassing U.S. privateers on the high seas. French-U.S. naval clashes followed, and the United States abrogated its 1778 treaty of alliance with France. However, French-U.S. tensions did not degenerate into war—unlike U.S.-British relations, which collapsed into the War of 1812.

The period from 1790 to 1910 has been described by former U.S. ambassador to Germany John Kornblum as a time when the United States was “working out its destiny.”<sup>9</sup> The major U.S. event in this period was the Civil War, which both Britain and France sought to exploit to their advantage, giving some assistance to the Confederacy but never proceeding to the brink of diplomatic recognition. But at the same moment, Napoleon III of France flouted the Monroe Doctrine in an ill-fated attempt to install an Austrian archduke as emperor of Mexico, backed by French troops.

It was not until the twentieth century and the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt that the United States began to be regarded as a power on the world stage along with France, Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Japan. With the United States’ long-delayed entry into World War I, the French-U.S. alliance was renewed (“Lafayette, we

are here!” was a rallying cry of the American Expeditionary Force), but in the peace that followed, the United States retreated into isolationism, and neither the United States nor Britain would support what they did not see as a greatly weakened France against a still powerful Germany. France’s military collapse in 1940 followed, and although Charles de Gaulle resuscitated the nation, France was left at the end of World War II in a state of dependency on the United States.

But while French-U.S. relations have rarely been entirely cordial, they also only rarely degenerate into the utterly intolerable. The United States and France, it should be remembered, have never gone to war against each other. The same cannot be said of the United States and any of the other historic Western powers: Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain. France was an ally who was “present at the creation” of the United States, and it remains, on paper at least, a member of the U.S.-led Atlantic Alliance, created in 1949 as a defense against the Soviet Union. It is a force to be reckoned with: a permanent member of the UN Security Council with the power of the veto; a possessor of nuclear weapons; a nation with unique though sometimes conflicted ties throughout the Middle East and Africa as part of a legacy of Western expansion and colonialism; and last but not least a country whose message and meaning as a society have a universal appeal not unlike that of the United States.

In short, France is a nation with which the United States will have to continue to reckon, whether Washington likes it or not. Moreover, notwithstanding the deeply divisive struggle over UN policy toward Iraq in the winter of 2002–03, the two countries have a long tradition of working together toward similar ends. This tradition is too often obscured by mutual antagonism, and its value too quickly forgotten in the heat of sudden disagreements. There is on both sides, but particularly on the U.S. side, what we might call a mist of incomprehension, which, if it could be even partly dissipated, would make easier the business of dealing with the other, as it would reveal not only that which divides us but that which unites us as well. As a senior British diplomatic official put it in the spring of 2002, “The French can’t help needling the Americans. And on the American side, there are raw nerves constantly and a readiness to take offense. We [the British] have a ringside seat in all this.”<sup>10</sup> More recently, however,

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Prime Minister Tony Blair stepped down into the arena and joined the U.S. war against Iraq. Still, despite sharp Anglo-French exchanges at the time of the UN debates on entering the war, Britain continues to occupy a unique position: the road to a Franco-American reconciliation appears to go through London.

This book is not a grail-like attempt to find the “secret keys” to successful negotiations with the French. Rather, it is a work, conducted with the goal of objectivity constantly in mind, that seeks to describe and analyze how French officials—including not only diplomats but also policymakers, bureaucrats, politicians, and military officers—approach and conduct negotiations, especially negotiations with their U.S. counterparts. As well as dissecting the bilateral French-U.S. malaise (what the French might characterize as a *méfiance cordiale réciproque* [mutual cordial distrust]), it also suggests for Americans—and others—ways of attenuating it. There are pitfalls here in terms of receptivity, and these have to be acknowledged and accepted at the outset: as the historian and philosopher Theodore Zeldin observes, “No people criticize themselves as much as the French, but it is also true that the French do not like others to criticize them.”<sup>11</sup> Resistance to a dispassionate assessment of French negotiating behavior can also be encountered on this side of the Atlantic, especially among those, and they are not just a few, who reflexively regard the French with a mixture of contempt and irritation.

It is also useful to make a study of French negotiating behavior as a way to avoid repeating some of the errors of the past. For example, in the case of the failed return of the French to NATO over the issue of the Southern Command at Naples (see chapter 5), many people on both sides have since regretted that the issue was not resolved, because what happened subsequently changed the future security outlook of Europe. We now have two potentially redundant military organizations in Europe: the NATO Rapid Reaction Force and the European Union’s Autonomous Defense Force.

Similarly, as regards the issue of weapons inspections in Iraq (see chapter 5), the high expectation stemming from the unanimous 15-0 Security Council vote on Resolution 1441 of November 8, 2002, on resumption of inspections in Iraq soon dissolved into a mist of misunderstanding and suspicion. As Richard Bernstein of the *New York*

*Times* observes: "That expectation, as everyone knows, was soon replaced by the coldest chill in trans-Atlantic relations that anyone could remember, and the reason was that Resolution 1441 obscured, but did not resolve, the fundamental fact that the ultimate goals of the two sides of the Iraqi debate were simply irreconcilable."<sup>12</sup>

Between those in Paris who wanted to give peace a chance and those in Washington who wanted to give Saddam Hussein no chance, a clash sooner or later was ineluctable. No amount of "creative ambiguity," so much a part of diplomatic practice, could obscure this fact. To put it in French terms, the United States was proceeding in a "logic of war," while France was proceeding in a "logic of peace." In other words, each side visualized differently the chain of events that was to ensue.

In the debate over Resolution 1441, France considered that it had succeeded in gaining acceptance of the principle that there could be no "automaticity" in going to war without a further meeting of the Security Council. But it was not specified in Resolution 1441 that a second *resolution* had to emerge from this further meeting, and this was the basis for the U.S. claim at the time Resolution 1441 was passed that it did not need a second resolution before proceeding to war.

A further reason why French negotiating behavior is important for Americans is that in dealing with France we are in many ways dealing with Europe, although it must be said that European unity was another victim of the debate over Iraq in 2002–03. At least two Europes emerged in the debate, what Donald Rumsfeld bluntly referred to as "old Europe" and "new Europe." The former, the "anti-war" party, was represented only by France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg. But these seemingly meager numbers were deceiving, because France and Germany are extremely important as the two largest founding members of the European Community, and the publics in two other significant countries were out of step with their right-wing prime ministers: Spain and Italy. "New Europe," of course, was represented by the incoming members of the European Union, still in thrall to the United States as their ultimate protector. Most important, for the issue of European unity, Britain came down on the side of its American cousin.

The European Union, the major development in Western Europe since World War II, has been described as a "French fling" (*une folie*

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*française*),<sup>13</sup> which is to say that France has put its stamp on the European Union more than has any other country. While it is true that many Europeans decry French tactics and what they often refer to as French arrogance—a designation that the French freely admit to—there is also something to be said for the notion that, as far as Americans are concerned, the French dare to say out loud what other Europeans are thinking.

Furthermore, France takes the lead in seeking to draw other Europeans over toward the French, as contrasted with the U.S., vision of what Europe should be: a power in its own right, including in defense; independent of the United States, though in association with it in an overall ensemble that is Western society; and part of the capitalist system, though practicing a “capitalism with a social face,” that is, in the model of the social welfare state. That many Americans do not understand, much less accept, the fact of French influence in Europe is itself a reflection of an imperfect understanding of the sources of this influence.

**A DISTINCTIVE STYLE**

This book assumes that there is indeed something resembling an overall French style that can be discerned in the conduct of French diplomacy. At first blush, this may seem an overly bold assumption. After all, when one thinks of some of the most eminent French statesmen of recent decades, one is struck by the very visible differences in their personal styles: the lofty Charles de Gaulle, intent above all on inspiring fear and respect in others, stands in stark contrast to the sibylline François Mitterrand, dubbed by his contemporaries *le Florentin*; the charismatic opportunist Jacques Chirac presents an equally stark contrast to the unbending and rather too “Protestant” (in Chirac’s characterization) Lionel Jospin. Given such glaring differences, can one really talk of a common French style?

To this very reasonable question there are at least two answers. The first is to point out that among the numerous diplomats from other countries interviewed for this book, none has doubted that there exists a distinct and identifiable French approach to the conduct of negotiations. To be sure, say these interviewees, different elements of

that style are more or less pronounced in different individuals, and some individuals add colorful characteristics all their own to the mix, but the overall mélange of traits is still recognizably French.

The second answer is to explain that while any single negotiation—whether with the French or anyone else—is likely to be unique in terms of the subject at issue, the makeup of the negotiating teams, and the circumstances in which the negotiation takes place, the purpose of this book is to focus not on evanescent idiosyncrasies, important though they may be, but on enduring characteristics. This is not to say that the following chapters disregard the impact of personalities, issues, and circumstances; on the contrary, as the reader will discover, a good deal of attention is given to examining not only the short-term political considerations at play but also the broader, longer-term structural factors that shape France's economic, foreign, and security policies—and that accentuate or temper various negotiating traits. Nonetheless, the reader should be in no doubt that the chief aim of this volume is to identify and analyze the elements that together make up the distinctive French negotiating style.

The reader should also bear in mind that the emphasis here is on how French *officials*—chiefly diplomats and members of the government bureaucracy, but also military officers and politicians—conduct negotiations. Those officials usually share a similarly elevated social background and, in the case of the civil servants, mostly undergo the same rigorous process of preparation and training at the *École Nationale d'Administration*. Inevitably, these shared experiences tend to create and reinforce a common outlook, and the attitudinal and behavioral similarities grow especially pronounced when these officials are entrusted with defending the interests of France against representatives from other countries. In brief, most of the French negotiators who appear in this book belong to the same elite group within French society, which among other things helps to explain the similarities in their negotiating behavior.

## A SKETCH OF FRENCH NEGOTIATING BEHAVIOR

What, then, are the key characteristics of this distinctively French approach to negotiations? Subsequent chapters will paint a detailed

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portrait, but it may be helpful here to sketch the broad lines of our subject.

Fundamentally, French negotiating behavior consists of a mixture of rationalism and nationalism, the former a product of French cultural and intellectual traditions, the latter shaped by both the glories and the miseries of French history.

Schooled in the tradition of rationalism that sprang from René Descartes and was later elaborated by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, French officials worship the “goddess of Reason,” who demands an emphasis on abstraction and the deductive approach. For the French, it is in the order of things to find a philosophical framework first, to establish a vision of things, before entering into practical matters. This is compounded by the formalism of French syntax and related to the French educational system’s emphasis on the art of logical disquisition,<sup>14</sup> or what the French call *dissertation*, and on rhetoric at the expense of dialogue. Moreover, the French are brought up to have an idea on everything and to express it with clarity. In ancient usage, this was known as the tradition of the “honest man.” There is a carryover of this tradition in the way France, as a collective identity, is compelled to express an idea on all issues, in the United Nations and elsewhere—a characteristic that Americans often put down to “pretentiousness.”

Thus the French approach, as sketched here, stands in stark contrast to the Anglo-American emphasis on pragmatism and inductive reasoning and does much to explain why these opposite mind-sets have a hard time getting through to each other.

Having arrived at a “logical” solution, based on the exercise of reason, the French negotiator is little inclined to change it. As Gérard Araud, director of strategic affairs and security at the Quai d’Orsay and former deputy ambassador to NATO, wryly remarks:

The French are prisoners of their Cartesian obsession. They believe, in the religious sense of the term, in reason, and they do not see in their position the defense of their interests but [rather] the expression of a transcendent reason of which they have the monopoly. They sincerely do not see that, as if by chance, this reason justifies their interests precisely.

Once the goddess of Reason has been satisfied, they do not understand it when a “rational” position does not meet with unanimity.

When a French position, ergo logical, is refused or countered, the French are taken aback by what they consider to be bad faith or stupidity. When one “is right” one doesn’t compromise.<sup>15</sup>

Such an attitude inspires not only a reluctance to compromise but also a disinclination to prepare a backup plan in case France fails to persuade its negotiating counterpart with its opening arguments. As the French themselves recognize, they often pay a price—in terms primarily of a failure to anticipate—for believing that the intelligence of their elites will by itself suffice for the development of a strategy and its pursuit over the long term.<sup>16</sup>

French fidelity to the goddess of Reason is not always absolute, however. In the first place, aggressive intransigence is sometimes leavened by a sense of realism, which the French possess, although they are loath to admit it. A French ambassador posted to Brussels attributed this to France’s long-standing peasant tradition, which stands in contrast to rationalism. In his words, “The peasant good sense is never very far off,”<sup>17</sup> whence the widely prevalent notion—not always borne out, as we saw in the Iraq imbroglio—that eventually, at the eleventh hour, and despite the rhetoric dispensed, the French will come around to a compromise.

In the second place, it is often the case that—to quote the same French ambassador—“reason clothes interest.”<sup>18</sup> Certainly, many foreign interlocutors see the French approach not so much as an exercise in abstract reasoning as an aggressive pursuit of the national interest. To the Germans, generally intent on harmony and thus acceptance in the Western community, this unabashed French approach is greeted with resignation, if not resentment. Speaking of EU negotiations, one German diplomat has remarked, “If all were as confrontational as the French, Europe would be in a mess.”<sup>19</sup> A German editorialist, evoking Carl von Clausewitz, had this disabused observation on the French at the time of their wrangle with the Germans at the December 2000 Nice summit meeting over voting weights in the European Union: “Europe is the continuation of France by other means.”<sup>20</sup>

The notoriously aggressive, even harsh, manner in which French negotiators defend their national interest springs in large part from two contradictory but coexisting attitudes toward France’s status in the

world. On one side of this dialectic is the tradition of what I have chosen to call *la Grande Nation*, which in its strict meaning is a term that applied to France's expansion in the revolutionary period (1789–99), as contained in the expression, “A Great Nation, carrier of the revolutionary ideal” (*une Grande Nation porteuse de l'idéal révolutionnaire*),<sup>21</sup> but which foreigners used in an ironically pejorative sense based on the smugness (*suffisance*) of the French conquerors.<sup>22</sup> In this work, I have given an extended meaning to the term *la Grande Nation*, to connote the military and cultural glories of the French past, the centuries-old history of a centralized state radiating from Paris, and an almost corporeal notion of the entity that is France. In the words of Anne-Line Roccati, “It is doubtless in this ancestral conception of [the] State as the founder of the entire life of the nation that resides that French ‘specificity,’ of which the Anglo-Saxon countries are unaware.”<sup>23</sup> In France the state is seen not as an intruder but as a fair arbiter; public service is highly esteemed; and there is a tradition of secrecy and discipline in what is a hierarchical bureaucracy. The French negotiator always assigns primary importance to defending the position of the state; reaching agreement with one's counterpart may be welcome, but it is of secondary concern.

France, the inventor of *la raison d'État*, is a nation that was built over the course of centuries chiefly by wars followed by harsh terms of peace, giving it in international relations what Alain Lempereur has called a “culture of war,”<sup>24</sup> or what we might call a “culture of authority” in dealing with others. This culture of authority, buttressed by a hegemonic past that is reflected in the awe-inspiring traditions and the ponderousness of the French state structure, helps to produce a comportment that sometimes comes across to others as condescension and arrogance, as in Jacques Chirac's veiled threat to the candidate countries of Eastern Europe for having supported the U.S. position over Iraq: “they lost a good opportunity to keep their mouths shut” (a liberal translation of “*ils ont perdu une bonne occasion de se taire*”).

On the other side of the dialectic is a “culture of the underdog,” born of the defeats, interspersed with moments of glory, that France has endured, culminating in the worst defeat of all—the collapse of the French army in 1940. This has developed into a mind-set of what has been described as a “culture of opposition to the dominant norms.” This

recalls the phrase of Philippe Burrin concerning the French: “a people that celebrates its conquered as heroes—Vercingétorix, Jeanne d’Arc.”<sup>25</sup>

This side of French culture is reflected in what can be called the “little Frenchman syndrome,” as exemplified by the persistent notion of Charles de Gaulle that the French give in too easily to foreigners. De Gaulle himself, who remains a sort of mystical role model for the way he projected France onto the center of the world stage, was constantly on the defensive in operating from a weak hand. “I am too poor to be able to bow,” he told Winston Churchill during World War II.<sup>26</sup> The general’s “formidable capacity to say no”<sup>27</sup> cannot have been far from the mind of his Gaullist heir, Jacques Chirac, in challenging the Anglo-American war policy on Iraq in 2003.

Drawing on the example of Charles de Gaulle’s solitary intransigence, French negotiators still fiercely contest, with some success, this turn of the historical wheel that, for almost a century and a half, has left France without the means to match its continuing, if unquenched, ambitions. In negotiating terms, this culture of the underdog is reflected, among other things, in an acute sensitivity to slights, in not being treated on the same plane as the stronger negotiating partner (read the United States), and in sometimes confronting the stronger partner in public rather than suffering a negotiation in private—as when Dominique de Villepin “sandbagged” Colin Powell on January 20, 2003, with a public statement attacking U.S. war policy on Iraq after persuading Powell to attend a meeting at the United Nations on terrorism. Unfair though de Villepin’s tactic was, it could hardly be argued by the U.S. side that Iraq was not a fit subject for a discussion on terrorism.

More generally the French, caught between the tradition of *la Grande Nation* and the culture of the underdog, alternate, as the historian René Rémond writes, “[b]etween the fear of decline and the hope of redressment . . . We move, almost without transition, from an inferiority complex that is denied by our unquestionable successes, to a superiority complex that sometimes makes us unbearable to our partners. We go back and forth between moroseness and self-importance.”<sup>28</sup>

The fact that France still has many of the pretensions of *la Grande Nation* but often not the means to match its ambitions can irritate its negotiating counterparts, especially the United States. In the

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words of former White House official Nancy Soderberg, “The French are fundamentally driven by a desire to be treated as a world power, which they no longer are.”<sup>29</sup> This desire is perceived by many in official Washington, among them Henry Kissinger, who remarks of the French, “they want from the U.S. to be recognized as a major power. Nixon and I were fully conscious of this.” In Kissinger’s view, given the large cultural differences between the two countries, there is a reflex of the United States to “personalize” things: “There is a tendency to man battle stations. We let the French get under our skin excessively.”<sup>30</sup> There is also a tendency within Washington toward a back-of-the-hand treatment of the French, which only confirms for the French that Americans are ignorant of the central role France has played in Europe and particularly in the European Union.

Where once Great Britain was France’s greatest rival and philosophical antithesis, today it is the United States that occupies that role. It has become, in French eyes, the major part of an ever-encroaching Anglo-Saxon world of which Britain has become a much smaller, and tamer, element. France has come to find itself, in relatively recent times, in a changed situation with the United States: defeated (in 1940), dependent, and deficient. That this was not always the case makes it all the more exasperating. In their study of the U.S. relationship with the world since the end of the Cold War, Pierre Mélandri and Justin Vaïsse point out that the *flambées* of anti-Americanism in France are inversely proportional to the degree of power and independence that France feels in itself.<sup>31</sup>

Anti-Americanism has deepened since the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the threat posed by the Soviet Union. A study conducted by the French institute Sofrès and the French-American Foundation in July 2000 showed that the French have an extraordinarily negative image of the United States.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States published results of a poll conducted in six European countries (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland) and found that the French were the most critical of U.S. foreign policy, with 63 percent saying that this policy was partly to blame for the attacks.<sup>33</sup> The growth of such animosity is in part a reflection of the contest between France and

the United States to each spread its own “universal” model of the ideal republic, a contest that involved three players until the demise of the Soviet Union but now features only two. Today, as Stanley Hoffmann observes:

[t]he United States and France are the only nations that present their values as universal, and they offer them as models to the rest of the world. The conflicts which, since 1945, have seen the two countries opposed in foreign policy have often been struggles between interests (economic, strategic, or diplomatic), but the rivalry of the universalisms has at times given them overtones of passion.<sup>34</sup>

As Hoffmann indicates, the idea of *nation* is closely associated with both French and American universalisms, in contrast to other universalist movements of the twentieth century, notably communism, which claimed to transcend the nation-state. But the idea of nation has a particular meaning for the French, as Dominique Schnapper points out. France is a democratic community of citizens, united around a common bond of principles and a common language. The French model represents a dual rejection: It rejects the particularisms of ethnicity, race, and religion in favor of a single community of citizens. Multiculturalism is seen as an American disease and not a French one (although this assertion is sometimes contradicted by the facts on the ground—for example, there are certain sections of Marseilles that are de facto off-limits to non-Maghrebians). And, as Schnapper notes, the French model also rejects the idea of a “productivist-hedonist” society, namely, a collection of individuals pursuing their own material or other aims.<sup>35</sup> Thus in the French lexicon, as can be seen in the light of what the French model rejects, the nation represents a *political* project rather than an *economic* contract among citizens, whence the perennial call for the supremacy of the political over the economic, which has a puzzling ring to Anglo-American ears.

At the same time, the French are eager in private negotiations no less than in public statements to demonstrate what is so clearly to them the superiority of their model, a model that is sometimes subsumed under the notion of a distinctly European “humanism.” Witness Jacques Chirac’s elliptical criticism of “the primacy of the sole law of the market, oblivious of this culture of humanism, whose very essence is to rally around ethical principles.”<sup>36</sup>

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As Europe and the United States continue to draw apart politically, France is at the forefront of those Europeans who want to assert policies that are independent of the United States. Of all the critiques of President Bush's "axis of evil" speech of January 29, 2002, it was France's, delivered by former foreign minister Hubert Védrine, that stung the most:

We are threatened today with a new simplism, which is to reduce all the problems of the world to a struggle against terrorism. This is not serious. We cannot accept this idea. . . . If we are not in agreement with American policy we must say it. We can say it and we must say it.<sup>37</sup>

Although other European leaders, such as the European Union's Chris Patten and German foreign minister Joschka Fischer, made equally serious criticisms, none implied that the U.S. president was personally "simplistic." On this as on many other occasions, Védrine, or so the *New York Times* claimed, "seemed to relish any opportunity to criticize the United States."<sup>38</sup> According to a senior State Department official, what was particularly irritating about Védrine's tenure as foreign minister was his pattern, after a seemingly amicable meeting with U.S. counterparts, of then choosing to make an acerbic comment about U.S. policy in a public statement.<sup>39</sup>

Védrine's readiness to deliver sharp criticism publicly, which the consensus-seeking Americans find so hard to take, reflects two aspects of French negotiating behavior. First, the French judge issues on their own merits, according to the mandate of "reason"—they are not tied to a particular ideological line and will say what they think. Second, given the imbalance in the power position between France and the United States, it may be easier for the French to get across what they want to say in a public statement rather than in a head-to-head confrontation, as in the incident between Védrine's successor, Dominique de Villepin, and Colin Powell referred to earlier.

## CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES

Each of the traits sketched in the preceding pages—devotion to logical disquisition and rhetoric, an overriding concern to defend the French position rather than to reach agreement, an aggressive and often

arrogant nationalism, an often passionate assertion of France's "universal" message, resentment at Anglo-Saxon and especially U.S. power and influence, a readiness to use the media to deliver sharp criticism—inevitably varies in extent from negotiator to negotiator and from negotiation to negotiation. Changing circumstances also produce variations over time. The advent of globalization, for instance, has intensified anti-Americanism while also spurring recognition of the need for France to make some accommodation to the non-Francophone world. At the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), proficiency in *two* foreign languages is now necessary, and spending some time abroad is now required as part of the training. Furthermore, the ENA curriculum and elitist student profile have been heavily criticized, and enrollment at ENA went down noticeably in the 1990s, as the private sector began to have more of an attraction in France than before. Today, the younger generation of French technocrats and business elites is generally characterized by flawless English. France has even witnessed the development of a U.S.-style entrepreneurial business culture in the past several decades.

The France of today is hardly the same as the France of fifty years ago, trapped as it was in the Cold War and uncertain of its and Europe's future. What may have seemed in the past unshakable affirmations are changing with time and the pressures of globalization. Who could have foreseen, back at the end of the Cold War, that a French president would have advocated extending NATO to the three Baltic states, as Jacques Chirac did during a visit to the region in July 2001? And who could have foreseen the internationalization of business in France such as has taken place in recent decades. Foreign ownership of French firms increased from 10 percent in the mid-1980s to more than 40 percent at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>40</sup> Also, the past several years have seen a wave of global acquisitions by French companies.<sup>41</sup> These points of change, reflecting, note Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier, a certain French adaptation to globalization,<sup>42</sup> continue to be by and large belied by French official rhetoric.

Yet France as a country, and France as a nation, perdures. In what can be called the second loss of an overseas empire (1945–62)—the first having been in 1763 with the loss principally of its possessions in Canada and India—France has rid itself of its colonial incubus, though

not the ghosts of its colonial past. It is, as Védrine among others has commented, a very homogeneous country,<sup>43</sup> albeit an *e pluribus unum* society not very different from that of the United States. For example, France has five million Muslims and Islam has become its second religion. Perhaps less well known is the fact that France is the only European country that has experienced massive immigration since the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Citizenship is open, based on location (*jus soli*) rather than on blood (*jus sanguinis*).

Despite its diversity, and unlike in countries such as Germany and Russia, there is no identity crisis surrounding the notion of being French. France has long had a centralizing machine—notably its public-sector educational system, described as “a political instrument at the service of the construction of the nation.”<sup>45</sup> Aggressively secular (and rigorous), the French public school system, founded in the 1880s, was given a consciously “republican” and nonabsolutist stamp. (To extol “republican” virtues in France is a civilized way of expressing acceptance of the French Revolution.) This is a process of conditioning that Eugen Weber describes under the term “[turning] peasants into Frenchmen.”<sup>46</sup>

France has its own way of learning, its own approach to moral and social questions, and its own ineffable way of life, summed up in the notion of *la douce France*, calling forth the image of the beauty and timelessness of the French landscape and weekends spent in second homes in the countryside enjoying delicious food and wines—as a German proverb has it, “Living like God in France.”

In short, despite globalization and a host of other profound alterations in the international political, economic, and security environment, and despite, too, the real political and cultural adjustments that these changes have elicited in France, the nation remains recognizably different from the other major players in the Western world. As this volume will show, this continuing difference is reflected in the very distinctive behavior of French negotiators.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The following chapters begin by examining the sources of French negotiating behavior and then move on to dissect its defining characteristics,

illustrate those characteristics in three specific cases, offer France's negotiating counterparts suggestions on how to make diplomatic encounters more fruitful, and conclude by looking to likely future developments.

As noted earlier, this book argues that the French style of negotiation can be understood only in light of the country's culture—especially the political and intellectual culture of its elite—and history. (This argument, it should be noted, is hardly unique. Henry Kissinger, for example, contends that French behavior is explainable by the country's "cultural past" and by its "historical past.")<sup>47</sup> Like two strands that make up a common thread, French culture and history are sometimes intertwined and sometimes distinct. To the extent possible, and to enhance analytical clarity, chapters 2 and 3 seek to disentangle them.

Chapter 2 begins by emphasizing the long-standing existence of the state apparatus in France and then looks in turn at France's democratic culture and how it differs from the Anglo-Saxon model; at France's pronounced anti-Americanism, which in part derives from the difference between these models; at the French "Latin" temperament and a taste for panache and audacious actions, at the influence of Cartesianism; and finally at the educational system through which members of the French elite pass.

Chapter 3 explores the main elements of French history: the construction of France through a process of military conquests followed by draconian peace settlements, culminating in the reign of Louis XIV, when France was the hegemon of Europe; and the decline of France in the eighteenth century and its rise again during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests. Throughout, and in the backdrop to these changing fortunes, lies what Henry Kissinger and others see as a consistent French policy of weakening the dominant power in Europe.<sup>48</sup> More often than not this policy involved France in a struggle against empires, from the Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Peoples, to the British Empire, the German Reich, and more recently the Soviet and U.S. empires. Though the French preference was for the "nation" over "empire," as illustrated in the phrase, "The king is an emperor in his own country,"<sup>49</sup> this did not prevent France itself from succumbing to the temptations of empire, whether

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it was Napoleonic in Europe or colonial in the Third World. This chapter also describes the decline of France as a great power, its abasement in 1940, its efforts to reassert its former status under de Gaulle, its changing relationship toward NATO, and its continuing effort to build and dominate a European Union that can keep German power in check and U.S. hegemony at bay.

In chapter 4 attention shifts from an examination of the sources of the French approach toward negotiation to a detailed analysis of the key elements of that approach. The chapter begins by discussing a French lack of interest in the negotiating process per se and the French preoccupation with a logical, eloquent, and uncompromising expression of the French position and French interests. Next, the chapter examines a number of prominent aspects of the French style: a superiority/inferiority complex, a concern with form over content, the pyramidal shape of key decision-making structures, a clear sense of one's final position, and an aggressive and emotional approach, à la de Gaulle. The French use of time, of the media, of back channels, and of entertainment is also analyzed.

The case studies in chapter 5 illustrate in very concrete terms the problems and pitfalls of dealing with France. Each of the three cases dates from the post-Cold War period and features sharp points of disagreement between France and the United States. The first concerns the public and acrimonious dispute in 1996-97 over the French attempt to secure for itself NATO's Southern Command at Naples as the price of France's full return to NATO. The second examines the growing differences that emerged following the Persian Gulf War between the French and the Anglo-Americans concerning policy toward Iraq. The case focuses on negotiations in 1999 for a new weapons inspection regime (UNMOVIC) for Iraq, on the negotiation in 2002 that led to Resolution 1441 and the return of the inspectors to Iraq, and on French resistance to the U.S.-led war to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The third case treats France's stubborn defense of its agricultural, commercial, and cultural interests in the later stages of the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations in 1993; these were conducted not by France directly but by the European Union. This case was chosen partly to illustrate the different negotiating cultures of those French officials who work through the European Union and

those who deal in classic bilateral negotiations. With some exceptions as regards the trade and culture negotiations, access to archival material from the 1990s has been extremely limited. Thus, the case studies rely very heavily on recent firsthand memoirs, on open source material, and on interviews.

The final two chapters are shorter, offering prescriptive and predictive analyses aimed in particular at those who must deal with the French across the negotiating table. Chapter 6 offers a variety of practical suggestions that are likely to make such negotiations more productive encounters. Chapter 7 looks to the near and midterm future with an eye to predicting how the French negotiating style might change. As the reader will discover, the chapter anticipates that French officials, faced with advancing globalization and more reliant on multilateral institutions, will demonstrate greater flexibility in the years ahead and will shift from positional negotiation to process-based negotiation. Even so, the defining characteristics of French negotiating behavior will endure, and the portrait of the French negotiator presented in this volume will continue to be readily recognizable.