

**FRENCH FOREIGN AND
DEFENCE POLICY
1918-1940**

The Decline and Fall of a Great Power



Edited by
Robert Boyce



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FRENCH FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY, 1918–1940

The sudden and wholly unexpected fall of France in 1940 was one of the most shocking events of modern times. So easily did German forces overrun the country that in retrospect it seemed almost self-evident that France was feeble or incompetently led or both. As a result, French inter-war history has suffered from relative neglect.

This book, which includes essays from young scholars as well as French experts whose work is little known outside France, places France's fall in the wider context of inter-war international relations. It challenges the conventional wisdom, which claims that the fall was inevitable, attributable to French pre-war decadence. Instead the collection shows that there is nothing simple or straightforward about the French inter-war experience. Discussion ranges from the Treaty of Versailles and the International Steel Entente, to French propaganda and Franco-American relations in the 1930s. There are striking differences of emphasis and interpretation among the contributors and these serve to illustrate the challenge facing students of inter-war history in analysing the performance of France. The impact of this history is evident in current French policy and it remains a central issue for students of contemporary international relations, history and politics.

The editor and authors in this volume are all actively researching on French and international history and represent some of the most distinguished scholars working in the field. **Robert Boyce** is specialist in contemporary international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of *British Capitalism at the Crossroads, 1919–1932: a study in politics, economics and international relations* and of numerous articles on recent French and British history.

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CONTENTS

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	x
Introduction	1
1 France at the Paris Peace Conference: addressing the dilemmas of security <i>David Stevenson</i>	10
2 France and the politics of steel, from the Treaty of Versailles to the International Steel Entente, 1919–1926 <i>Jacques Bariéty</i>	30
3 Raymond Poincaré and the Ruhr crisis <i>John F. V. Keiger</i>	49
4 Economics and Franco-Belgian relations in the inter-war period <i>Eric Bussière</i>	71
5 Reparations and war debts: the restoration of French financial power, 1919–1929 <i>Denise Artaud</i>	88
6 Business as usual: the limits of French economic diplomacy, 1926–1933 <i>Robert Boyce</i>	106
7 René Massigli and Germany, 1919–1938 <i>Raphäelle Ulrich</i>	131
8 Franco-Italian relations in flux, 1918–1940 <i>Pierre Guillen</i>	148
9 In defence of the Maginot Line: security policy, domestic politics and the economic depression in France <i>Martin S. Alexander</i>	163

10	A douce and dextrous persuasion: French propaganda and Franco-American relations in the 1930s	194
	<i>Robert J. Young</i>	
11	Daladier, Bonnet and the decision-making process during the Munich crisis, 1938	214
	<i>Yvon Lacaze</i>	
12	Intelligence and the end of appeasement	233
	<i>Peter Jackson</i>	
13	France and the phoney war, 1939–1940	260
	<i>Talbot Imlay</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	282

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAN	France, Archives de l'Assemblée Nationale
AN	France, Archives nationales
AS	France, Archives du Sénat
BN	Bibliothèque nationale, Paris
CACF	Centre des archives contemporaines a Fontainebleau
CADN	Centre d'archives diplomatiques, Nantes
CTP	Commission des traités de paix
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DDF	Documents Diplomatiques Français
FO	Foreign Office
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
JO	Journal Officiel de la République Française
LGP	Lloyd George Papers
MAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris
MF	Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, Paris
PRO	Public Record Office, London
SHAT	Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre Vincennes
SHAA	Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de l'Armée de l'Air Vincennes
SHM	France, Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de la Marine Vincennes

INTRODUCTION

1940 as end and beginning in French inter-war history and historiography

Robert Boyce

No event in contemporary history has caused greater shock and consternation than the fall of France in June 1940. For fully three hundred years France had been universally regarded as one of the greatest of the Great Powers. From time to time, of course, French forces met defeat on the high seas or in land battles. In 1870 Napoleon III's armies were swiftly humiliated by the Prussians, but there were good reasons for treating this as a self-inflicted wound. Subsequently France appeared to make up for this show of weakness by acquiring a vast new overseas empire and close alliance relations with Imperial Russia. In August/September 1914 French armies seemed up to the standards of old when they bore the brunt of the initial German offensive, throwing it back in the first battle of the Marne. Thereafter they held on for four more years, enduring the carnage and halting the last great German (Michael) offensive in the second battle of the Marne in July 1918. Two months later Germany sued for an armistice and on 11 November France emerged victorious from the bloodiest war in modern times.

At this point no less than four great European empires—the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and German—succumbed to defeat, with the prospect of severe political upheaval and near certainty of territorial losses. France was also seriously affected. Ten of its most industrialised *départements* had been laid waste by the war, its casualties approached four million killed or wounded and its Treasury was empty. But against this could be set the recovery of Alsace and Lorraine, possession of a stable political system and the largest army in Europe, indeed in the world.

The preliminary peace conference was convened in Paris after only half-hearted efforts by Britain and the United States—the so-called Anglo-Saxon powers—to meet in a neutral capital. Allied objections to Paris arose not because it was inconvenient or France too exhausted to host the conference. Quite the contrary: their fear was that the clamour of the French public and government propaganda would make French peace terms irresistible. And this is what Anglo-Saxon opinion generally believed to have happened when the terms of the settlement were revealed in May 1919. It was, in the famous phrase of John Maynard Keynes, the economist who attended the conference as a member of the British delegation but resigned in disgust, a 'Carthaginian peace'.¹ According to this view, France was to be allowed to crush Germany while bestowing on itself inflated

reparation claims, military and commercial privileges, and initiating territorial transfers that favoured France or its Continental allies. The charge was greatly overstated, but it contained an element of truth that appeared fully borne out in subsequent years when Germany endured economic instability while France prospered, and particularly when the onset of the world economic slump threatened to destroy Britain, Germany and much of the world, leaving France apparently unaffected. Meanwhile, the fact that until 1933 Germany was largely disarmed helped to sustain the myth of French ‘militarism’. This was grossly unfair, since France too had largely disarmed: within two years of the Armistice in 1918, it had reduced its defence spending by 85 per cent and as late as 1939 was spending barely more than a third of its 1918 total.² But even after Hitler swept aside the Weimar Republic to make way for the Third Reich the Anglo-Saxon powers persisted in pressing France to disarm further. In their view, if the ‘Have-not’ powers of Europe were now rearming or threatening aggressive action, it was largely because France had humiliated them. The solution to Europe’s instability therefore lay in French concessions.

In early 1933 any hope that France would prove resistant to the economic slump abruptly collapsed. Private hoarding began in earnest, and faced with chronic currency weakness French governments seemed incapable of confronting foreign challenges. Political, economic and military weaknesses appeared. Yet until German armies attacked on 10 May 1940, France’s military capability went largely unquestioned. It was partly for this reason that the *Wehrmacht’s* Chief of Staff, Franz Halder, and other senior officers protested and secretly revived plans for a putsch when Hitler informed them on 27 October 1939 of his decision to launch Plan Yellow, the offensive in the west, on 12 November.³ Inclement weather delayed action, and a new plan far better than the previous one was adopted in the spring of 1940. Even then Hitler found it hard to believe that France could be swiftly defeated.

On 17 May, days after the *Wehrmacht* had made the decisive breakthrough at Sedan, Halder scornfully recorded in his diary: ‘An unpleasant day. The Fuehrer is terribly nervous. Frightened by his own success, he is afraid to take any chance and so would rather pull the reins on us.’⁴ The entry next day was similar: ‘The Fuehrer unaccountably keeps worrying about the south flank. He rages and screams that we are on the best way to ruin the whole campaign and that we are leading up to a defeat.’⁵

By 4 June Halder estimated that France and its allies had lost 1.5 million men, equivalent to approximately seventy divisions.⁶ Yet on 6 June, barely four days before the French government abandoned Paris and twelve days before it opted for an armistice, Hitler’s respect for French power seemed undiminished. He was prepared to limit his immediate strategic objective to ‘a sure hold of the Lorraine ore basin, so as to deprive France of her armament resources. After that [Halder recorded] he believes it would be time to consider a drive in westerly direction.’⁷

Nor was it only Hitler who seriously misjudged France’s strength. Until 10 May the whole of British military strategy rested upon the assumption that the

French army, with modest help from Belgium and the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), could mount effective resistance to a German offensive. Some officers of the BEF had actually installed their families in France, expecting the *Wehrmacht* to be held to another long war of attrition, which in consequence would create heavy congestion on the Channel crossing. Hasty efforts were needed to repatriate them, and several were left behind to be interned by the advancing Germans.⁸ Churchill, who became prime minister the day the German offensive began, strove to assist the French by appealing to the American president, Franklin Roosevelt, to declare a state of non-belligerency, thereby justifying all aid short of war.⁹ Meanwhile he appealed to Paul Reynaud, the French premier: 'if only [the Allies] could stick out for another three months', the position would be 'entirely different'.¹⁰

The *Wehrmacht's* swift advance led to the decision to withdraw the BEF and to a prolonged struggle fought out behind the closed doors of the War Cabinet. Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, favoured an approach to Germany with a view to securing an armistice; Churchill feared that an armistice would lead to defeat and used all his rhetorical skills to oppose it.¹¹ Eventually on 27 May Churchill prevailed, not least because France still seemed likely to hold out. It is usually forgotten that in his famous speech in the House of Commons on 4 June, when he declared that 'we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets', he made clear that he did *not* think Britain would have to fight alone. Just before the peroration he affirmed, 'The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength.'¹² By early June he was prepared to accept the possibility that France might actually be knocked out of the war,¹³ but the awful consequences made it hard to accept. Evidently unaware that the French government had already abandoned Paris, he renewed his appeal to Roosevelt on the evening of 10/11 June:

Everything must be done to keep France in the fight and to prevent any idea of the fall of Paris, should it occur, becoming the occasion for any kind of parley.... [The French] should continue to defend every yard of their soil and use [the] full fighting force of their army.... Our intention is to have a strong army in France for the campaign of 1941,¹⁴

Four days later Reynaud warned Churchill that France would soon leave the war. Churchill immediately flew to Tours to urge the retreating French government to mobilise its strategic reserves and fight on. At this moment hopes of further French military resistance died. Contrary to his assumption, the whole of the French army *was* already engaged. Britain would not be afforded the time to ready a large army for any 1941 campaign.¹⁵

Observers in more distant capitals felt themselves equally deceived. Since 1936 Stalin had become increasingly cynical about France's anti-fascism, but not, it

seems, its military strength. Khrushchev, who was with him in Moscow, records that

Stalin's nerves cracked when he learned about the fall of France. He cursed the governments of England and France: 'Couldn't they put up any resistance at all?' he asked despairingly. 'He too had counted on the French army, with British support, to grind down the German war machine before it could again turn east. 'Now', he complained, 'Hitler was sure to beat our brains in.'¹⁶

In Washington, Congress had been temporising over new tax measures to cover the cost of rearmament. France's fall suddenly galvanised it into action. On 25 June, three days after General Huntziger, representing the French government, signed the armistice in Hitler's presence, the First Revenue Act of 1940 became law.¹⁷ President Roosevelt was as disturbed as anyone by the French collapse. Hitherto he could assume that the United States need not become directly involved in the war; now he could not be so sure. According to one American authority,

When France collapsed... Roosevelt reacted with indignation that a country so glorious and a people so talented should have surrendered so ignominiously to Nazi violence. Publicly Roosevelt placed the blame on Axis aggression, but privately he had come to the realization [sic] that France had revealed itself as weak, impotent and completely demoralized.¹⁸

Regularly thereafter signs of resentment reappeared. In 1944, when Churchill sought to restore France to the status of a full-fledged ally, Roosevelt responded with scorn. 'France is your baby and will take a lot of nursing in order to bring it to the point of walking alone.'¹⁹ The president and his advisers saw 'little need or possibility for a revival of French power'.²⁰ They were not prepared to have France join the Allied commission for Italy or to attend the Yalta or the Potsdam conferences. Later, despite acute financial and economic weakness, Britain could pretend to a 'special relationship' with America and a directing role in the Western alliance; not so France. De Gaulle's efforts in the 1960s to reassert France's Great Power status met with scorn in Washington and impatience in London. Even now, nearly sixty years after the fall of France, the legacy of this event contributes to strain in the Western alliance. France, while spending a relatively large amount on defence, jealously guards its right to share in the decisions over its deployment. The Anglo-Saxon Powers in turn regard this as divisive and evidence of a willfully difficult neighbour.

From this distance it is clear that France's defeat marked the collective failure of all the anti-fascist powers. But in view of the speed with which it occurred, it was all too easy for others to make France the scapegoat. Efforts to explain it therefore dwelt upon specifically French shortcomings which, it must be said, were scarcely

hard to find. The Vichy régime, in an effort at self-legitimation, wasted no time charging recent leaders of the Third Republic with dereliction of duties, although their trial was delayed, then abandoned on Hitler's orders when it threatened to embarrass Pétain and his ministers.²¹ But others of almost every political stripe went some way to corroborate the charges. Marc Bloch, the great medieval historian and socialist, assigned failing marks to almost everyone he encountered while in uniform on the north-west front.²² The Chief of the General Staff, Maxime Weygand, accused the politicians of leaving the soldiers inadequately armed.²³ Edouard Daladier, the recent premier, lashed out in his diary at the generals as well as his own predecessors, creating a grim picture of incompetence, cowardice and deceit.²⁴ In London, General de Gaulle was so disgusted with the Third Republic that he abjured the very word republic until 1942.²⁵ Upon taking office in Paris two years later, he found almost universal support for the principle of replacing the Third Republic, which had apparently failed the country completely in 1940.

The historiography of the inter-war period has until recently tended to reinforce this trend. Such was the awfulness of France's fall that historians concentrated their efforts upon the examination of the immediate origins of the war and military defeat of 1940. It should be said that the practice of 'writing history backwards' is both common and perfectly legitimate. But the search for explanations of any large event, pursued single-mindedly, can easily result in creating the impression of inevitability. For many years France's fate in 1940 appeared over-determined by domestic shortcomings alone. France, it seemed, had become decadent and at the first blow collapsed from within.²⁶ Only in the past twenty years or so has it become commonplace to locate French history within an international perspective, giving due prominence to the weakness of France's alliance relations, the German advantage of surprise, the role of chance which heavily favoured Hitler at this time, and other factors largely beyond France's control. By the same token, it is only latterly that historians have turned their attention from 1940 to earlier events, thereby including a wider range of issues within their purview. In particular, they have come to treat the 1920s, when France was prosperous and Hitler did not yet exercise power, on a par with the 1930s, which has had the effect of restoring a degree of openendedness to the historiography.

The present volume offers a selection of current scholarship, combining work by well-known historians from the English-speaking world, a number of eminent French historians whose work has hitherto been available only in specialist French-language publications,²⁷ and several promising young scholars at the beginning of their careers. Its purpose is not to tell the whole story of French external relations between the wars, nor to suggest the emergence of an overarching consensus among historians on France's decline and fall. Indeed, in the contributions of Keiger and Artaud, to take one example, or Jackson and Imlay, to take another, the reader will find striking differences of emphasis. As these differences illustrate, the purpose is to explain the challenges facing contemporary

French decision-makers during France's inter-war decline as well as the puzzle surrounding its sudden fall in 1940.

The France that emerges from these separate portraits nevertheless presents several clearly identifiable features which are seldom if ever prominent in the older English-language accounts. One is the moderation of French foreign policy aims. Even now it is still usual for students to assume that in the aftermath of the First World War France was bent upon revenge, determined to crush Germany almost out of existence, and persisted in this ambition through much of the 1920s. But as David Stevenson demonstrates in his examination of France at the Paris peace conference, this is far from the case. The term containment more accurately sums up French policy. John Keiger's account of Raymond Poincaré's German reparations policy confirms that even the man who for Germans, Britons and Americans personified revanchism in fact harboured consistently moderate ambitions. Denise Artaud's complementary account of post-war French war debt policy reaches a broadly similar conclusion. Whilst it is true that Poincaré and other French leaders in the 1920s demanded sufficient reparations to leave a balance after war debts were paid to Britain and the United States, they repeatedly entertained compromises and ended the decade in a position where only a part of their aims were realised.

A second feature is the presence of intelligent leadership, competent advisers and far-sightedness in the policy-making process. Raphaëlle Ulrich's account of René Massigli and the inter-war Quai d'Orsay, while acknowledging the existence of divided counsels, helps to restore a truth too often forgotten, that France as a great power for at least three centuries benefited from a diplomatic service of impressive professionalism. Martin Alexander in his study of the Maginot Line in conception and development presents an equally robust defence of the army high command. Peter Jackson complements these accounts with a carefully documented examination of French military intelligence, as provided chiefly by the services' *Deuxième bureaux*, which confirms their effectiveness in gathering and analysing data on German intentions in the later 1930s. The one dissenting voice among the contributors is that of Pierre Guillen. His survey of Franco-Italian relations, the distillation of over thirty years of research, points to serious shortcomings in French diplomatic and intelligence-gathering efforts, which contributed to contradictions in French policy towards Italy. But even here, as Guillen acknowledges, much of the difficulty arose from external constraints on French policy and the dizzying inconsistencies of Mussolini himself.

A third feature, which similarly should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with contemporary French affairs yet scarcely figures in older accounts of the inter-war period, is the recurrent element of creativity in French external policy-making. Jacques Bariéty's account of French policy towards coal and steel in the peace settlement and early post-war period provides a vivid example of initiative, originality and persistence in diplomatic activity, which was eventually rewarded with the partial success of the International Steel Entente. This should be read in

conjunction with Eric Bussière's survey of post-war Franco-Belgian relations wherein economic cooperation formed the centrepiece of French security plans. Albeit largely unsuccessful, France went well beyond conventional diplomatic action and normal bilateral economic relations in the pursuit of an over-arching European framework. Robert Young, examining Franco-American relations in the 1930s, reveals initiative of a very different kind in the realm of cultural propaganda. France's capacity to influence American opinion was as limited as its reasons for doing so were great. Nevertheless a remarkable range of initiatives were set in train to exploit American interest in French cultural achievements, albeit with limited result. Robert Boyce presents a less flattering account of French foreign economic policy in the crisis years midway between the wars. French policy included several important initiatives such as the employment of the League of Nations to convene a world economic conference in 1927, co-sponsorship of an international tariff truce and most ambitious of all, the call for the federation of Europe starting with rapprochement on the economic front. This incidentally made France the first country formally to support European integration through democratic means and anticipated the process, which led after the war to the creation of the European Economic Community and present-day European Union. French policy was nevertheless severely constrained by the capitalist system, which required the state to respect the independence of commercial and financial interests, aggravated divisions within the apparatus of the state, and increased the reluctance of statesmen to take risks in the sphere of economic policy-making.

This points to the fourth and most prominent feature, namely the limits of French power and influence. Yvon Lacaze's careful dissection of the decision-making process at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938 confirms that French weakness was due in part to failings of leadership, in this case of Edouard Daladier, the premier and minister of national defence, and Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister. Talbot Imlay in contrast takes as his starting point the underlying factors of politics and economics. His ambitious examination of the influence of domestic politics and industrial and social relations upon strategic planning during the phoney war demonstrates how crises in civil society produced a crisis for the strategic planners.

More generally, however, the contributors to this volume confirm that if France's power declined in the 1920s and 1930s while Germany regained the capacity to menace the world, much of its decline had already occurred before the start of the period. France's population weakness was an unavoidable fact; its dependence upon Britain and the United States, already of critical importance, became all the greater as a result. Whether France enjoyed prosperity or suffered depression, its soldiers and statesmen faced acute constraints imposed by an unfavourable international balance of power and the need to work within a democratic political system and a capitalist system made fragile by the upheavals of the recent war. It is against this background that one must judge French civil and military leaders and weigh up the claims, still frequently made, that they

displayed poor judgement, cowardice or simply ‘decadence’.²⁸ Inevitably French diplomatic and military initiatives displayed less decisiveness than those carried out by the contemporary Fascist and Nazi regimes. But before judging the record of France’s inter-war leaders, it is well to remember the priorities and the constraints that a free society placed upon them. This book, by examining their decision-making from as early as 1918, casts new light on many of the difficulties they faced. The result, perhaps, is a certain *banalisation* of French inter-war history. If so, it also transforms it into a context more easily recognisable in our present age of globalization and reduced expectations of state initiative.

NOTES

- 1 J.M.Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London, Macmillan, 1919.
- 2 R.Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement 1935–1939*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982, p. 304, table II (military spending in constant francs).
- 3 J.W.Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945*, London, Macmillan, 1953, p. 466.
- 4 F.Halder, *The Halder War Diary, 1939–1942*, eds C.Burdick and H.-A.Jacobsen, London, Greenhill Books, 1988, p. 149.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 182. It is worth noting that in the week this volume went to press the last iron-ore mine in Lorraine closed down, marking an end to the era when national power was equated with iron and steel. On this, see [chapter 2](#), below.
- 8 See one victim’s charming account: A.Hunt, *Little Resistance: A Teenage English Girl’s Adventures in Occupied France*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1982.
- 9 F.L.Loewenheim, H.D.Langley and M.Jonas (eds), *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, New York, Saturday Review Press and E.P.Dutton, 1975, p. 94.
- 10 M.Gilbert, *Winston S.Churchill*, vol. VI, *Their Finest Hour, 1939–41*, London, Heinemann, 1983, p. 403.
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FRANCE AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

Addressing the dilemmas of security

David Stevenson

The Treaty of Versailles, negotiated at the Paris Peace Conference and signed by the victorious powers and Germany in June 1919, set the agenda for European diplomacy for twenty years. Its terms were central to the confrontation between supporters and opponents of the new international status quo. It was at issue in crises ranging from the Ruhr in 1923 to the Rhineland in 1936 and the Sudetenland in 1938, and formed the pretext for the German attack on Danzig that unleashed World War II.

It is unsurprising that the treaty has had a poor historical press. The German delegation at Paris contended that the Allies' terms were not only unjust but also unworkable, and they soon found sympathisers. The British economist J. M. Keynes's best-seller, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, predicted that Versailles would lead to chaos and collapse in Central Europe.¹ Ray Stannard Baker and Harold Nicolson underlined the treaty's contradiction of the Fourteen Points, the peace programme of the American president, Woodrow Wilson, on which basis both sides had agreed to the armistice of November 1918.² All these writers were agreed, moreover, in seeing France as the principal obstacle to an equitable settlement. British officials at the peace conference condemned French policy as 'greedy' and vengeful,³ while symptomatic of the judgements made in retrospect was the comment in Cabinet by the deputy prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, at the time of Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland, that he was pleased that Versailles was 'vanishing', and he hoped the French had been taught a 'severe lesson'.⁴

In France itself, by contrast, the memoirs written in 1917–19 by the premier, Georges Clemenceau and by his principal adviser at the peace conference, André Tardieu, repudiated less the charge of harshness towards Germany than that of having conceded too much to London and Washington.⁵ Together with the reminiscences of the head of Clemenceau's private office in the French war ministry, Jules Mordacq, these memoirs were probably the most important inter-war accounts of France's peacemaking role, and for many years little was added to them.⁶ It is true that the documentation available on the Paris Conference increased dramatically with the publication of many of the records of the American delegation.⁷ It grew further with the printing of the minutes taken by Paul Mantoux, the French interpreter in the Council of Four, the supreme

decision-making body at Paris between March and June 1919.⁸ But greater insight into the inner workings of French policy-making had to await the opening of the Paris archives. The records of the relevant ministries were made accessible in the 1970s, as were the papers of Clemenceau and Tardieu, the diaries of the president of the republic, Raymond Poincaré, and the transcripts of the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the peacemaking, the *Commission des traités de paix*.⁹ These sources, together with the files of the British delegation to the conference and the papers of the prime minister, David Lloyd George, provide the basis for this chapter.¹⁰

The opening of the archives has made possible a much more detailed reconstruction of French policy.¹¹ In contrast with earlier indictments, most commentators since the 1970s have been impressed by French moderation and defensiveness, and Walter McDougall has asserted that, of all the participants at the conference, Clemenceau's policy was the best-calculated to bring about a lasting settlement.¹² The jury is still out, however, and there have been signs that the pendulum of judgement is swinging back the other way.¹³ Versailles continues to be attacked both as too severe and as too lenient: according to the French royalist critic, Jacques Bainville, it was a peace 'trop douce pour ce qu'elle a de dur' (too mild for what is in it that is harsh).¹⁴ Arguably it fell between two stools, being neither conciliatory enough for a lasting rapprochement with the Weimar Republic, nor rigorous enough to contain Hitler. Although it will be argued here that such a critique is too simple, it is a helpful starting point. The following account falls into three parts. First, it will consider the initial French negotiating position, to isolate the limitations that the French imposed upon themselves. It will then turn to the bargaining at the peace conference. Finally, it will reconsider what alternatives were open to the French leaders, and the implications of their choices for the wider theme of French decline.

FRANCE'S INITIAL NEGOTIATING POSITION

The Clemenceau government presented its demands to the peace conference between January and March 1919. These demands will be outlined here under the headings of territory, economics and security, although all three aspects intermeshed. If fully attained, the programme would have drastically curtailed German independence. Outside Europe, the French wanted Togo and part of the Cameroons in Africa, as well as to deprive Germany's ally, the Ottoman Empire, of Syria and the Lebanon.¹⁵ Within Europe, the starting point was Alsace-Lorraine, lost to Germany in 1871, but for whose northern border Clemenceau required not the line of 1815–70 but that of 1814, thus adding two salients round Landau and Saarbrücken. This would give him most of the Saar coalfield, the rest of which he wanted to garrison and bring into customs and monetary union with France, transferring the mines to French ownership.¹⁶ Germany's remaining territory on the left bank of the Rhine would be divided into nominally independent buffer states under Allied occupation, disarmed and neutralised, and

incorporated into the French customs zone. Should this claim be rejected, Clemenceau held in reserve one of a 'strategic frontier', originally proposed by the Allied commander-in-chief, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, which would include one million Germans within a line running north of the 1814 border.¹⁷

To complete their western security system, the French sought military and trade agreements with Belgium and supported the latter's territorial claims on Germany and the Netherlands, though opposing its ambitions to absorb Luxembourg, which they thought Belgium was too weak to defend.¹⁸ On the remaining German frontiers French policy was consistently to weaken Germany as much as possible and to strengthen its neighbours, irrespective of the self-determination principle. This meant prohibiting an *Anschluss*, or union, between Germany and the seven million German-speakers of the newly created Republic of Austria,¹⁹ while assigning the 2.5 million German speakers in the Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia, thereby assuring to the Czechs industrial and mineral wealth and defensible borders.²⁰ Most categorically, the French backed the claims of Poland to the historic frontiers of 1772 (including a broad land corridor along the river Vistula to the Baltic) as well as to the whole of Upper Silesia.²¹

To these territorial impositions would be added economic ones. The preconference memoranda of the Paris finance ministry, headed by Louis-Lucien Klotz, required Germany to make restitution in cash and kind for the destruction it had caused. Further it should reimburse the French government for disablement and widows' pensions and for the whole cost of the war, as well as repaying with accumulated compound interest the indemnity imposed on France in 1871.²² The commerce ministry, in contrast, headed by Etienne Clémentel, preferred to avoid large cash payments, which it feared would stimulate inflation and make French exports uncompetitive. If the wartime inter-Allied arrangements for pooling raw materials survived, it wanted reparation only for damage to property, plus protection against unfair German trading competition. If, however (as it expected), the pooling arrangements broke down, it would seek 'enormous' money payments and big coal deliveries.²³ Adding this to Germany's losses of the coal and steel of Upper Silesia, Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar would go far to eliminate the imbalance in heavy industry that had grown up before 1914.

Both France's territorial and its economic demands therefore had strategic implications. If implemented they would make a new invasion impossible. But the French also made proposals for reducing Germany's army to 200,000 men,²⁴ as well as for a strong League of Nations with a military planning staff that would monitor enemy armaments, from which Germany would be excluded because its democratic credentials were inadequate. In effect, such a League would continue the wartime alliance,²⁵ Finally, and principally, French security would be guaranteed by a permanent occupation of the left bank of the Rhine and the bridges across the river.²⁶

How were these demands formulated? Clemenceau's domestic position was stronger than that of Woodrow Wilson—a Democratic president who after the mid-term elections of November 1918 faced a Republican majority in Congress—

and even that of Lloyd George, who presided over a Cabinet of political heavyweights and a governing coalition in which Unionists outnumbered his Liberal followers. The French premier, in contrast, had a dependable majority of up to two-thirds of the Chamber of Deputies, where the Socialists provided the only systematic opposition. His relations with President Poincaré were icy, but Poincaré vented his frustration in his diary rather than seeking a showdown with the premier.²⁷ Clemenceau's ministers were not nonentities but tended to be technicians and protégés, none of whom threatened him: he told his Cabinet the minimum about the peace negotiations²⁸ and the British ambassador considered that 'when he is away the Government does not really exist'.²⁹ He had an inveterate suspicion of experts, be they soldiers or diplomats, and an impatience with bureaucracy. He was willing to delegate, but to subordinates whom he respected and trusted, often outsiders with unconventional backgrounds and ideas.

Between November and December 1918 the main government departments formulated their wishes, before Tardieu tried to synthesise a negotiating position.³⁰ The departments had most scope over the issues that Clemenceau deemed secondary. These issues included Africa and the Middle East as well as commercial objectives and, to begin with, financial ones. On German disarmament, the main input came from Foch, while the League of Nations was left primarily to Léon Bourgeois, a former premier and the League's most eminent French advocate. Relative to Germany's frontiers, in contrast, Tardieu had the leading role.

It would be wrong, however, to see Tardieu and Clemenceau as defying the views of the bureaucracy. On the contrary, the French élite appeared united until Clemenceau began to negotiate. In economic matters, as has been seen, the premier let Clémentel and Klotz take the lead; in security ones, Tardieu's Rhine demands differed little from Foch's and Poincaré's thinking, and were acceptable to both men. Nor can it be demonstrated that the government was at odds with public opinion. The public were briefly infatuated with President Wilson and his peace programme, but only while Wilson's ideals seemed compatible with French ones. Once it became clear, by early 1919, that they were not, Wilsonian enthusiasm dissipated. In any case, official surveys suggested that most of the public remained deeply distrustful of Germany. Reparation and security guarantees were the loudest voiced concerns, in parliament, via pressure groups and in the press. But calls to annex the left bank of the Rhine or break Germany up were few.³¹ By the time the largest patriotic gathering, the French National Congress, met in February the government had decided its position, and if Clemenceau's opening claims had been publicized they would probably have enjoyed wide support.³²

In translating concerns for reparation and security into concrete proposals, Clemenceau enjoyed considerable latitude. Moreover, although on paper having agreed to Wilson's Fourteen Points as part of the ceasefire, the French took little account of the American peace programme, and only in January did they formally

accept it as the Paris Conference's terms of reference.³³ In fact the armistice had caught the government by surprise, with its central demands still undefined. Nonetheless, the French peace programme did not spring from nowhere between November 1918 and March 1919. On the contrary, it was public knowledge that Aristide Briand's government had wanted the Saar and left-bank buffer states in 1917, and Clemenceau's own administration had openly encouraged the Polish national committee's claims to the 1772 frontiers and those of the Czech national committee to the Sudetenland. Much in the French economic and colonial programmes, too, had been worked out before the shooting stopped. It is true that discussion of France's north-eastern frontier had been interrupted after the emergency caused in 1918 when Bolshevik Russia withdrew from the war. But as the ceasefire approached the Paris leaders were again considering the possibilities for European expansion.³⁴

This may suggest that the French negotiating position was an egotistic, imperialist one, and many in the American and British delegations so characterised it. Such suspicions had some foundation. The colonialist pressure groups hoped to spread French dominion in central Africa and to found a great new empire in the Levant.³⁵ Clemenceau and Tardieu believed that some Saarlanders wanted union with France, although they knew that many did not.³⁶ On the left bank of the Rhine, French forces quickly began a campaign of propaganda, and Foch's headquarters, advised by an ex-colonial official, Paul Tirard, tried to flood the region with French exports and reorientate its economy towards the west.³⁷ 'In reality,' Clemenceau told a Senate delegation in February, 'we shall occupy until the country is willing to unite itself with France.'³⁸ In Luxembourg, despite denials that France wished to frustrate the Belgians' plans, Foch excluded Brussels from any significant role in the occupation. French troops protected the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg's government against a coup by pro-French radicals in February, but the commander concerned was replaced and the French garrison instructed not to act similarly again.³⁹ Luxembourg, and perhaps Belgium itself, faced inclusion in a buffer-state system that would reinstate the Rhine strategic frontier France had lost with the Napoleonic wars.

Memories of historic greatness, vengefulness for 1870, and sentiments of national pride and moral superiority all fed into the French negotiating programme. Some officials and businessmen hoped for major commercial expansion at Germany's expense.⁴⁰ It is difficult to see cultural and economic imperialism, however, as the driving force behind Clemenceau's demands. The western European power balance required that German capacities be limited, but the principal French objective was protection against a new attack.

Underlying French security planning were three axioms: German malevolence, French vulnerability and French isolation. Clemenceau and his advisers did not share Woodrow Wilson's hopes that the revolution of November 1918 might usher Germany into the community of liberal democracies. On the contrary, they suspected it of being a manoeuvre to win easier terms.⁴¹ According to French intelligence the Germans did not feel beaten and the struggle with them was far

from over.⁴² The French were less afraid than the British and Americans that the German extreme left would seize power, and until March they obstructed American efforts to raise the blockade and rush in food relief.⁴³ At the peace conference, Clemenceau and Tardieu underlined the continuity between the 'so-called' Weimar democracy and its imperial predecessor: many figures from the old regime (such as Brockdorff-Rantzau, the new foreign minister) held key positions, and the German Socialists were not to be trusted.⁴⁴ Clemenceau's testimony was based on years of experience and on deep pessimism: the Germans respected only force, and the Allies could not afford to lift their guard. The prospect ahead was not relaxation, but continuing vigilance.⁴⁵

Against this menace, France would remain handicapped. Clemenceau and Tardieu hoped that behind the shield provided by the treaty France could recuperate, and their faith in their country was reinforced by its wartime resilience. But there was a tradition, reaching back into the nineteenth century, of pessimistic speculation about national decline,⁴⁶ and the war had exacerbated France's industrial and demographic inadequacies. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1 the two sides had been approximately equal in population and manufacturing output; by 1914 Germany's population was over half as big again as that of France, and its steel production four times greater. In the Rhineland an infrastructure of bridges, railways and unloading ramps formed the springboard for invasion.⁴⁷ Since 1914 not only had the war cost France nearly 1.4 million dead, but there had been a further reduction in the birth rate and its export industries had been pillaged while Germany's—not to mention Britain's and America's—had remained intact. In the postwar 'race for foreign markets' predicted by the reconstruction minister, Louis Loucheur,⁴⁸ the country risked being disadvantaged; yet the war had emphasised as had none previously the importance of industrial might. Finally, although the royalists of the *Action française* organisation advocated breaking up Germany, the French government was sceptical. The left bank might be detachable, and there were hopes of decentralising Germany by encouraging separatist tendencies, but Clemenceau accepted that a German national identity had been established, and doubted whether French military power could destroy it.⁴⁹

The prospect ahead was therefore a prolonged confrontation with an inherently stronger antagonist, in which France would need all the protection it could get, especially if it had to stand alone. Clemenceau and Poincaré remembered the years after 1871 when an isolated France had been exposed to German blackmail, as well as the relief that followed the alliance formed in 1891–4 with Tsarist Russia. Nicholas II, for all his failings, had offered the security of a long-term combination with a major land Power, and had supported Briand's wartime plans for Rhineland buffer states. But now he had gone, and his Bolshevik successors were not only ideologically antipathetic but had expropriated France's huge Russian investments and signed a separate peace with Wilhelm II. In the winter of 1918–19 the Clemenceau government tried to overthrow them, landing forces at Odessa and stationing warships in the Black Sea. When Wilson proposed in

January that representatives of all parties in the Russian Civil War should meet on Prinkipo Island in the Sea of Marmora, Clemenceau went along with the invitation to humour his partners, but unofficially the French foreign ministry encouraged the Russian Whites to reject the initiative.⁵⁰

Despite Clemenceau's efforts to dislodge the Bolsheviks (which he scaled down after France's Black Sea fleet mutinied in April and the Odessa force withdrew) there was no prospect of the pre-war Russian alliance being resurrected at any time soon. Nor was Italy a convincing substitute. The French leaders disliked the Italians, who were rivals in the Mediterranean and Africa, and were unimpressed by their fighting effectiveness. Poincaré was anxious to maintain the tie with Rome,⁵¹ and Clemenceau accepted that he was pledged by the 1915 Treaty of London to support Italy's claims to German- and Slav-populated territories in the Tyrol and the Adriatic, but when the Italians collided head-on with Wilson and walked out of the peace conference in May 1919, France joined Britain in opposing them. Of the other pre-war Great Powers, the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary disintegrated in October–November 1918. Although at points during the fighting the French had hoped to wean Austria-Hungary away from Germany, they had eventually written it off and now looked instead to a new chain of eastern allies, centred on Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia.⁵² To do so was making the best of a bad job, as the emergent states were internally fragile and divided against each other. The likelihood of their replacing Russia as an eastern counterbalance was slim.

All of this meant that the most plausible candidates as Great-Power allies were Britain and the USA. The maritime powers' contribution to the Allied victory was underestimated by French public opinion, but well understood by Clemenceau, who told the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the Versailles Treaty that without Britain France could not have won, and without the USA it could have won only in very different circumstances.⁵³ On 29 December he ironised in the Chamber of Deputies about 'certain high authorities' who condemned defensive systems of armaments and alliances in which he still saw merit; but warned that his 'directing thought' at the peace conference would be to keep in being the wartime coalition, and 'to this unity I will make every sacrifice'.⁵⁴ Yet the alliance with Britain, concluded in the Pact of London of September 1914, was valid only for the duration of hostilities: while the USA had fought as an 'Associated Power', without binding obligations to France at all. Neither Britain nor America had experience of long-term Continental commitments (although Britain had guaranteed Belgium's neutrality since 1839), and Clemenceau entered the negotiations with no assurance of their continuing support beyond the vagaries of the League Covenant. Should an Anglo-American offer be made, however, he was likely to be willing to compromise on his own security plans.

FRANCE AT THE PEACE CONFERENCE

The peace negotiations ran through four main phases. During January and February the heads of government and foreign ministers of Britain, France, America, Italy and Japan met in the Council of Ten, delegating detailed examination of economic and territorial problems to sub-committees and commissions. The main business accomplished in this period was the drafting of the Covenant. Between mid-February and mid-March there was an interregnum, while Wilson and Lloyd George were absent and an assassination attempt temporarily incapacitated Clemenceau. In contrast, during the third phase from mid-March onwards the main points of the Versailles Treaty were hammered out by Lloyd George, Wilson and Clemenceau, meeting with the Italian Premier Orlando as the Council of Four, before the draft terms were presented to the German delegation on 7 May. In the final phase, after the Germans set out their objections, Lloyd George threatened that unless the treaty were moderated Britain would not assist in imposing it. Against strenuous opposition from Clemenceau he made only limited headway, and finally, after weeks of tension, the Germans signed.

How did the treaty compare with the initial French programme? In many respects favourably.⁵⁵ Alsace-Lorraine was returned without a plebiscite, bringing with it phosphates, steel, iron ore and a Franco-German border on the Rhine. France gained Togo and most of the Cameroons as League of Nations mandates, but Britain resisted French claims to Syria, leading a furious Clemenceau to accuse Lloyd George of double-dealing.⁵⁶ Austria and Germany were forbidden to unite without unanimous agreement from the League Council, thus leaving France with a veto. The Sudetenland went to Czechoslovakia. In the north, there were to be plebiscites in northern and central Schleswig (which in due course returned these areas to Denmark)—though the French were frustrated in their wishes to extend the plebiscite zone southwards and to internationalise the Kiel Canal.⁵⁷ Similarly, Britain and America blocked Belgium's claims to 'compensation' at Dutch expense, although it did gain Eupen-Malmédy and most of Moresnet from Germany. Not only did the Belgians make no progress in laying claim to Luxembourg, however, but the French took over the Grand Duchy's main railway system, probably without Lloyd George and Wilson realising what was happening.⁵⁸

As for the commercial clauses of the treaty, the inhabitants of Alsace-Lorraine could export duty-free to Germany for five years, and Germany conceded France most favoured nation status for the same period. This was shorter than Clémentel had wanted, but it assisted French manufacturers who feared that the new capacity would cause over-production, and for most of the 1920s France ran a trade surplus with Germany.⁵⁹

There was little disagreement about the German armed forces, though at Britain's suggestion Germany was to have a 100,000-man volunteer army instead of a 200,000-man conscript one. It would have no general staff, poison gas, tanks

or aircraft, and an inspection commission would monitor armaments production. The French themselves opposed a more complete disarmament, given the threat from Bolshevism and Clemenceau's unwillingness to place Germany under the Allies' own protection.⁶⁰

Finally, in the League of Nations Commission a prior Anglo-American understanding froze Bourgeois out. Germany would be excluded from the new organisation, but the League was not to monitor disarmament or have a planning staff, and this made questionable the general guarantee of its members' integrity in the Covenant's Article 10.⁶¹ This setback for French security seemed far outweighed, however, by the Anglo-American guarantee of France against German aggression offered on 14 March and embodied in two texts signed by Wilson and Lloyd George simultaneously with the treaty of peace.

The hardest fought negotiations from the French perspective—and those involving the biggest concessions—concerned the Polish frontiers, the Saar, the Rhine and reparations. These included the issues over which Clemenceau was under greatest domestic pressure, and were to be among the most contentious for years ahead.

Over the Polish frontiers the French representatives, better co-ordinated and with a clearer purpose than the British and Americans, were able to steer the Polish Affairs Commission into recommending that the Poles should get much of what they wanted, including the whole of Upper Silesia and a broad corridor to the Baltic with the port of Danzig.⁶² During February, Foch won approval for German troops to withdraw from the corridor and for Polish forces to replace them.⁶³ When the report from the Polish Commission reached the Council of Four, however, Lloyd George assailed it, and his 'Fontainebleau memorandum' of 25 March recommended placing as few Germans as possible under Polish rule.⁶⁴ In fact a French interdepartmental conference chaired by Tardieu had already agreed that an 'internationalisation' of Danzig was an acceptable second best⁶⁵ and, after Lloyd George won over Wilson, Clemenceau acquiesced in the city being placed under the League. In addition he accepted a plebiscite in the Marienwerder district, which by going in Germany's favour was to deprive the Poles of one of the two railways through the corridor that the Polish Affairs Commission had wanted for them. Finally, in early June, faced with Lloyd George's eleventh-hour onslaught in favour of treaty revision and Wilson's renewed support for the British premier, Clemenceau said that he did not wish to 'create difficulties'⁶⁶ and agreed to a plebiscite in Upper Silesia, two-thirds of which voted in 1921 to stay German. It seems that he consistently found it easier to give way over Poland's borders than over France's own, and that he found it harder to divide the maritime powers.⁶⁷

Over the Saar, in contrast, Wilson was isolated, and this issue brought the conference closest to failure. Yet the territory concerned was not intrinsically particularly important, Tardieu considering the 1814 frontier a 'third-rate gain' that would not bring even the whole of the Saar coalfield under French control.⁶⁸ True, the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine would increase France's coal import

requirement, with the danger of France's eastern provinces becoming dependent on the Ruhr. Adding the Saar would reduce the fuel deficit to its previous level, though it would do little to remedy France's most critical energy shortage, which was in the coking coal used to smelt iron ore. Lloyd George, however, otherwise so sensitive to the danger of creating Alsace-Lorraines in reverse, seems here to have had a blind spot. It was Wilson who objected that the French claim would violate both self-determination and his Fourteen Points, which had limited American aims to redressing the wrong suffered by France 'in 1871'. The one argument that weighed with him was economic: control of the mines was justified as compensation for Germany's devastation of France's northern coalfield during the war. But once they had opened a chink in Wilson's logic the French dropped their claims to Landau and to the 1814 frontier, arguing instead that it would be impracticable to give them ownership of the mines without the right to administer on the surface. Furthermore, they maintained, the Saarlanders would never be able to practise genuine self-determination unless the local Prussian officials were removed.⁶⁹ Although Wilson maintained nominal German sovereignty, it was decided that until a plebiscite in fifteen years' time the Saar would be governed by the League of Nations, but brought into the French customs and monetary zone and placed under French occupation. There would be plenty of opportunity, the French leaders hoped, to bring out latent francophilia before a vote that they expected to win.⁷⁰

According to Mordacq it was on the Rhine that Clemenceau's eyes, 'like all who had seen the defeat of 1870', were concentrated.⁷¹ Foch urged the case for a permanent Rhenish occupation and a buffer zone on the left bank from as early as the armistice negotiations of October 1918, and he regularly returned to it.⁷² It was probably in December that Clemenceau decided to press for buffer states and a permanent end to German sovereignty west of the river, mistakenly assuming that Lloyd George would support him.⁷³ Tardieu put the French government's case to the British and Americans in a series of powerful position papers in January and February, and in meetings such as that between himself, Philip Kerr for Britain, and Sidney Mezes for the USA on 11–12 March.⁷⁴ Germany, he pleaded, would remain a threat, which neither disarmament clauses (which it could evade) nor the League of Nations would obviate. Only a Rhine military frontier could prevent another invasion from over-running northern France before British and American assistance arrived. Only an occupation—preferably inter-Allied—of the bridgeheads could deprive the Germans of the railway concentration zones they had prepared for deployments along the river or west of it.⁷⁵ On this basis, and proceeding from the need to safeguard communications, he insisted that the left bank must be separated from Germany, and that if granted economic advantages and freedom from conscription it could be brought to acquiesce in this fate.

Clemenceau was surprised and angered by the opposition that his Rhineland claim encountered, opposition which came especially from the British.⁷⁶ Conversely, he was delighted by Wilson's and Lloyd George's 14 March guarantee offer. There was now a choice, as Tardieu put it, between 'two systems'

of security: one based on a physical presence on the Rhine, and one more deterrent in operation, based on an alignment with London and Washington.⁷⁷

The decision on how to respond was taken without consulting the Cabinet, in meetings between Clemenceau, Tardieu, Stephen Pichon (the foreign minister) and Loucheur. All agreed it would be folly to reject the offer, especially, or so Tardieu argued in retrospect, as they had been doubtful about the Rhineland plan, and had pushed it in the absence of anything better.⁷⁸ They knew the left bankers were loyal to Germany, and feared guerrilla resistance.⁷⁹ A war ministry expert queried the value of river frontiers in the light of the experiences of 1914–18 and the development of long-range artillery and airpower, and this scepticism influenced Clemenceau: France might find itself over-extended, facing heavy demands on its manpower and its budget for the sake of a strategic liability.⁸⁰ All the same, Britain and America were uncertain quantities, and an occupation seemed necessary not only for defence but also to enforce the treaty. Hence the inner circle decided to accept the guarantee, but to obtain alongside it as much of the earlier 'solution' as they could.⁸¹ Foch's 'strategic frontier' was abandoned, as was the plan for buffer states. Everything now turned on the occupation, which the British wanted to be as short as possible, whereas Clemenceau desired one of at least five years. In the end he got fifteen, winning over Wilson on 20 April while Lloyd George was away. It was true that if Germany implemented the treaty loyally there would be phased evacuations after five, ten and fifteen years, but although the British military proposed a retreat from east to west, the French won agreement to one from north to south, from first the Cologne, then the Coblenz and finally the Mainz zones. In this way their border would be protected for as long as possible, their military frontier would remain on the river, and if necessary they could implement their favoured strategy of advancing up the Main valley to meet the Czechs and split Germany in two.⁸² The treaty provided further that the left bank and a strip on the right bank would be permanently demilitarised (ungarrisoned and unfortified), leaving the Ruhr and Frankfurt potentially vulnerable to French attack. Additional clauses (429 and 430) gave the right to prolong the occupation if for any reason French security remained inadequately safeguarded, and to reoccupy if Germany failed to comply with the reparation terms.

By presenting the occupation as a means of enforcement as well as a protection against attack, the treaty linked the Rhineland and reparation issues. Although the latter was one of Clemenceau's highest priorities, he notoriously had little expertise in economics and for the first part of the conference gave no clear lead. As in the security question, moreover, he began from a position of isolation. During the war the most influential figure in French economic policy-making had been Clémentel, who hoped to facilitate French reconstruction by preserving the wartime Allied shipping and raw-materials controls. But it quickly became clear that the Americans would accept nothing of the sort, and wanted deregulation as soon as possible. They would tolerate no discussion at the conference of the war debts owed to America by the Allies, and would not allow war debts and German

reparations to be treated in conjunction.⁸³ Yet the French government was spending more than twice what it was receiving in taxation, and French imports were four times the value of French exports. When the British Treasury cut off subsidies in February the French ambassador pleaded that his government was within days of 'bankruptcy'.⁸⁴ Although the French would doubtless have pressed for reparations anyway, American economic nationalism helps to explain the extremism of their claims in the early part of the conference, during which time Clémentel's influence was eclipsed and Klotz demanded not only compensation for physical damage but also France's entire war costs.

This phase did not last long, and Marc Trachtenberg has emphasised the moderation of the French negotiators in February–March, which brought them closer to the American than the British standpoint.⁸⁵ At this time Loucheur won his way into Clemenceau's inner circle, and Loucheur, like Clémentel, was impressed by the disadvantages of large German cash transfers. The French ceased to press for war costs, Loucheur assessing the total Germany could pay at 160 milliard gold marks, compared with American estimates of 120 milliard and British of 190 milliard or more.⁸⁶ This harmony, however, was short-lived. The American financial experts wanted a low fixed sum to be specified now and paid off quickly, which would end uncertainty and facilitate the private investment needed for German and European economic recovery, stabilising the Continent against Bolshevism. Conversely, Clemenceau let Loucheur play hard and soft according to the broader imperatives of French negotiating strategy, and in late March the premier again toughened his stance.⁸⁷

Realising how long it might take to assess the destruction done to France and to estimate Germany's financial capacity, Clemenceau now opposed stating a figure in the treaty. He joined Lloyd George in insisting that dependants' pensions must be added to reparation for damage—a demand that, once Wilson had conceded it, approximately doubled Germany's liability. In addition, Clemenceau was coming to see a German reparations default as the means by which the French could stay in the Rhineland after all, without sacrificing the alliances, and this insight lent his diplomacy new purpose.⁸⁸ Including pensions made little sense financially, as it would increase Britain's share of the receipts relative to France's. But by enlarging Germany's total debt it would prolong the period of implementation. Moreover, while Wilson was absent from the Council of Four through illness Clemenceau removed a thirty-year limit on Germany's payments, and gained a ruling that any decision to reduce the reparations total must be unanimous: in other words, subject to a French veto.

Loucheur secured German coal deliveries of up to 30 million tonnes a year for 30 years, but otherwise the final reparations clauses of the treaty left a great deal unresolved. Articles 231 (the 'war guilt' clause) and 232 provided that despite Germany's liability in justice for the entire cost of the war the Allies would claim primarily for damages and for pensions. The total owed and the schedule of payment were left to be decided before 1 May 1921 by an Allied Reparation Commission in which France would hold the chair and a casting vote. Much

therefore remained flexible, but this flexibility represented victory rather than defeat for Clemenceau's goals.⁸⁹

FRANCE'S ALTERNATIVES

The package delivered to the Germans on 7 May was altered before 28 June in two substantial respects. The first was the Upper Silesian plebiscite; the second a new convention establishing an Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission (IARHC), which would place the occupation under civilian control. Essentially, however, what the Council of Four had agreed amongst themselves was imposed upon their former enemy. And while it was true that over the League Covenant (the first 26 articles of the peace treaty) the French had made no impact on an Anglo-American united front, over the other aspects of the settlement they achieved much more. The disarmament clauses emerged from an Anglo-French understanding; over reparations Clemenceau and Lloyd George beat the Americans down; and in the commercial section of the treaty Clémentel got much of what he wanted. Finally, over Germany's frontiers the French took the lead and set the framework of discussion, even if Clemenceau subsequently made major concessions.⁹⁰

The questions remain of whether the French delegation had a choice, and of how far their decisions contributed to French decline. We may return to Jacques Bainville's assessment. The Versailles Treaty was indeed 'harsh' in that it failed to conciliate Germany or to consolidate the Weimar Republic. New research has shown that Clemenceau was keeping his options open and pursuing a more complex strategy than had earlier been thought, but has not radically altered our understanding of French policy.⁹¹ His government attempted secret bilateral contacts through the agency of Professor Haguénin, who was sent to Germany as an observer in March, and later through discussions between the German delegation at the peace conference and the French diplomat René Massigli.⁹² Neither initiative, however, revealed much scope for an agreement, or great German interest in one, the Weimar government seeing its best hope in the Americans.⁹³ Nor were the French leaders prepared for major concessions, hoping rather by these contracts to ease the difficulties of treaty enforcement and gain economic advantages.

Does this mean that there was a lost opportunity? Lloyd George's Fontainebleau memorandum argued that Germany might voluntarily accept terms that were stern but just, but Tardieu riposted that the British were simply proposing conciliation at other people's expense, having themselves confiscated Germany's fleet and absorbed its colonies.⁹⁴ Lloyd George's intransigence over reparations bears out the imputation that he had double standards and, although Wilson was more even-handed, American policy towards Germany also had a punitive edge.⁹⁵ The truth is that none of the three main victors was willing to concede many of the demands made by the German delegation after it arrived at the conference. On the other hand, research into the 1918–19 German

Revolution has tended to confirm the contemporary French opinion that German mentalities had not been altered by the defeat, and that the prewar administrative and military élites remained intact.⁹⁶ Clemenceau and Tardieu were probably right to believe that the treaty must ultimately rest on force rather than consent, and after the invasion and devastation of French territory, as well as appalling human sacrifice, they were entitled to seek safeguards.

Bainville's principal concern, however, was the weakness of the enforcement provisions. Had Clemenceau needed to yield so much? The report of the parliamentary commission of inquiry, whose chair, Louis Barthou, had been a severe critic of the premier, concluded that another ministry could not have done better.⁹⁷ Yet Clemenceau's bargaining tactics—delaying before addressing the issues of key French interest, and seeking to build up goodwill by concessions beforehand—were criticised by Poincaré at the time, and the premier himself eventually regretted them.⁹⁸ He would probably have done better to present his demands at once and drive a harder bargain with the British over Syria and with Wilson over the League in return for economic assistance and a longer occupation. All the same, it is questionable whether when the treaty was signed that Clemenceau and Tardieu felt they had given much away. The biggest sacrifices had been of Polish interests rather than their own. Landau and the 1814 frontier were unimportant; they had the Saar basin for fifteen years and quite possibly permanently. As for reparations, they had dropped the demand for war costs, but it is doubtful if this had ever been more than a bargaining gambit. Loucheur regarded it as impractical, and Klotz knew (although he was pilloried for publicly admitting it) that France would not get everything and must eventually raise extra taxes.⁹⁹

This leaves the security question as fundamental. And here, from the vantage point of the 1920s, it appeared that Clemenceau had sold the Rhine frontier for a mess of pottage, an Anglo-American guarantee that never materialised. With the failure of the American Senate in 1919–20 to ratify the Versailles Treaty, the guarantee agreements fell through, Lloyd George asserting that without an American commitment Britain was no longer bound. Anthony Lentin has plausibly argued that Lloyd George had made the offer in bad faith anyway.¹⁰⁰ However, Clemenceau and Tardieu had foreseen the possibility of non-ratification, and covered themselves with the right to prolong the occupation under Article 429.¹⁰¹ Nor were they themselves entirely acting in good faith, as they intended to use the occupation to encourage Rhenish separatism. It is true that Clemenceau was embarrassed when in early June separatist forces in the Rhineland attempted abortive coups with French military assistance, and he reprimanded the commanders concerned. But he was angry because their involvement complicated his position at the peace conference rather than because he disagreed with their objective. To an extent the IARHC assisted him, as a means of ensuring that a *politique rhénane* could continue under civilian overview.¹⁰²

In contrast with Clemenceau's strategy of staying in the Rhineland and expecting Germany to default, Foch and Poincaré opposed a fifteen-year limit and wanted France to stay for as long as reparations were being paid. The consensus among the French leaders behind the initial negotiating position broke down once Clemenceau moved away from it. Yet, as Clemenceau and Tardieu pointed out, their critics were inconsistent. Although to begin with Foch wanted the left bankers to be conscripted, in January he dropped this demand and by April he and Poincaré were arguing neither for buffer states nor for the Rhineland occupation to be permanent but simply that it should continue until the treaty was fully executed.¹⁰³ This might mean an occupation of thirty years rather than fifteen, or it might, if Germany defaulted, mean no difference at all. Clemenceau's defence was that he had obtained the maximum possible from his allies, and it is certainly true that he played off president against prime minister in order to obtain a much longer occupation than the British had envisaged or wanted. It is unlikely that Wilson and Lloyd George would have conceded more. Admittedly, if the conference had broken down over the issue, France was already ensconced in the Rhineland, and Foch had argued before the armistice that it must occupy all the territory it was interested in precisely because this would be the crucial factor in determining the treaty. But if France had simply stayed put and no treaty had been signed, would its position have been stronger than the one it occupied once the Anglo-American guarantee evaporated? The answer is probably no. Even without the guarantee, the Versailles safeguards were adequate to maintain French security provided the treaty was implemented, the bridges with London and Washington had not been irretrievably broken, and it was not necessary for Clemenceau to tell his people that after years of unprecedented national effort there would be no settlement.

Events were to demonstrate that the occupation of the Rhineland was neither as inflammatory nor as subversive of the peace of Europe as Lloyd George had predicted, and that international stability would have been better protected if the Anglo-Saxon powers had accepted more of the French demands. Given that at the time they would not do so, however, Clemenceau felt it necessary to make concessions to keep in being the newly forged Atlantic alliance, especially as he had doubts about the value of the occupation anyway. Different negotiating tactics could probably have elicited somewhat more, but Clemenceau was right to insist that ultimately he had to opt between pursuing French objectives unilaterally and maintaining inter-Allied solidarity.¹⁰⁴ The final question is whether his decisions accelerated French decline.

France's power did not begin to ebb in 1918. The country's international position had been deteriorating for much of the nineteenth century, and it was no longer possible after 1870, as it had been for the *grande nation* of Louis XIV or Napoleon I, to assure French security unaided. According to Tardieu, the peace settlement followed 150 years of decadence.¹⁰⁵ Clemenceau defended it in parliament as a chance to rebuild the nation's vital forces, but one that subsequent leaders must exploit: 'The treaty...will only be worth what you are worth; it will

be what you make it...'¹⁰⁶ It added some 1.8 million new citizens, brought France some way to catching up with Germany in heavy industry, and provided a breathing space until a new generation of Germans reached adulthood without having undergone military training. It made France, for a decade or more, the strongest force in western and central Europe, and to this extent it did indeed check the decay. Yet the recovery rested on a treaty whose terms were necessarily one-sided and discriminatory because of Germany's inbuilt advantages,¹⁰⁷ and therefore unappealing to Anglo-American liberal opinion. Clemenceau's successors would inherit his dilemma of whether to act unilaterally or to seek co-operation with an evasive London and Washington, given that France lacked the financial self-sufficiency and domestic totalitarianism that enabled Soviet Russia to enforce for forty years unaided the much more severe settlement that followed 1945. In fact Bainville was wrong, and the Versailles Treaty did contain enough to prevent another war in Europe, but not if the task were left to France alone.

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FRANCE AND THE POLITICS OF STEEL,
FROM THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES
TO THE INTERNATIONAL STEEL
ENTENTE, 1919–1926

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During the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, coal and steel were major factors in determining economic power and consequently political power. Coal was a factor for two reasons: first, as a source of energy (coal remained the principal source of energy in the world until 1955; not until then was it displaced by oil), and second, because transformed into coke and combined with iron ore it is one of the two essentials for making pig iron, then steel. From 1850 until 1950 steel was the basic element of all modern manufacture, and more particularly the manufacture of weapons of all types.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a powerful steel industry was the basis of both industrial and military power, and World War I was a war of economic resources and of steel. It could even be said that Germany was able to stand up to the Allied coalition for more than four years because it had become the leading steelmaking power of Europe, its production, having surpassed Britain's before 1900, far exceeding France's and being second only to that of the United States. One can only wonder about the outcome had the United States not entered the war in 1917, along with its tremendous population and military manpower, its financial and industrial strength. It can be said, however, that victory went to the side possessing the greatest quantity of steel.

THE SITUATION IN 1913

In 1913, the last full year of peace, Germany produced almost 19 million tons of steel, or nearly a quarter of the 77 million tons world total.¹ The growth of German steel production, a relatively recent phenomenon, had been made possible by the conjunction of several factors: the possession of enormous coal reserves (190 million tons of coal were mined in 1913); coal of good quality permitting the manufacture of excellent coke; possession of large iron ore reserves including the resources of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the part of Lorraine that had been annexed to the Reich by the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871.

Long considered poor quality because it was low in iron and contained sulphur, Lorraine iron ore became suddenly more valuable after the invention of the Thomas process for making pig iron.² The large German steelmaking firms, generally located in the Ruhr, acquired mining rights in the Lorraine region

annexed to the Reich, dug mines and established the first stages of steel manufacture (smelters and steel mills, even sometimes rolling mills) near the mines for reasons of profitability. Since far more iron ore than coke is needed to make steel, it was cheaper to transport coke from the Ruhr than to transport iron ore from Lorraine to the basic steel mills of the Ruhr. Accordingly, between 1890 and 1914 a large part of the German steel industry migrated from the Ruhr towards Lorraine and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the division of labour involving the manufacture of basic steel in Lorraine and Luxembourg, which was then transported to the German interior for use in industrial manufacture. The Germans saw only advantages in this arrangement, which allowed the manufacture of excellent quality steel at the lowest cost. There were no perceived drawbacks since Lorraine had been annexed to the Reich and a tariff union existed with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. That the situation could change did not seem to occur to them.

On account of this development, Germany's steel industry and hence its industrial and military power were heavily concentrated in what German steel-makers called the 'South-West'—the industrial region formed by the annexed part of Lorraine, Luxembourg and the Saar basin, which was close to the French and Belgian frontiers. In 1913, South-West Germany furnished German industry with 80 per cent of its iron ore, 40 per cent of its pig iron and 30 per cent of its basic steel.³ In 1913 the German industrialist, Fritz Thyssen, inaugurated Europe's most modern and important steelmaking complex at Hagondange, near Metz, in annexed Lorraine. Of 316 smelters operating in Germany in 1914, 138 were in the South-West, and in German heavy steel-making the shift towards Lorraine was accelerating.⁴

THE WAR

Since before 1914 the growth of German industry, and particularly its steel-making, had caused disquiet in France. Not content with exploiting the resources of annexed Lorraine, German steelmakers set up in the part of Lorraine that had remained French (the Briey-Longwy basin), and even in Normandy. This apparent German economic invasion had created a virtual psychosis in France on the eve of the war.⁵ Once the war began, the growing importance of heavy armaments and hence steel (for artillery, tanks, submarines) intensified anxieties. French wartime governments were constantly concerned about German steelmaking, and introduced economic issues into their war aims in the event of an Allied victory.⁶

Etienne Clémentel played an essential role as minister of commerce in all the French governments from October 1915 to May 1919. He sought to establish economic solidarity among the Allies during and after the war, and was the leading proponent of French economic war aims at the war's end and during the peace conference.⁷ It should be emphasised that French leaders, both statesmen and steelmakers (the *Comité des Forges*), were acutely aware of the seriousness of

the steel question they were to face when the war was over. For the government, in the first instance, it was a question of security. After the massive ordeals and sacrifices of the war it would be essential to curb the power of German steelmaking and its capacity to manufacture arms. This was a political imperative rather than a matter of economics. French steelmakers were divided, but assuming the war ended in victory for France and its Allies, they feared postwar competition with German producers.⁸

The return of Alsace and annexed Lorraine remained the first of France's war aims from the outbreak of war. As has been shown, however, annexed Lorraine occupied a highly important place in Germany's industrial life. The Lorraine of 1914 was not the Lorraine of 1871. De facto integration had occurred under German domination of Lorraine iron ore and Ruhr coke. A return to the frontiers of 1870 would destroy this integration and threaten to destabilise both German and French steelmaking, in France's case by the acquisition of a very substantial amount of basic steelmaking without sufficient coke or domestic markets to sustain it. Whereas French statesmen were tempted to see in this a means of drastically reducing German steelmaking capacity, French industrialists recognised that it was likely to be a poisoned chalice that would result in destabilising the French market and lead to endless difficulties with their German colleagues. Yet it was inconceivable to the French that Alsace and Lorraine should not be restored integrally, both legally and economically, to France and impossible to imagine a powerful German steelmaking capacity remaining on French soil. This thorny problem was particularly closely analysed in France during the last months of the war, when victory was imminent and it became essential to define France's war aims.⁹

Before analysing the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles concerning coal and steel, we should recall that during the war years and until the peace conference some French leaders, Clémentel in particular, dreamed of forming a vast customs union embracing France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Saar and perhaps even the Rhineland separated from the Reich. Such a maximalist solution would result in the creation of a vast economic, industrial and commercial unit capable of overshadowing a weakened Germany. At the same time it would assure the security of France and Belgium vis-à-vis Germany, increasing France and Belgium's industrial strength and extending their geostrategic influence, by realising Foch's obsession of a military frontier on the Rhine.

This dream did not become a reality and was not even pursued by French decision-makers in 1919. Belgium, while determined to throw off German influence, would not hear of a customs union with France and instead favoured a large free trade area including Britain.¹⁰ The fate of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg almost became a bone of contention between Paris and Brussels when the Belgians remained opposed to a customs union between the Grand Duchy and France, even though the Luxembourggeois had voted in favour of it.¹¹ As for the proposal to create an independent Rhineland state, it is well known that Clemenceau abandoned it in face of opposition from the American president,

Woodrow Wilson, and the British prime minister, David Lloyd George. In return, he secured the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, the temporary occupation of German territory on the left bank of the Rhine (without affecting German sovereignty), and the promise of American and British security guarantees.¹² He also secured agreement on the inclusion of various territorial, customs, commercial and reparation clauses in the Treaty of Versailles, all of which would drastically reduce the coal and coke available to German industry and eliminate a considerable part of its steelmaking potential.

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES: COAL AND STEEL¹³

The Treaty of Versailles severed the links which had been established over the pre-war decades between the Ruhr and the German South-West, Lorraine, the Saar and Luxembourg. Lorraine was restored politically and economically to France: article 74 of the treaty authorised the liquidation of all German assets in the restored provinces; article 70 accorded France the right to forbid all German ownership in its mining properties and metallurgical firms. The French state immediately sequestered all mines and steel mills in Lorraine which had belonged to Germans and transferred them into French hands. This constituted a considerable transfer of steelmaking capacity from Germany to France.

For the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, article 40 confirmed its withdrawal from the German *Zollverein* without defining its future customs status.¹⁴ However, Belgian capital, assisted by French capital, very quickly drove German proprietors from Luxembourg, and the de-Germanisation of the Luxembourg steel industry was soon accomplished, not least because Luxembourg's leading steelmaker of the time, Emile Mayrisch, was in favour of French schemes.¹⁵

As for the Saarland—now on the Lorraine frontier but a part of Lorraine when it been absorbed into France in the eighteenth century, and a French *département* in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era—the Treaty of Versailles provisionally detached it from Germany and placed it under the control of the League of Nations, with a referendum scheduled for 1935 to settle its future. Its coal mines, however, became the property of the French state and the country entered into a monetary and customs union with France.¹⁶

In short, the various clauses of the Treaty of Versailles concerning Lorraine, Luxembourg and the Saar had the effect of repositioning the steel industry of the former German South-West. France was the principal beneficiary, and in 1919 it seemed likely that steelmaking in the region would pass completely into the French economic system by means of the customs unions which extended France's economic frontiers well beyond its political frontiers. On the basis of the statistics noted above on the importance this region had acquired for German steelmaking, the shift to France (and to Belgium in the case of Luxembourg) seemed likely to result in France displacing Germany as Europe's leading steelmaking power.¹⁷

In the case of coal, a detailed analysis of the clauses of the treaty shows that had they been strictly applied, Germany would have lost nearly half its coal production to France and its Continental allies, Belgium, Poland and Italy.¹⁸ In fact, territorial concessions were augmented by reparation obligations; coal deliveries were expressly included in the treaty under the heading of reparations. One must bear in mind that German territory had emerged unscathed from the war while the rich regions of the north and east of France had been a battle-ground, that for four years the Germans had exploited Belgium, and that in 1918 the retreating German army deliberately flooded the coal mines of northern France. By way of compensation the treaty obliged Germany to deliver, over a ten-year period, enough coal and coke to France, Luxembourg and Italy to enable them to sustain their economies and steelmaking at full capacity. Total deliveries were expected to reach 45 million tons of coal a year. With France acquiring the mines of the Saar and Poland, after a plebiscite, acquiring the greater part of Upper Silesia, this total would have amounted to nearly half of Germany's 1913 coal production. It is easy to imagine how severely these clauses would have damaged German industrial power, had they been applied.

In fact, the Treaty of Versailles contained a real steelmaking and energy scheme.¹⁹ Henceforth, with its Belgian, Luxembourg, Polish and Italian allies, France would control 80 per cent of the iron ore and nearly half the coal that Germany had consumed before the war. France could therefore hope to see both a drastic reduction in German steel production and a fundamental change in Europe's economic balance of power, which favoured not only French and Belgian but also Polish and Italian industry.

One must finally note that a number of clauses in the treaty concerning international trade placed Germany in a position of inferiority for a transitional period of five years, to allow the victors to adapt to the changes in frontiers and customs barriers following the war.²⁰ In effect, this gave the Allies, and above all France, five years to attempt to implement the treaty's steelmaking and energy scheme. The treaty entered into effect on 10 January 1921, making the date 10 January 1925 the deadline for this ambitious enterprise. We shall return to it.

Does this mean that the treaty had consciously anticipated and even prepared the way for an economic war between the Allies and Germany following the real war? There is no doubt that the Allies sought to reduce Germany's economic power, which had been a source of great fear. On this they agreed, in 1919 at least, and in France's case security was primordial. But were they firmly resolved to weaken Germany to the extent indicated by the figures quoted above? Recent studies of the Treaty of Versailles and its aftermath confirm that the treaty was far more complex than hitherto assumed. The treaty could evolve very differently depending upon the general international situation, the difficulties of its application and future relations between Germany and the Allies. The treaty contained clauses enabling the Allies to pursue a very firm policy towards Germany, even to realise the dream of a separate Rhineland. Article 430 tied the end of military occupation of the Rhineland to the fulfilment of reparations

obligations and held open the possibility of prolonging the occupation and even the occupation of territory already evacuated if Germany did not fulfil its obligations. Article 270 gave the Allies the right to accord the occupied territories a special customs status by imposing a customs barrier between the occupied territories and the rest of Germany.²¹ Finally, France maintained a group of officials in the Rhineland from the beginning of the occupation in December 1918, under the name of *Contrôle Général*, which the treaty institutionalised as the Inter-Allied Rhineland High Commission, with Paul Tirard, a senior French official, its president. The *Arrangement rhénan*, signed at Versailles on 28 June 1919 by Germany and the Allies, at the same time as the treaty, gave the Allies the right in time of crisis unilaterally to transfer the Rhineland Commission into a *de facto* government of the occupied territories, with no German participation.²²

Conversely, on condition that Germany fulfilled its treaty obligations, there was nothing in the treaty to rule out the pursuit of compromise solutions to overcome the difficulties created for German and French steelmakers, notably the 'political' and customs divisions imposed between Ruhr coke and Lorraine and Luxembourg iron ore. Attempts of this kind were to be pursued on several occasions.

The authors of the treaty had sought to place France and Belgium in a position of strength in their future relations with German steelmaking. French steelmakers preferred to seek a compromise solution, but German steelmakers were prepared to risk a trial of strength, and Poincaré took up the challenge in occupying the Ruhr in 1923.

THE YEARS OF HESITATION, 1920–1

It soon became apparent that the energy and steel scheme contained within the Treaty of Versailles was unrealisable, at least in the short term and on the scale indicated by the statistics cited above. There were many reasons for this. From the outset the Germans, having clearly grasped the implications of the treaty and the gravity of the challenge to their industrial power, were determined to see that it was not implemented. Of course they could not stop the transfer of ownership of the mines and steel mills, which was rapidly carried through, but the quantity of coal and coke they delivered to the Allies was far smaller than the levels specified. True, in 1920 Germany produced only 131 million tons of coal against 190 million in 1913,²³ but between January to April 1920 its deliveries amounted to only 5 million tons (3.7 million to France) rather than the nearly 8 million tons called for.²⁴ Beside the territorial losses, the decline in German production was due to the social transformation resulting from the 'revolution' of 1918–19 and to the exhaustion of the workers following the ordeals of war and malnutrition. It would take time for German miners to return to their 1913 levels of productivity.

On the French side, the gloomy predictions of the steelmakers came true: quite apart from the shortage of coal and coke, the domestic market, despite the needs of reconstruction, could not absorb the increased production resulting from the

transfer of ownership, not least because of the terrible demographic losses of the war which drastically reduced the number of consumers and workers. The shortage of consumers and workers was the fundamental reason for France's decline between the wars and the difficulties of applying the steel scheme contained in the Treaty of Versailles. After more than a century of restricted birth rate, France's population in 1913 was still less than 40 million. In the war 1.4 million young men were killed; another 2 million were wounded and would never again function as normal economic agents. The great demographer, Alfred Sauvy, combining the war casualties with the increased mortality rate among civilians and the decline in birth rate, calculated that the war reduced France's population by nearly 3 million while increasing the average age of those who remained.²⁵

In the end the Allied front did not last, another essential reason for the failure of Versailles. However imperfect, the treaty was the work of a coalition, and the coalition lasted barely eighteen months after the armistice. The United States did not ratify the treaty, and Britain, while remaining firm on the application of certain clauses, notably those dealing with territorial change and disarmament, rapidly came round to favour revision of the economic clauses. The celebrated book by J.M.Keynes revealed a new spirit: too drastic a reduction in German economic power would undermine the general prosperity of all the industrialised countries.²⁶ In addition, many in Britain accepted that the establishment of the Weimar Republic, ostensibly transforming Germany into a democracy, had removed the German threat, and that from now on danger would arise further east from Bolshevik Russia. Germany was therefore to be handled gently, even made an ally. Finally, in 1920 a specific issue—coal—threatened to bring France and Britain into confrontation in the application of the treaty. Here Germany's obligations to pay reparations with coal conflicted with British interests. Coal was one of Britain's main exports and a major factor in its balance of trade and in the difficulties of financial reconstruction; German coal deliveries competed with British exports in third markets, and above all in France, traditionally one of Britain's main markets.

The French government in 1920, headed by Alexandre Millerand following Clemenceau's resignation, became rapidly aware of the situation and sought to adapt the application of the Versailles Treaty. His idea was to re-establish economic relations with Germany, associate its industrial power with French reconstruction while at the same time controlling it (this presupposed that Germany would be granted a certain freedom to expand economically), and to pursue this new Franco-German policy with the assent of Britain.²⁷ The steel problem—the necessity of combining iron ore from Lorraine with coke from the Ruhr—was at the heart of the issue.

From April to May 1920 Millerand, assisted by Jacques Seydoux, sought to develop economic and commercial relations with the Germans. He had in mind the development of reparation deliveries in kind, exchanges of iron ore for coke and even French investment in German firms, which would enable the re-

establishment of the pre-war economic links while assuring a certain degree of French control. For ambassador to Berlin he chose Charles Laurent, who was not a professional diplomat but a close associate of French steelmakers, in the hope that Laurent might forge links between French and German industrialists. Some German industrialists showed interest, but this first attempt failed in face of opposition from the large German steel trusts.²⁸ The trusts were fundamentally opposed to the steel scheme of Versailles and reasserted their opposition several times in the next few years. They regarded the treaty as deeply prejudicial to them, and their resentment grew when France designated several of their best-known leaders as war criminals. The importance of this psychological factor should not be under-estimated.

Then came the Spa conference in July 1920, which brought together the Allies and Germans for the first time since Versailles. Alongside the ministers, Hugo Stinnes represented the German steel industry. He displayed an extraordinary arrogance, telling the Allies that they were 'mad with victory'.²⁹ Nevertheless France made concessions and a compromise solution was reached. Germany agreed to deliver two million tons of coal a month to the Allies. This was barely half of what the treaty called for, but substantially more than had been delivered since the treaty came into force. France in turn agreed to pay a premium of five gold marks per ton, supposedly to finance an improvement in the food consumption of German miners, but in fact to raise the price of German coal to the same level as German export coal. They hoped this would settle the problem. Seydoux prepared a settlement of the reparation problem involving an increase in German deliveries in kind and French acquisition of shares in German firms.³⁰ This plan, presented again at the Brussels conference in December 1920, was not adopted in face of opposition from German industrialists. It should be added that the British were cool towards signs of a Franco-German rapprochement.³¹ As early as 1920, German coal deliveries declined sharply again and continued to decline thereafter. Thus the compromise proved a failure.³²

The dissatisfaction of the French parliament led to the fall of the government in January 1921, and Aristide Briand was called upon to form a new government. It should be noted that the future 'pilgrim of peace' had been premier during the war, from October 1915 to March 1917, and that he had played an important part in the elaboration of France's war aims, territorial as well as economic. It was Briand who had brought Clémentel into the government. In the new government of 1921 Briand pursued a policy of strict application of the Treaty of Versailles, in association with Lloyd George whom he persuaded of the necessity of a policy of 'sanctions' in face of Germany's bad faith.³³ A few days after Briand's return to office, Foch submitted a note underlining that the seizure of the Ruhr coal and steel region would paralyse Germany, particularly if they were to introduce a customs barrier between the occupied and unoccupied German territories, which would also provide reparations income.³⁴ Certain senior French officials also revived the dream of an active separatist Rhineland policy.

The negotiations with the Germans on the settlement of the total reparations bill (which had not been fixed in the Treaty of Versailles) failed and, Germany having failed to satisfy its disarmament obligations, the Allies retaliated on 8 March 1921 by occupying the towns of Düsseldorf, Duisberg and Ruhrort, key centres of the Ruhr. On 5 May the Allies issued the 'London ultimatum', demanding that Germany accept the figure of 132 billion gold marks as the reparations total and that it disarm, under threat of occupation of the Ruhr basin. Germany gave way.

French policy now took a new turn. Walther Rathenau, the powerful head of *Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft* and minister in the new German government, negotiated with Louis Loucheur, a French industrialist and minister in the Briand government. Rathenau did not belong to the caste of German steel barons; a large employer in the German electrical manufacturing industry, he did not share their opposition to any agreement with the French. The Rathenau-Loucheur negotiations resulted in agreements on deliveries in kind signed at Wiesbaden in October 1921. These agreements meant that Germany would have been liberated from a large part of its reparations obligations to France through the delivery of coal and finished products for the reconstruction of the devastated regions.³⁵

French hopes of 1920 thus seemed to be revived on an even larger scale, but again the initiative ended in failure. On 20 October 1921 the League of Nations (barely two weeks after the Wiesbaden agreements!) approved the partition of Upper Silesia, granting Poland the larger part of the coal and steel basin. France, in openly supporting Poland,³⁶ pursued hopelessly contradictory policies. How could it secure rapprochement with Germany while at the same time maintaining its friendship with Poland? Rathenau had expected the Wiesbaden agreements would lead France to support the revival of German industry and prosperity. He therefore resigned. Once again, the majority in the French parliament disagreed with the government. After the failure of the Cannes conference, Briand also resigned, on 12 January 1922.

POINCARÉ IN OFFICE, JANUARY 1922 to MAY 1924

Poincaré's name is intimately associated with the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. Once must, however, underline two points. First, in seizing the Ruhr in 1923, Poincaré had in no way acted as an agent of French steel interests. All historians are now agreed that this was a political decision. Second, no one knew when he returned to power in 1922 that he would take this decision. Here also historians are agreed: the process was long and extended throughout 1922.

To begin with, Poincaré sought to implement the Wiesbaden agreements of 1921, which appeared to have been stillborn following the partition of Upper Silesia and Rathenau's resignation. His efforts lasted several months, but ran up against the opposition of French firms, which were eager to monopolise the opportunities arising from the reconstruction of the devastated regions, and also against opposition from Britain. Once again, the British displayed unease at signs

of an exclusive Franco-German rapprochement and raised objections in the Reparations Commission, recalling that reparations were a multilateral rather than a bilateral Franco-German issue.³⁷

Another solution to the steel problem was mooted: that of international cartels to overcome the consequences of the altered postwar frontiers. Loucheur had been thinking along these lines since 1919; so had Seydoux. In London in December 1921 the British proposed the reconstitution of the International Rail Makers' Association (IRMA), which had been founded in 1884 and disappeared at the outbreak of war. In reviving it at the end of 1921, the British sought to contain German competition, which had again become very dynamic while the British economy remained in crisis. The negotiations pursued from the start of 1922 produced no result because the French insisted upon a common line of conduct among the Allies before entering the negotiations with the Germans.³⁸

In March 1922, on the initiative of French steelmakers, a new cartel proposal was put to their German counterparts. At a meeting on 21 March, German steelmakers refused to enter into negotiations with the French, so long as the occupation lasted. Thyssen set as a precondition the evacuation of the Rhineland by the French and the return of the Saar. Stinnes declared, 'It is too soon for a cartel. Let us not negotiate on that. It would be interesting if we could recover our factories in Lorraine, and I think we can.'³⁹

The great German steelmakers in the spring of 1922 thus opted for a trial of strength with French steelmakers, and even with the French state, since they set political conditions (indeed, significant revisions of the Treaty of Versailles) as preconditions for negotiations among industrialists. Between 1919 and 1922 German steelmaking made a remarkable recovery, in spite of or because of the inflation.⁴⁰ To begin with, it had considerably reduced its consumption of iron ore from Lorraine and Luxembourg, replacing it first with scrap iron which was in abundant supply at the end of the war, and subsequently with Swedish iron ore, which was 'politically neutral' and also rich in iron, enabling the Germans to economise on coke.⁴¹ Finally, between 1919 and 1922 Germany started new steel production on its own soil to make up for the losses caused by the territorial changes and tariff barriers contained in the Treaty of Versailles.⁴² Thus in 1922 German steelmaking was on the point of regaining its pre-war strength while safeguarding its independence, whereas French steelmaking was condemned to under-production and unemployment: on 1 January 1923, 47 per cent of French smelters were idle.⁴³ The 'steel scheme' of Versailles appeared to have failed.

In April 1922, the German-Russian Treaty of Rapallo aroused keen disquiet in France, and the repeated German demands for a moratorium on the payment of reparations led many French leaders to think that they must return to a policy of sanctions vis-à-vis Germany. It took several months more for Poincaré to decide to occupy the Ruhr. This is not the place to analyse the long and complicated decision-making process which continued until the close of 1922.⁴⁴ Suffice it to note that the operation was intended not only as a military occupation of the Ruhr basin by means of sanctions, but also as the seizure, according to Poincaré's

formula, of a 'productive pledge': industrial equipment, coal mines and steel mills, for which the *Mission Interalliée de Control des Usines et des Mines* (MICUM) was created.⁴⁵ The French scheme thus aimed at creating the basis of a new solution to the steel problem. Poincaré was not acting under pressure from French steelmakers. He made a political choice in mounting a trial of strength with German big business and the Reich, whose chancellor from November 1922 was the great capitalist Wilhelm Cuno.⁴⁶ Unlike the British, the Belgians, who found themselves in the same position as the French, chose to participate in the French initiative.⁴⁷

It is beyond the scope of this account to offer a history of the battle of the Ruhr.⁴⁸ Suffice it to say that the technical success was followed by the political failure of Poincaré's initiative. It should be recalled nevertheless that in the autumn of 1923, after Germany's abandonment of passive resistance, the German industrialists in the occupied territories signed contracts with MICUM for deliveries in kind which continued to function until the spring of 1924.⁴⁹ Stinnes himself participated. Had the system lasted, it would have marked the end of the German steelmakers' ambitions and the return to the earlier ambitions of French statesmen in 1916–19. But the momentary success was dependent upon the exceptionally favourable political situation of October 1923, and could not survive the reversal of the first months of 1924.⁵⁰ When on 25 April 1924 Poincaré accepted the Dawes plan, which altered reparations policy, he could still take advantage of MICUM and the agreements it had signed with firms in the occupied territories, and could hope therefore for an outcome favourable to French interests.⁵¹ His hopes ended, however, on 11 May 1924 when he lost the legislative election and fell from power.⁵²

NEGOTIATION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL STEEL ENTENTE, 1924–6

The International Steel Entente, the cartel among makers of basic steel in Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Saar, was signed on 30 September 1926 after nearly two years of negotiations. One might think the reason for the agreement was self-explanatory, because the summer of 1924 marked the transition from the era of sanctions to the era of negotiations, and September 1926 fell in the middle of this period of rapprochement between the German Reich and the western powers: eleven months after Locarno, three weeks after Germany's entry into the League of Nations, thirteen days after the celebrated meeting of Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann at Thoiry, near Geneva, and four months before the winding up of the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission in Germany. Of course, this conjuncture of facts and dates did not occur by chance. Nonetheless, the creation of the International Steel Entente was not a simple consequence of the international climate, but the result of long and difficult negotiations taking place in parallel with other negotiations between 1924 and 1926.

First, something should be said about the state of relations, both contractual and psychological, between the German, French and Belgian steelmakers at the end of the battle of the Ruhr in the spring of 1924. It was a struggle which the German steelmakers appeared to have lost and which the French state, if not French steelmakers, ostensibly won. The MICUM contracts were still in operation, and before accepting the Dawes plan, Poincaré had secured their extension. His aim had been to transform them into agreements for long-term deliveries allowing France to overcome the problems already described. Seydoux still hoped that France could acquire partial share ownership of the mines in the Ruhr before military forces were withdrawn, and Stinnes had sent personal emissaries to Paris to negotiate.⁵³

The Poincaré scheme to combine the adoption of the Dawes plan with the establishment of permanent links between French and German industry, in their mutual interest but within a system which would allow France a measure of control over German steelmaking, collapsed during the course of meetings at Chequers between Edouard Herriot, the new French premier, and Ramsay MacDonald, the British prime minister, on 21 to 22 June 1924, then during the London conference of July and August. Pressure from the American banks, who sought to invest in German firms and were therefore eager to see the French withdraw from the Ruhr, was sustained by the British banks and the British government when they made and achieved the demand that France abandon all means of pressure on Germany as a pre-condition of the implementation of the Dawes plan.⁵⁴

Poincaré's scheme was shattered. At least Jacques Seydoux, who had participated in the London conference and who was the senior French official most familiar with the issue, in exchange for concessions accepted by Herriot, obtained Germany's agreement to enter into economic and commercial negotiations in Paris on 1 October 1924. His hope was to secure a Franco-German treaty of commerce before the fateful date, 10 January 1925, when the transitional clauses of the Treaty of Versailles were due to end and Germany would regain complete freedom over its external commercial policy and tariff system. Seydoux especially hoped to establish secure supplies of coal and coke for France as well and to revive sales of Lorraine iron ore to Germany—in short, to establish peaceful coexistence between the French and German steel industries.⁵⁵

The negotiations began in Paris at the intergovernmental level on 1 October. Representatives of various sectors of the economy took part as experts. But the official French representative made the mistake of entrusting French experts, that is to say representatives of private interests, with the task of finding solutions to the steel problem. French and German steelmakers, affected by the battle of the Ruhr, still detested one another. In December the German steel-makers, now led by Fritz Thyssen—Stinnes having died a few weeks earlier—broke off negotiations and left Paris in a show of bad temper. The official German representative meanwhile adopted delaying tactics, with the result that 10 January 1925 passed without agreement between Germans and French.⁵⁶ Seydoux's hopes

went unrealised, and all regulations governing Franco-German economic and commercial relations vanished. Once again, German steelmakers and the German Reich had opted for a trial of strength.⁵⁷ At least, on Thyssen's initiative, German steelmaking experts had taken advantage of their visit to Paris to reach agreement among themselves. They decided on the creation of a German national cartel designed to preserve the domestic market for themselves by means of a system of rebates, and to form a common front against foreign competitors, in particular French and Luxembourg producers.⁵⁸

The Franco-German crisis of January 1925 went well beyond economic issues. The Interallied Military Control Commission in Germany had issued a report in December 1924 confirming that German had not yet disarmed to the extent demanded. By way of sanction, the Allies decided not to evacuate the Cologne zone on 10 January 1925, as scheduled in the treaty, which ensured direct access to the Ruhr and the French occupying troops. It was to address this crisis that British and German diplomats devised the scheme for a Rhineland pact, which was the centrepiece of the Locarno agreements in October 1925.⁵⁹

In the face of this situation the Luxembourg steelmaker, Emile Mayrisch, intervened again, this time in a manner that proved decisive. The result of the recent developments was that his industrial empire, the *Acéries Réunies de Burbach, Eich et Dudelange* (ARBED), had become divided, with parts of it in Luxembourg, now linked by a customs union with Belgium, and other parts in Germany and the Saar, now in a customs union with France. The new trial of strength seriously imperilled ARBED.⁶⁰ Mayrisch therefore took the initiative by entering personally into negotiations with the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft*, the main organisation of German heavy steel, without consulting with the French. He asked the Germans to accept a quota for Luxembourg basic steel, which would allow the re-establishment of the traditional commercial links which had been broken when Luxembourg left the *Zollverein*. A contract providing for 175,000 tons of Luxembourg steel a year was signed, to take effect from 1 July 1925.⁶¹

In rendering this service to Mayrisch, German steelmakers ensured his good offices in the re-establishment of links with French steelmakers. The situation had been reversed within a few months. German steelmakers, who as late as December 1924 had opted again for a trial of strength, now in June 1925 sought negotiations with the French. Why? The stabilisation of the mark at the same exchange rate as the gold-mark of 1914 rendered German steel expensive, whereas the depreciation of the franc, which sharply accelerated in 1925, gave a huge advantage to French steel, enabling it to surmount the new German customs barrier, to penetrate markets in the south of Germany and to over-whelm the national cartel by which Ruhr steelmakers had hoped to maintain their monopoly of the German market. German steelmakers therefore sought negotiations with the French to limit the import of French steel into Germany. Meeting in Luxembourg on 16 June 1925, German, Luxembourg and French steelmakers reached agreement, after ten hours of negotiations, on the annual import into Germany of 1,750,000 tons of basic steel products from Luxembourg, France and

the Saar. However, this did not provide a solution because parallel to the private negotiations in Luxembourg, official negotiations were taking place in Paris on Saar–German trade, which resulted in an agreement on 11 July 1925. The agreement displeased the German steelmakers because its application would permit the sale of Saar steel in Germany outside the framework of the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft* cartel, which the Ruhr barons saw, not without reason, as their means of controlling the whole market. Thus in August 1925 all agreements were set aside and the situation once again became unregulated.

These developments invite several observations. In the face of the power and combativeness of the German steelmakers, the failure of private steel negotiations, and French concern to divert the larger part of Saar production to the German market, Paris' offensive spirit gave way to a defensive one. The ambitions of 1919 were well and truly abandoned.

On 7 November, immediately after Locarno, Léger, Briand's *chef de cabinet*, informed the Germans that France sought industrial ententes with Germany in order to develop co-operation and a 'United States of Europe'.⁶² There is every reason to think that by now Briand had definitively renounced the ambitions of 1919 and had come around to thinking that France's security must be sought through an entente with Germany, if necessary at the price of concessions. German political power at this time was seeking a solution to the economic problems, despite the bad faith of German steelmakers.⁶³

On 29 December 1925 Thyssen drafted a proposal for an international steel cartel, which was simply an extension of the production quotas of the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft* beyond German frontiers. On 30 January 1926 Mayrisch chaired a meeting of Fritz Thyssen and the French industrialists, Charles Laurent and Humbert de Wendel, in Luxembourg. Having agreed on Thyssen's draft as the basis for negotiations, their negotiations made progress. The Germans were ready to accept limited imports of French, Saar and Luxembourg steel on condition that they were handled through the commercial organisation of the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft*. On 16 February the Belgians joined the negotiations, which continued until July among the leaders of the steel industries of the five countries. On 13 August the Luxembourg representatives unilaterally signed an agreement with the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft*. Finally on 30 September 1926 at Brussels, they all signed, and the International Steel Entente was born.⁶⁴ The five participants agreed to quotas on the production of basic steel as follows: Germany, 40.45 per cent; France, 31.89 per cent; Belgium, 12.57 per cent; Luxembourg, 8.55 per cent; the Saar, 6.54 per cent. Over the next few weeks complementary agreements established quotas for French and Luxembourg steel to be allowed into Germany and taken in hand by the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft*, thus excluding all direct contract between non-German producers and German consumers: Luxembourg steel secured 2.75 per cent of the German market; French steel, 3.75 per cent. Up to 1,500,000 tons of Saar steel could henceforth be sold in Germany on condition that Saar steel mills, even those controlled by French capital, entered into German organisations; another 500,000 tons of steel could be sold on the French market.⁶⁵

The steel problem arising from the Treaty of Versailles was finally resolved. The steel scheme contained within the treaty had however failed. The International Steel Entente was to continue functioning until the declaration of war in 1939 with modifications due principally to the economic crisis and the return of the Saarland to Germany in 1935. The cartel agreements were extended to the countries of central Europe as the stage before Germany's *Anschluss* with Austria and the destruction of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁶

The steel entente of 1926 unquestionably contributed to international détente, and the problems of coal and steel played no part in the origins of the war of 1939. Nevertheless the historian must acknowledge that over the long term the German steel industry succeeded in defeating the Versailles scheme and in safeguarding its power, its independence and control over its domestic market at the price of only minor concessions. The Allied dream of 1919 of depriving Germany of a powerful industry capable of evolving into armaments did not come true, as was demonstrated by World War II. Did the failure of the French scheme mark the decline of France? At the least it demonstrated the practical limits of French ambitions. Just as the Versailles Treaty was under-pinned by the Locarno agreements, so the steel scheme implicit within the treaty was underpinned by the International Steel Entente, which could thus be regarded as the 'steel Locarno'. For France compromise was unavoidable. At the time of Locarno, Briand had said, 'I am pursuing the policy dictated by our birthrate.'

NOTES

- 1 J.Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale*, Paris, Pedone, 1977, p. 123ff. The German total includes steel production from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg which, although politically independent, belonged to the German *Zollverein*.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–33. This process was invented and developed by two Englishmen, Thomas and Gilchrist. They sold the rights to their invention for a derisory sum, unaware of the technological and industrial revolution they had set loose.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3.
- 5 This psychosis in face of German economic strength has continued throughout the century. J.Bariéty, 'Les enjeux des relations économiques franco-allemandes au XXème siècle', in A.Wilkens (ed.), *Les Relations économiques franco-allemandes 1945–1960*, Thorbecke, Sigmaringen, 1997, pp. 11–17.
- 6 D.Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982; G.-H.Soutou, *L'Or et le sang, les buts de guerre économiques de la première guerre mondiale*, Paris, Fayard, 1989. On German war aims see F.Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag und Druckerei, 1961. On German industry and the war see G.Feldman, *Army, Industry and Labour in Germany, 1914–1918*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, *Iron and Steel in the German Inflation, 1916–1923*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977 and *The Great Disorder*:

- Politics, Economics and Society in the German Inflation, 1914–1921*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- 7 M.Trachtenberg, 'A new economic order: Etienne Clémentel and French economic diplomacy during the First World War', *French Historical Studies*, 1972, 10, pp. 315–41; Soutou, *L'Or et le sang*, pp. 231–305, 490–500, 766–95. One should also note the important role played by the French diplomat, Jacques Seydoux, who managed the blockade from 1917 and was the Quai d'Orsay official responsible for commercial affairs until 1926. There is as yet no biography of him.
 - 8 Soutou, *L'Or et le sang*, pp. 180–8.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 765–86.
 - 10 E.Bussièrre, *La France, la Belgique et l'organisation économique de l'Europe 1918–1935*, Paris, Comité pour l'Histoire Economique et Financière de la France, 1992. See also S.Marks, *Innocent Abroad: Belgium at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1981; *Les Relations franco-belges de 1870 à 1934*, Metz, Centre de recherches des relations internationales de l'université de Metz, 1975.
 - 11 Notably the study by Gilbert Trausch, 'Les relations franco-belges à propos de la question luxembourgeoise'. See also, R.Poidevin and G.Trausch (eds), *Les Relations franco-luxembourgeoises de Louis XIV à Robert Schuman*, Metz, Centre de recherches des relations internationales de l'université de Metz, 1978.
 - 12 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 23–63.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–63; W.McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 1978. See also J.Bariéty, 'Le Comité d'Etudes du Quai d'Orsay et la frontière rhénane 1917–1919', in C.Baechler and C. Fink (eds), *L'Établissement des frontières en Europe après les deux guerres mondiales*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1996.
 - 14 See the works cited in notes 10 and 11. The customs status of Luxembourg was fixed by the agreement of 25 July 1921 creating a Belgian-Luxembourg economic union. France agreed to leave Luxembourg alone in exchange for a Franco-Belgium military agreement.
 - 15 J.Bariéty, 'Le Rôle d'Emile Mayrisch entre les sidérurgies allemande et française après la première guerre mondiale', *Relations internationales*, 1974, 1, pp. 123–34.
 - 16 M.-R.Mouton, *La Société des Nations et les intérêts de la France 1920–1924*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1995, pp. 51–154.
 - 17 As well as the severance of German steelmaking potential in the West, Germany lost the major part of Upper Silesia in the east to Poland. See *ibid.*, pp. 223–59.
 - 18 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 138–40.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 140–4.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 177–87.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 61–3.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–60.
 - 23 J.-J.Boisvert, *Les relations franco-allemandes en 1920*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1977, p. 164.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 176, table of total German coal deliveries as reparation payments for 1920, showing expectations and deliveries actually made. On the coal and coke question, see also G.-H.Soutou, 'Le coke dans les relations internationales en Europe de 1914 à 1924', *Relations internationales*, 1985, 43, pp. 249–67.

- 25 A.Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, Paris, Economica, 1984, tome I, pp. 6–22, 370–6. Demography as a science was born from the study of the consequences of World War I; Sauvy played a decisive role in its development in France.
- 26 J.M.Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, London, Macmillan, 1919.
- 27 Boisvert, *Les Relations franco-allemandes en 1920*, pp. 175–204; G.-H.Soutou, 'Une autre politique? Les tentatives d'entente économique avec l'Allemagne 1919–1921', *Revue d'Allemagne*, 1, pp. 21–34.
- 28 DDF, vol. I, January–May 1920, (in press); DDF, vol. II, May–September 1920, (in preparation).
- 29 The French archives unfortunately contain little on the Spa conference; doubtless many documents were destroyed in 1940. However, substantial German and above all British documentation is available. The minutes of the conference proceedings are printed in full in DBFP, series 1, vol. VIII.
- 30 E.Weill-Raynal, *Les Reparations allemandes et la France*, Paris, Nouvelles éditions latines, 1947, vol. I, p. 575ff. The German reparations question was complicated by the inter-Allied debt question. See D.Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées et la reconstruction de l'Europe 1917–1929*, Lille, Atelier Reproduction des Theses Université de Lille III, 1978, vol. I, pp. 286–92.
- 31 G.-H.Soutou, 'Die deutschen Reparationen und das Seydoux-Projekt 1920–1921', *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 1975, Heft 3, pp. 237–70.
- 32 Boisvert, *Les Relations franco-allemandes en 1920*, p. 176. Of 1920, Boisvert writes (p. 206), 'the economic negotiations, so well pursued, failed'.
- 33 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 68–9; Bariéty, 'Aristide Briand', in J.-F. Sirinelli, *Dictionnaire historique de la vie politique française au XXème siècle*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995, pp. 107–17.
- 34 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 70–2. At the time of this note, 19 January 1921, the plebiscite called for by the Treaty of Versailles had not yet been held. On 21 February Briand signed a treaty of alliance with the Poles. J.Bariéty, 'Die französisch-polnische "Allianz" und Locarno', in R.Schattkowsky (ed.), *Locarno und Osteuropa, Fragen eines europäischen Sicherheitssystems in den 20er Jahren*, Marburg, Hitzeroth, 1994, pp. 75–91.
- 35 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 73–86. P.Letourneau, *Walther Rathenau 1867–1922*, Strasbourg, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1995.
- 36 M.-R.Mouton, *La Société des Nations et la intérêts de la France 1920–1924*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1995.
- 37 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 91–5.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 165–6; M.Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, various; Bussière, *La France, la Belgique et l'organisation économique de l'Europe*, p. 131–5.
- 39 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 166–7. The Bundesarchives have been examined for the professional organisations of German steelmaking industry.
- 40 See the works of G.Feldman cited in n 6.
- 41 In 1913 German steelmakers used 21,133,000 tons of iron ore from annexed Lorraine, 7,333,000 tons from Luxembourg and 3,810,000 tons from France. In 1922 Germany imported 2,035,000 tones of French iron ore ('old France' plus reannexed Lorraine) and 766,000 tons from Luxembourg. Germany's dependence

- on French and Luxembourg iron ore thus declined from 32,277,000 tons in 1913 to 2,803,000 in 1922. See Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 158–63.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 150–2.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 163–5.
- 44 A final attempt at rapprochement was made by the Luxembourg steelmaker, Mayrisch, in September and October 1922, who tried to bring together the German, Stinnes, and the Frenchman, Schneider; however the attempt failed. *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 108–12.
- 46 Cuno was not a steelmaker but head of the great shipping firm, Hamburg–Amerika. Nonetheless his appointment as chancellor was a reflection of the political influence of German big business. Cuno shared the ambitions of the German steelmakers.
- 47 R.Depoortere, ‘La Belgique et les réparations allemandes après la première guerre mondiale’, thèse de doctorat soutenue at the Université de Bruxelles, to be published in 1997. The Belgian ministers Theunis and Jaspar called on Poincaré in Paris on 23 November 1922, a few days before the meeting of the French Cabinet where, with Foch present, Poincaré announced his decision.
- 48 This has been examined in Bariéty, *Les relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 221–88. In recent years numerous accounts on the Ruhr have appeared, among them the works cited by D.Artaud, E.Bussière, R.Depoortere, G.Feldman, W.McDougall and M. Trachtenberg. See also J.–C.Favez, *Le Reich devant l’occupation franco-belge de la Ruhr*, Genève, Droz, 1969, and P.Krüger, *Die Aussenpolitik der Republik von Weimar*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985.
- 49 Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 276–8.
- 50 S.Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe. The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1976; Bariéty, *Les relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 289–320.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 302–6.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 353–9.
- 53 Schuker, *The End of French Predominance*, pp. 171–231; Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 302–6.
- 54 Schuker, *The End of French Predominance*, pp. 232–382. Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes*, pp. 388–415, 473–722. The MICUM was wound up, as were all the Franco-Belgian organisations in the occupied territories created during the ‘battle of the Ruhr’, on 28 October 1924. See *ibid.*, pp. 736–7.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pp. 640–2.
- 56 *Ibid.*, pp. 742–4.
- 57 K.–H.Pohl, *Weimars Wirtschaft und die Aussenpolitik der Republik 1924–1926, vom Dawes-Plan zum internationalen Eisenpakt*, Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 1979, pp. 29–59.
- 58 This agreement was known by the name ‘AVI-Abkommen’ (AVI= Arbeitsgemeinschaft der eisenverarbeitenden Industrie). See also Pohl, *Weimars Wirtschaft und die Aussenpolitik der Republik*, and B.Weisbrod, *Schwerindustrie in der Weimarer Republik, Interessenpolitik zwischen Stabilisierung und Krise*, Wuppertal, P.Hammer, 1978.
- 59 C.Wurm, *Die französische Sicherheitspolitik in der Phase der Umorientierung 1924–1926*, Frankfurt a. M., Europäische Hochschulschriften, 1979, pp. 198–224. K.Mayer, *Der*

- Weimarer Republik und das Problem der Sicherheit in den deutschfranzösischen Beziehungen 1918–1925*, Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang, 1990, pp. 226–48.
- 60 J. Bariéty, 'Industriels allemands et industriels français à l'époque de la République de Weimar', *Revue d'Allemagne*, 1974, April–June, 1974, pp. 1–16. Bariéty, 'Das Zustandekommen der Internationalen Rohstahlgemeinschaft (1926) als Alternative zum misslungenen "Schwerindustriellen Projekt" des Versailler Vertrages', in H. Mommsen, D. Petzine and B. Weisbrod (eds), *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik*, Düsseldorf, Athenum Droste, 1974, pp. 552–68. Bariéty, 'Le sidérurgiste Emile Mayrisch, promoteur de l'Entente Internationale de l'Acier après la première guerre mondiale', in R. Poidevin et G. Trausch (eds), *Les relations franco-luxembourgeoises*, Metz, Centre de recherches des relations internationales de l'université de Metz, 1978.
- 61 477,000 tonnes from Luxembourg, 530,000 from France, 742,400 from the Saar. This multilateral agreement did not nullify the bilateral agreement between the *Rohstahlgemeinschaft* at ARBED. It should be noted that Belgian steelmakers were included in the first draft agreement. A major reason was the difficulty the Belgians had in reaching agreement among themselves. See Bussière, *La France, la Belgique et l'organisation économique de l'Europe*, pp. 241–6.
- 62 Archives of the Auswärtiges Amt, Akten W II, Frankreich, Handel 13, Band 20, L 423, pp. 796–8.
- 63 *Ibid.*, L 423 pp. 791–8. See also *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, Series A, Band XIV, document no. 223, 7 November 1925.
- 64 German text of the agreement in G. Kiersch, *Internationale Eisen- und Stahl-Kartelle*, Essen, 1954, pp. 138–41.
- 65 Bundesarchiv, dossier R 13 I 266.
- 66 H. Rieben, *Des ententes des maîtres de forge au plan Schuman*, Lausanne, 1954, pp. 223–41.

RAYMOND POINCARÉ AND THE RUHR CRISIS

John F.V.Keiger

After the war French leaders struggled to find a solution to two fundamental problems: how to maintain French security against a resurgence of German power, and how to ensure the payment of reparations to stabilise French finances. Raymond Poincaré was no more successful than his predecessors in achieving these aims. France's domestic politics, the state of its finances, the divisions among its élites and bureaucracy, the position of its allies, the international perception of France and the personality of its leader conspired to deny Poincaré any real freedom of manoeuvre and rendered French foreign policy defensive and incoherent. Nowhere was that incoherence more evident than over events leading to the so-called Ruhr crisis.

Poincaré's appointment as premier on 15 January 1922 was the first occasion in the history of the Republic, though not the last, that a former president of the Republic returned to government. Poincaré's tidy mind would have noticed that it was ten years almost to the day since he had formed his first ministry. Now, as then, he sought to maintain a broad Republican majority, and for that reason his new Cabinet included four Radicals. He was also motivated by the belief that what had made a substantial contribution to France's victory in the war was national unity, without which the centrifugal forces of French society would have undermined the war effort. His new government was little different from the others of the broad *Bloc national* majority elected in 1919, which contrary to received opinion were not right-wing but centrist governments.¹ The general tone of the government was set by its reliance on members of the centre-left *Alliance démocratique*, such as Louis Barthou and André Maginot. Overall there was more continuity than change. Most of the ministers from the preceding Briand government were retained, though with some changes of portfolio. It would soon be clear that there was almost as much continuity in policy as personnel.

Poincaré's Cabinet included few members of the largest parliamentary group, the centrist and right-wing *Entente républicaine et sociale*, but it was the mainstay of support for his policy of firmness towards Germany, even if it dissented from his domestic policy and his desire to keep the Radicals sweet. The Radicals in the Chamber would, however, be split between support and abstention for his policies. But on the question of the occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 they would vote with him, as would the whole Chamber, except for the extreme left

Socialists and Communists. Gradually, as the extreme right began to raise its head in the country, the left began to rediscover its unity and the majority of Radicals slid into opposition. This displacement of his parliamentary support towards the centre-right occurred by default, and was certainly something to which he was ideologically opposed.² But in wishing to carry the support of the Radicals in a Republican majority he was limiting his freedom of manoeuvre. As one specialist has written of French parliamentary constraints at the time, ‘Poincaré was to discover that the possibilities for firmness were as limited as those of appeasement.’³

The state of France’s finances was a further constraint upon its leaders. The financial cost of the war, let alone the cost of reconstruction, weighed heavily on postwar France and its currency. Public debt had increased tenfold from 1913 to 1920, of which approximately one-tenth had been supplied by foreign loans, mostly from the United States and Britain. As a result of the war, French dependence on Britain was probably greater than at any time before and it was growing. Despite the souring of relations as mutual interest in defeating the common enemy subsided after the war, many in France believed that for financial and strategic reasons they could not afford to estrange the United States or Britain, and that after the American Senate’s rejection in 1920 of a military guarantee to France, a formal alliance with Britain was a necessity. No matter how unpalatable this dependence on their erstwhile rival, there was no clear alternative to staying on good terms with Britain along with all the constraints on policy that that implied. Had not Clemenceau confessed to Poincaré at the time of the peace treaties, ‘We will not perhaps have the peace that you and I would like. France will have to make sacrifices, not to Germany but to its allies’?⁴

Poincaré’s ability to steer France’s foreign relations in the direction he wished was further constrained by perceptions of him in the postwar era. It was during this time that vigorous attacks were mounted against ‘Poincaré-la-guerre’, suggesting he was a guilty party in the war’s origins, by France’s international adversaries, notably Germany and Russia, and his political opponents at home, in particular the Communists and left-wing Socialists. The motives for such propaganda were transparent. Article 231 of the Versailles peace treaty laid sole responsibility for the outbreak of the war on Germany; if therefore it could be demonstrated that Germany was not solely to blame, then the whole basis of German reparations could be contested and the general treatment of Germany softened. Poincaré was an obvious target, given his Lorraine origins, the supposed desire for *revanche* in France before 1914 and his robust foreign policy. This lavishly funded propaganda campaign by Germany, but also the Soviet Union bent on discrediting its tsarist predecessors, had a considerable effect on ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and neutral countries, contributing in the postwar era to the image of France, and Poincaré in particular, as Germanophobe, bellicose, militaristic and intent on restoring French hegemony to the European continent. Even for those who did not subscribe to the Poincaré-la-guerre myth, some of the mud stuck. Such an aura of suspicion would have handicapped many a politician, but for someone of Poincaré’s

hesitant and risk-averse personality it could be decisive in making him avoid certain courses of action and prefer conciliation and even weakness in relation to Germany.

Any politician coming to power at this time in France was bound to be constrained. French foreign policy appeared to have acquired a momentum of its own since the peace treaty, which appeared to come more from the French bureaucratic machine than its transitory political masters. Certainly, more than at any other time in the history of the Third Republic foreign affairs actively involved a multitude of interested governmental and non-governmental agencies: parliamentary commissions, the central administration of the foreign ministry, diplomats in the key embassies of London, Washington, Berlin and Rome, the finance and war ministries, the Reparation Commission, administrators of the occupied territories, the ministry of commerce and industry, myriad ad hoc committees, as well as powerful French pressure groups representing French industry and commerce. All of these agencies were competing for a say in foreign policy at one of those rare moments in the history of the Third Republic when public opinion and parliament actually took an interest in foreign affairs because of their direct impact on daily life from taxation to retail prices. There was ample scope for incoherence and contradiction in policy-making and execution.⁵

Poincaré reserved for himself the foreign affairs portfolio, as indeed would a majority of premiers from 1919 to 1939, demonstrating foreign affairs' crucial impact on French politics.⁶ He also hoped that this would allow him to keep control of the Quai d'Orsay whose factions he had encountered in 1912. The jockeying for position of permanent officials in favour of an alliance with Britain and those in favour of conciliation of Germany was resurfacing, and with it old threats of disruption in policy formulation and execution. Poincaré was said to be suspicious of the Quai d'Orsay's Briandist temperament for concessions and compromise. As a precautionary measure he ensured that the Briandist Secretary-General Philippe Berthelot, whose influence over the Quai was legendary, was disqualified from returning to the Quai in the near future. This did not endear him to the diplomats who belonged to the Secretary-General's charmed literary circle, including Alexis Léger (Saint John Perse), Paul Morand and Paul Claudel, who favoured closer Franco-German relations. This was not helpful. In 1912 he had shaped the foreign ministry into a workable tool for his policies.⁷ But given the myriad external influences on foreign policy formulation and execution in 1922, to achieve the same control would have meant reorganising virtually the whole of French bureaucracy. This was not an option even for someone of Poincaré's Herculean capacity for work. Consequently, he was unable to dominate policy as he had once done a decade before.

What then was the thrust of the policy which Poincaré inherited? It was a cluster of confused and contradictory policies variously grasped at by an anxious and insecure power. It was not a policy of vengeance against Germany by which reparations would be used to break its will. Even if that had been the intention, France was prevented from carrying it out by Britain and America, whose

goodwill, guarantees and finances it coveted. These powers held the key to France's foreign policy in the early 1920s. As in the simplest balance of power equation, when relations with the 'Anglo-Saxons' were strained, given the absence of the Russian counterbalance, relations with Berlin improved. This took the form of overtures on economic and industrial collaboration, which Germany had thus far not taken up. Contrary to received opinion, the French authorities understood the problems which Germany faced over the payment of reparations, and economists whom Poincaré had long admired, such as Charles Gide, favoured an 'international solution' whereby the cost of reconstruction would be borne by the international community and not solely Germany. Thus a number of French politicians and newspapers of the centre favoured a 'Financial League of Nations'.⁸ But America's rejection scuppered French efforts.

Though these conciliatory policies were pursued according to circumstance, France had not discarded more coercive action. Theoretically, the treaty gave it the right to take direct military action in the event of Germany's refusal to implement its terms. But as Poincaré had pointed out to Clemenceau during the peace conference, whatever the merits of its case, in the current international climate France could not take action of this sort without undermining its moral position and jeopardising British and American support. The same was true of the policy some advocated of subverting German unity and power by encouraging separatist movements in Germany, and in particular in the Rhineland where French occupying troops were stationed. This Rhenish policy was also fraught with danger; if the hand of France was discovered, its moral authority would be undermined in the eyes of international opinion which at this time of Wilsonianism was very influential.

On coming to power Poincaré appeared to have had a number of options open to him; in reality that was not so. Given his aversion to risks it was not surprising that French foreign policy did not alter radically.⁹

POLICY TOWARDS GERMANY

German press reaction to Poincaré's return to power was so hostile that the French ambassador in Berlin was instructed to intercede with the German government.¹⁰ This was partly the result of Germany's massive propaganda campaign to displace its responsibility for the war and partly the result of Poincaré's outspoken calls for a strict application of the treaty and reparations.

Despite his public image, there were clear signs in private, well before 1922, that Poincaré might adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards Germany. On 16 December 1920, when the French were urging the Germans to accept some sort of programme for economic collaboration through a system of reparations in kind, the French delegate to the Brussels conference, Pierre Cheysson, told his German counterpart that Tardieu, Loucheur and Poincaré 'have now wheeled around and come to the conviction that economic collaboration with Germany is necessary'. The German ambassador in Paris reported that later the same day Poincaré had

approached him at a dinner and had spoken reasonably about reparations. That moderate line was still in evidence on 8 January 1921 when Cheysson reported that Poincaré had told him of his ‘readiness to tell Germany that he would examine with “benevolence” its capacity for payment in order to set the sums that the Allies would ask for’ and had even approved the plan for a provisional five-year settlement for German reparations.¹¹

Thus when Poincaré returned to government at the beginning of 1922 it was with a more open mind than his public persona betrayed. His policy towards Germany from 1922 would be characterised by a mixture of robustness and conciliation. Experience of dealing with Berlin prior to the war had confirmed him in the belief that Germany had respect only for strength and that this had paid off with Franco-German colonial agreements in 1914.¹² The Quai d’Orsay meanwhile possessed considerable evidence to show that Germany was stepping up its international propaganda campaign to undermine both the Versailles settlement and reparations payments and that Poincaré was increasingly targeted as the arch-villain.¹³ This would have confirmed his suspicions that it was attempting to wriggle out of the Versailles settlement. The German campaign’s success was endorsed in a series of French secret service reports which Poincaré scrutinised over the summer. Financed by powerful industrialists and subsidies voted by the *Reichstag*, it was using every available means, from the press to cinemas, theatres and music-halls, to get across its message. It had three aims: to rehabilitate Germany and show that it was not responsible for the war; to bring about a revision of the peace treaties; and to provoke a definitive break in Anglo-French entente.¹⁴

Despite the German propaganda, or perhaps because of it, Poincaré did not abandon the idea of economic collaboration with Germany as an alternative means of obtaining satisfaction for France on reparations. Like his predecessors, he still hoped to solve the reparations question by means of a vast credit operation through which reparation bonds would be sold to foreign investors in order to finance German reparations to the Allies, in particular France. But this needed to be conducted in conjunction with a tight control of German finances by the Allies; otherwise potential investors would not subscribe to bonds issued on behalf of a potentially bankrupt Germany. This remained his policy right up to the occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923. At the same time he pursued a policy of seeking reparations in kind, which he described as a ‘secondary but important’ means of payment. Indeed, agreements on this were reached with Germany on 15 March and between 6 and 9 June 1922. Similarly, he endorsed the scheme devised by his minister of public works, Yves Le Trocquer, for largescale public works programmes to be carried out by Germany in France as a means of paying reparations. In the spring of 1922 he also pursued the schemes developed by his predecessors for Franco-German industrial collaboration.¹⁵

Despite Poincaré’s best efforts the German government and German big business, often blaming each other, repeatedly sought pretexts to avoid any

serious Franco-German agreement, setting as pre-conditions the ending of Allied occupation or French recognition of its share of responsibility in the outbreak of the war.¹⁶ Certainly Poincaré's conciliatory role did not go unnoticed in elements of the German press who were willing to use it mischievously. The *Hamburgischer Korrespondant*, organ of the *Deutsche Volkspartei*, carried an article at the end of March entitled 'A Poincaré crisis', which began by asking 'Is Poincaré worn out?' It explained that there was growing opposition to Poincaré in France because of his conciliatory diplomacy: 'In short, he is not carrying out all the promises contracted during his activity as a writer, and above all he is not bringing to the execution of his programme the desired haste.' This was not untrue; Poincaré had created hostages to fortune by his intemperate public language before his return to power. Sarcasm aside, the article's final remark was evidence of the contradiction between Poincaré's public image and his true policies: 'Poincaré charged with softness towards Germany by French chauvinists. One can't believe one's ears.'¹⁷ Though Poincaré received a copy, he needed no reminding that progress on a Franco-German agreement was painfully slow.

By late summer of 1922 it had become obvious to French officials and Poincaré that Germany was unwilling to respond to this conciliatory approach. Indeed, Germany was being encouraged to take a hard line against France in calling for a moratorium on payments by the influential British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes was the guest of honour at the Hamburg Overseas Week in August 1922, an exercise in civic pomp attended by President Ebert, parliamentarians, diplomats and businessmen, but which doubled as an unofficial conference on German foreign policy. Keynes was introduced by the influential anti-French businessman, soon to become chancellor, Wilhelm Cuno, as 'the man most responsible for the changed attitude of the English-speaking world towards Germany' and was cheered rapturously. His speech of 26 August came five days after Poincaré's Bar-le-Duc speech calling for 'productive pledges' on reparations. Keynes jibed at the French and Poincaré in particular, claiming that they were 'bluffing' about reoccupying the Ruhr, and he advised the Germans to 'keep cool' and not be alarmed. In conclusion he endorsed proposals for a moratorium, a loan and reduced reparations. This was telling the Germans what they wanted to hear: Poincaré's 'bluff should be called. Not long afterwards Cuno became chancellor, putting Germany and France on a collision course.'¹⁸ In France too the belief was hardening that a more forceful policy was all that Germany would understand.

Poincaré's policy towards Germany had always involved both carrot and stick. His ideas for a Franco-German entente on reparations went hand in hand with a desire to ensure Allied control of German finances through the Reparation Commission. But on 7 April 1922 the German government formally rejected the Reparations Commission's plan. Poincaré was adamant that the Commission should 'officially recognise German shortcomings and notify the Governments which will have the respective right to take the necessary sanctions'.¹⁹ Plans for the occupation of the Ruhr were now prepared in detail.²⁰ Unfortunately for

Poincaré, adopting a tougher policy towards Germany could not be reconciled with the second goal of French foreign policy, that of close relations with Britain.

RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN

The ending of the wartime Franco-British alliance was a major loss for France, for which there was no compensation in its new eastern European alliances. The fundamental problem was that Germany's defeat and Russia's collapse made France and Britain rivals again for international influence. Age-old suspicions resurfaced: the French again suspected the British of wishing to divide and rule on the Continent to clear a path for global imperial ambitions; the British suspected the French of seeking to restore their dominance of the Continent and continued to fear their military might. Unfortunately for France, it felt more in need of Britain than vice versa. But despite the fact that Poincaré's German policy was influenced by the fear of breaking with London, Anglo-French relations continued to diverge and deteriorate over how best to deal with Germany. In an angry speech at Bar-le-Duc on 24 April Poincaré attempted to put pressure on Britain by making it clear in public that if it did not support France against Germany within the Reparation Commission France would act on its own, even in defiance of Britain.

It was at this time that French consulates in Germany began to receive unofficial hints of German desires for a reconciliation with France. But these were often contradicted by secret service reports giving evidence of the worldwide German propaganda campaign financed, amongst other sources, by substantial credits voted by the Reichstag in April 1922.²¹ This and the fact that the French were also reading German diplomatic traffic²² probably confirmed Poincaré in his belief in German bad faith. But cautious as ever, his tactic was to wait for an opportunity to act, such as an official German default on reparation payments. Fear of responsibility and his lawyer's instinct for presenting a water-tight case explain his prudence. But even though France did have a solid case for measures against Germany, in the meantime it was losing the propaganda war.

It was partly the power of this propaganda campaign and partly the desire not to break with Britain which over the summer of 1922 led Poincaré to soften his position towards London's proposals for greater flexibility over German reparations, even though he made clear to the French representative on the Reparation Commission that he was not happy with this line. But he was beginning to distrust Britain as much as Germany. He told the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on 7 June that he viewed an occupation of the Ruhr as a last resort which in the meantime represented a useful weapon for forcing Britain and America into making financial concessions.²³ Anyway, it would not be possible to put plans for occupation of the Ruhr into operation without a majority decision of the Reparation Commission declaring a German default.

In mid-July 1922, the prospect of the Reparation Commission granting a moratorium to Germany for two years without future 'guarantees' of payment,

such as customs receipts, frustrated Poincaré still further. By the end of the month he was again threatening independent action, and warned Britain of this on 28 July. He brought things to a head at the Allied conference in London in early August, forcefully pleading the French point of view: 'For three years, the treaty has been applied less and less.' At the same time his patience was being stretched more and more. He denounced the 'calumny' of those who criticised France for being imperialistic and militaristic, and for wishing to dismember or crush Germany. He insisted that France wished to collaborate in European reconstruction, but that without reparations its own financial collapse would make this impossible. He made it clear that if Germany could truthfully show that it could not pay, no one would ask for sanctions. But if the Allies judged that this was a sham, that Germany was engineering its own ruin to avoid payment 'and that we were obliged to intervene, we would not have the judgement of world opinion to fear.' He ended presciently:

We are in the presence of a Germany where the spirit of revenge is awaking every day, where reactionary militarism is still possible and where disarmament is insufficiently carried out. If we disarm further, these bad seeds will germinate once more.²⁴

Britain refused to accept French proposals and the London conference collapsed. Thereafter Germany's attitude to reparations stiffened again. On 16 August Berlin announced that domestic food supply would have priority over reparation payments and by the end of the month, egged on by Keynes, refused to countenance the idea that German state mines and forests should be used as pledges for coal and timber deliveries. Consequently, France continued to oppose a two-year moratorium on reparations throughout the autumn, while Poincaré stressed that France was willing to act alone over the reparations issue. On 23 November he personally warned Belgian leaders in Paris that France would occupy the Ruhr if the Allies refused to respect the French point of view. He had all but decided that this was the only course of action open to him.²⁵

At home opposition was growing to Poincaré's moderate policy from the right of the *Bloc national*, who felt that France was getting nowhere, and from the left who were beginning to prefer something less 'nationalistic'.²⁶ Relations with Britain were now severely strained. For Poincaré, London had added insult to injury by issuing the Balfour Note of 1 August, which called on France to honour its war debts to Britain if the United States did not remit British debts. But France's financial position made this impossible unless Germany paid reparations. Reparations and debt issues were 'inextricably entangled', as Lloyd George's successor as prime minister, Bonar Law, recognised.²⁷ For his part, Lloyd George had insisted in Cabinet on 10 August, as the conference ended, that Britain should not give into 'the tender mercies of M.Poincaré and the French militarists', for that would mean that Britain 'had yielded up the control of Europe not to France, but to M.Poincaré and his chauvinistic friends'.²⁸ Franco-British

differences were at their most personal, with Paul Cambon describing the London conference as having degenerated into 'a question of pride between two men who detest each other'.²⁹

Nor were Franco-British differences restricted to Europe. Over the Chanak crisis in the Middle East in September 1922, Poincaré was said to have reduced the British foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, to tears and a state of nervous collapse. Curzon's differences with Poincaré came close to paranoia a year later when, after reading French diplomatic telegrams intercepted by the British security services, he gained the impression that Poincaré was plotting to have him replaced.³⁰ This was ironic coming from the British. It would seem that they had themselves been happy to seek Poincaré's downfall by goading him into occupying the Ruhr. As Sir John Bradbury, Britain's chief delegate to the Reparations Commission, told Colonel James Logan, the American observer on the commission, it was his government's desire

to let M.Poincaré try out his policy in the face of their sulky disapproval in the hope that, when M. Poincaré had gone a little way on his independent policy, the French people, feeling consequently the weakening of the franc, increased taxation, etc., would rise in their wrath and oust M.Poincaré before too much harm was done.³¹

In a book published in 1930, one of Poincaré's unofficial ambassadors to Britain, Jacques Bardoux, reported that the British intelligence service had spent large amounts of money to oust Poincaré from power.³² The veracity of such claims about the intelligence service remains to be proven; but not Poincaré's frustration with regard to Britain and Germany.

THE OCCUPATION OF THE RUHR

The detailed plan of occupation of the Ruhr had been drawn up well before Poincaré's return to power. Dated 22 April 1921, it was ready for execution by the Allies as a legitimate sanction in the event of a German default on reparations. On the day that Germany requested a moratorium, 12 July 1922, Poincaré called for the establishment of an interministerial committee to study the whole question of an occupation of the Ruhr.³³ Operational questions were subsequently examined by civil servants and military planners.³⁴ Yet Poincaré did not directly participate in the development of the Ruhr doctrine which finally emerged at the end of 1922. The proposals he finally put to the London conference of Allies in December 1922 were far more moderate than those of the Ruhr working party he had set up. In particular, he was anxious to avoid the thorny question of a Rhenish policy designed to bring about the autonomy of the Rhineland, even though many of his senior advisers favoured this outcome.³⁵ This was probably due to his characteristic caution, but more importantly due to a reluctance to break with Britain.

The prospect, at last, of improved relations with London loomed after the fall of the Lloyd George government on 19 October and its replacement by that of the avowedly more francophile leader of the Conservative party, Andrew Bonar Law. In early November, even before the general election which confirmed the Conservatives in power, francophiles in British governing circles became very active in pushing the new Cabinet closer to France over reparations. But the stumbling block continued to be, in the words of Sir William Tyrrell, assistant under-secretary at the Foreign Office, the 'selfish and treacherous' Curzon, who had been retained as foreign secretary.³⁶

With British opinion hostile to an occupation of the Ruhr and French opinion in favour, a break seemed inevitable. Nevertheless, Poincaré, true to form, continued to hesitate about taking the final step. He was willing to be more flexible if Britain and America came to France's financial aid. Though on 27 November the French Cabinet approved plans for an occupation of the Ruhr, two days later Poincaré told the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee that no decision to act had been taken and that the threat of occupation was still only a bargaining counter for the forthcoming inter-Allied London conference. Through much of December he gave a demonstration of the kind of hesitation which some reckoned to be his greatest weakness. French proposals for German pledges as security on a moratorium were further moderated to accommodate Britain.³⁷

President Millerand telegraphed to Poincaré on December 11 to break off talks with Bonar Law on the moratorium and continued to pressure him to do so thereafter. Poincaré refused. On 22 December, ironically for someone with his strong presidential track record, Poincaré wrote to Millerand to complain of this executive use of the presidency and to offer his resignation if it did not stop.³⁸ By Christmas Eve Poincaré had actually come round to accepting that security on the moratorium should no longer be the military occupation of the Ruhr, merely the control of its trade. Still Britain refused and came up with counter-proposals at the Paris conference on 2 January 1923, angering Poincaré. That anger seemed increasingly justified given the obstacles Britain unremittingly put in France's path. Ever since the European economic conference at Genoa the British had virtually ceased to work with the French. Lloyd George had even told the Cabinet on 15 July 1922:

it might be best the situation reach rock bottom before building up.... The French...would not come round until the ship was in sight of the reefs...it would be a mistake to make any proposals to M. Poincaré just at present. It was necessary to leave France to realise all the facts of the situation. Then something might be done.³⁹

And that was largely what Britain did for the rest of 1922; it continued to do so in spite of Lloyd George's replacement by Bonar Law, because men such as Curzon remained in power. Such brinkmanship was foolhardy for several reasons. First, if the French were intercepting and reading British diplomatic traffic or being

informed by the likes of H.A.Gwynne and Sir William Tyrrell, they would have been aware of the ploy. Second, it took no account of the intense frustration among the French public and in parliament at Germany's refusal to honour reparation payments and the opposition of Britain and the United States to any financial concessions to France in exchange for a lighter German reparations burden. All this was bearing down on Poincaré. The strength of feeling was apparent when the occupation of the Ruhr was approved in the French Chamber by a massive 452 votes to 72, the dissidents comprising only the extreme left Socialists and Communists. Third, it pricked Poincaré's strong sense of pride and spurred him into action. He was left with little alternative but to demonstrate France's resolve and show that it could not be treated in such cavalier fashion by its adversaries or its allies.

Even then, Poincaré had to be pushed into the Ruhr, apparently by President Millerand and the war minister, Maginot. The military urged that the occupation had to be carried out before the planned reduction in military service to eighteen months made the expedition impossible, while certain sectors of the French steel industry saw it as access to Ruhr coke.⁴⁰ Poincaré commented to a friend, 'If I don't carry out the operation myself, someone else will be asked to do it. And he won't do it so well.'⁴¹ The diplomat André François-Poncet claims that just after the occupation began Poincaré, worried about German resistance and adverse comment in the foreign press, told him

he had not been a supporter of the operation, the responsibility for which, however, he would have to carry in the face of History; he had advised against it, so, indeed, had Marshal Foch; but the President of the Republic, Alexandre Millerand, and all his ministers, notably André Maginot, his colleague from the Meuse, had pushed him with such insistence that he believed he did not have the right to go against their feelings.⁴²

In the end, both Germany and Britain bore responsibility for finally goading Poincaré into occupying the Ruhr. The German proposal of 22 December was so manifestly a calculated decision to force a confrontation that the German reparations adviser in Paris, Bergmann, did not even present it to the French foreign ministry. The British attempt to accommodate it led to a document so complicated that Bergmann said he would rather pay reparations than try to understand it. If anyone was going to understand it, it was Poincaré. At the Allied discussions in Paris, on 3 and 4 January he ridiculed the new British proposal as nothing more than hollow promises to France reminiscent of signs outside French barber shops: 'Free shaves tomorrow.'⁴³ Since 26 December he had the support of the Reparation Commission, which had outvoted Britain three to one in declaring Germany in default on timber deliveries. On 9 January it declared Germany in default on coal. On the morning of 11 January 1923, French and Belgian troops with a symbolic Italian detachment entered the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr valley, to escort the engineers and

technicians of the specifically created *Mission Interalliée de Contrôle des Usines et des Mines* (MICUM), whose intention was to determine the true ability of German firms to deliver reparations. Now that Poincaré had come to his decision, albeit reluctantly, he would not easily be shifted from it.

What is important about the occupation of the Ruhr is that it was not a long-term goal of the French government pursued with single-minded devotion, as polemicists and historians used to claim. Nor was Poincaré the tool of French militarists obsessed with the need for a Rhine frontier, or the instrument of French coal and steel bosses intent on controlling German heavy industry.⁴⁴ As for his own role, he had eschewed the more extreme plans of his officials for serious economic exploitation of the area, but had nothing to replace them except that of obtaining the coal which France was being denied. Neither did he present the occupation as the great showdown with Germany. The whole operation was almost apologetic, characterised by prudence and moderation, with the French officially announcing to the Germans that it had no military or political character. Poincaré repeated this to the Chamber on 11 January 1923, adding that France had been forced into it by the absence of any acceptable alternative, and stressed that he still wished to negotiate with Germany and to help restore its financial stability.

On 19 January the Cuno government ordered miners and railway workers to withhold their co-operation, hoping to make the occupation as costly as possible for France, undermining its finances and the franc on the foreign exchanges, and in the expectation that British and American diplomatic pressure would be brought to bear on Poincaré.⁴⁵ This 'passive resistance' led France and Belgium to send in more troops and to extend their area of occupation as far east as Dortmund; Germany retaliated by suspending all reparations payments. The number of occupying troops rose to 100,000. The French and Belgians were obliged to exploit the mines and operate the railways themselves. Nevertheless the French continued to exercise restraint which was criticised in France as a lack of forcefulness.⁴⁶ This timidity could be explained largely by Poincaré having been cornered into the occupation of the Ruhr. To a large extent his threat of occupation had been a bluff, which had been called. He had then hoped the occupation would produce rapid results. When that did not happen his pride led him to hold out for a political victory.

For at least the first half of 1923 Poincaré's policy in the Ruhr seemed directionless. He hesitated over, and eventually rejected, a policy of more extensive exploitation of the Ruhr economy. His only clear aim seemed to be to obtain coal. Yet this was not easy given German resistance and his own reluctance to use more coercion. Only after agreements were negotiated with German mine owners at the end of November 1923 did coal deliveries to France reach even five-eighths the amount Germany was providing before the occupation.⁴⁷ It is easier to state what Poincaré's Ruhr policy tried to avoid. He feared antagonising moderate opinion at home and abroad by too forceful a policy; he did not wish to jeopardise relations with Britain more than was necessary; he wanted to keep the

support of the moderate left at home who were willing to support his Ruhr policy so long as it remained moderate.⁴⁸ But neither did he wish to alienate the Germans. He still believed that the long-term stability of European finances rested on some form of Franco-German economic and financial entente. This is evident from his correspondence with the French ambassador in Berlin.

British reactions to the French occupation of the Ruhr were less hostile than expected. The *Morning Post* of 12 January 1923 carried a leading article entitled 'Good Luck to France', and the paper's editor, Gwynne, told Saint Aulaire that Prime Minister Bonar Law had congratulated him on this. By early March 1923, Gwynne and the francophiles were putting together another plan to get the Cabinet to adopt a more pro-French foreign policy about which Saint Aulaire, and hence Poincaré, were kept informed.⁴⁹ There is little doubt that this influenced Poincaré's diplomatic action, making him more optimistic about improved relations with London. But over the rest of 1923 relations with Britain fluctuated between amity and hostility, according to whether the British prime minister or Curzon were dealing with France, and occasionally descended into conspiracy and farce.⁵⁰

Not knowing where he stood in relations with Britain meant that Poincaré kept other options open. Germany was one. This avenue was all the more tantalising for the effect it could have on London, who had always, and would always, fear the prospect of an entente between Paris and Berlin. During the summer of 1923 Franco-German relations began to thaw and the question of collaboration reappeared.

On 3 August the French ambassador in Berlin, de Margerie, Poincaré's loyal pre-war political director of the Quai, reported favourable German press reactions to a speech by the German Chancellor Cuno approving a policy of Franco-German economic co-operation. Nine days later Margerie emphasised that German opinion was ripe for some agreement with France. He suggested that Poincaré should make some direct appeal to the German people:

Undoubtedly, your Excellency has never stopped, again recently, proclaiming in documents presented to the British Government, that France wants in no way to destroy Germany but asks only for the treaty to be executed and fair reparations; and that it is only out of necessity that it was obliged with Belgium to secure some pledge.

He stated that France could truthfully proclaim that it did not want Germany's ruin and indeed considered the latter's financial recovery to be important for the world economy and fundamental to the payment of reparations.⁵¹ And Margerie gave further examples of German interest in an entente with France and Franco-German industrial collaboration. But on 12 August 1923 Cuno resigned. His government was replaced by a broad coalition led by Gustav Stresemann, who also took on the foreign affairs portfolio. By 24 August Margerie was insisting on

how well disposed to France and to a settlement with it the new German chancellor was. He remarked that the statements which

you authorised me to repeat strongly here at an opportune moment and which I tried to disseminate by means at my disposal in the new Government's circles, have led M.Stresemann to record with satisfaction the declarations by which Your Excellency repudiated once more the supposed annexationist, separatist or destructive tendencies of France towards Germany.⁵²

On 27 August he reported an audience with Chancellor Stresemann in which the latter, referring to articles in the French press, had asked whether France wished to destroy Germany, ruin it financially and economically, and split off the Rhineland and Bavaria simply in order to dominate it. Margerie had replied that the French government, not the press, was what mattered and that he should look for the former's views 'in the numerous speeches in which the responsible Head of French policy had clearly, these last days again, exposed his feelings towards Germany'.⁵³

On 4 September in great secrecy Margerie reported to Poincaré his conversation the previous day with Stresemann in which the chancellor admitted that the present situation had lasted long enough and that it was time to reach a settlement with France. He confessed to the French ambassador that what he was about to say was for the personal attention of Poincaré and was not known by anyone in the Cabinet other than the foreign minister. He wished to know if France was interested in a 'Franco-German economic entente through the establishment of closer relations between certain industrialists of both countries'. He added that if 'M Poincaré in a personal capacity' would indicate that negotiations could begin on this basis, this would facilitate his efforts to get passive resistance lifted.⁵⁴

It seemed that the German government had moved in favour of economic collaboration with France. This was partly a result of German disappointment at not winning British support for their struggle against French occupation.⁵⁵ It was also due to pressure from German industrialists who by September 1923 were experiencing difficulties with exports, the collapse of economic activity and the curtailment of credit resulting from the Ruhr occupation.⁵⁶ Poincaré doggedly refused to take up Berlin's offer until the decrees on passive resistance issued by the preceding government had been withdrawn and reparation deliveries had been resumed. Nevertheless he did sound out Stresemann unofficially, through Margerie, on the issue of Franco-German industrial collaboration. The German chancellor replied that such collaboration could not be a means to a Franco-German settlement, but that he agreed with Poincaré in believing that 'it should be the crowning achievement'.⁵⁷ In the strictest confidence, Stresemann stated that France and Germany could begin negotiations to settle reparations and that he would send an ambassador to Paris.⁵⁸ On 26 September the German

government, undermined by a plummeting mark and various revolutionary, reactionary and separatist movements which threatened the survival of the Reich, officially announced the end of passive resistance and the resumption of reparation deliveries, even if, like the armistice of 1918, this was still presented as a tactical retreat.⁵⁹

Though the occupation had lasted much longer than anyone had expected and cost a good deal more, Poincaré had achieved a political victory. He had stuck to the Brussels agreement with Belgium of 6 June whereby negotiations could only begin with Germany once passive resistance had ended, calculating correctly that France could hold out longer than Germany. The technique of firmness in dealing with Germany since 1912, helped by the collapse of concerted employer and trade union resistance, had paid off.

There is still some confusion among historians as to what Poincaré's aim was once he had forced Germany's abandonment of passive resistance. It has been suggested that he sought to use financial and political disorder to weaken Germany still further and obtain an independent Rhenish buffer state. Certainly by the autumn of 1923 both left- and right-wing revolts, including Hitler's attempted putsch in Munich, were breaking out across Germany, leaving France in control of the Rhine and Ruhr. But whatever the zeal among certain of his officials for such a negative policy, Poincaré did not share their enthusiasm. Jules Laroche, deputy director of the Quai d'Orsay during the Ruhr occupation, recorded in his memoirs that Poincaré was opposed to the encouragement of Rhenish separatism.⁶⁰

Most modern historians agree that French policy over the question of an autonomous Rhenish state was characterised by confusion and lack of purpose. Even if Poincaré had favoured a separatist outcome he would certainly not have been willing to impose it by force or commit French resources to the creation of the political and economic institutions vital to an independent political entity.⁶¹ For someone of his native caution such action was fraught with problems. French finances had already suffered badly from the heavy costs of the Ruhr occupation and could not stand further expenditure, along with increasing taxes, less than six months before a general election. A combination of financial constraints, the unlikely prospect of a virtually bankrupt Germany being able to make any serious payment to France, the need for France to seek British and American financial assistance, the disaffection of Radical party support from his parliamentary majority and the forthcoming French general elections, all pushed Poincaré on 13 November, in a conciliatory gesture, to accept the 'Anglo-Saxon' recommendation to refer the reparations question again to two committees of experts appointed by the Reparation Commission, the first, known as the Dawes Committee, to inquire into Germany's capacity to pay, the second to inquire into methods of stabilising its finances.⁶² They would meet in Paris in January 1924.

After passive resistance had ended, Poincaré concluded the MICUM agreements with Ruhr industrialists in November 1923, thereby ending the industrialists' opposition to reparation payments and obtaining a guarantee for

their delivery. However, recent historical interpretations diverge on whether these agreements were actually beneficial to France: some suggest that they provided guaranteed reparations and turned the economy of the Ruhr towards those of France and Belgium; others claim that they made reparations dependent on the goodwill of Ruhr industrialists, and on German financial stability and economic recovery.⁶³

At the same time, spurred on by the declaration on 21 October of a Rhenish republic, Poincaré toyed again with the idea of a strategy for Rhineland independence negotiated with local leaders and sanctioned internationally. But his legalism made him loathe to negotiate with unconstitutional separatists, let alone identify French policy with them. By the beginning of December 1923 he had even become disenchanted with constitutional Rhenish patriots like Konrad Adenauer, mayor of Cologne. In the end all this came to nothing. His native caution, fear of over-stepping the bounds of legality, distaste for illicit schemes and vacillating temperament, exacerbated by opposition from Britain, led him to discard the separatist strategy. As Charles Maier has written, 'With a keen sense of international constraints, aware that British neutrality had facilitated his victory in the Ruhr, and cautious by temperament, the French premier was not prepared to speculate on windfall gains.'⁶⁴ For some he let slip an opportunity to capitalise on the Ruhr victory by failing to support either the Rhenish separatists or a general settlement with Germany and the industrialists. Millerand allegedly sought a new treaty bilaterally negotiated with Germany which would have drawn together the coal of the Ruhr, the iron ore of Lorraine and French security on the Rhine. But Poincaré told Charles Reibel, the minister of liberated regions, 'Discussions with Germany would upset England. If they wanted to force me into that policy, I would hand in the resignation of the Cabinet.' Marshal Foch was said to have supported Millerand telling Reibel,

This is a decisive day. It depends on M.Poincaré whether war becomes impossible between France and Germany. Mark my words. The whole of France's victory is in M.Poincaré's hands. If we do not talk with Germany immediately it is an irretrievably lost opportunity.

When Poincaré refused, Millerand thought of getting Poincaré to relinquish the foreign affairs portfolio in favour of the minister of justice, Maurice Colrat. But nothing came of it.⁶⁵ Millerand would harbour much resentment against his old friend for not having grasped this opportunity.⁶⁶

Feeling that France was as yet still in a powerful position after its victory over Germany, Poincaré preferred to make way for the great settlement which would encompass reparations, inter-Allied debt and Anglo-American loans to Europe. He was sceptical of separatist schemes and special Franco-German economic agreements which would offend Britain. Neither was he willing to court parliamentary isolation which would put him at the mercy of the right of the *Bloc national*. Though the support of the Radicals in the Chamber had slipped from

him for purely domestic political reasons, he fared better in the Senate where, like him, they still looked to a centre-left moderate coalition. He was no longer in tune with the majority of the *Bloc national*, which he was said to dislike because it was insufficiently left-leaning.⁶⁷ This also explains why he was willing to demur to 'Anglo-Saxon' pressure for France to accept the setting up of another committee of experts, against the will of the French right and of powerful individuals such as André Tardieu and Georges Mandel, but with the support of the Radicals. He had attracted applause from the left and the Radicals on 23 November 1923 when he had told the Chamber that collective action was preferable to unilateral measures. He wanted to steer a middle path between extremes in international and domestic politics, and was now of the opinion that the more unilateral his actions had been, the more he had become a hostage to a narrower and more zealous majority. By keeping to the legal framework of the treaty, accepting American reparations mediation while still in a position of strength, he hoped to re-occupy the centre ground, something which came naturally for a moderate Republican lawyer.⁶⁸ Though the *Bloc national* majority had felt bound to support Poincaré, for fear of the alternative, by the beginning of 1924 that support was wearing thin. Thus Poincaré's action in foreign and domestic politics at the end of 1923 and the beginning of 1924 contradicts the traditional picture of him as narrowly nationalistic and enthusiastically fulfilling the interests of the right. In foreign and domestic policy he has been depicted in retrospect through the eyes of his political enemies.

The Dawes Committee in its April 1924 report proposed a five-year reparations settlement funded by an international loan to Germany and a reduction in its debt. At the same time Poincaré's correspondence from January 1924 with the new British Labour party prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, gave hope for a renewal of Franco-British cooperation. But with elections in May it was too late for Poincaré to draw from the Dawes plan the political and financial advantages which may have made the Ruhr occupation appear a success. Foreign affairs had dominated Poincaré's eighteen month long government. No more than his predecessors had he been able to reconcile France's mutually exclusive goals of Allied support for its security and the payment of reparations to stabilise its finances. Britain, in particular, was loath to side with France if it continued to stick to a strict application of the Versailles Treaty, particularly on the question of German reparations. Many British politicians and civil servants continued to fear that too great a cowing of Germany could lead to the equally dangerous prospect of French hegemony on the European continent. As relations with Britain cooled, Poincaré came round to the idea of economic collaboration with Germany as an alternative. But German reluctance scuppered this and in the end Poincaré backed into the Ruhr. Such shifts in direction justify in part the claim of incoherence which some historians have highlighted in Poincaré's foreign policy.⁶⁹ Consequently, although he won a political victory in the Ruhr over Germany he attained none of the fundamental objectives on security and finance. Domestic political considerations and a desire to maintain Anglo-American

support conditioned his ineffective use of the Ruhr victory. Financial difficulties and the weakness of the franc also belatedly affected his decision-making. He was brought to the conclusion that an international reparations settlement was the only feasible means of producing fiscal solvency and monetary stability, and that demanded agreement with the 'Anglo-Saxons' and an accommodation with the Germans.

This international solution to reparations, to which Poincaré was converted by October 1923, meant letting go of the only hold France had on postwar Germany—the Versailles Treaty. But it did hold out the possibility of retaining links with the Radicals and the prospect of Republican concentration and national unity after the forthcoming elections. In accepting an international reparations settlement Poincaré was choosing a moderate alternative to the nationalist right's policy of coercing Germany and the socialist left's unilateral abandonment of the Ruhr. As Jacques Seydoux, one of Poincaré's most farsighted advisers, put it on 27 December 1923, France was moving towards a 'financial reconstruction' of Europe by which it was no longer possible to deal with Germany as 'victor to vanquished'.⁷⁰ This is the view of modern historiography which has, in the words of one authority, rescued Poincaré from 'the aggressive and vengeful role which at times has been assigned to him in German, British, and American historiography'.⁷¹ Ironically the man most committed to upholding the Versailles system at the outset was instrumental in its demise. It was Poincaré who embarked France on the road to Locarno and reconciliation with Germany.⁷²

NOTES

- 1 J.-J.Becker and S.Berstein, *Victoire et frustration 1914–1929*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, p. 198.
- 2 J.-M.Mayeur, *La Vie politique sous la Troisième République 1870–1940*, Paris, Seuil, 1984, pp. 259–69.
- 3 C.S.Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilisation in France and Italy after World War I*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 281.
- 4 A.Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's bid for power in Europe 1914–1940*, London, Arnold 1995, p. 76.
- 5 J.Jacobson, 'Strategies of French foreign policy after World War I', *Journal of Modern History*, 1983, 55, 1, pp. 86–7.
- 6 J.Hayward, *Governing France: The One and Indivisible Republic*, third edn, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p. 243.
- 7 See J.F.V.Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War*, London, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 48–54.
- 8 M.Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916–1923*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 44–5 and on the main thrust of French foreign policy during these years *ibid.*, pp. vii–xi and various.
- 9 See Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, various; Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, p. 355 and various; S.A.Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe. The*

Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1976, pp. 18–19.

- 10 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 237.
- 11 All quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 174–5.
- 12 On this see Keiger, *France and the Origins of the First World War*, pp. 129–35
- 13 See for instance, Charles Laurent (French ambassador Berlin) to foreign minister, 1 January 1922, telegrams 2738–40, 2744, 2746, MAE, Europe 1918–29, Allemagne, vols 327–8, Politique intérieure: Responsabilité de la guerre; Albéric Ne-ton (Consul General, Hamburg) to Poincaré, 23 January 1922, *ibid.*, vol. 328; for further details on this campaign, see J.F.V.Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 279–82.
- 14 ‘Bordereau d’envoi, Sous direction Europe’, Quai d’Orsay, 22 May 1922, copy of Reichstag budget for propaganda, extract from Reichstag Aktenstück no. 3753 8 May 1922, MAE Europe 1918–40, Allemagne, vol. 408, Propagande allemande 1 April–31 December 1922; Renseignement, S.C.R. (Service Central des Renseignements—the French security service) 2, 29 June 1922, *ibid.*; German propaganda abroad, 4 July 1922, *ibid.*; Renseignement, S.C.R.2, Subsidies to Pangermanists by major industrialists, 5 July 1922, *ibid.*
- 15 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in world politics*, pp. 237–8.
- 16 See Tirard to Poincaré, 15 March 1922; Laurent to Poincaré, 16 March 1922, Europe 1918–1929, Allemagne vol. 386, ‘Politique Etrangère. Relations avec la France’.
- 17 Newspaper cutting dated 30 March 1922 in Neton to Poincaré, 31 March 1922, Europe 1918–1929, Allemagne, vol. 386.
- 18 N.Ferguson, *Paper and Iron. Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897–1927*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 358–9.
- 19 Poincaré to Millerand, 12 April 1922, MAE, Papiers d’agent, Archives privées (AP) 118, Millerand, vol. 81.
- 20 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 234.
- 21 For reports on German desires for a Franco-German rapprochement, see for example French Consul Brême to Poincaré, 13 May 1922; French Consul Dusseldorf to Poincaré, 15 May 1922; Minute by Quai, 7 June 1922; Laurent to Poincaré, 22 June 1922; all in Europe 1918–1940, Allemagne, vol. 386. For evidence of the power and financing of German propaganda, see for example Tirard to Poincaré, 20 April 1922; ‘Bordereau d’envoi’ from the Sous-direction d’Europe on Reichstag credits voted for propaganda purposes, 22 May 1922; the many S.C.R. reports for 1922; all in Europe 1918–1940, Allemagne, vol. 408, ‘Propagande allemande 1/4–31/12/1922’.
- 22 C.M.Andrew, *Secret Service. The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, London, Heinemann, 1981, p. 375.
- 23 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 245–51; B.Kent, *The Spoils of War: The Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy of Reparations, 1918–1932*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. 181–2.
- 24 French Embassy London to French Foreign Ministry, 8 August 1922, Millerand AP 118, vol. 50; ‘Minutes of meeting 10 Downing Street’ between Poincaré, Lloyd George, Balfour and Sir Robert Horne, in Millerand AP 118, vol. 50, p. 20.
- 25 For details of Poincaré’s readiness to proceed with occupation see Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 251–4; R.J.Young, *Power and Pleasure. Louis Barthou*

- and the Third French Republic, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991, p. 174. For the dilemmas confronting Poincaré and other leaders over reparations, see Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, p. 288–90.
- 26 Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 289–90.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 291.
- 28 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 254–5. See also P.Guinn, 'On throwing ballast in foreign policy: Poincaré, the entente and the Ruhr', *European History Quarterly*, 1988, 18, pp. 430–1; Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 186–9.
- 29 Quoted in Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 190.
- 30 Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 423–4; K.Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of the Morning Post 1905–1926*, Lewiston, Mellen Press, 1990, pp. 193–4.
- 31 Quoted in Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 191.
- 32 J.Bardoux, *Le socialisme au pouvoir, l'expérience de 1924*, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1930, p. 186, quoted in J.-N.Jeanneney, *Leçon d'histoire pour une gauche au pouvoir. La faillite du Cartel 1924–1926*, Paris, Seuil, 1977, p. 115.
- 33 Minutes of Allied meeting in London 7 August 1922, Millerand AP 118, vol. 50, p. 97; Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 271.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 259–89.
- 35 On the differing conceptions and motives for a separate Rhineland and Ruhr to be exploited directly by France as an economic bloc isolated from Germany see, Jacobson, 'Strategies of French foreign policy', pp. 87–9.
- 36 Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of the Morning Post*, pp. 198–200.
- 37 Poincaré stated at the London Conference on 9 December 1922 that he would accept a moratorium on German reparations for two to three years if Germany were given a loan to ease her financial position. MAE, Série Y, Internationale 1918–40, vol. 687, pp. 49–50.
- 38 See the letter Poincaré to Millerand, 22 December 1922, in M.Carley, 'The shoe on the other foot: a letter from Raymond Poincaré to Alexandre Millerand, December 1922', *Canadian Journal of History*, 1991, XXVI, 3, December, pp. 583–7.
- 39 Cab. 23/26, 15 July 1922, quoted in Guinn, 'On throwing ballast', p. 428. For similar British views see Kent, *Spoils of War*, pp. 190–1; Kent, though agreeing with Trachtenberg about Poincaré's lack of fixity of purpose in wishing to occupy the Ruhr, seems to share the contemporary 'Anglo-American' lack of sympathy for the French cause and its premier in particular, describing Poincaré, as 'launching his nation into a self-indulgent act of criminal folly', *ibid.*, pp. 197–202. Young, *Power and Pleasure*, pp. 174–5 gives further evidence of Britain's unco-operative attitude and disingenuousness in the International Reparations Commission.
- 40 Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, pp. 20–1.
- 41 J.Chastenet, *Raymond Poincaré*, Paris, Julliard, 1948, p. 245.
- 42 A.François-Poncet, 'Poincaré tel que je l'ai vu', in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 26 June 1948, quoted in R.Persil, *Alexandre Millerand*, Paris, Société d'Éditions françaises, 1949, p. 149. Persil, though disagreeing that he was pushed into it, believes that he was seriously torn over the decision, see p. 150. Millerand in his unpublished memoirs claimed to have pushed Poincaré into the Ruhr: Millerand 'Mes souvenirs (1859–1941)' MS. p. 114 cited in Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, p. 292, n. 136. Barthou, chairman of the International Reparations Commission, who had not always seen eye to eye with Poincaré, justified the occupation: Young, *Barthou*, pp. 175–6.

- 43 Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, pp. 23–4; quoted in Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 288.
- 44 For a summary of the new interpretations of French foreign policy which have emerged since the 1970s, see the review articles by Jon Jacobson, ‘Is there a new international history of the 1920s?’ in the *American Historical Review*, 88, 1983, pp. 617–45 and by the same author, ‘Strategies of French Foreign Policy’, pp. 78–95; Guinn, ‘On throwing ballast’, pp. 427–37; D. Silverman, *Reconstructing Europe after the Great War*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. v–vi, 1–12; McDougall, *France’s Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924*; Kent, *Spoils of War*, pp. 205–8 and various, provides much support for the modern interpretation, but remains hostile to Poincaré the ‘Germanophobic Lorrainer’; Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale*, pp. 118–20, 265, 274 and various depicts the Ruhr episode as a concerted attempt by France to establish a long-term Franco-German coal and steel complex dominated by it, but depicts Poincaré as moderate and flexible over the occupation.
- 45 Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, p. 368.
- 46 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 291–5.
- 47 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 301 and Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 392–3, especially for Poincaré’s restraint and hesitation during the Ruhr occupation.
- 48 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 301–5; Mayeur, *Vie politique*, pp. 265–6; Kent, *Spoils of War*, p. 214, mistakenly suggests that Poincaré’s policy was dependent on ‘a mixed bag of nationalist, militarist, and annexationist supporters’.
- 49 Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of the Morning Post*, ch. 7, ‘Making Germany pay: Gwynne’s conspiracy against Lord Curzon’.
- 50 Wilson, *A Study in the History and Politics of the Morning Post*, pp. 200–8, 208–11.
- 51 Margerie to Minister, 3 August (telegrams 1141, 1142) and 12 August (telegrams 1014–1021) 1923, MAE Papiers de Margerie, PA AP 113, vol. 8, ‘Embassy in Germany, Political and Commercial Correspondence July 1923–Dec 1924’.
- 52 Margerie to Minister, 24 Aug 1923 (telegrams 1095–7), *ibid.*
- 53 Margerie to Minister, 27 Aug 1923 (telegrams 1057–61), *ibid.*
- 54 Margerie to Minister, 4 Sept 1923 (telegrams 1143–53), *ibid.*
- 55 For further examples of this, see Margerie to Minister, 23 August, 3 and 9 September 1923, *ibid.*
- 56 Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 390–3.
- 57 Margerie to Poincaré, 10 September 1923, MAE Papiers de Margerie, PA AP 113, vol. 8, ‘Embassy in Germany, Political and Commercial Correspondence July 1923–Dec 1924’.
- 58 Margerie to Poincaré, 10 September 1923, (très confidentiel), *ibid.*
- 59 Schuker, *End of French Predominance*, p. 26.
- 60 J. Laroche, *Au Quai d’Orsay avec Briand et Poincaré, 1913–1926*, Paris, Hachette, 1957, p. 181.
- 61 Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 320–6.
- 62 Guinn, ‘On throwing ballast’, pp. 432–4.
- 63 Jacobson, ‘Strategies of French foreign policy’, pp. 89–90.
- 64 Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, p. 395; Chastenet, *Poincaré*, p. 249 and Persil, *Alexandre Millerand*, p. 153, are of the same opinion. For other interpretations of

- Poincaré's intentions after the end of passive resistance, see Jacobson, 'Strategies of French foreign policy', pp. 89–92.
- 65 Quoted in Chasteney, *Poincaré*, pp. 249–50.
- 66 He expressed this in his unpublished memoirs; see J. Jeanneney, *L'argent caché. Milieux d'affaires et pouvoirs politiques dans la France du XXe siècle*, Paris, 1981, p. 198 fn. 9; for Millerand and Foch's attempts to convince Poincaré of the need to seize this opportunity to impose a Franco-German deal and Poincaré's desire to get back to applying the Versailles Treaty, see Persil, *Alexandre Millerand*, pp. 152–3. Persil believes, with some hyperbole, that had Poincaré followed the course of action suggested by Millerand and Foch the Second World war would have been averted, p. 154; Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 406–8 for Poincaré's reluctance to exploit France's advantage.
- 67 Mayeur, *Vie politique*, pp. 265–7; Persil, *Alexandre Millerand*, pp. 140, 157; Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 403–6, 411–3, 470–1.
- 68 For Poincaré's political calculations, see Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 410–13.
- 69 Jacobson, 'Strategies of French foreign policy', pp. 85–93; Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, pp. 331–5 and various.
- 70 Quoted in Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, p. 335. For criticism of Poincaré's failure to use the Ruhr victory, see Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe*, pp. 413–4.
- 71 Jacobson, 'Strategies of French Foreign Policy', p. 83.
- 72 This is the criticism made of him by the right, especially in its most extreme guise, the Action Française. See the virulent criticism by Charles Maurras, Jacques Bainville and in particular Léon Daudet, *Les nouveaux châtiments*, vol. 1, *Le Nain de Lorraine. Raymond Poincaré*, Paris, Editions du Capitole, 1930, p. 25: 'Poincaré ruhrien de 1923, est devenu locarnien de 1926' and various.

ECONOMICS AND FRANCO-BELGIAN RELATIONS IN THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

Eric Bussière

Relations between France and Belgium remained remarkably intense during the inter-war period, despite the conflicts and disappointments which occasionally obscured them. The primary reason was their experience during World War I when as brothers in arms they shared the same community of fate, augmenting historical and cultural ties that were already close. Economic connections were no less important, and here too important financial and industrial connections went back at least to the middle of the previous century.

French leaders hoped that their common victory would be the occasion for consolidating the relationship and crowning it with a comprehensive political, military and economic alliance. As for Belgium, the war had undermined the diplomatic equilibrium on which its neutrality had been maintained during the nineteenth century, and the search for an anchorage drew it naturally towards its wartime allies and France in particular. Economics constituted the key element in their bilateral relations during the whole of the inter-war period, in light of the war's demonstration of the vital connection between economic strength and political survival. But whereas for Belgium the crucial objective was economic security in an uncertain environment, for France the objective from as early as 1915 was a special relationship with postwar Belgium within a comprehensive European economic framework. Until 1924 French policy was dominated by confrontation with Germany, and the Belgian alliance was regarded as a valuable component in the strategy of reducing Germany to a condition of inferiority. The failure of the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923–4, however, brought a change of approach, and between 1925 and 1930 France sought to promote a new economic organisation of western Europe. The Franco–German relationship was to be its centrepiece, but Belgian participation was assumed to be a necessary component. Whether France had the means to realise such a project may however be doubted. The protectionist impulse which re-emerged within France in 1930, and the inability of its leaders to contain it, tied France's hands just as the opportunity again arose to consolidate a special relationship with Belgium between 1932 and 1935, at a time when the latter sought to promote economic regionalism on the Continent.

FRANCE IN SEARCH OF A PREFERENTIAL ECONOMIC ALLIANCE

French aims towards Belgium, pursued consistently by every government since the armistice, derived from general assumptions about the bases of economic and political equilibrium in postwar Europe, assumptions which had arisen during the war from the apparent link between economic power and political influence. Etienne Clémentel, the wartime minister of commerce, was the first to promote a policy intended to strengthen France's economic power vis-à-vis Germany. While devised on an inter-Allied basis, French plans assumed a privileged place for Belgium.

Allied wartime leaders attending the economic conference convened by French initiative in Paris in June 1916, agreed in principle to constrain Germany's postwar industrial potential and export activity by a discriminatory trade regime which involved withholding most-favoured-nation treatment from German commerce and sharing out among themselves all available raw materials in the world. On the bilateral level, France hoped to negotiate a customs union with the Belgian government before the end of the war. In the words of Georges-Henri Soutou, French statesmen regarded Belgium as 'a major prize for the Reich and the Entente and in particular France: the postwar balance of power depended to an important degree upon Belgium's economic orientation towards one or the other camp.'¹ France, augmented by Alsace and Lorraine, and supported by Luxembourg and perhaps the Saarland, would integrate Belgium into its customs zone. Altogether, on paper at least, a bloc comprising these elements would form an effective counter-weight to Germany, particularly in the heavy-industry sector.

It was in the industrial sphere that the French government plans for the Franco-Belgian alliance were the most thoroughly developed. Clémentel did not envisage the process of integration as taking place on a strictly liberal basis, with a customs union providing the framework for a quasi-spontaneous merging of commercial and industrial interests. Rather, he assumed that it would require negotiated agreements and concerted arrangements. The reconstruction of the devastated regions and the rebuilding of factories destroyed by the Germans, along with the elimination of German financial interests, which were very substantial in certain sectors of the Belgian economy, were expected to furnish the opportunity for France and Belgium to work together to promote the inter-penetration of commercial capital and develop complementary industrial specialisation. The main sectors of industry would be organised, at least during the reconstruction phase, in consortiums, in fact cartels, along the model developed by France during the war. Notwithstanding the fears of certain French industrialists, Clémentel hoped this would create conditions favourable to the negotiation of the customs union.²

The application of the French plan depended upon several factors at both the domestic and the bi-national level. Among French industrialists the prospect of an economic alliance with Belgium and Luxembourg provoked sharply differing

reactions. One group of steelmakers led by Eugène Schneider fully subscribed to Clémentel's plan. Schneider saw every advantage in an aggressive economic struggle against Germany, limiting German trade to a strict minimum while reorganising French heavy industry towards the production of finished goods so as to take full advantage of the increased steelmaking potential which would accrue to France at the war's end. From this perspective, an alliance with Belgium and Luxembourg could only increase France's potential. Steelmakers with mills or other interests straddling the Franco-Belgian frontier were similarly favourable to rapprochement, as were industrialists in other sectors such as glassmaking, ceramics and paper, which were strongly export-oriented or had investments on both sides of the border.

A second group of French steelmakers, however, dissented from this view. As they saw it, the recovery of Lorraine and its steelmaking potential posed a serious problem from the standpoint of markets, and to add Belgian and Luxembourg production by forming a customs union seemed to them to make no sense. By the same token, industrialists in the Department of the Nord, who would be the first affected, were markedly hostile to facilitating Belgian competition through a customs union and petitioned Clémentel against it. Nevertheless, by and large employers' organisations favoured a customs union or economic rapprochement, and in the immediate aftermath of the Allied victory industrialists would scarcely have been able to block a customs union had the French government been able to impose it upon Belgium.³

In Belgium attitudes among business groups differed substantially from those of political leaders. Belgian industrialists, concentrated at this time mainly in Wallony and oriented largely towards heavy industry and the manufacture of semi-finished goods, mostly favoured breaking relations with Germany, their chief competitor, and forging an alliance with France which held out the promise of a large market for their output. Business leaders in Antwerp, the great commercial capital of Flanders were however more circumspect. Although fully disposed to see Belgium secure greater economic independence from Germany, they could not overlook the fact that a significant part of their business consisted of entrepôt trade and commercial links with their Rhenish neighbour. Hence, without opposing an opening towards France, they favoured a solution that included Britain as a counter-weight that would safeguard the interests of their port and region. The Belgian government shared this outlook for political as well as economic reasons. In 1916 it rejected the proposed customs union with France. Paul Hymans, the Belgian representative in London and from January 1918 minister of foreign affairs, became a leading advocate of the policy of actively pursuing equilibrium. As he put it in February 1918,

Our interest is to negotiate separately with France, a protectionist country, and with England, which, if no longer committed to absolute free trade, nevertheless does not appear to be prepared to go much further in the direction of protection.... [I]n negotiating with our two great neighbours,

we have the chance to exploit their desire to play an influential role in our economic life.⁴

The French government was keen to take advantage of the favourable climate created by the war in order to reach an early agreement. The Belgian government, however, temporised. The first series of meetings of national representatives, which culminated in a Franco-Belgian economic conference in Paris between 10 and 13 April 1917, came to no agreement. In the months that followed the Belgian government continued to temporise while seeking to interest the British government in Belgium's postwar economic fate. Despite the creation of a British trade committee in June 1917, expert discussions at Le Havre in August and September, and further deliberations in April 1918, Belgian leaders came away disappointed.⁵ At the beginning of 1919, therefore, they agreed to negotiations with France, albeit with considerable apprehension.

The negotiations, lasting from June to October 1919, were intended to produce a comprehensive agreement on all aspects of Franco-Belgian economic relations, including not only bilateral tariff levels but also water and rail communications and industrial links. In fact, of course, all the issues were inter-related, since the cost of transport and tariff levels were key determinants of wholesale prices and the ability of heavy industry such as steelmaking to export. The problem was made yet more complicated by the existence of another factor, namely the economic future of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.⁶ Belgium had raised this question with France as early as 1915, when it appeared certain that Luxembourg would withdraw from the German *Zollverein* after the war. Having hastily abandoned the idea of annexing Luxembourg politically, the Belgian government fell back on the solution of economic annexation by means of a customs union, and in 1917 Belgium received assurances of French acquiescence in its aim. Behind the scenes, however, differences of view remained, with Poincaré and Paul Cambon sympathetic towards the Belgian position and Philippe Berthelot, director of political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, strongly opposed. In Berthelot's view, 'Luxembourg is vitally important to us: it is one of the great crossroads of coal and steel, that is to say of world domination.' France could only yield to the Belgians on Luxembourg, if Belgium itself were integrated 'into our financial, military and customs orbit'.⁷ French interest in Luxembourg remained substantial: beyond claims upon a part of the rail network of the country, the French government had already pressed certain of its steelmakers to develop close ties with their Luxembourg counterparts and to assist them in displacing German interests at the end of the war. This operation took place in the spring of 1919 and involved both French and Belgian steel-makers. Henceforth, it was clear, any economic agreement between France and Belgium would have implications for Luxembourg.

Following the war Luxembourg industrialists had indicated their preference for a customs union with France. On 28 September 1919 they obtained public support when a referendum was held to decide between the alternatives of a

customs union with France or with Belgium, and a majority chose France. The result offered France an enormous means of pressure in its negotiations with Belgium. The French nevertheless found it difficult to exploit their advantages, for at the end of September the Franco-Belgian negotiations remained stalled. On the French side this failure derived from their inability to choose between two options: a limited agreement strengthening bilateral economic relations, which was favoured by a section of French industrialists, notably those from the Nord, or a more ambitious agreement, virtually a customs union, which would embrace Luxembourg and draw Belgium into France's economic orbit. From June to September supporters of the second option gradually gained the ascendancy over supporters of the first, and in the negotiations Daniel Serruys, director of the ministry of commerce, assisted by Berthelot of the Quai d'Orsay, aggressively led the French delegation and attempted to tighten the screws further when the referendum in Luxembourg went against Belgium. However, the effect of the referendum, together with signs of renewed protectionism in France, particularly among the steelmakers of the *Comité des Forges*, and Serruys' aggressive negotiating tactics, was merely to intensify the resistance of the Belgian delegation, who feared that economic absorption into France would be the prelude to political absorption. They therefore adopted an attitude of extreme reserve and secured authority from Brussels to suspend the negotiations on 20 October.

Despite the Quai d'Orsay's reassertion of authority over all foreign economic negotiations and the appeal from Pierre de Margerie, ambassador in Brussels, never again to refer to 'economic union' in conversation with Belgian leaders, the suspension proved decisive. Not until the autumn of 1922 was it possible to resume wide-ranging negotiations between the two countries, after which an agreement was eventually reached on 12 May 1923. In the interval, all the issues raised at the bilateral level since 1917 remained in constant dispute: the important question of Luxembourg and influence over the Grand Duchy's railways and heavy industry; questions about steel production, which were affected by the shortage of coking coal and the recession of 1920-1; tariff questions, affected by the revision of the French tariff in 1921; questions concerning the navigation of the Rhine and the additional access requested by Belgium in favour of the port of Antwerp. The outcome of all these issues was in fact largely bound up with the fate of relations between the Allies and Germany.

The shortfall in German coke deliveries due as reparation payments and the intense competition of German steelmakers, who refused to negotiate the partition of markets with Allied producers and benefited from the sharp depreciation of the mark, placed new strains on Franco-Belgian relations and exacerbated tensions between Paris and Brussels. By the same token, each crisis that arose between Germany and the Allies over reparations payments gave rise to bargaining between Belgium and France, with the Belgians attempting to extract concessions in return for supporting French policy. Thus in April 1920 Belgian support for France at the time of the occupation of Frankfurt and Darmstadt helped to remove most of the outstanding differences over Luxembourg: the

Guillaume-Luxembourg railway, the principal north-south line linking Lorraine steel and Ruhr coal, was to be jointly controlled; the Luxembourg government was invited to seek an agreement on trade with Brussels.⁸ At the conference at Spa in July 1920 the French president, Alexandre Millerand, agreed to reduce France's share of reparations so that Belgium could obtain 8 per cent of the total, in return for Belgium's endorsement of the military agreement which had just been negotiated. The following year at the London conference, in exchange for supporting France on reparations, Belgium obtained the removal of an annoying exchange compensation tax on all trade with Alsace-Lorraine and shortly afterwards French agreement to abandon all claims on the Guillaume-Luxembourg railway.⁹

Tensions between Belgium and France remained a feature for much of this period, owing in part to French willingness to contemplate an economic rapprochement with Germany, even at the expense of Belgium. Louis Loucheur, a minister whose pre-war business activity had brought him into contact with leading German industrialists and bankers, and Jacques Seydoux, the leading economic authority at the Quai d'Orsay, were principally responsible for this change of direction after the breakdown of Allied economic solidarity in March-April 1919. The Seydoux plan, which envisaged extensive industrial cartels and a comprehensive commercial settlement, was presented to German experts at the Brussels economic conference on 15 December 1920. The Loucheur-Rathenau agreements of October 1921 constituted a reformulation of the same proposals. Henri Jaspar, the Belgian minister of economic affairs, was deeply disturbed by reports of this change in French policy: 'it is an intimate economic union they are seeking—it is a policy of reciprocal penetration which would have the profoundest consequences'.¹⁰ But opposition from French industrialists, who objected to increased imports of German reparations in kind, blocked progress. Meanwhile a combination of factors again pushed Belgium towards rapprochement with France: notably the intensification of German industrial competition; the uncertainty over British commercial policy provoked by the adoption in June 1921 of the Safeguarding of Industries Act; and frustration over German non-payment of reparations. Britain seemed almost determined to drive Belgium into France's embrace, with Lloyd George's support for Soviet reconstruction at the Genoa conference in 1922 and Bonar Law's opposition to Belgian priority in reparation payments at the Paris conference in January 1923. But it was the reparations issue itself that was decisive. Belgium and France were experiencing closely similar monetary and financial problems, and since May 1922 the Theunis government was prepared to support Poincaré in a drastic policy of confrontation with Germany in order to secure reparations payments. This led to the occupation of the Ruhr and in turn to the reopening of negotiations for a permanent economic alliance.

The commercial agreement of 12 May 1923, which was to be the basis of this alliance, represented a clear victory for France when Belgian negotiators, squeezed between their own industrialists and French pressure, agreed to a *de facto*

preferential system. By introducing new classifications into their tariffs—the new Belgian tariff had approximately 1,200 against only seventy before the war—the two countries were able to exchange concessions which amounted to a preferential agreement. Most notably, article 6 of the agreement established a common tariff maximum to be applied to products from countries with depreciated currencies, that is to say essentially Germany. Altogether, the combination of the advantages exchanged between the two countries and the virtual closing of their two markets to German products marked a distinct orientation of the Belgian economy towards France. Taking into account the effects of the depreciation of the franc vis-à-vis the strong currencies such as the pound sterling, such an orientation might eventually have drawn Belgium and Luxembourg—now united in a customs union—decisively into France's economic orbit.¹¹

But the Franco-Belgian agreement of 12 May was only one element of the vast upheaval occurring in the west European economy. Since January 1923 French and Belgian troops had occupied the Ruhr. Poincaré evidently regarded the operation as having implications far beyond reparations including the prospect that the political and economic settlement agreed in the Versailles Treaty would be altered in France's favour by its promotion of separatism in the Rhineland.¹² This policy contained an essential economic element whose outlines were sketched out in 1923: France would virtually seize the region by means of long-term control over the Rhineland railway system; there was to be a separate Rhenish currency, first envisaged in the spring then more seriously pursued in the autumn of 1923; the coal mines would be confiscated with the object of securing a stake in the ownership; negotiations with German steel-makers were to secure a similar result; finally there was to be reorientation of trade in the region towards the west by introducing a customs barrier—*un cordon douanier*—between the Rhineland and the rest of Germany.

The success of such a policy was bound to have profound implications for Belgium. Georges Theunis, the prime minister, who had taken the decision to participate in the occupation on 23 November 1922, did so largely in order to control the initiative and secure Belgium's share of the benefits. His decision thus contained an element of ambiguity. However, Belgium's resources left it little room for manoeuvre, and in the early stages its policy was dominated by anxiety to avoid unnecessarily prolonging this dangerous initiative or provoking a breach with Britain, which was hostile to Poincaré's policy. It was for this reason that Belgium opted initially for a policy of maximum disruption of the occupied regions in order to induce the local population, and indirectly Berlin, to give way. Such a policy contrasted starkly with that of Poincaré, which was implicitly directed towards a permanent occupation. During the summer and the autumn, as German resistance weakened, the Belgians on several occasions indicated their wish to terminate the crisis by accepting the first German proposals for negotiation.¹³ Progressively, however, as the Franco-Belgian positions were consolidated, Brussels modified its position and sought to profit from the

operation. In the autumn of 1923 the Belgian banks participated in the negotiations on the creation of a future Rhineland central bank, while Belgian representatives in the Rhineland advised their government not to forgo the chance to participate in the disposal of the Rhenish railway network. Finally, in early November, while dissociating itself from the putsch at Aix-la-Chapelle, the Belgian government discreetly raised the possibility with Paris of support for an autonomist solution in the Rhineland.

The success of Franco-Belgian action in the autumn of 1923 would have had important implications for the economic balance of power in western Europe, in integrating Belgium into the Lotharingian region led by France. Ultimately it would have required an organisation of some sort and a strengthening of the Franco-Belgian preferences followed by comprehensive negotiations with the Reich. The shifting correlations of force and the difficulties even France's partners had in understanding Poincaré's intentions during the autumn of 1923, however, aroused increasing doubts and opposition. The merchants of Antwerp who had been opposed to the Franco-Belgian commercial agreement from the outset, were now joined by leading Dutch papers and elements of the Belgian socialist press. As a result, at the end of November Belgium reasserted its independence from France in the Ruhr, and on 24 February 1924 the Belgian Chamber of Representatives refused to ratify the economic agreement of May 1923 with France. Article 6, which would have tied Brussels' hands in its future relations with Germany, had been the primary cause of objection. But beyond the criticism of the agreement itself, from the Walloon side, where it was denounced for failing adequately to open access to the French market, as well as from the Flemish side, where Antwerp circles feared for the activities of their port, it was a signal that Belgium was determined to reassert its economic freedom.¹⁴

1924–30: FROM BILATERALISM TO THE BEGINNINGS OF A EUROPEAN PLAN

The liquidation of the Ruhr operation carried out during the London conference in the summer of 1924 marked a new stage in European economic relations. Henceforth, with the reparations question apparently settled thanks to the Dawes Plan, there was no longer any question of basing European economic relations on the confrontation of antagonistic blocs. The time had come for stabilisation, particularly as the commercial clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, which imposed a series of constraints on Germany for the benefit of the former Allies, expired on 10 January 1925. For Belgium as for France the stabilisation of its relations with Germany thus became a priority, leaving Franco-Belgian relations in second place. The same trend occurred in the sphere of monetary relations. Until 1924 the markets had imposed a common fate upon the Belgian and French francs, largely due to their similar financial situation and the same dependence upon reparations. From the summer of 1924 Belgium's priority became currency stabilisation and the dissociation of its monetary fate from that of France. Such an

objective obliged it to seek support from the Anglo-Saxon financial powers and to distance itself from France.

Such an evolution could have marked the return to an organisation of European economic relations based upon bilateral relations between the great commercial powers, such as existed before the war. But instead France sought to regain the initiative by promoting an international economic conference, the purpose of which was to develop a specifically European economic organisation. This approach largely removed the prospect of preferential relations with Belgium and ensured instead that relations with Germany would take precedence.

The importance of the rupture caused by Belgium's non-ratification of the 1923 commercial agreement was not immediately perceived in France. Between the spring and autumn of 1924 the Poincaré and Herriot governments had encouraged Belgium to sign a *modus vivendi* containing the essential elements of the agreement. But Brussels now gave absolute priority to a commercial agreement with Germany and sought to retain control of all the bargaining chips until the negotiations were completed. In the autumn the Belgian government thus prepared a general revision of its tariff in order to have concessions to make to Berlin. Brussels could no longer contemplate entering into an ambitious scheme with France, despite demands from Walloon industrialists. In face of insistent pressure from Paris, Brussels agreed only to a limited *modus vivendi* signed on 30 October 1924, and a second one on 4 April 1925. Meanwhile the Belgian government succeeded in normalising relations with Germany: the *modus vivendi* signed on 4 April 1925 was far more comprehensive than the one signed the same day with France. As Fernand Vanlangenhove of the Belgian foreign ministry frankly acknowledged, the German agreement was comparable in scope to the agreement signed with France in 1923 but never ratified; 'before the war one would have called it a treaty of commerce'.¹⁵

Unable to reach prior agreement with Belgium, France too gave priority to securing a commercial agreement with Germany. The negotiations were longer and more difficult than anticipated, in part because of the specific problems posed by Alsace-Lorraine and the continued depreciation of the French franc in 1925 and 1926. Following a first setback in July 1925, the Franco-German negotiations stretched on, culminating two years later in the signature of an agreement on 17 August 1927. This set the parameters for agreements that France subsequently signed with other partners, including Belgium on 23 February 1928. In fact, the Franco-German agreement consolidated 950 of the approximately 1500 items in the French tariff; the Franco-Belgian agreement consolidated about 300. Franco-German economic relations thus largely determined the structure of commercial relations on the Continent, and Franco-Belgian relations, while remaining important, became a subordinate component of the new framework.¹⁶

Belgium's new priorities on the commercial front had their counterpart in the monetary sphere. The liquidation of the Ruhr occupation was accompanied at the start of 1924 by a monetary crisis which struck both the French and the Belgian francs. At the time rumours were rife of deliberate attacks by agents of

Germany or the Anglo-Saxon powers to force a settlement. Whatever the role of political pressures, it highlighted the risks the Belgian government took in associating too closely with French plans, and encouraged the prime minister, Georges Theunis, in particular to dissociate the two currencies. The victory of the *Cartel des Gauches* in the French legislative elections of May 1924 strengthened this tendency. In the circumstances, the Belgian authorities were obliged to turn to Anglo-Saxon finance in order to arrange the separate stabilisation of the Belgian franc. The bases of stabilisation were elaborated during the summer of 1925, with Montagu Norman, governor of the Bank of England, playing the preponderant role in the negotiations and encouraging the Belgian authorities definitively to divorce their currency from the French franc. Belgium took the necessary domestic stabilisation measures and agreed to adhere to the gold exchange standard which the British supported by contributing to a large sterling/dollar loan. With this backing, the *Banque Nationale de Belgique* intervened in the exchange markets in September 1925 in an attempt to stabilise the Belgian franc. Despite heavy sacrifices, however, this first attempt failed, partly because domestic inflationary pressures had not been fully quelled, but mainly because of the speculative pressure on the French franc between October 1925 and March 1926, which spilled over onto the Belgian franc. On 15 March the *Banque Nationale de Belgique* threw in the towel and allowed the exchange rate to slide.¹⁷

This setback provided the opportunity for a new rapprochement in the form of a joint stabilisation of the two currencies. Emile Francqui, director of the *Société Générale de Belgique*, the country's most powerful financial conglomerate, and currently minister of state without portfolio and member of the Jaspar Cabinet with responsibility for the currency stabilisation, favoured a simultaneous stabilisation which would place the Belgian and French francs at a common exchange rate. This might have been possible because their rates in July 1926 were virtually identical and wholesale price levels in the two countries were very close. Several leading industrialists including the leading Luxembourg steelmaker Emile Mayrisch favoured the attempt, as did Emile Moreau, governor of the *Banque de France*. But in addition to pressure from the Anglo-Saxon central banks, led by Norman, which favoured an independent stabilisation by Belgium, Poincaré's return to office in Paris doomed Francqui's project. Despite repeated approaches, Francqui could not overcome Poincaré's fear of jeopardising France's national independence or selecting an inappropriate exchange rate. Belgium, supported by the Anglo-Saxon central banks, therefore acted alone, announcing its decision to stabilise the currency at FB175=£1 on 25 October. At the end of the year the French franc was also stabilised at FF125=£1, but only on a de facto basis. Formal return to the gold standard was postponed until 25 June 1928.¹⁸

The choices adopted by the two countries between 1924 and 1928 ruled out preferential Franco-Belgian relations and pointed towards the return to more traditional policies based on the defence of national interests within a framework shaped by bilateral relations. But France sought to go further by promoting a broad framework of European economic relations, begun when Loucheur

proposed an international economic conference at the annual assembly of the League of Nations in September 1925.¹⁹ Loucheur's objective was to promote European economic stabilisation by encouraging industrial cartels and ententes on the model of the International Iron and Steel Entente adopted in September 1925 by German, French, Belgian, Saarland and Luxembourg steelmakers, which would make tariff protection less important and easier to reduce; eventually, he appears to have hoped, this would open the way to a European Economic League of Nations and ultimately to a United States of Europe.²⁰ According to Loucheur, this mode of organisation based on individual sectors of industry would make possible the progressive reduction of tariff protection between contracting states. It was a Continental project with a Franco-German foundation, embracing a limited number of countries including Belgium; and it corresponded to the evolution of customs systems on the Continent, which tended after 1925 to correspond to a common model, that of tariffs within which specific duties were fixed through bilateral negotiation. This differed sharply from the British approach, which involved an autonomous and non-negotiable tariff and insistence upon automatic and unconditional most-favoured-nation treatment.

Loucheur's initiative, intended to exploit the temporary trade advantage France had gained from the steep depreciation of the franc, had the support of the most dynamic sections of French industry and was welcomed by the Belgian government. But while participating in the sectoral ententes being created in Europe from 1925, Belgium's industries lacked the necessary weight and cohesion to influence decisions, which seldom went their way. The Belgian government itself remained loyal to the liberal tradition which had served the national economy so well until the war, and favoured a wider Europe that included Britain rather than the narrow Continental approach that Loucheur had in mind. Thus during preparations for the World Economic Conference, then during the conference which took place in Geneva in May 1927, Belgian representatives resisted the system of industrial ententes promoted by France, and by backing the British experts encouraged the adoption of liberal commercial policies. In the event, the conference endorsed the principle of open markets, but failed to produce agreement on practical action.²¹ The debates begun at the conference continued afterwards within the Economic Committee of the League of Nations and merely confirmed the opposition between British commercial principles and those of the Continent. Little by little the debates gave rise to a specific Continental approach to trade liberalisation based upon the multilateral agreements—or as they were known then, plurilateral conventions—whose signatories were prepared to reduce tariff barriers against one another and for which an exception to the most-favoured-nation clause would be permitted. Belgium defended this approach, although it raised questions of principle that Britain found hard to accept.

The negotiations that followed the announcement of the Briand plan for European federation in September 1929 did no more than demonstrate the rift between Britain and its Continental neighbours over commercial policy. Belgium, having feared that Britain might abandon free trade and retreat into

protectionism from as early as 1928, co-sponsored with Britain and France the conference on concerted economic action, commonly known as the tariff truce conference, in February 1930. But the renewed protectionism triggered by the economic slump which overtook Europe in 1930 soon overwhelmed this initiative. Its failure pushed Britain into devaluation and protectionism in September 1931. The Belgian economy, already severely affected by the slump, was particularly affected by British action and drawn once more towards closer relations with France.

FRANCO-BELGIAN RELATIONS IN THE CRISIS OF THE 1930S: BARRIERS AND PERSPECTIVES

Franco-Belgian economic relations during the economic slump in the early 1930s became more intense if only somewhat more intimate. In France pressure for increased protectionism began in 1930, accelerated between August 1931 and the beginning of 1932, and resulted in a succession of attempts to safeguard the domestic market by means of quotas, introduced to bypass the constraint of duties consolidated in various commercial treaties signed during the 1920s. Belgium took similar but much less radical measures. The consequences of this rise in protectionism were much more serious for Belgium, with a small open economy and a colonial empire which could not possibly substitute for the closing of foreign markets, than for France, whose empire provided a partial substitute. Belgium therefore pressured its neighbour to allow it continued access to the French market.

This policy was partially successful and culminated in a first commercial agreement signed on June 1932, which accorded Belgium relatively favourable treatment. For the French government, however, the system of quotas proved difficult to manage diplomatically and was soon regarded merely as a provisional palliative. During the second half of 1932 Paris therefore embarked upon a policy of renegotiating its commercial agreements so as to deconsolidate duties and regain greater freedom of action. Following the agreement with Germany to deconsolidate duties in December 1932, France turned to Belgium and signed a similar agreement on 29 July 1933. This agreement, which followed only days after the collapse of the World Economic Conference in London, affirmed that deconsolidation was not intended to increase protection but to 'ameliorate the conditions of reciprocal commercial exchanges'.²² The relatively buoyant state of Franco-Belgian trade between 1930 and 1933 attests to the goodwill of the French government with regard to Belgium. The French tariff was lower for Belgian imports than for German or British imports, and France provided a substitute for the British market whose partial loss severely affected Belgium.

The evolution of commercial relations between the two countries had its counterpart in financial relations. From the autumn of 1929 the Belgian financial markets were stretched to the limit and unable to meet the requirements first of several large firms, then the Belgian state itself, which faced an increasingly serious

budget deficit. The abundance of liquidity in the Paris market and the existence of extensive industrial and banking links led Belgian firms to turn to the Paris market. Between 1929 and 1931 several major Belgian firms applied to the Paris Bourse for listings, then sought to raise capital through the issue of stock, and between 1931 and 1934 the Belgian state followed suit, placing nearly a third of its long-term loans in France. On the occasion of the 1932 loan the French minister of finance refused the idea of an economic *quid pro quo*. But it seems that Paris pressured Brussels to carry out the fortification of the Arlon-Bastogne-Liège line and received certain assurances. Generally Paris favoured accommodating Belgian requests because of their common interest in maintaining the gold standard. But France also appears to have exploited its position to secure Belgian agreement to the deconsolidation of duties in July 1933.²³

The years of the economic crisis thus reinvigorated Franco-Belgian economic relations and reaffirmed the density of their bilateral economic links. This tendency coincided with Belgium's search for an economic and financial space necessary for its equilibrium. Still more generally, it formed part of a renewed movement towards economic regionalism in Europe.

The years 1930–2 marked a rapid evolution of the European idea. The debate developed within several organisations, notably the Committee of Enquiry for European Union (CEUE), charged with examining the practical aspects of Briand's proposal for European federation. The principal confrontation of views took place within the sub-committee of economic experts charged with analysing the means for a rapprochement and co-operation among the European countries. Its report, drafted in late August 1931 just as the threat of increasing protectionism was compounded by the international financial crisis, was elaborated in haste and took into account the accelerating fragmentation of the European economy. If the final objective was 'the economic organisation of Europe', it was recognised that the problem could not in the circumstances be resolved in one step, as might still have been possible in 1929, but only in a piecemeal way.

The committee of experts considered two approaches. One, by means of regional arrangements, found favour not only with the German experts but also with those from middle-ranking countries such as Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, who envisaged a European customs union realised in stages. This however conflicted with the French approach, combining industrial cartels or ententes and state action through tariff policy, which had been promoted by Loucheur as far back as 1925. In fact, as the German and Belgian experts recognised, the two methods were not incompatible insofar as markets organised by cartels would permit the necessary adaptation of tariffs to a progressive economic union.

The common feature was the need for a derogation from the most-favoured-nation principle. While customs unions were generally accepted as legitimate exceptions to most-favoured-nation agreements, it was obvious that Europe could only reach this goal in stages, which meant the need for an interim period of preferential tariffs and the likelihood of challenge from third countries

complaining of discrimination and demanding the right to most-favoured-nation treatment. By the same token, the exemptions from import duties envisaged by the French in favour of industrial ententes were also subject to the working of the most-favoured-nation clause. The experts' report pronounced in favour of an exemption in favour of plurilateral conventions so long as they were open to all countries on the same basis, were concluded under the auspices of the League of Nations and tended to reduce the overall level of tariff protection.²⁴

The failure of the tariff truce conference and Britain's resort to an active imperial protectionist policy following the abandonment of the gold standard in September 1931, prompted the Belgian government to take more concrete initiatives. Pressures from within the business community were intense. In Wallony among industrialists, politicians and the press, the movement in favour of an economic rapprochement with France intensified from the end of 1929. Similar tendencies developed in Luxembourg. The pressure intensified after September 1931, and Hymans, the minister of foreign affairs, was challenged in parliament on 1 December.²⁵

The policy of the Belgian government of rapprochement with the northern countries and above all with the Netherlands, which led to the Oslo convention of 22 December 1930, was a compromise, a kind of economic balancing acceptable to Flanders as much as to Wallony. But it was also little more than a gesture. At the start of 1932, the Belgian government proposed a customs union with the Netherlands, but retreated to the less ambitious formula employed in the Ouchy convention of 16 June 1932 of a regional preferential agreement to be implemented in stages. The convention, supported by Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, was another attempt to deflect Britain from retreating further into imperial protectionism. It found favour among Flemings for its opening to the Netherlands and among Walloons in the prospect of attracting French participation.

French commercial policy reflected the instability of this decisive period in Continental history. On the one hand the government seemed ready, in deconsolidating duties, to support regional arrangements; article 6 of the Franco-German agreement of December 1932 included provision for plurilateral conventions to be excepted from the application of the most-favoured-nation clause. On the other hand, the Ouchy convention aroused opposition because it created a dangerous precedent for initiatives such as an Austro-German customs union, as well as indicating a political distancing of Belgium from France. French policy during this time also reflected a strong, if short-lived tendency to retreat into imperialism. Nevertheless support for a rapprochement with Belgium and regional action increased in the early months of 1933. In Paris, Yves Le Troquer, president of the *Union douanière européenne* as well as the *Comité d'entente franco-belge*, argued in favour of French adherence to the Ouchy convention. Henri Bouchet, the French commercial attaché at Brussels, also encouraged sympathy towards the convention and in 1933 advocated its enlargement to Switzerland and France. However, the French government seemed too preoccupied with large

issues such as disarmament to adopt a coherent strategy, which would have been more apparent had Britain not decided to block the convention.²⁶

When the World Economic Conference in London faltered in July 1933 it was again Belgium that took the lead in organising the European countries still determined to resist devaluation of their currencies: France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium, and possibly Italy and Poland. However, the first debates among members of the gold bloc, as it was known, revealed the inadequacy of this regional grouping. Belgium and France, with 40 per cent and 36 per cent respectively of their exports going to countries within the bloc in 1933, had the greatest interest in a commercial policy favouring trade among the members. But for the other countries less than 30 per cent of their exports went to gold bloc partners. Were Germany and Britain to join, the export trade of all the members, excepting only Italy, within the bloc would rise above 60 per cent. But whereas French and Belgian statesmen were prepared to consider German membership and German officials indicated their interest, the Dutch, facing strong German trade compensation, favoured an approach to Britain, and the Swiss firmly opposed German accession. In consequence, only bilateral initiatives were possible.

The bilateral agreement concluded between France and Belgium on 4 August 1934 offered Belgium only modest satisfaction. Protectionism in France limited initiatives to a redistribution of quotas on a strictly reciprocal basis, and indeed during 1934 Belgian trade with France sharply declined, partly as a result of the slump, partly because of France's tightening of import restrictions. From the start of 1934 there was a call for more vigorous action from liberal voices, in particular spokesmen for the chambers of commerce of the gold bloc countries who met in Switzerland with the encouragement of the Economic Section of the League of Nations secretariat and its director, Pietro Stoppani. Those responsible hoped to see a dynamic growth of trade within the gold bloc and early approaches to Britain and Germany. Another conference was held in Brussels on 19–20 October 1934, but once again delegates failed to agree on the appropriate attitude to adopt vis-à-vis Britain. France and Belgium thus fell back on bilateral negotiations, which resulted in another limited agreement on 20 February 1935.²⁷

The Belgian economy was being asphyxiated, with firms facing the two-fold problem of foreign protectionism and domestic deflation imposed in order to defend the gold parity of the franc. A delegation of ministers led by Theunis visited Paris on 17 March, only to reconfirm the limits of French help and the inadequacy of the gold bloc, notwithstanding official support in Paris for close relations with Belgium.²⁸ Before the end of the month, Paul Van Zeeland secured parliamentary approval to abandon the gold standard. With that, the gold bloc was shattered.

With impressive foresight, Van Zeeland informed Ambassador Paul Claudel of his intention to revive international monetary co-operation, for which the devaluation of the French franc seemed a precondition. The French devaluation at last came on 25 September 1936, after which Britain and France requested Van

Zeeland to survey the prospects for European recovery. The main conclusion of his report corroborated what the failure of the gold bloc had already demonstrated all too well: the need for Franco-British co-operation and the reintegration of Germany into the European economic system if the Continent was again to be viable. Van Zeeland also endorsed the lessons of recent years in supporting the introduction of 'collective [economic] agreements or regional pacts' open to all European countries. It was on this basis that Franco-Belgian economic relations could be renewed.²⁹ In the meantime, however, Franco-Belgian relations reached a hiatus, with Belgium's abandonment of the gold bloc followed in 1936 by its withdrawal from their bilateral military alliance and reversion to neutrality.

The inter-war period witnessed a series of French efforts to promote the organisation of economic relations in Europe and a series of failures, while the French economy gradually succumbed to the world economic crisis. This succession of initiatives clearly demonstrated the limits of France's capacity for action. Following the failure to impose its policy on Belgium in 1919, it had tested the limits of a strategy based upon the confrontation of antagonistic economic blocs. After 1925, when a new policy was required, its most ambitious and innovative political leaders discovered the difficulty of carrying economic opinion with them in a country still largely dominated by protectionist lobbies.

It can be said that these years witnessed a modernisation of the debate on the organisation of economic relations in Europe. By the early 1930s the realisation of the inadequacy of the bilateral approach united Belgian economic circles in support of the creation of a stable economic area within a regional framework. But Van Zeeland's lessons on suitable means of developing economic relations in western Europe during the 1930s only bore fruit after World War II with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community and later the European Economic Community. The inter-war years were thus a temporary stage in Franco-Belgian relations, one that was both fateful and highly frustrating.

NOTES

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- 2 E.Bussière, *La France, la Belgique et l'organisation économique de l'Europe 1918-1935*, Paris, Comité pour l'Histoire Economique et Financière de la France, 1992, pp. 19-20.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 36-8; Soutou, *L'Or et le sang*, pp. 288-93.
- 5 F.Van Langenhove, *L'Action du gouvernement belge en matière économique pendant la guerre*, Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France, 1927, pp. 211-16.
- 6 G.Trausch, 'Les relations franco-belges à propos de la question luxembourgeoise (1914-1922)', in *Les Relations franco-belges de 1830 à 1934*, Metz, Centre de recherches des relations internationales de l'université de Metz, 1975, pp. 275-93.
- 7 Quoted in Soutou, *L'Or et le sang*, p. 600.

- 8 G.-H.Soutou, 'La politique économique de la France à l'égard de la Belgique', in *Les relations franco-belges de 1830 à 1934*, Metz, Centre de recherches des relations internationales de l'université de Metz, 1975, p. 267.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- 10 Quoted in Bussière, *La France, la Belgique*, p. 132.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 149–59.
- 12 On these aspects, see the thesis of S.Jeannesson, 'La France, Poincaré et la Ruhr (1922–1924)', Université de Paris IV, 1995.
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- 15 F.Van Langenhove, *L'Elaboration de la politique extérieure de la Belgique entre les deux guerres mondiales*, Brussels, Academie royale de Belgique, 1980, p. 49.
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- 18 Bussière, 'Les relations monétaires', pp. 191–2.
- 19 Bussière, 'L'organisation économique de la SDN et la naissance du régionalisme économique en Europe', *Relations internationales*, 1993, 75, pp. 303–4.
- 20 Bussière, *La France, la Belgique*, p. 259.
- 21 Bussière, 'L'organisation économique de la SDN', p. 306; Bussière, *La France, la Belgique*, pp. 277–81.
- 22 Bussière, *La France, la Belgique*, pp. 351–62.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 374.
- 24 Bussière, 'L'organisation économique de la SDN', pp. 310–11.
- 25 Bussière, *La France, la Belgique*, p. 406.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 412–13.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 430–45.
- 28 Bussière, 'Les relations monétaires franco-belges', pp. 192–4.
- 29 M.Dumoulin, 'La mission Van Zeeland: essai de clearing diplomatique de l'apaisement (1937–1938)', *Relations internationales*, 1984, 39, 1984, pp. 333–54; P.Van Zeeland, *Rapport présenté aux gouvernements du Royaume-Uni et de la France sur la possibilité d'obtenir une réduction générale des obstacles au commerce international*, Paris, 1938, p. 10.

REPARATIONS AND WAR DEBTS

The restoration of French financial power, 1919–1929

Denise Artaud

France, victorious but weakened by its human losses and the burden of its devastated regions, found itself in 1919 confronted by a Germany that did not accept its defeat and whose territory, if reduced, had not been similarly ravaged by war. The Treaty of Versailles, as well as requiring Germany to pay reparations, provided a general outline of an iron and steel project, which would have left France the dominant power in Europe.¹ However, if these clauses were not to become a dead letter, Germany would have to collaborate in their implementation, either voluntarily or under compulsion by the Allies or by France alone. But in view of its weakness France could scarcely act alone with much chance of success. This was illustrated during the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, and it points to one of France's fundamental weaknesses, namely its financial condition, which seldom receives careful attention even though at crucial moments it was almost certainly the decisive factor undermining French foreign policy. Yet the determination with which Raymond Poincaré, during his two governments in 1922–4 and 1926–9, pursued the objectives set down by the ministry of finance in 1919, seems finally to have borne fruit in the summer of 1929. Was it a success or merely a Pyrrhic victory? This is the question that shall be addressed in the present chapter.

THE COST OF VICTORY

In the aftermath of World War I one of the most serious problems facing French foreign policy makers was the vast domestic and foreign debt built up as the result of the decision to finance both war and postwar reconstruction mainly by borrowing rather than taxation. In fact, by the outbreak of war in 1914 France's domestic financial position was already weighed down by debt. Largely because of the war indemnity imposed by Germany in 1871 and increased military spending after the turn of the century, France had the largest debt of all the industrialised countries: 34 billion francs or £1.3 billion. Debt servicing absorbed 27.3 per cent of the budget, and required heavier taxes than in the United States, Britain or Germany.² Reluctance to add to existing tax burdens largely explains the French government's decision to finance the war effort mainly by borrowing, and to delay the introduction of income tax until 1916 although it had been

approved by parliament in the spring of 1914. Yet in the government's defence, it should be noted that upon the outbreak of war the Germans soon occupied ten of France's richest departments, which had been responsible for 20 per cent of national revenues, and that France paid a 'blood tax' which was more onerous than in any other belligerent country. All the same, the war vastly inflated the domestic debt, which on 31 December 1918 stood at 123.7 billion francs or nearly £5 billion.³

France's international financial position was equally dire. In 1913 its foreign investments had amounted to between 40 and 45 billion gold francs.⁴ In the aftermath of the war, after the sale of assets to pay for imports, losses due to the Russian revolution, commercial loans arranged through foreign banks, and above all the credits provided by the British and American governments, France, despite loans to Belgium, Italy and Russia, was reduced to debtor status, owing on balance some 18.5 billion gold francs.⁵ In addition France faced a bill for the reconstruction of the devastated war zone, which was eventually to reach no less than 158 billion francs.

In 1919, France's financial losses, if less visible than its human losses or the devastation of the war zone, were a major preoccupation for the ministry of finance on account of their impact upon the budget, and seriously affected the premier and the foreign minister by weakening France's international influence. Foreign investments had been frequently used as an instrument of diplomacy by the Quai d'Orsay before the war, and now they were no longer available. Moreover, for several years Paris continued to hope that the franc could be restored to its pre-war parity, but international financial opinion, taking into account France's massive debts, decided otherwise. Thereafter movements in the franc exchange rate had less to do with fluctuations in foreign commerce or the purchasing power theory of money⁶ and more with speculative activity, which drove up the rate in 1921 and drove it down again from the summer of 1922.⁷ The fragility of the monetary situation was thus a second handicap for French diplomacy. The third was the fiscal problem, which is usually ignored in historical accounts. In 1913 Germany's fiscal burden calculated as a percentage of national revenue had been less than half that of France (5.33 per cent versus 11.71 per cent),⁸ a factor that could partly explain the dynamism of the German economy; and by the end of the war France's handicap threatened to become even worse. With French tax burdens threatening to rise faster than Germany's, largely because France faced the heavy cost of reconstructing its devastated regions while Germany faced no such charges, the spectre emerged of Germany economically dominating its French victor.

SHARING THE COSTS OF THE WAR

It is true that France was partly responsible for its own heavy indebtedness because before the war its antiquated budgetary and fiscal practices had obstructed efforts to address the situation, and its overseas investments had been less

judiciously allocated than Britain's. Whereas 63 per cent of Britain's investments went to countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina, with strong development potential and whose exports contributed to Britain's war effort, more than a half of France's investments had gone to Russia, Turkey, the Balkan countries and its own colonies.⁹ But in 1919 it was politically difficult to admit responsibility. How could French leaders tell the country that, after such exceptional tenacity, endurance and courage during the war, and such a massive 'blood tax', it must now shoulder the cost of the war through higher taxes? How could they persuade the electorate that the recent victory had increased their tax burden as much as the defeat in 1870?

The result of this dilemma was the famous formula coined by Lucien Klotz, the Minister of Finance: 'Germany will pay'. The Allies would impose on Germany the cost of reconstructing the devastated regions, now known as reparations. But this by no means removed the problem of France's war debts to Britain and the United States, which represented approximately 18.5 per cent of French indebtedness and whose total exceeded France's overseas assets by fully a third (25 versus 18.5 billion gold francs). If no satisfactory settlement could be found, they would severely compromise France's fiscal position and obstruct the revival of foreign lending.

The solution proposed in December 1918 by Alexandre Céliér, director of the *Mouvement général des Fonds* in the Ministry of Finance, was a sort of corollary of Klotz's formula. 'Our country,' he wrote in an internal note, 'cannot envisage the settlement of its political [i.e. war] debt until the peace treaty secures payment of the reparations due to us and our economic reconstruction provides us with the necessary means.'¹⁰ Céliér thus affirmed the priority of reparations over war debts: the latter would not be repaid until or unless reparations were paid. This underlined the paradox of France's situation where, overwhelmed with debt, it could only reap the fruits of victory if the wartime Alliance was prolonged and if its former Allies assisted by forcing Germany to pay reparations and granting France favourable war debt repayment terms; in short by a general settlement of war debts and reparations in which they agreed to 'an equitable distribution of the costs of the war'.

France had reason to expect the British government to show some appreciation of its predicament. London was fully aware that the massive scale of war debts—set at \$21.5 billion after the armistice and at \$24.9 billion in 1920¹¹—were bound to be a major obstacle to the restoration of international financial stability, which had been crucial to the prosperity of pre-war Europe and would be so again after the war. The British economist, J.M.Keynes, had proposed their general cancellation during the peace conference, but his plan had been disregarded on account of objections from the US Treasury.¹²

Washington's attitude was now decisive.¹³ The key factor was America's international financial position, which presented a mirror image to that of France. A net debtor in 1913 of \$3.7 billion, by 1919 the United States had become a creditor of roughly \$3 billion, taking into account only private transactions;

government claims on its wartime allies amounted to over \$7 billion in 1918, reaching \$9.5 billion in 1920.¹⁴ To this should be added the increase in America's gold reserves, which had more than tripled and now amounted to nearly 40 per cent of the world's stock. Henceforth, to borrow a phrase from Herbert Feis, the United States, not Europe, was 'the world's banker'. It was from America that credits would have to come for the reconstruction of Europe's financial system and devastated regions. Yet paradoxically Americans themselves were still expecting repayment of their wartime credits.

The second factor was the rivalry, albeit often denied, between London and Washington. In spite of disinvestment during the war, Britain remained a major creditor power at the end of the war, with overseas investments of perhaps \$14 billion.¹⁵ Within the ensemble of inter-Allied debts, moreover, it was a net creditor of slightly over \$3 billion in 1920. But this was merely a theoretical figure, since its claims on Russia were now worthless and those on France, Belgium and Italy were unlikely to be honoured in full. In contrast, it owed \$4.2 billion in war debts to the United States, which it could repay given its international position. It thus stood to lose very little from the cancellation of war debts, especially if this facilitated European reconstruction and in turn stimulated British trade. Unfortunately for those who favoured this solution, however, the American position was different. When war debts were taken into account, the American creditor position reached some \$12.5 billion, and the British creditor position some \$17 billion. If the debts were cancelled, America's foreign claims would decline to \$3 billion whereas Britain's would still be \$14 billion. Therefore the US government did not want to cancel the debts because they offered a means of pressuring its debtors on, for example, disarmament policy, and very likely because they promised to strengthen the dollar vis-à-vis the pound sterling and US financial power vis-à-vis the City of London.¹⁶

In these circumstances the French thesis was not well received in Washington. The Americans took the view that the peace conference had decided not to include the costs of the war in the reparation demands on Germany. Therefore, war debts, which indubitably were part of the cost of the war, were unrelated to reparation payments. They firmly rejected the idea of an inter-Allied conference to arrange a comprehensive settlement. By the same token they absolutely refused to accept the priority of 'reparations over debts' or the need for 'an equitable sharing of war costs'. Beyond the principles underpinning the American attitude, there is also evidence of fear, albeit unacknowledged, of a debtors' front organised against them.¹⁷

With the French and American positions virtually irreconcilable, Britain was in a position to play a major role, since it was at one and the same time a creditor and debtor, and it understood better than the United States the burden that debts posed for European reconstruction. It could thus make common cause with the debtors, which to a certain extent it did at the conference in London in May 1921. There, German reparations were fixed at 132 billion gold marks, but actual payments were divided into three series: series A totalling 12 billion marks, series

B totalling 38 billion marks, and series C whose total of 82 billion marks corresponded closely to total war debt demands. In accepting this arrangement Britain implicitly accepted the connection between debts and reparations as well as the possibility of reducing reparations if the debts were cancelled. Besides, postponement of payment of the C series was an indirect acknowledgement of the priority of reparations over debts. French policy in the early 1920s was thus not, as is sometimes suggested, part of a triangular struggle between Paris, London and Berlin, but part of a four-sided conflict including Washington, and it is in this perspective that the major turning point of 1922 should be seen.

THE TURNING POINT, 1922

The year 1922 has attracted much attention from historians on account of the Genoa conference and the Russo-German agreement reached at Rapallo.¹⁸ It also marked a crucial turning point in the history of reparations.¹⁹ However, in many respects this merely reflected developments in Washington in March 1921, when the Republicans returned to power. This was followed shortly by the naval conference in Washington, which was marked by Franco-British differences and ended on 6 February 1922 with agreement between Britain and the United States on naval parity, at least in the important category of capital ships. The second important event was the ending of the moratorium that the Democratic administration had granted to debtors in 1920, suspending interest payments during the period of reconstruction. On 9 February 1922, barely three days after the naval agreement was signed, Congress created the World War Foreign Debt Commission (WWFDC) to negotiate agreements for the repayment of war debts, much of which was short term and required rescheduling if it was to be paid at all. The commission, however, had no authority to reduce the capital of the debts, and could only make small reductions on interest payments. The US government immediately called upon creditor countries to contact the commission with the purpose of opening negotiations. This placed London in a quandary. Since 1920 it had hovered between its positions as creditor and as debtor in the attempt to carry both Paris and Washington with it. The Washington naval conference and the creation of the WWFDC, however, left it no alternative but to choose.

London's change of direction had in fact begun as early as December 1921. At that time the German government was preparing to request a moratorium on reparation payments—which it did on 14 December—because it had not managed to obtain credits from American banks, which were unwilling to commit themselves until reparations were reduced to 'reasonable' levels. Lloyd George invited Louis Loucheur, minister for the liberated territories, for talks. They met at Chequers on 8 December, where Loucheur proposed reparation payments divided into two series of obligations. The first, amounting to 53 billion marks and corresponding to the cost of repairing physical war damage, would be distributed 83 per cent to France and 5 per cent to Britain; the second, amounting

to 82 billion marks and corresponding to the cost of interAllied debts, would be distributed 58 per cent to Britain (net of war debt out-payments) and 15 per cent to France.

This proposal reflected the position of the French ministry of finance, which favoured priority to reconstruction, opposed reparations for human losses paid out in war widows', orphans' and invalidity pensions, and sought a clear link between reparations and war debts. At the same time it overturned the Spa percentages agreement²⁰ and the state of payments in 1921. But it offered satisfaction to the American bankers who were seeking a reduction in total reparations, although only on condition that war debts were also cancelled. Loucheur, it seems, returned to Paris hopeful that his proposal would be accepted, but Lloyd George had in fact indicated that the cancellation of war debts was conditional upon prior agreement with the United States which, given the attitude of Congress, was out of the question. Thus when the premier, Aristide Briand, visited London with Loucheur on 18 December, the Chequers proposal was set aside. Lloyd George now altered course in favour of reconstructing Europe by means a vast scheme involving Britain, France and Germany in the development of Russia. This resulted in the Genoa conference of April 1922.²¹

Delegates to the Genoa conference could deal neither with reparations, because of Paris' veto, nor with war debts because American representatives were not present. Thus caught in an impasse, reparation creditors passed the issue on to a loan committee set up under the auspices of the Reparation Commission, which met for the first time in Paris on 24 May. The committee, chaired by the Belgian, M.Delacroix, and comprised of prominent bankers including the American, J.P.Morgan, was called upon to examine a possible loan to Germany, but on 10 June it suspended its work, deciding that no loan was possible until total reparations were reduced. This decision was motivated by the French government's refusal to agree to such a reduction. Here again, inter-Allied debts were at the heart of the problem, as the French delegate to the Reparation Commission on 7 June stated: German liabilities could not be reduced if French liabilities were not reduced as well. J.P.Morgan attempted to get around this situation by suggesting that the difficulty of debts owed to the United States was purely a theoretical one, since any serious attempt to repay them would only impoverish Europe to the point of provoking social unrest. Besides, the United States, whose balance of trade was in surplus, could not absorb the payments. Indirectly, Morgan counselled the French government to accept a reduction in reparations, because Washington would soon be obliged to accept a concomitant reduction in its debt demands. But this was a leap in the dark, which Poincaré, premier since 15 January 1922, refused to make in view of the recent decisions of the US Congress, just as Lloyd George had refused to gamble on Washington's complete or partial cancellation of war debts in December 1921.²²

The consequences of the failure of the loan committee were immediate, in the first instance upon the health of the franc. At the same time as the prospect of a loan to facilitate reparation payments disappeared, so France's hopes of rapid payment

and relief from its domestic debt also vanished; and this while the sword of Damocles hung over its external debt. The franc, which had recovered since the start of the year to reach its December 1919 level, immediately began to weaken in face of adverse speculation. From 9 June to the end of December it fell 20 per cent on the foreign exchanges.²³

The failure of the loan committee also illustrated France's diplomatic isolation and the gulf that had emerged between Paris and London. The evolution of British policy towards a war debt settlement with the United States only widened the gulf. On 5 July 1922 Lloyd George decided to send a mission to Washington in the autumn to negotiate a settlement. Despite 2 million unemployed, Britain was prepared to increase the burden on its budget by war debt repayments to the United States in order to strengthen the entente with Washington sketched in during the naval conference, and thereby persuade the United States to participate in Europe's reconstruction.²⁴ The corollary of this decision was the despatch of the Balfour Note on 1 August to all of Britain's debtors, affirming that Britain sought only enough reparations and war debts to cover its own liabilities to the United States. The note was drafted mainly for the purpose of confronting the United States with its responsibility for the tangle of inter-governmental debt. But in Europe and especially in Paris the effect was that of a red rag to a bull. Since 1919 France had insisted upon reparations before war debts: French war debt payments would come only after receipt of German reparations, and conversely the less Germany paid, the less France would repay. The Balfour Note, in making the Allies and Germany jointly responsible for the British debt, invited the opposite interpretation, that the less Germany paid, the *more* France must repay.

POINCARÉ'S DECISION TO OCCUPY THE RUHR

The failure of the loan committee led to a third consequence: removal of any prospect of an early stabilisation of the mark and the intensification of inflation in Germany. On 12 July 1922 Berlin, pointing to its financial difficulties, requested a new moratorium on reparation payments. Poincaré insisted upon one condition: the receipt of 'physical pledges', essentially in the Ruhr. In fact, the possibility of occupying the Ruhr had been discussed in Paris since June, which invites speculation about the premier's broad intentions. On 7 June—when the failure of the loan committee was already virtually certain—Poincaré presented his policy before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee.²⁵ He made clear that he was not hostile in principle to facilitating German reparation payments by a loan. On the contrary, 'the loan is a necessity', he stated, for other means of payment, whether through the sale of gold or the profits of a trade surplus, would simply not suffice. A loan would provide fresh money, permitting France to balance its budget and avoid additional tax burdens. Although he also claimed to be favourable to the payment of reparations in kind and expressed regret that some industrialists were opposed to this form of payment, it seems clear that he was mainly interested in

the financial and fiscal benefits to be gained from reparations. Two weeks later, he wrote to the Comte de Saint-Aulaire, ambassador in London,

The day when Germany...reduces its spending to the level of its income, which should be easy for a country no longer burdened with military expenses and with no debts other than reparations, we will find ourselves confronting a country with the lowest fiscal burden and the greatest wealth in the world. [France would then face] the truly frightening prospect of Germany economically hegemonic and capable of realising all the objectives it would have gained had it won the war.²⁶

But, it might be asked, if Poincaré was mainly interested in the financial aspect of reparations and favoured a reparations loan, why did he scupper the work of the loan committee, and why did he turn towards the occupation of the Ruhr and the seizure not of financial but economic pledges? The answer to the first question is simple and has already been provided. 'The American bankers,' he explained to the senators on 7 June, 'have no mandate from their government to consider the question of inter-Allied debts.... We thus had to set down our markers clearly.' As for the occupation of the Ruhr, Poincaré did not expect a financial miracle. 'It will not be the magpie in the nest,' he commented. But by taking the initiative, France would gain control of the distribution of coal in Germany, which would force it to come to terms. It would also strengthen France diplomatically vis-à-vis Britain. When discussion of the German moratorium was resumed, Poincaré was determined to be able to act alone. 'I am not prepared to confront Britain with empty hands and admit I can do nothing.'²⁷ Subsequently he went further, claiming that in occupying the Ruhr he sought to make the Americans 'think again'.²⁸

The London conference of 7 to 14 August 1922, convened at French request to examine Germany's application for a payments moratorium, gave prominence to the war debt question even if the most controversial issues were the control of German finances and the physical pledges that might be seized. In his first statement to the conference, Poincaré called into question the Balfour Note which obstructed a settlement of war debts and in turn reparations. Eventually the French position was implicitly accepted, for on 14 August it was decided to adjourn further discussions until November when it was hoped all the financial missions sent to Washington would have returned and the American government's attitude towards war debts would be clearer.²⁹ At the second London conference on 9 to 11 December, the first afternoon was devoted entirely to the question of inter-Allied debts, and Poincaré offered to pay French war debts by handing over German C series obligations. The conference ended on 11 December in total disagreement, as much over the debt question as that of seizing pledges in Germany, and a further meeting was scheduled for 2 January 1923 in Paris.

The Paris conference was marked by ill-tempered exchanges and an irreconcilable rift between the French and British positions, and likewise ended in failure on 4 January. The British prime minister, Andrew Bonar Law, presented a complicated plan, indeed so complicated that the German financial expert, Carl Bergmann, claimed he would rather pay reparations than try to understand it.³⁰ Poincaré, however, dismissed it so quickly that it invited suspicion that he merely sought a pretext to enter the Ruhr and pursue an active Rhenish policy. This, however, is plausible only if the British plan was compatible with French interests as defined since 1919. Without going into the details, it should suffice to note that it would have allowed Britain to cover approximately 70 per cent of its war debts while providing only 55 per cent of the sums France had already spent on reconstructing its devastated regions; that it did not provide for any further expenses of this sort, and only for a quarter of France's estimated war debt payments to the United States.³¹ In other words, whereas the Loucheur plan and the ministry of finance plan (calling for the concomitant cancellation of war debts and Germany's series C bonds, which Poincaré had briefly advanced in London in August 1922) gave clear priority for the devastated regions and modified the Spa percentages in France's favour, the Bonar Law plan gave priority to war debts—which were of course the equivalent of France's devastated regions to Britain's commerce and currency—and would have modified the Spa percentages in Britain's favour.

Thus in January 1923 France and Britain were stalemated. Paris as well as London understood that reparations must be reduced, but two issues remained unresolved: how much to reduce Germany's debt, and how to share out the sacrifices among the Allies. As to the first point, Poincaré regarded the Bonar Law plan as too generous to Germany, and he again raised the spectre of Germany liberated of external charges and free to dominate Europe while France remained crippled by debts.³² Poincaré was not rigidly committed to the figure of 132 billion marks in reparations, but he refused any modification of the May 1921 schedule of German payments which would be unfavourable to France—as he had said to the senators in June 1922³³ and repeated in December, when the minister of finance suggested he make specific proposals at the forthcoming London conference,

Let us face the facts squarely. We shall go to London and request a liquidation of all inter-Allied debts. When we are told that this is impossible, we shall then request that loans be made to Germany. When we are told this is also impossible, we shall return and carry out our own policy. It is quite useless in these circumstances to set out detailed proposals.³⁴

Poincaré had thus not budged an inch from the position he set out before the senators: the situation was not yet ripe, he would only negotiate with pledges in hand. Although he faced increasing pressure from senior colleagues who favoured an active Rhenish policy, available documentation leaves little room for doubt

that in occupying the Ruhr he was not indifferent to Allied co-operation, which he believed essential for the defence of French interests. On the contrary, his aim was to strengthen his hand so as to revive Allied negotiations that had become hopelessly bogged down.³⁵

MAN'S FATE IS DECIDED BY MONEY³⁶

Poincaré's decision reflected a conflict of interest between Paris and London not only over reparations but also over economic and political principles. In occupying the Ruhr he did not hope for immediate or substantial financial gains. His aim was rather to persuade the Germans to fulfil their obligations. For in contrast to many British and Americans who stressed the limits of Germany's capacity to pay, Poincaré insisted that the only criterion for determining a country's capacity to pay was the will of its people to make sacrifices.³⁷ Britain, liberal and committed to the promotion of free market economics, thus confronted Poincaré's policy of 'will' and even more the ambitions of French officials who sought to subordinate economic forces completely to military force.³⁸ Up to a point, therefore, Poincaré's action can be seen in the tradition of Colbert and the Napoleonic Continental system.

J.M.Keynes was prepared to put a different gloss on the situation:

The European countries after the war, have been obliged to move from a regime where force reigned towards one closer to freely contracted agreements. Before arriving there, it was essential to rectify the situation unilaterally created by the occupation and the devastation of northern France. The occupation of the Ruhr restored that equilibrium. France is no longer simply a petitioner at the bar of international justice. It has gained a position of equality in the negotiations.³⁹

Even so, in certain respects the occupation of the Ruhr can be interpreted as a distant echo of the struggles of a hundred years earlier. As seen from London, the Ruhr occupation was the first step towards the re-establishment of French hegemony in Europe. But as seen from Paris, the Bonar Law plan, which aimed not only to reduce German reparation obligations but also to grant London the sole right to determine Austrian, Hungarian and Bulgarian reparations, was Britain's way of restoring sterling to its pre-war prestige, reinforcing its financial influence in central Europe and gaining hegemony on the Continent.⁴⁰

In the subsequent duel between Paris and London, France could count on two allies, Belgium and Italy, but it soon became clear their support was by no means unwavering. Moreover, France itself was vulnerable to fiscal and monetary weakness. The Ruhr cost dearly before yielding any returns. During the first six months of 1923 the decline in German coal deliveries to France and Belgium to 30 per cent of the previous year seriously affected steel production. Meanwhile the franc continued to decline on the exchanges. On 8 June 1922 it had stood at

\$0.09. By the start of 1923 it had fallen to \$0.075, and by the year end to \$0.05, down 44 per cent over the eighteen-month period.⁴¹

In Britain the inverse occurred. By the spring of 1923 the pound had nearly regained its pre-war parity, and the only important obstacle to stabilisation seemed to be the consolidation of war debt obligations to America. This obstacle was removed in June 1923 with the negotiation of a repayment agreement which, as Myron Herrick, the American ambassador in Paris, observed, was carried out mainly for political rather than for economic reasons. British statesmen had been stung by their isolation at the time the Ruhr occupation was decided.

Britain hoped to intervene sooner or later in Continental affairs, but with the full backing of the United States and a common program which the European countries would find difficult if not impossible to resist. The debt settlement thus in a sense dissociated Britain from its continental allies.⁴²

The struggle between France, whose currency was in steep decline, and Britain, which now encouraged close relations between the Bank of England and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York,⁴³ was an unequal one. Nevertheless France won the first battle. Passive resistance in the Ruhr unleashed acute inflation in Germany which threatened the Reich with financial and political collapse. On 26 September 1923 the German government was thus obliged to end passive resistance. Yet, despite the fact that Poincaré now seemed to be in control, he refused to enter into direct negotiations with Berlin. To those who pressed him to do so, he replied, 'You would have me tangle with Britain. I do not intend to do so, and if pressured, I would rather resign.'⁴⁴ As at the start of the year, Poincaré again avoided a confrontation that threatened to break up inter-Allied solidarity.

More remarkable was his decision on 24 October to accept the convening of a committee of experts, including an American, to study the question of reparations. Having broken up the loan committee and disregarded the proposal made by the US Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, on 29 December 1922 to convene a committee of experts, why did he now accept this solution? He was certainly aware of the difficulties facing France, including Belgium's reluctant support, the impossibility of balancing his own budget, the declining franc and the breakup of the *Bloc national*, the centre-right coalition of which he was leader, during the summer. He would have to look to his own political position before the legislative elections in the spring of 1924. All the same, he had several strong cards in his hand, including the Germans' abandonment of passive resistance and the Rhenish separatist movement which he decided to support, albeit briefly, on 24 October. It seems likely therefore that he believed the moment had arrived to issue a loan to facilitate a settlement of the reparations problem, an action he already believed necessary on 7 June 1922 and which was now more urgent than before because of the decline in the franc.

Another factor affecting his decision may have been developments in the United States. President Harding had died in August 1923, and his successor,

Calvin Coolidge, appeared to be less intransigent on the question of debts. Statements by a number of American bankers also seem to have had their effect. Poincaré appears to have nourished the hope—or rather illusion—that a comprehensive war debt and reparations settlement was now possible.⁴⁵ Since in his view the expert committee derived its authority from the Reparations Commission, this removed its power to reduce the nominal amount of German reparation charges.

However, the next round in the battle soon went against France. Paris distanced itself from the Rhenish separatist movement, and the alternative solution that it thereafter favoured—the creation of three autonomous *Länder* or provinces in the Rhineland—also failed in January 1924. The monetary problem was probably crucial here. In the first days of January, Hjalmar Schacht, president of the Reichstag, met Montagu Norman of the Bank of England, who promised his support for the creation of a new German currency, the Rentenmark, while refusing support for a Rhenish currency and reserve bank, for which the French were calling.⁴⁶ From 14 January the franc faced unprecedented pressure, obliging Poincaré to request support from the American banker, J.P.Morgan. Controversy still surrounds the source of this speculation. It possibly began in the Paris foreign exchange market, provoked by disgruntled industrialists who sought a lower franc to assist their export efforts. But thereafter it was fuelled mainly by foreign speculation, notably from Vienna and Amsterdam.⁴⁷ Was it encouraged by the German government? The absence of direct evidence makes it impossible to be sure. But after the hyperinflation of 1923 the German government knew what it was like to have been beaten by monetary weakness, and during the work of the two expert committees, the Dawes and McKenna committees, which got under way on 14 January 1924, the Germans were undoubtedly delighted to see the franc under attack.

All the same, when the experts submitted their reports on 9 April, the franc gained strength thanks to the Morgan loan. Poincaré believed it possible to accept the reports, especially as he had other weapons available. The Dawes plan on reparations called for the placement of a German loan, which, as indicated already, Poincaré favoured. However, it fixed reparation payments for the next five years only. Poincaré hoped to obtain agreement that a final settlement of war debts should also be postponed for five years. On this basis and with the benefit of its 'pledges' in the Ruhr, the *Mission Interalliée de Contrôle des Usines et des Mines* (MICUM) agreements and its still pre-eminent position in the Reparation Commission, Poincaré was hopeful of a favourable settlement. He thus did not abandon France's traditional position based on the principle of maintaining a link between reparations and war debts, and priority for the first over the second. He had merely abandoned hopes for an immediate general and definitive settlement.⁴⁸

The French legislative elections of 11 May overturned this elaborate plan of battle. The three themes dominating the elections were the high cost of living due to the recent inflation, the rise in taxes Poincaré had introduced in the spring

to reduce the budget deficit and the vulnerability of the franc, and the heavy cost of the Ruhr occupation which appeared excessive to public opinion. The *Bloc national* was therefore defeated by the *Cartel des Gauches*, and Herriot succeeded Poincaré as premier on 15 June. It was thus Herriot who represented France at the London conference, convened between 16 July and 16 August to discuss the experts' reports. For the first time since 1919 the American government was represented at an Allied conference, and moreover it had at its disposal a shadow delegation: by 'pure coincidence', the Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, was in London and the secretary of the Treasury also made a brief visit, while equally important partners of the Morgan bank were constantly present behind the scenes. The American bankers were determined to set the conditions for the issuing of a German loan: to assure lenders that France could not again disrupt Germany's economic and administrative affairs, the Reparations Commission, in which France had hitherto been pre-eminent, should no longer be empowered to declare Germany in default.

After weak resistance, Herriot yielded to the bankers' demands. Perhaps it was because, as the Morgan partner, Thomas Lamont, reported, Herriot lacked energy and his parliamentary majority was unsteady. But to this must be added two long-standing weaknesses: the fragility of Belgium's support and the fragility of the franc. For these reasons the bankers found it easy to exploit the threat of a collapse of the French and Belgian francs if Paris refused to acquiesce to their demands and allowed the conference to break up without agreement. Following a lunch with Hughes and a private meeting with Georges Theunis, the Belgian prime minister, Herriot yielded and put forward a new proposal: an American would be the fifth member of the Reparations Commission, and, if a decision to declare Germany in default was not reached by unanimity voting, any member in the minority could appeal to an arbitration commission, chaired by an American.⁴⁹ The London conference ratified the reduction of the Reparations Commission's powers—the first serious breach in the Treaty of Versailles—and agreed on the evacuation of the Ruhr within one year. To add to his humiliation, Herriot found Ramsay MacDonald, the British prime minister, unwilling to enter into serious discussion of the war debt problem.

THE CIRCULAR FLOW OF PAPER

In 1924 France agreed to a considerable modification of policy in setting aside its postwar effort to establish a link between the settlement of reparations and war debts. Yet this link was no mere invention of the ministry of finance, but a reality of the international balance of payments and was bound to re-emerge through the force of events. One early indication came in 1925, when the French Treasury ceased to borrow abroad once reparation payments became regular and substantial. In 1928 the franc was officially stabilised: the balance between Treasury receipts from reparations and payments of commercial and political debts was now positive. In fact, the French international balance of payments had

spectacularly improved since 1924, paving the way to the Mellon-Bérenger agreement and Churchill-Caillaux agreement of 1926, which consolidated war debt repayments with the United States and Britain, and the de facto stabilisation of the franc in December of the same year.⁵⁰

By the same token, if Germany easily met its reparation obligations from 1924, it was because the Dawes plan, in re-establishing confidence, opened the floodgates to commercial lending to Germany. Thus began, in the words of J. M. Keynes, the great 'circular flow of paper': the American banks lent to Germany; Germany paid reparations mainly to France and Britain; and they in turn repaid their war debts to the United States. In a sense, the United States thus paid itself. But it could hardly have been otherwise, since the debts, given their magnitude, could be paid neither in gold nor in exports, especially as the US commercial balance was already in surplus.⁵¹

However, looking more closely, the flow of paper was not merely circular but a rising spiral of indebtedness. Taking into account the interest due to private lenders and the repayment of political debts, Europe's need for American capital steadily increased. In 1927 Benjamin Strong, chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and America's leading central banker, reckoned that at least \$700 million was required annually if the international payments system were to remain balanced. Amidst growing fears that this was beyond the means of the American financial system,⁵² the Young plan was drawn up in 1929 in the hope that it would provide a permanent settlement of the reparations issue. Total reparations were somewhat reduced, and by dividing reparations into two annuities, one unconditional, the other conditional, priority was given to the devastated regions. Moreover, the amount of unconditional annuities was strictly parallel to the amount of war debt instalments: in effect, Germany had been saddled with the war debt to America. The French position thus largely carried the day, to the intense annoyance of Washington.

Strengthened by this success, Poincaré, now back in government, decided to ratify the Mellon-Bérenger agreement,⁵³ even though France still had no assurance that if Germany defaulted on reparation payments, the United States would suspend war debt demands. His decision was probably prompted by two considerations. In the first place, if France did not ratify the 1926 agreement, the debt for war materials acquired after the armistice, \$400 million, would fall due on 1 August 1929.⁵⁴ France could pay, but it would require the withdrawal of gold on deposit in London and seriously shake the international monetary system. Second, after the failure of French approaches to London and Berlin to create a united front of debtors against American financial imperialism, Poincaré evidently decided it was preferable not to break the entente with Washington in order to be able to call upon its support in case of need.⁵⁵

From this brief study a certain number of conclusions may be drawn. To take the reparations problem first, if it required ten years to reach agreement on a final settlement with the adoption of the Young plan, this was not because Paris refused any reduction in reparations, but because of the difficulty in sharing out

the sacrifices between France and Britain. The Loucheur plan of 1921 was too favourable to France; the Bonar Law plan of 1923 was too favourable to Britain. The Young plan, if it modified the Spa percentages in favour of Britain, nevertheless favoured France insofar as it received more of the unconditional annuities, and hence would be paid more rapidly than Britain. The priority of reparations over war debts was thus safeguarded.

The second problem was the impact of inter-Allied debts on the financial and monetary reconstruction of Europe. Because they weighed particularly heavily on France, they threatened to create a deep economic gap between France and Germany, and by their fiscal and monetary effects to block the coal and steel project outlined in the Treaty of Versailles.⁵⁶ They were therefore a major preoccupation for Poincaré during his two periods of government. Poincaré was keenly interested in restoring France's monetary stability: it was he who took the decision to stabilise the franc, which was henceforth known as the franc Poincaré, and it was monetary stability that largely influence his decision to ratify the Mellon-Bérenger agreement. The great continuing source of instability was inter-Allied debts, and from archival sources it is clear that they strongly influenced his decision to demand pledges in the Ruhr, in the hope of re-entering Allied negotiations with a stronger hand.⁵⁷

If the Ruhr occupation did not realise all of France's aims, France appeared nevertheless in 1929 to have re-established its financial and diplomatic position. Its currency was stabilised, its political debts were effectively placed on Germany's shoulders, and gold was flowing to the *Banque de France*. France also seemed in a position to call on the direct or indirect support of the United States because of the ratification of the Mellon-Bérenger agreement and the de facto link established between war debts and reparations in the Young plan. Would the United States not be obliged to put pressure on Germany—of which it was the major creditor—if it failed to honour its obligations? France also seemed able to count on the dynamic of Keynes's circular flow of paper, which oiled the wheels of international payments.

Despite this brilliant picture, France's diplomatic position was far from strong. The link between debts and reparations, real or not, was never accepted by Washington, as became clear when the Hoover moratorium ended in 1932 and it demanded the resumption of war debt payments in conditions where further German reparation payments were out of the question. Besides, while Paris sought to re-establish a balance between France and Germany, which had been distorted by the war and its postwar burdens, Washington reproached France for its militarism and sought to reintegrate Germany into the diplomatic and economic system. This objective was, of course, favoured by German-American bankers, and from the autumn of 1923 coincided with the German government's desire to forestall the collapse of the Reich by securing the support of British and American finance. This support, as has been seen, enabled the stabilisation of the mark and encouraged large-scale capital lending to Germany, hence the circular flow of paper which incidentally benefited France.

Up to a point, the circular flow of paper eliminated Franco-German antagonism and made American capital one of the motors of European prosperity, potentially even the guarantor of its security. The Hague agreements of 30 and 31 August 1929, which officially endorsed the Young plan along with a commitment to the early evacuation of the last Allied troops still in the Rhineland, appeared to put the seal upon this financial approach to appeasement. But can one ever guarantee peace solely by economic means? American financial diplomacy in the 1920s did not offer France protection as effective as the guarantee pact promised by President Wilson to the French government in 1919. The great financial crisis of 1929 halted the flow of American capital to western Europe and destroyed the fragile equilibrium created by the settlement that year, leaving France with no assurance of support against the eventual renaissance of German militarism.

NOTES

- 1 J.Bariéty, *Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale*, Paris, Pedone, 1977; G.-H.Soutou, *L'Or et le Sang. Les buts de guerre économiques de la première guerre mondiale*, Paris, Fayard, 1989.
- 2 E.L.Dulles, *The French Franc, 1914–1928: The Facts and their Interpretation*, New York, Macmillan, 1929.
- 3 H.G.Moulton and C.Lewis, *The French Debt Problem*, New York, Macmillan, 1926, p. 68. The size of France's domestic debt varies according to different authors: A. Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, Paris, Fayard, 1965, p. 520, puts it at 105.4 billion francs; but as M.Wolfe notes in *The French Franc Between the Wars*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1951, a study based upon the work of Gaston Jèze and Henri Truchy, it is doubtful that the exact financial cost of World War I will ever be known.
- 4 On the divergent estimates of French investments, see M.Lévy-Leboyer, 'La capacité financière de la France au début du XXème siècle', in *La Position internationale de la France. Aspects économiques et financiers, XIX-XXe siècles*, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1977.
- 5 Moulton and Lewis, *The French Debt Problem*, p. 35.
- 6 According to the purchasing power theory, the value of a currency changes over time so as to maintain equilibrium between its internal and its external purchasing power.
- 7 Dulles, *The French Franc*, pp. 32–48.
- 8 H.E.Fisk, *The Inter-Ally Debts: An Analysis of War and Postwar Public Finance, 1914–1923*, New York and Paris, Bankers Trust Company, 1924, pp. 322–3.
- 9 H.Feis, *Europe, the World's Banker, 1870–1914*, New York, Kelley for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1964.
- 10 Ministère des Finances, F30/780, note, n.d.
- 11 Fisk, *The Inter-Ally Debts*, pp. 345–7.
- 12 D.Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées et la reconstruction de l'Europe*, Paris, Champion, 1978, pp. 123–31.
- 13 On the position of the United States, see *ibid.*, p. 137 and various.
- 14 Fisk, *The Inter-Ally Debts*, p. 347.

- 15 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, p. 61.
- 16 One source of friction derived from the fact that until World War I American trade with Latin America was carried out through the agency of City of London banks and finance houses.
- 17 The Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, did however admit this to the German ambassador in 1929. See Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, p. 906.
- 18 C.Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921–1922*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1984; C.Fink, A.Frohn and J.Heideking (eds) *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction, 1922*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- 19 D.Artaud, 'L'anné 1922 et les ambiguïtés économiques du traité de Versailles', in *Une occasion manquée? 1922: La reconstruction de l'Europe*, ed. by M.Petricioli, Berne, Peter Lang, 1995.
- 20 The conference at Spa in July 1920 agreed to reparations being distributed 52 per cent to France and 22 per cent to Britain.
- 21 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 366–83.
- 22 E.Weill-Raynal, *Les Réparations allemandes et la France*, Paris, Nouvelles Editions latines, 1947, vol. II, pp. 166–82; Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 420–7.
- 23 Dulles, *The French Franc*, pp. 156–7, 462–3.
- 24 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, p. 410.
- 25 D.Artaud, 'A propos de l'occupation de la Ruhr', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 1970, XVII, January–March. It should be noted that Poincaré spoke more freely to the Senate than the Chamber because no members of the Communist Party were present.
- 26 Poincaré to Saint Aulaire, 29 June 1923, *Documents diplomatiques publiés par le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1923, p. 54.
- 27 Artaud, 'A propos de l'occupation de la Ruhr', pp. 11–12.
- 28 France, Senate Foreign Affairs Commission, 17 May 1923.
- 29 Weill-Raynal, *Les Réparations allemandes et la France*, vol. II, pp. 201–2, 223. However, because of Lloyd George's resignation and replacement by Andrew Bonar Law, the British mission was not sent until the spring of 1923.
- 30 J.Seydoux, *De Versailles au Plan Young*, Paris, Plon, 1932, p. 193.
- 31 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 452–7.
- 32 Weill-Reynal, *Les Réparations allemandes et la France*, vol. II, p. 360.
- 33 Artaud, 'A propos de l'occupation de la Ruhr', pp. 8–9.
- 34 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, p. 448.
- 35 This is also the position of J.Bariéty, in *Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale*; W.McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914–1924*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978; and M.Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.
- 36 According to Jacques Rueff's formula, in *L'Age de l'inflation*, second edn, Paris, Payot, 1963.
- 37 Artaud, 'A propos de l'occupation de la Ruhr', pp. 5–6.
- 38 J.Bouvier, R.Girault and J.Thobie, *L'Impérialisme à la française*, Paris, Editions de la Découverte, 1986.
- 39 J.M.Keynes, 'The German transfer problem', *Economic Journal*, 1929, xxxix, 153, March, pp. 405–6.
- 40 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, p. 454.

- 41 Dulles, *The French Franc*, pp. 462–6, 505.
- 42 Cleveland Historical Association, Herrick papers, box 14, Herrick to Hughes, 28 February 1923.
- 43 S.V.O. Clarke, *Central Bank Cooperation, 1924–1931*, New York, Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 1967.
- 44 Poincaré to Reibel, quoted in J. Chastenet, *Histoire de la IIIème République*, vol. V (1918–1931), Paris, Hachette, 1960, p. 130.
- 45 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 584–91.
- 46 Bariéty, *Relations franco-allemandes après la première guerre mondiale*, p. 286.
- 47 J.-N. Jeanneney, 'De la spéculation française comme arme diplomatique', and J.-C. Debeir, 'La crise du franc de 1924, un exemple de spéculation internationale', *Relations internationales*, 1978, 13, spring.
- 48 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 632–9.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 661–2.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 927 and various.
- 51 In 1920 total gold reserves of European governments and central banks scarcely reached \$6.5 billion. In addition, the Fordney-McCumber tariff of 1922 intensified American protectionism and was in contradiction with the official policy of demanding repayment of foreign debts.
- 52 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 879–85.
- 53 The agreement was signed and applied in 1926, but not actually ratified until this time.
- 54 In 1919 the French government purchased remaining US war materials in France.
- 55 Artaud, *La Question des dettes interalliées*, pp. 878, 891 and various.
- 56 In 1928 the popular book by Robert Crozier Long, *The Mythology of Reparations*, London, Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1928, which argued that even at current levels Germany could easily pay reparations, could only reinforce French fears of the consequences of a German tax level lower than theirs.
- 57 During the Franco-British exchange of correspondence which followed the German note of 7 June 1923, Poincaré cabled Saint-Aulaire in London, 'If nevertheless Lord Curzon wished to enlarge the discussion, he should include war debts, which are the key to the whole situation.' Unless one regards Poincaré as a specialist in double-speak, one can only conclude that war debts played a central role in the Ruhr affair.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

The limits of French economic diplomacy, 1926–1933

Robert Boyce

In the years between 1919 and 1926 and again from 1933 to 1938 France experienced financial and economic difficulties which seriously compromised its foreign policy. In the former period, mounting budget deficits, inflation and accelerating currency depreciation increasingly dominated domestic politics, eventually forcing France to go cap in hand to British and American bankers, whose dislike of French policy towards Germany was well known.¹ In the latter period, when the world economic slump had caught up with France, the problem of declining government revenues and the threat of renewed currency instability had a devastating effect upon defence spending, employment and political morale.²

But in the intervening years economic conditions generally favoured France. For this period at least the franc was stable, the domestic economy was strong, and large balances became available for lending abroad; a situation all the more favourable to France when the other European powers sank into the economic depression in 1929–30.³ France now appeared enormously rich and economically robust. Moreover, France had the reputation of possessing a strong state which harnessed its capitalist economy to the pursuit of foreign policy goals. Friends were rewarded with loans and credits, enemies were punished by withholding them. Stiff protectionism, which attested to its narrow nationalism, was similarly altered when this served the pursuit of political hegemony. This reputation was established before World War I when French banks lent huge sums to Russia for what appeared to be mainly strategic purposes. It became even stronger in the seven-year period under discussion.⁴ Yet in the event France seemed to make little of its financial and economic strength, for during this same period Germany shrugged off most of the remaining restraints imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, the French alliance system crumbled and France ended up weaker than before.

Historians seeking to explain this failure have generally fallen back on the familiar one of timid and unimaginative leadership.⁵ But as will be seen, France's capacity for economic diplomacy has been seriously exaggerated. The distinctive statist character of French capitalism was overdrawn: politicians and statesmen could not order businessmen to do their bidding, even had they wished to do so.⁶ In any case, the options available to them were severely constrained.

THE RECOVERY OF FINANCIAL POWER

The summer of 1926 marked the culmination of France's first experience of acute inflation in modern times. Successive governments had borrowed vast sums to pay for the war, then borrowed more to pay for the reconstruction of the eleven devastated departments of the north. The high levels of public spending enabled the economy to be converted rapidly to peacetime production, and industry and the national infrastructure to be further modernised. But the strength of the real economy was overshadowed by the accelerating depreciation of the franc and the threat of runaway inflation.

The turning point came in late July 1926 when Raymond Poincaré, the conservative former president of the republic, formed a new government and by his presence alone succeeded in restoring confidence. Hitherto, speculators had bet on the continued decline of the franc. Now they bet on its recovery, driving it from a low in July of 240 francs to the pound sterling to around 170 francs in October, 140 francs in November and to slightly over 120 francs by January 1927. The decision was then taken to hold the exchange rate at this level to allow French manufacturers to remain competitive at home and abroad. But as speculators continued to bet on the further recovery of the franc, the *Banque de France* was obliged to intervene and purchase large quantities of foreign exchange which were being sold for francs. The bank's intervention continued until June 1928 when the franc was restored to the gold standard, by which time it had acquired nearly £530 million in gold and foreign exchange. This was an enormous sum: three and a half times the total current reserves of the Bank of England and only somewhat less than the gold reserves backing the US dollar. Not only was the franc no longer vulnerable to foreign pressure, the huge foreign exchange reserves provided French statesmen with a potentially formidable weapon in their pursuit of diplomatic objectives.

The *Banque de France*, although a private institution owned by its two hundred shareholders, accepted a national responsibility in issuing, and the need for close relations with the state. This was especially true between 1926 and 1930 when Emile Moreau was governor of the bank. Moreau was a former civil servant and governor of the *Banque d'Algérie*, who, unlike Montagu Norman, his counterpart at the Bank of England, had little experience of international banking. He and Poincaré, although not on close terms, agreed on the desirability of using the *Banque's* resources to reinforce French influence in eastern Europe. They believed their chief obstacle was Norman, who was using his control over access to the London financial markets to draw European central bankers into his orbit. Norman disguised his efforts by working through the League of Nations Financial Committee on which Britain was strongly represented. But French observers had watched with increasing frustration as one European banking system after another was reconstructed on an underpinning of sterling loans, which made the central bankers and governments concerned more interested in the goodwill of Britain than that of France.⁷ Joseph Avenol and Jacques Seydoux, senior Quai d'Orsay

officials, advised Poincaré to seek a real partnership with Britain by forcing Norman to recognise and respect France's interests in Europe.⁸ Poincaré therefore agreed that Moreau should confront Norman with the offer of 'war or peace'.⁹

The first encounter took place in January 1928, when Moreau met Norman's deputy in London. This brought assurances of goodwill but no practical results. Accordingly, at a second encounter, when Norman called on Moreau in Paris in May 1928, Moreau issued a scarcely veiled threat to convert his sterling balances into gold if Norman did not show respect for French interests elsewhere in Europe. The *Banque de France* at this time was holding some £150 million on deposit in London, more than enough to drive sterling off the gold standard if all of it was presented at the Bank of England for conversion into gold. Norman therefore had little choice but to yield. A large Romanian state loan, then being arranged in London, was left for a French-led banking consortium. Norman also agreed to the nomination of French experts as well as British experts when European central banks sought the assistance of the League Financial Committee.¹⁰

This was one occasion when France appeared to make effective use of financial diplomacy. Even so, it would be wrong to treat it as a purely political act, since the offensive against the Bank of England served the interests of the *Banque de France* and the French banking community quite as much as the French state. It was certainly not a case of the state diverting or overriding private financial interests in the national interest. It was also far from being a decisive victory because recent events and the still undeveloped state of French financial institutions made it difficult to exploit Moreau's action.

Having suffered devastating losses on pre-war loans to Russia and other foreign countries, French commercial banks in the 1920s remained reluctant to lend abroad. The Quai d'Orsay had had to twist arms vigorously to persuade the banks to participate in the 1927 Polish stabilisation loan.¹¹ In 1928 similar pressure was required to dissuade the *Banque de Paris et des Pays Bas* and four other French-controlled banks from disposing of their interest in the *Banque Franco-Serbe*.¹² The problem was aggravated by regulations introduced during World War I which made it easy for individuals and groups seeking compensation for defaulted pre-war loans to obstruct the listing of new foreign security listings on the Paris *Bourse*. Another shortcoming was the near absence of trade finance facilities, which were a mainstay of the City of London. The Bank of France resolved to transform Paris into an international financial centre to rival London,¹³ and at its instigation, the *Banque de l'Union Parisienne* created France's first acceptance house. But this was only announced in October 1929, virtually at the same moment as the Wall Street crash, which accelerated the general retreat into trade protectionism already under way and reduced opportunities for acceptance or lending business.¹⁴

FIRST ATTEMPTS AT COMMERCIAL DIPLOMACY

The Ruhr crisis not only ended in a major diplomatic defeat for France but marked a turning point in Franco-German economic relations. In the aftermath Germany was less constrained by reparations than before, its economy rapidly recovered on the strength of large-scale foreign borrowing, and in January 1925 it also regained control over the granting or withholding of most-favoured-nation treatment. France continued to be regarded as a protectionist country, whose leaders preferred stable markets to expansion, maintaining them by means of reciprocal tariff bargaining and industrial cartels or 'ententes'. But confronted with the challenge of an economically resurgent Germany, its leadership wasted no time adopting new policies. In September 1925 Louis Loucheur, a member of the government and close ally of the foreign minister, Aristide Briand, secured League support for a world economic conference. Meanwhile the government dropped its aloofness from the 'European' movement, despite continuing suspicions in Paris that it was largely inspired by pan-German interests.¹⁵ At French instigation the Mayrisch Committee was created for the purpose of promoting an industrial rapprochement among Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and France. In early 1927 Briand agreed to serve as honorary president of the French national committees of the two principal European organisations, Pan-Europa and *Union Douanière Européenne*. Practical results, however, were slow in coming.

The strategy of the French national committee of the *Union Douanière Européenne* was in the first instance to form a union with Belgium and Luxembourg, then, with France's strength thus augmented, to seek a union with Germany. Once this was accomplished, it was assumed, the rest of Europe would have little choice but to join as well. Unfortunately, initial efforts to form a Belgian national committee came to nought when the man invited to organise it, the rector of the University of Brussels, denounced France for aiming to exclude Britain from a protectionist Europe. Only after the Quai d'Orsay actively intervened did the Belgian government form a national committee in the spring of 1929.¹⁶

The World Economic Conference of May 1927 was, despite its name, essentially a European affair, and the European countries, despite their reputation for protectionism, had no difficulty agreeing on the desirability of liberalising trade. The question was no longer whether to reduce trade barriers, but how. The League was invited to convene another conference to arrange the phasing out of quotas and other quantitative trade controls. The question of tariff reductions, however, exposed sharp differences over the application of the most-favoured-nation principle. Britain, as a free-trade country, was less concerned with protectionism than with trade discrimination, and absolutely insisted upon the automatic or 'unconditional' extension of most-favoured-nation treatment. But France, along with most of the Continental countries, regarded the British approach as unrealistic: countries could not be expected to reduce import duties on goods from a second country, if third countries insisted upon sharing the

advantage on account of their most-favoured-nation rights, while refusing to make any reciprocal concessions, or even increased their own protective barriers. France instead proposed reciprocal agreements whereby countries engaged in bilateral tariff bargaining could withhold most-favoured-nation treatment from third countries until reciprocal concessions were negotiated. Eventually the conference approved in principle the use of 'plurilateral conventions', as well as bilateral and global efforts to reduce tariff barriers, but the application of the most-favoured-nation principle in each case was left unclear. Instead, the whole question was passed to the League of Nations Economic Committee for its consideration.

Practical progress came a few months later when France and Germany completed negotiations for a new trade agreement. Popularly known as the 'economic Locarno', it involved concessions by both sides which opened the way for substantially greater bilateral trade. On France's side at least, this was undoubtedly intended to serve a political as well as an economic purpose. But it was one thing to draw Germany closer to France, and quite another to turn it loose in Europe.

In March 1928 the League Economic Committee circulated a draft report on plurilateral conventions and their relationship with the most-favoured-nation principle. It proposed that member states should agree to exempt plurilateral conventions from their most-favoured-nation agreements, so long as the conventions contributed to reducing trade barriers among the signatory countries, were open to all countries prepared to make comparable concessions, and had the approval of the League of Nations.¹⁷ This seemed like a fruitful approach for a nervous, protectionist Europe and was welcomed by several countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland and France. The French government vigorously defended the proposal in the League Economic Committee while making provision in its commercial treaties with Switzerland and Belgium for future plurilateral conventions. Briand, the leading supporter, had the Cabinet's backing to urge the Quai d'Orsay in April 1929 to press ahead with its promotion. France had everything to gain from plurilateral conventions, Briand believed. They could hold Europe together. They could demonstrate to Britain, now hovering on the brink of protectionism, that Europe was serious about trade liberalisation. They could also be 'an effective weapon against the protectionism of the United States'.¹⁸

Here indeed was a major problem for the whole of Europe. The United States having retreated into isolationism after the war had also reverted to protectionism, introducing the highest tariff in its history in 1922.¹⁹ But this had not stopped American manufacturers from aggressively expanding their exports to Europe and, after the situation in Germany and central Europe was stabilised, sharply increasing their direct and portfolio investment. By 1929 the US-European economic relationship was so one-sided that neither France nor virtually any other Continental country was prepared to reduce trade barriers if it meant that the United States, through the operation of the most-favoured-nation principle,

also benefited without conceding greater access to its own markets. Unfortunately the same isolationism that encouraged protectionist policies also made the United States indifferent to Europe's problems and firmly hostile to any discrimination against its trade. Hence it was certain to oppose European plurilateral conventions.

Although Daniel Serruys, chief commercial negotiator at the ministry of commerce, sought to press on with the policy, René Massigli, head of the League of Nations section, and other Quai d'Orsay officials strongly advised caution. One reason was their fear that any relaxation of the most-favoured-nation principle might favour Germany at France's expense. France, with its large agricultural sector, could offer almost no market for the farm and forest products of Poland and the Danube region. Germany, with its much larger urban population, could offer large markets and moreover needed outlets for its manufactures. If free to exploit its advantages, it could easily draw its smaller neighbours into a dependent relationship. This made French diplomats very reluctant to endorse preferential trade arrangements. Unlike British authorities, they refused to accept the principle that even full customs unions should automatically be excepted from the most-favoured-nation principle: again from fear that otherwise Germany might adopt a customs union with Austria or the Baltic states.²⁰

The second reason was their reluctance to tangle with the United States. The Young plan currently being drafted by an international team of experts to put reparation claims on a definitive basis, offered France the chance to raise a large international loan on the collateral of its tranche of the 'unconditional' reparations. This was an important and long-standing objective, which would enable tax levels to be reduced. But it made American goodwill essential since a large part of the loan would be sold in New York. In any case, having themselves recently yielded to American pressure on the most-favoured-nation question,²¹ the French doubted that Europe would be prepared to confront the United States over 'discriminatory' plurilateral conventions. Approaches to European delegates at the Congress of the International Chamber of Congress in the spring of 1929 to join in an organised defence against American trade policy had evoked little response; the Germans, who counted on financial and diplomatic support from the United States, seemed particularly reluctant to act. The Quai d'Orsay was therefore sceptical of this approach and favoured further discussions on it only as a means of reminding the Anglo-Saxon powers of Europe's presence.²²

France nevertheless was prompted to take a major initiative in the summer of 1929. The Young plan, completed in May, was to be the subject of a diplomatic conference at The Hague in August. The French government favoured the plan, but was uncomfortably aware that London was demanding as part of the settlement the immediately withdrawal of all remaining Allied troops from the Rhineland. Since this seriously affected French security, Briand turned to the European idea in the hope of introducing a new means of anchoring Germany in place.

On 31 May the US Congress, disregarding Europe and the rest of the world, overwhelmingly confirmed its support for another major tariff increase. The news caused consternation throughout Europe. By August every European government excepting only Britain had lodged a formal protest in Washington. Briand, it seems, sought to exploit this frustration. On 12 July he revealed his intention to speak on European federation at the forthcoming League Assembly in Geneva.²³ In September, immediately after the Hague conference, he addressed the Assembly. As he admitted, the idea of European federation seemed utopian. However, he stressed that the starting point must be economic action, 'for that is the most urgent aspect of the question'.²⁴ Briand's speech was limited to generalities, and it was far from clear what he had in mind. Most of the other European delegates were quietly sceptical, while Ramsay MacDonald, the British prime minister, was openly dismissive of Briand's proposal. Nevertheless, some such initiative was urgently needed to address the incipient economic and political crisis. The European delegates therefore invited Briand to develop a plan for consideration before the next League Assembly.

A second proposal at the 1929 Assembly, initiated by Belgium and co-sponsored by Britain and France, called for a tariff truce to provide a breathing-space for the restarting of the process of liberalising trade.²⁵ The proposal conformed with France's commitment to freer trade and was not incompatible with a specifically European initiative, although British delegates left no doubt that they regarded it as a free trade alternative to regional action. The main reason for French support was the belief that the United States might yet be dissuaded from proceeding with its tariff revision if Europe resisted a retreat into protectionism.²⁶ But by February 1930, when, the first tariff truce conference—or to give it its formal title, the first Conference on Concerted Economic Action—opened in Geneva, President Hoover was about to sign the stiffly protectionist Smoot-Hawley tariff into law. Moreover, France's commitment to economic liberalism was also in retreat in face of protectionist pressure in parliament. The minister of commerce, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, had been keen to use the tariff truce conference, where he hoped for agreement on a plurilateral convention, as a means of promoting European unity. But after permanent officials warned of certain opposition from the Anglo-Saxon countries the plurilateral convention idea was set aside, leaving only the vague hope that the conference would contribute to '*une entente européenne dans la domaine économique*'.²⁷ The start of the conference coincided with a political crisis in Paris, which left France without a government for two weeks. Eventually, however, Flandin, once again minister of commerce, returned to Geneva where he secured agreement on a loose formula for restraining tariff building.

Briand in Geneva the previous September had wisely stressed that the initial basis of European 'federation' must be economic. Yet the memorandum he circulated to European governments on 17 May 1930 declared that political action must take precedence over economic co-operation, and called for a commitment to the political status quo and the creation of an elaborate European

institutional structure along the same lines as the League of Nations. The fragmentary evidence does not make the reason for this shift in priority clear. Evidently, however, neither the premier, André Tardieu, nor Briand, albeit able and experienced, felt at home with economic issues. Yet as could be expected of the liberal and somewhat ramshackle governments of the Third Republic, Briand did not consult the economic ministries, but instead relied upon experts at the Quai d'Orsay. There, Alexis Léger, Jacques Fouques-Duparq and René Massigli, who were responsible for drafting the memorandum, once again advised extreme caution. They worried about antagonising Britain and the United States, and about opening the way to German domination of the Continent in the absence of special safeguards.²⁸

Their caution was understandable, if unfortunate. In the eight months since Briand's speech the financial crisis had given way to an unprecedented slump, producing massive unemployment in Britain, Germany, central and eastern Europe, almost everywhere except France, and putting economics at the top of the political agenda throughout Europe. A daring initiative promising collective action to halt the rise of European protectionism and the collapse of trade might have tempted many countries to offer support. Instead, the change of emphasis subverted the memorandum's appeal and moreover, on being rejected, it seriously discredited Briand himself who hitherto had enjoyed the confidence of a wide spectrum of French opinion as well as great prestige abroad. More fundamentally, it left France without a coherent strategy for addressing the European crisis. France continued to advocate a united Europe including, as the memorandum affirmed, an eventual customs union. Yet it refused to encourage plurilateral conventions and actively opposed bilateral preferential agreements except of the most limited kind, without which a customs union or almost any form of European economic rapprochement was virtually impossible.²⁹

This lack of coherence remained evident through the winter of 1930–1. At the eleventh League Assembly in September a Committee of Enquiry for European Union (CEUE) was created as a polite means of burying the Briand plan. It provided French ministers with a League-sponsored agency through which to address the fundamental problems afflicting the Continent. Yet on the eve of the first CEUE conference in February 1931 the only proposals they managed to come up with were special treatment of the 1930 cereal surplus from the Danube region and mortgage credits to tide the region over the slump.³⁰ The agrarian countries had been hit especially hard by the crisis,³¹ and Romania and Yugoslavia as well as Poland were French allies. But declining cereal prices and surpluses were little more than symptoms of the wider crisis affecting the whole of Europe, which demanded bolder, more radical solutions.

The revelation on 19 March 1931 that Germany and Austria were well advanced in secret plans for a customs union prompted French ministers immediately to denounce it as a disguised form of *Anschluss*—which it was³²—and to oppose it by legal action. But they soon appreciated the danger of adopting a purely negative position, if this were seen to block Austria's only means of

avoiding economic collapse. André François-Poncet, minister of state for the national economy, was therefore called upon to draft a *plan constructif français*.³³ The plan comprised four elements: unilateral preferences in favour of Austrian manufactured exports; unilateral preferences for a limited quantity of cereal surpluses from the Danube region; European cartels or *ententes* to stabilise markets and prices for a range of industrial products; and a rather unspecific promise of new credit and lending agencies which would draw heavily upon financial resources in Paris.

Although this was the first time that France was prepared to endorse preferential agreements, it was nothing like the inclusive programme that Europe needed. A number of prominent Europeans including Emile Francqui, the Belgian financier, Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, and even Montagu Norman of the Bank of England urgently appealed for the revival of the principle of an open-ended plurilateral convention in which all the European countries could join to liberalise trade.³⁴ Interest in such an initiative had recently been signalled by Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and several other northern countries that had signed the Oslo convention in December 1930. But once again, France drew back from arrangements that might favour German ascendancy on the Continent. Even so, the *plan constructif* might conceivably have alleviated the plight of the most severely depressed countries. Briefly its prospects seemed good when the British foreign secretary, Arthur Henderson, was advised by senior officials to acquiesce in its preferential arrangements before he set off to Geneva for the crucial meeting of the League Council. But after ministerial colleagues in London belatedly objected, some on free trade principles, others out of concern for opinion in the empire, he had no choice but to oppose discussion.³⁵ The plan was therefore withdrawn and passed to the CEUE for further examination. Shortly afterwards, Austria yielded to pressure from France and Britain to set aside the Austro-German customs union scheme until the International Court at The Hague could rule on its legality.

EFFORTS TO EXPLOIT FINANCIAL STRENGTH

The movement into the franc from other currencies which had begun in the autumn of 1926 did not stop with France's return to the gold standard in June 1928. Periodically over the next three years the *Banque de France* faced strong demand for francs, which it met by purchasing the inflow of foreign exchange, then where possible converting foreign exchange balances into gold. The Bank's large and growing gold reserves prompted foreign observers to suspect a political motive. By 1929 the City of London, normally the best-informed financial centre in the world, abounded with highly coloured talk of a *masse de manoeuvre* designed to bring France's weaker opponents to their knees or perhaps as preparation for another war.³⁶

The truth was more prosaic. Essentially, the bank's gold reserves were a reflection of previous currency weakness and the nervous determination of

French bankers to ensure that this disastrous experience was never repeated. At no time after June 1928 did they sell foreign balances or draw in gold in order to weaken or embarrass foreign powers. It was not that such ideas did not cross their minds. On the contrary, on several occasions the possibility was considered and threats were actually made. But on each occasion the balance of advantage favoured inaction or even assisting, rather than punishing, the other power concerned.

In April 1929, Hjalmar Schacht, the German member of the expert committee preparing what came to be known as the Young plan, provoked a crisis in Germany by issuing extravagant political demands in return for a reparations agreement. German short-term balances declined and the mark slumped on the foreign exchanges. In the circumstances, German claims that France had engineered an attack on their currency seemed plausible, since French interest in reparations provided a motive for aggressive action, and as the mark fell the franc rose. The real explanation, however, was that the mark, already weakened by the pull of speculative activity on Wall Street, suffered a further loss of confidence due to Schacht's reckless actions. Archival evidence from Berlin and Paris confirms that France did nothing to aggravate the pressure.³⁷ Senior officials of the *Banque de France* and ministry of finance had indeed examined the pros and cons of provoking a withdrawal of commercial balances from Germany, and ironically it was the bank officials who were the more sanguine. But Henry Chéron, the minister of finance, feared that an attack on the mark would end German reparation payments. He therefore appealed to Poincaré, and with his support called in Governor Moreau to advise that the mark should not be undermined.³⁸

A similar episode occurred in the summer of 1929 when, shortly before the opening of the conference at The Hague to ratify the Young plan, the pound sterling fell below gold export point on the exchanges and gold was shipped from London to Paris. During the recent general election in Britain, leaders of the Conservative and Labour parties had vied with one another in denouncing further concessions to other Allies on the share-out of reparations. The slump in sterling in July was widely interpreted as a deliberate French attempt to make Britain give way.³⁹ The connection seemed certain. Only days before, the Paris correspondent of *The Economist* had written,

Unofficially, the opinion is expressed here that, in view of the present situation of the pound, the new Labour Government may find it advisable to take a more conciliatory attitude towards its Continental debtors than Mr. Churchill [chancellor in the recent Conservative government] appeared to assume.⁴⁰

But in fact this could not have been the reason for sterling's weakness. *Banque de France* and French government officials were already embarrassed about adverse British criticism of their monetary policy and anxious not to aggravate it.⁴¹ In any case they did not at this time anticipate serious difficulty with Britain over the

reparations settlement at The Hague.⁴² The real source of sterling's weakness was the Wall Street boom and the fundamental British balance of payments problem, as indicated by the fact that sterling was weak against currencies other than the franc and remained weak after differences were resolved at the reparations conference, at which time France had every reason to promote British goodwill. It is true that at a difficult moment during the conference, Pierre Quesnay, a young official of the *Banque de France* threatened Frederick Leith Ross of the British Treasury with the withdrawal of French balances from London if Britain did not accept the Young plan unchanged. But Leith Ross brushed the threat aside. As he appreciated, an attack of this sort on the pound could not fail to have disastrous consequences for France as well as Britain. The threat was not taken seriously, and indeed nothing came of it.⁴³

The threat of withdrawing short-term balances was again used in July 1930, shortly after Germany rejected the Briand plan, when the French premier, André Tardieu, called in Leopold von Hoesch, the German ambassador, to insist upon the need for Franco-German economic co-operation. Again the threat was not acted upon, and only a few weeks later when the markets were shaken by the Nazi and Communist gains in the *Reichstag* election, the *Banque de France* intervened to discourage withdrawals of short-term French commercial balances from Germany.⁴⁴ In January 1931 the Quai d'Orsay and the *Banque de France* actually encouraged French banks to participate in an issue of *Reichsbahn* preference shares.⁴⁵

Mounting complaints in London about continued gold movements to Paris and constant suggestions of nefarious political motives⁴⁶ led the French government to arrange a meeting of experts at the British Treasury that same month. French officials saw nothing whatever to apologise for, but they were extremely uncomfortable at the level of British hostility against France on account of the recurrent gold movements.⁴⁷ In the interests of solidarity, they therefore agreed to a number of minor concessions designed to expand French foreign lending and thereby ease the pressure on sterling.⁴⁸ In a similar gesture of solidarity, the *Banque de France* had already on its own initiative intervened repeatedly in the foreign exchange market to reduce the pressure on sterling.⁴⁹ And in the midst of the Treasury conversations, Briand pressured Clément Moret, the new governor of the *Banque*, to reduce the discount rate for the same political purpose.⁵⁰ A few voices were raised in favour of a more aggressive policy. General Réquin, a senior adviser to the minister of defence, André Maginot, urged that financial pressure be put on the Anglo-Saxon powers to support a policy of containing Germany: 'We can lean on Britain whose currency is at our mercy. We can make her understand...that if she wishes to obtain our support as lenders, we must settle other questions...beforehand.... Similarly with the United States.'⁵¹ But neither the premier, Pierre Laval, nor Briand had any intention of risking the friendship of these powers in this way.

In the meantime French efforts to retain political influence in eastern Europe led foreign ministry officials to encourage French banks to maintain or extend their

involvement in the region. In 1930 French-led consortia arranged financing for the Baltic-Silesian railway and a loan to the Romanian state, and pursued negotiations for loans to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. A 113-million-franc credit was extended to the Polish army.⁵² And as part of the CEUE programme, France also put forward a plan for an international agricultural mortgage corporation, designed to tide over the Danube countries while agricultural prices remained depressed. The fact that the slump made all of these ventures risky and the fact that in a few cases the French government offered guarantees confirm that financial diplomacy was more than simply a myth. Yet the hopes of French statesmen that additional credits would be decisive in stabilising political relations in central Europe soon proved ill-founded.⁵³ Although France was the largest or second largest foreign investor in Poland and the Little Entente countries,⁵⁴ it was no more able to disregard commercial realities than other powers. French bankers held back from new lending because the slump had undermined the credit-worthiness of borrowers. French industrialists objected to support for foreign competitors. And in parliament Radicals joined Socialists and others on the left in opposing financial assistance that burdened taxpayers for the sake of old-fashioned military alliances.⁵⁵

As Leith Ross, the British Treasury's leading authority on international financial relations and a close observer of French affairs, pointed out to the Foreign Office, the problem from Britain's point of view was not that the French government played fast and loose with its loanable funds, but, on the contrary, that it was not adventurous enough. Existing regulations enabled any French individual or group with a grievance against a foreign borrower to object to a new foreign loan being listed on the *Bourse*.

The system obviously lends itself to abuses, and we have urged the French Treasury to do what they could to secure that authorisations were not withheld on unreasonable grounds and to use their influence generally to favour foreign loans. *But there is no question of the French Treasury making Government loans to foreign countries or of their directly exercising pressure on French investors.*⁵⁶

The crisis over the Austro-German customs union scheme did not immediately provoke a French financial reaction. François-Poncet called for vigorous action: French commercial banks should threaten Germany with the withdrawal of their credits if it did not renounce the scheme; large loans should be offered to Austria and the Danube countries to draw them firmly into France's orbit.⁵⁷ But a senior finance ministry official discouraged the minister from expecting much in this direction. So far as he knew, French banks held less than four billion francs in short-term deposits in Germany, which was not enough to have a decisive effect. If they were withdrawn, British banks would probably plug the hole that was left, and the only result would be to confirm the jaundiced view abroad that French financial activity was always tainted by politics. In any case, he

pointed out, France received 50 per cent of German reparation payments, which were essential to balancing the budget. Hence, 'we would be the losers from any such operation'.⁵⁸ As for loans to central and eastern Europe, François-Poncet was advised to bear in mind that all the loanable funds belonged to savers or taxpayers and in either case could not be squandered on high-risk ventures merely because it suited government strategy.

In late May a new opportunity arose when the threatened collapse of the Austrian financial system forced Vienna to appeal to Paris for assistance. The *Banque de France* had already participated in a 100 million schilling credit through the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) to the Austrian National Bank. But when the Austrian government sought a further 150 million schilling commercial credit to stave off the collapse of the Credit Anstalt, the country's largest financial institution, the Paris banks were obliged to secure government approval before offering their support. By this time institutional lenders in London and New York were already over-committed in central Europe and unwilling to become further exposed. French participation was thus almost essential, and the government sought to exploit the situation by making its approval conditional upon Austria's public renunciation of the customs union scheme.⁵⁹ The Austrian government prevaricated, offering only private assurances. With the country's financial position rapidly deteriorating, French pressure seemed likely to prove irresistible. But at the eleventh hour the Bank of England stepped in to provide the full 150 million schillings requested. French officials were furious at Norman, whom they accused of deliberately subverting their policy. With equal bitterness British observers denounced France for driving the whole of central Europe to the brink of collapse in its attempt to 'blackmail' Austria.⁶⁰

On the face of it, this looked like an instance in which British financial diplomacy was more effective than French financial diplomacy. Norman, although denying knowledge of the Franco-Austrian negotiations, was intensely francophobic and too well informed to be unaware of developments in Paris. All the same, his resources allowed him to extend only a very short-term credit to Vienna. He was also so jealous of the Bank of England's independence that he seldom talked to the Treasury let alone the Foreign Office. Hence his initiative did not form part of a co-ordinated strategy.

As this showdown was occurring, the German chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, announced that Germany would be soon be unable to pay reparations, which triggered a massive flight from the mark. French statesmen, already annoyed by the Austro-German customs union scheme, regarded this—with good reason—as another deliberate provocation. They were further angered when on 20 June Herbert Hoover, the American president, without prior consultation called for a one-year moratorium on all inter-governmental debt payments.⁶¹ French statesmen feared that reparations once suspended would never be resumed and that Hoover's initiative would be the start of a general revision of treaty obligations. They were therefore determined to secure certain concessions from Germany before agreeing to participate in the moratorium. At a minimum they

insisted that Germany promise to continue interest payments on reparations and to abandon the construction of the second battle cruiser currently on the stocks, as well as the Austro-German customs union scheme and the demand for equality of rights under the disarmament section of the Treaty of Versailles.⁶² Brüning, however, refused their request to come to Paris for negotiations. Meanwhile London and Washington became increasingly exercised by the delay. Belatedly aware that their commercial banks were dangerously overextended in central Europe, they accused France of dissipating the salutary effect of Hoover's moratorium announcement and of being an 'international Shylock' in attempting to extract its pound of flesh from Germany even at the risk of destroying the capitalist system itself.⁶³

In Paris this seemed grossly unfair. If British and American banks had recklessly lent to German and Austrian borrowers, this was no reason to demand that France should forgo its claim to reparations, especially when only two years earlier Germany had freely endorsed the Young plan with its commitment to certain 'unconditional' payments.⁶⁴ But faced with the almost hysterical demands from the Anglo-Saxon powers who threatened to by-pass France in their desperation to assist Germany, French leaders felt obliged to give way.⁶⁵ As on many other occasions before and after, they faced the choice of containing Germany or safeguarding the friendship of the Anglo-Saxon powers, and chose the latter. It was a difficult choice which seldom brought rewards, but given the danger of becoming isolated it was scarcely an unreasonable one. The only concession they managed to extract was an announcement by Brüning that credits for a *third* battle cruiser would not at this point be allocated.⁶⁶

On 24 June 1931 the *Banque de France*, with the government's approval, participated in a \$100 million BIS credit to the *Reichsbank*.⁶⁷ The bank also, it seems, discouraged French commercial banks from withdrawing their short-term balances from Germany, despite the risk that they might be tied up indefinitely or lost in a crash.⁶⁸ It is tempting to explain these actions solely in political terms. But of course it was part of the *Banque de France's* remit to co-operate with other central banks and to discourage financial panics. French leaders nevertheless did try to secure political concessions from Germany in return for financial help. On 10 July, when the governor of the *Reichsbank*, Hans Luther, visited Paris in search of credits, Flandin and Moret reiterated their terms: a ten-year political moratorium along with a non-aggression and a consultation pact in exchange for a large loan.⁶⁹ On 15 July Briand pressed the British foreign secretary, Arthur Henderson, to urge direct Franco-German conversations in Paris on his way to Berlin.⁷⁰ Three days later Brüning attended four-power talks in Paris, where, in private conversations, Laval set out the political conditions for large-scale French financial help. With Germany hovering on the brink of collapse and a French loan within reach, Brüning, it seems, was tempted. But others in the German camp remained strenuously opposed to the principal French condition of a commitment to the political status quo.⁷¹

To reduce France's leverage on Germany, British leaders insisted upon transferring the conversations from Paris to London where, in circumstances strikingly reminiscent of the London conference of 1924, France found itself isolated.⁷² MacDonald, the British prime minister, and Henry Stimson, the American Secretary of State, sided with Brüning in opposing French political pressure. Laval thus found himself helpless. He was prepared to support a comprehensive settlement with Germany, but he could not risk large amounts of French public or commercial funds without the assurance of Allied support, and neither Anglo-Saxon power was prepared to contribute further to assist Germany and central Europe.⁷³

By this time the financial crisis had spread to London, triggering a flight from sterling into dollars, francs and gold. Governor Moret at the *Banque de France* sought to minimise the pressure on the Bank of England by sitting tight on his large sterling balances, and on 25 July when Norman requested assistance he responded immediately by joining with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in extending a £50 million credit. Moret repeatedly offered to assist further by arranging a large-scale loan. Norman ignored the offer, hoping that vigorous retrenchment by the British government would make it unnecessary. But when he squandered the French short-term credit in a deliberate attempt to frighten the politicians into action,⁷⁴ France again came to the rescue with a £40 million credit matched by an equal amount from New York. When by mid-September even this proved insufficient, the French government offered to support a still larger longer-term loan. Preliminary efforts to mobilise the funds were already under way on Monday 21 September when the pound was driven off the gold standard.⁷⁵

French assistance to Germany and to Britain was by no means an act of charity, since its purpose was to prop up the international monetary system on which France's own survival depended. Nevertheless French officials hoped to reap some goodwill from it, not least because they believed the other powers had brought their problems upon themselves by their inflationary policies and reckless foreign lending. They were therefore unready for the eruption of francophobia in the City of London and throughout Britain, where they were blamed for causing the crisis and accused of deliberately provoking the gold losses from London.⁷⁶

At the time Britain left the gold standard, the *Banque de France* held fully £65 million in sterling balances, the same amount as at the beginning of the crisis. The sharp depreciation of the pound therefore cost the bank heavily. Indeed, by mid-October its losses stood at 1,500 million francs (£10 million) and rose to no less than 3,150 million francs (£25.8 million) before the year-end.⁷⁷ As this was seven times the bank's total paid-up capital and reserves, it was therefore technically bankrupt. Yet British officials visiting Paris in October to discuss the future of the gold standard refused to thank the *Banque* for its support, to offer compensation for its heavy exchange losses or even to express regret at its current predicament.⁷⁸ This led to sharp exchanges and the French decision to convert all foreign exchange balances to gold as soon as possible. Meanwhile the French

government was obliged to rush a bill through parliament before publication of the *Banque's* third-quarter results, indemnifying its losses and enabling it to carry on. Despite unprecedented 'political' loans and credits, French influence and goodwill abroad seemed less in evidence than ever.

FURTHER FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL INITIATIVES

September 1931, when sterling and most other currencies linked to sterling left the gold standard, marked a decisive moment in inter-war economic history. Britain's commitment to internationalism was shattered, and by leaving the franc increasingly over-valued, it also progressively reduced France's capacity to influence international relations. As early as December 1930 signs had appeared in France of a renewal of domestic gold hoarding.⁷⁹ This accelerated after 1931, and despite vigorous retrenchment which included sharp reductions in defence spending, French diplomacy was eventually hobbled again by a weak currency and the need for a succession of credits from London. But for a little while longer the opportunity existed to support foreign policy commercial and financial action.

Through the *Banque de France* credits were extended to central banks in eastern Europe: to Poland in August and again in October 1931, to Romania in September, and to Czechoslovakia in October. France agreed to renew the BIS credit to the *Reichsbank* in September 1931 and every three months thereafter until 1933. It also allowed Romania to raise a loan of 575 million francs on the Paris market, and Yugoslavia to raise 675 million francs. In April 1932 French loans to the region for the preceding twelve months amounted to 1.2 billion francs (£9.6 million);⁸⁰ and in June the government agreed to support Austria with 100 million of a 239 million schilling international loan. Whether the purpose of these loans and credits was primarily political or economic is a moot point. Doubtless, French statesmen hoped to reap some political benefit from them. But they were also intended to earn a commercial return or to underpin the international monetary and financial system on which France's future depended. As in virtually every other financial and commercial operation mentioned in this account, reference to political objectives is not required to explain them.⁸¹ Unfortunately for France, the franc itself became too weak to continue large-scale foreign lending after the spring of 1932.⁸²

In September 1931 France also sought to work directly with Germany in an attempt to improve relations through economic rapprochement. François-Poncet, author of the *plan constructif* in the spring, abandoned a promising political career and went to Berlin as ambassador.⁸³ A *Commission mixte économique franco-allemande* created that month had as its objective an eventual customs union to serve as the nucleus of a united Europe. The approach favoured by France, of industrial ententes, eventually resulted in twenty-three agreements on separate products. None, however, covered a major industry, and in view of the almost trivial issues

added to the agenda, both sides betrayed their lack of commitment to the commission.⁸⁴

More important was France's decision to accept a radical writing down of reparations in 1932. Fearing that the Hoover moratorium meant the end of reparations, French statesmen had first sought concessions from Germany, then turned to the United States in the hope of securing support for a general politico-economic settlement. In the last week of October Premier Laval, apparently unaware of Hoover's francophobia,⁸⁵ invited himself to Washington for talks with the president. Laval, who had been a successful entrepreneur before entering politics, had a high opinion of his deal-making skills, too high in fact. In private conversations he raised the question of the future of intergovernmental debts, and believed he had gained a major concession when Hoover vaguely agreed that once Europe had settled the reparations problem American would see what could be done on war debts.⁸⁶ Laval faced an acutely embarrassing situation when Brüning announced in January 1932 that Germany would not resume reparation payments after the Hoover moratorium came to an end. But in June 1932, Edouard Herriot, once again premier, agreed to forgo further reparation claims on Germany so long as Allied war debt demands on France also ceased. This might be regarded as a form of negative financial diplomacy, undertaken in pursuit of French goodwill with the Anglo-Saxon powers.

Herriot was encouraged to acquiesce in the abandonment of reparations by a British offer of consultation on war debt policy: France, it seemed, could count on Britain maintaining a common front in the event of difficulties with America. But in November, with the Hoover moratorium year ended, Washington renewed its demand for war debt payments as if nothing had happened. This aroused intense anger and frustration in Paris, where angry demonstrations took place outside the parliament when it debated the issue. To make matters worse, London, by way of consultation, invited Herriot to London to inform him that Britain would pay its 15 December war debt instalment.⁸⁷ Herriot, still convinced that close relations with the Anglo-Saxon powers were vital to French security, succeeded in persuading his Cabinet to support a further payment but could not persuade a frustrated parliament, which defeated his motion by 402 votes to 187. Herriot was defeated on all fronts. Besides facing an increasingly intractable budget deficit, only days before he had also yielded to pressure from the Anglo-Saxon powers to concede Germany equality of rights on the disarmament issue (*Gleichberechtigung*).⁸⁸ He had no choice but to resign.⁸⁹ Thus ended a particularly sorry chapter in French economic diplomacy marked by support for collective solutions and increasing isolation. France, yielding to British and American pressure, made concessions to Germany, but this did nothing to restrain Germany from turning to Hitler and intensified hostility.

Since the first tariff truce conference in February 1930 the agrarian states of eastern Europe had constantly pressed for the introduction of a preferential regime in Europe, to favour them over competition from Russia and the great overseas producers, and to enable them to dispose of their surpluses at remunerative prices.

France insisted upon attending the conferences they convened, claiming to be their best friend. But, fearing that it would open the door to German offers of special arrangements, France rejected their call for a preferential regime until April 1931, when it cautiously endorsed preferences from the rest of Europe, so long as they were unilateral or unreciprocal and carefully limited in time and scope. When efforts to secure agreement on these lines failed and Germany began tempting east European countries with reciprocal preference agreements, France responded by offering unilateral preferences in its own markets. This was a heroic gesture, since domestic farm organisations raised strong objections, and, in contrast with Germany, France largely resisted the temptation to demand reciprocal concessions.⁹⁰ But it was obvious that the modest amounts of cereal imports that France could absorb were wholly insufficient to overcome the crisis affecting the countries of eastern and southern Europe or discourage them from looking to Germany for markets. From the winter of 1931–2, therefore, French efforts turned back to collective solutions.

These began with the Tardieu plan of February 1932,⁹¹ which led to a four-power conference in London in April. There followed discussions at the Lausanne conference in June, and after intense and lengthy negotiations a conference in September at Stresa attended by all the European Great Powers as well as the eastern agrarian states. Georges Bonnet, the minister of finance, chaired the gathering and demonstrated impressive negotiating skills in securing nominal agreement on a package of measures that, if fully implemented, would have alleviated the plight of the agrarian countries.⁹² But the whole exercise had an air of unreality about it, since the underlying objective was to bar German domination of central and eastern Europe, yet implementation required Germany and Italy's agreement to unilateral concessions as well as Britain's acquiescence to preferences, none of which was ever likely.⁹³

Once again, the one potentially feasible approach was the promotion of a broad plurilateral convention on the lines set out in 1928 and raised repeatedly thereafter. In June 1932 support for this approach again found clear expression in a convention signed at Ouchy by representatives of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, which called for an immediate 10 per cent reduction in import duties and a halving of duties over five years.⁹⁴ What might have happened had France also signed the convention and encouraged its east European friends to do so as well, it is impossible to know, but the possibilities are intriguing. At this time governments everywhere were intensely preoccupied by the economic crisis. A zone of liberalised trade might just possibly have tempted Germany to join. In that event, Britain, despite its previous opposition to all European preferences,⁹⁵ might finally have acquiesced in a 'discriminatory' arrangement of this sort. For one thing, it would not have been open to the main British criticism of the French *plan constructif* in April 1931, that it offered nothing to Germany. Second, British statesmen were uncomfortably aware of the possibility of total economic collapse in eastern Europe. In March 1932, when the Tardieu plan was under discussion, the British Cabinet agreed that regional preferences could be

tolerated within the Danube region, although not, it must be stressed, preferences in trade with countries outside the region.⁹⁶ A few months later, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Economist* and other liberal voices spoke up loudly in support of the Ouchy convention.⁹⁷ In France the National Association for Economic Expansion and other important commercial associations urged action on these lines.⁹⁸ General support for, or in Britain's case acquiescence in, the Ouchy convention, with its promise of an immediate 10 per cent reduction in import duties by all participants and a halving of duties over five years, might well have had an immediate and salutary effect in restoring confidence in Europe. Sadly, however, the Quai d'Orsay discouraged the new Herriot government from supporting the convention.⁹⁹ Meanwhile France too had succumbed to the world depression, and its essentially liberal government was besieged by agricultural and industrial groups with demands for greater protection. In Germany the first signs of economic recovery were apparent before the end of 1932. But they came too late to affect the international scene. With Hitler's advent to power in January 1933, the potential for economic diplomacy virtually ended. Coincidentally, a new flight from the franc began.¹⁰⁰

Despite the strength of France's domestic economy and its huge financial resources, French statesmen by 1933 had almost nothing to show in the way of diplomatic victories. On the financial front almost no action seemed possible without disrupting the international payments system and antagonising the Anglo-Saxon powers. Attaching political conditions to loans or credits to the former enemy powers or alternatively refusing financial support caused particular annoyance to the Anglo-Saxon powers because of their huge financial stake in central Europe. And since French foreign policy gave primacy to allied solidarity, this was a major constraint. The potential for financial diplomacy was further constrained by the impact of the economic crisis upon Germany, whose leaders became increasingly determined to end reparations and were tempted into drastic action to fend off challenges from political opponents on the extreme right. But in any case, French statesmen could not have been expected to do much more, given the limits on state intervention in the French capitalist system. They could encourage foreign loans or withhold their approval in the hope of securing political benefits, but the funds came from the private sector, whose independence they respected. At no time did they press for action that was seriously at odds with the interests of private capital. Reparations and war debts were a different matter, since they were public obligations. But here too French policy was governed primarily by budgetary considerations, that is to say in the interests of taxpayers, and only secondarily by foreign policy goals. In either case, its actions could have only limited effect.

On the commercial front French options were limited for much the same reasons. As has been shown, French authorities were far from unimaginative or timid in promoting initiatives including the tariff truce, the Briand plan, the alternative to the Austro-German customs union scheme and the Tardieu plan. They were however working within a state that was neither dirigiste nor even

deliberately protectionist.¹⁰¹ Departments administered, they did not seek to manage, and governments came and went largely according to their success in responding to domestic pressures from sectional interests or public opinion. Hence the suggestion that commercial and financial power was closely co-ordinated under the aegis of the Quai d'Orsay would have been regarded as a bad joke by French statesmen. They repeated the same complaints as their Foreign Office counterparts that they were excluded from the economic policy-making process and systematically disregarded by their Treasury and central bank.¹⁰² Ironically, while British diplomats spoke enviously of the Quai d'Orsay's supposed mastery over financial and commercial relations, French diplomats imagined that the Foreign Office was better equipped than the Quai to deal with the complex politico-economic issues facing them in the inter-war period.¹⁰³

In retrospect it is easy to see that France should have taken greater risks in promoting collective efforts to halt Europe's slide into autarky. In particular the concept of League-monitored plurilateral conventions open to all countries to join on a similar basis might conceivably have created a virtuous circle of revived trade and political stabilisation. But French statesmen were obliged to heed Eduard Benes's repeated warnings that any general relaxation of the most-favoured-nation principle would greatly favour Germany and marginalise France. Since this was precisely what French economic diplomacy was designed to avoid, it is all too understandable that the statesmen repeatedly pulled their punches. Economic diplomacy continued into 1933 at the World Economic Conference and beyond, but by 30 January 1933 when Hitler took power, nothing France did could make much difference. As a result, France had to endure another war, defeat and four years of occupation before a new opportunity for active economic diplomacy arose.

NOTES

- 1 S.Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe. The Financial Crisis of 1924 and the Adoption of the Dawes Plan*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1976.
- 2 Despite rapidly worsening external relations, French governments authorised virtually no increase in military spending between 1931–2 and 1936. See R. Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français 1935–1939*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982, Table VII, p. 309.
- 3 H.Shamir, *Economic Crisis and French Foreign Policy, 1930–1936*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1989, pp. 27–34, notes that the French economy may have begun to decline before 1929, but unemployment and other signs of crisis elsewhere remained negligible until 1931.
- 4 France's allegedly skilful co-ordination of commerce, finance and foreign policy management was used prominently by advocates of an economic section in the Foreign Office: see PRO, FO371/15671, W2128/441/50, Tyrrell to Henderson, no. 202, 23 February 1931. Despite the failure of France's inter-war economic

- diplomacy, its reputation for state directed capitalism continued. See for instance A. Teichova, *An Economic Background to Munich: International Business and Czechoslovakia 1918–1938*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 5: 'It is...a historic fact that the Quai d'Orsay was closely connected with the high finance of France and that capital exports were strongly influenced...not only by profit motives but also by French colonial and power-political interests.' This claim, made before the opening of the archives, is not borne out by the evidence now available.
- 5 See, for instance, M.Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord: la politique française en matière de désarmement 9 décembre 1930–17 avril 1934*, Paris, Editions Pedone, 1981, p. 123; P.S.Wandycz, *The Twilight of the French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 221; A.Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's bid for power in Europe, 1914–1940*, London, Arnold, 1995, p. 138.
 - 6 For an accurate description of French state-capitalist relations in the 1920s and early 1930s, see R.F.Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, ch. 4.
 - 7 MAE, Papiers Seydoux 38, Seydoux to de Fleuriau, 31 May 1926; *ibid.*, Papiers Avenol 37, Moret memorandum, 11 December 1926.
 - 8 MAE, Y International 251, Seydoux note to Berthelot, 31 March 1927; *ibid.*, Papiers Avenol 37, Avenol to Quesnay, 17 February 1928.
 - 9 E.Moreau, *Souvenirs d'un gouverneur de la Banque de France: Histoire de la stabilisation du franc (1926–1928)*, Paris, Editions M.-Th.Genin, 1954, pp. 488–9.
 - 10 R.W.D.Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads, 1919–1932: A Study in Politics, Economics and International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 158–66.
 - 11 MAE, Papiers Seydoux 39, Seydoux to de Fleuriau, 4 April 1927.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, Papiers Seydoux 42, Corbin to Seydoux, 6 April 1928.
 - 13 Banque de France (hereafter BDF), Deliberations du Conseil Général, 23 August 1928; *ibid.*, 28 November 1929.
 - 14 *Le Messager de Paris*, 31 October 1929.
 - 15 On pan-Europa see MAE, Papiers Seydoux 33, Note of Coudenhove-Kalergi visit to Seydoux, 25 May 1925; *ibid.*, Papiers Seydoux 42, Berthelot to Seydoux, 5 April 1928; *ibid.*, Papiers Seydoux 43, Seydoux to Léger, 2 May 1928. On the Union Douanière Européenne see *ibid.*, Relations Commerciales, B- Informations économiques 30 (hereafter RC B-IE 30 etc.), Elbel to de Saintquentin, 9 April 1926; *ibid.*, de Saintquentin to Seydoux, 12 April 1926.
 - 16 MAE, RC B-IE 47, Le Trocquer to Berthelot, 10 January 1929; *ibid.*, Herbetto to Briand, no. 143, 15 February 1929.
 - 17 League of Nations, Report of the Economic Committee on the Most-Favoured-Nation Clause in Relationship to Plurilateral and Bilateral Conventions, L.N.E391, 28 March 1928.
 - 18 MAE, Y Internationale 1918–1940, 1398, Briand to Serruys, 5 April 1929; League of Nations, Minutes of the First Session of the Economic Committee, 8 April 1929.
 - 19 This was the Fordney-McCumber tariff, which followed an emergency tariff the previous year.
 - 20 PRO, FO371/12145, C8021/1294/18, Arthur Yeames to Sargent, 30 September 1927.
 - 21 FRUS, 1929, vol. 1, memorandum by McClure, pp. 988–9.

- 22 MAE, Société des Nations IJ-Questions Economiques et Financières 1172 (hereafter SDN IJ-QEF 1172 etc.), Minutes of Inter-Departmental Meeting, 27 June 1929.
- 23 Marcel Ray, 'Vers un Locarno Européen', *Le Petit Journal*, 12 July 1929, p. 1.
- 24 League of Nations, *Official Journal*, Records of the Tenth Assembly, Plenary Meetings, 1929, p. 52.
- 25 MAE, SDN IJ-QEF 1429, Degrand to Briand, no. 25, 12 December 1929.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 1428, Elbel to Loucheur, 11 September 1929.
- 27 MAE, Papiers Léger 3, Léger to Briand, 16 November 1929; MAE, SDN IJ-QEF1430, Minutes of Interdepartmental Meeting, 1 February 1930; *ibid.*, Massigli to Gueyraud, 8 February 1930; *ibid.*, Y International 1918-1940, 0631, Coulondre to Arnal, 22 February 1930.
- 28 R.Boyce, 'Britain's first "No" to Europe: Britain and the Briand Plan, 1929-30', *European Studies Review*, 1980, 10, pp. 17-45.
- 29 MAE, Société des Nations Union Européenne 14 (hereafter SDN UE 14 etc.), 'Attitude taken by the French delegation on the question of preferential treatment', n.d.; R.Boyce, 'Was there a "British" alternative to the Briand Plan?', *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-45*, eds P.Catterall with C.J.Morris, London, Leicester University Press, 1993, pp. 17-34.
- 30 MAE SDN UE 5, F.Seydoux note for Massigli, 29 December 1930.
- 31 M.Tracy, 'Agricuulture in the Great Depression: world market developments and European protectionism', in *The Great Depression Revisited: Essays on the Economics of the Thirties*, ed. H.van der Wee, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1972, pp. 91-119; H.Raupach, 'The impact of the Great Depression on Eastern Europe', *ibid.*, pp. 236-45.
- 32 F.G.Stambrook, 'The German-Austrian customs union project of 1931', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 1961, 21, pp. 15-44.
- 33 France, Ministère des Finances (hereafter MF), B32290, 'Plan constructif français', 16 May 1931.
- 34 Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads*, pp. 319-20, 330.
- 35 On this episode see *ibid.*, pp. 313-27.
- 36 P.Einzig, *In the Centre of Things*, London, Macmillan, 1960, pp. 128-35; K. Mouré, *Managing the Franc Poincaré: Economic Understanding and Political Constraint in French Monetary Policy, 1928-1936*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 50.
- 37 H.James, *The Reichsbank and Public Finance in Germany, 1924-1933: A Study of the Politics of Economics in the Great Depression*, Frankfurt am Main, Fritz Knapp, 1985, pp. 77-9; MF, B42173, Farnier to Chéron, 19 April 1929.
- 38 *Ibid.*, Chéron to Poincaré, 26 April 1929.
- 39 *The Times*, 'City Notes', 30 July 1929; *The Statist*, 10 August 1929, pp. 204, 219; *The Economist*, 31 August 1929, p. 391; *Manchester Guardian Commercial*, 3 October 1929, p. 384. The suspicions were shared by the British Treasury, see MF, B12612, no. 53,778, de Chalendar to Chéron, 3 October 1929.
- 40 *The Economist*, 29 June 1929, p. 1452.
- 41 MF, B31727, de Chalendar to Farnier, 26 July 1929; BDF, Délibérations du Conseil Général, 1, 16 August 1929.
- 42 MF, F30/930, de Chalendar to Farnier, 20 June 1929.

- 43 Sir F. Leith Ross, *Money Talks, Fifty Years of International Finance*, London, Hutchinson, 1969, p. 124; PRO, FO371/13602, C6130/1/18, Phipps to Sargent, 7 August 1929.
- 44 James, *The Reichsbank and Public Finance in Germany*, p. 124.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 46 See, for instance, *The Times*, 'City Notes', 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 22 August 1930, 3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 24, 25 September 1930; *Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 8 August 1930, p. 116.
- 47 MF, B12613, Rueff to Farnier, 29 July 1930; MF, F30/1411, Farnier to Moret [Bank of France], 24 September 1930; MF, F30/1411, Bizot note, 28 December 1930.
- 48 Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads*, pp. 294–9.
- 49 BDF, Deliberations du Conseil Général, 13, 20, 27 November, 4, 18 December 1930.
- 50 PRO, Treasury papers, T160/430, F12317/1, Tyrrell to Wellesley, 7 January 1931.
- 51 Réquin to Weygand, 2 February 1931, quoted in Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, pp. 99–100.
- 52 Wandycz, *The Twilight of the French Eastern Alliances*, p. 185.
- 53 MAE, Y International 251, Briand to Tardieu, 22 October 1931.
- 54 Teichova, *An Economic Background to Munich*, pp. 17, 18, 20, 23, 47 and various.
- 55 As a result, plans for the Polish and the Czech loans marked time. Wandycz, *The Twilight of the French Eastern Alliances*, pp. 184, 213, 254.
- 56 PRO, FO371/15641, W3707/56/17, Leith Ross to Howard Smith, 30 March 1931 (italics added).
- 57 MF, B32290, François-Poncet memorandum, received, 15 April 1931.
- 58 *Ibid.*, unsigned note (by Bizot or Escallier), 19 April 1931.
- 59 MAE, SDN IJ-QEF 1237, Farnier note, 29 May 1931; P.L. Cottrell, 'Austria between diplomats and bankers, 1924–1932', in *Konstellationen Internationaler Politik 1924–1932*, ed. G. Schmidt, Bochum, Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1983, pp. 308–9.
- 60 FRUS, 1931, vol. 1, Mellon to Stimson, 18 June 1931. See also MF, B31728, Rueff to Bizot, 12 June 1931; *ibid.*, Rueff to Escallier, 18 June 1931.
- 61 PRO, FO371/15182, C4340/172/62, Tyrrell to Henderson, no. -, 22 June 1931; FO800/283, Tyrrell to Henderson, 30 June 1931.
- 62 H. Brüning, *Memoiren 1918–1934*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970, p. 301.
- 63 E. Monick, *Pour Mémoire*, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1970, pp. 40–2.
- 64 MAE, Papiers Massigli 91, Avenol to François-Poncet, 21 June 1931.
- 65 PRO, FO371/15183, C4516/172/62, British Treasury to Lindsay (Washington), no. 446, 27 June 1931; FO371/15183, C4534/172/62, Lindsay to Henderson, no. 371, 27 June 1931; FO371/15183, C4553/172/62, Lindsay to Henderson, no. 374, 28 June 1931; FO371/15183, C4650/172/62, Lindsay to Henderson, no. 384, 30 June 1931; PRO, Cabinet papers, CAB23/67, Conclusions, 36(31)2, statement by foreign secretary, 1 July 1931.
- 66 E.W. Bennett, *Germany and the Diplomacy of the Financial Crisis, 1931*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1962, pp. 192–8; Brüning, *Memoiren 1918–1934*, p. 216.
- 67 MF, B32234, Moret to Flandin, 24 June 1931; *ibid.*, Flandin to Moret, 24 June 1931.

- 68 Brüning, in response to Flandin's challenge, acknowledged that they had not been reduced. PRO, Cabinet papers, CAB 29/136, Minutes of the London Conference, July 1931.
- 69 Bennett, *Germany and the Diplomacy of the Financial Crisis*, pp. 235–6.
- 70 Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, p. 109.
- 71 Brüning, *Memoiren 1918–1934*, pp. 329–31, denies any wavering. But see P.-E. Flandin, *Politique française 1919–1940*, Paris, Les Editions Nouvelles, p. 39 f. 1.
- 72 Guided by Frederic Sackett, the American ambassador in Berlin, Washington was equally solicitous of Brüning's independence, but sought to minimise its involvement in European diplomatic horse-trading. B.V.Burke, *Ambassador Frederic Sackett and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic, 1930–1933*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, ch. 5. It was left to Britain to manage the diplomatic manoeuvres. FRUS, 1931, vol. 1, Stimson-MacDonald conversation, 17 July 1931, pp. 271–2.
- 73 PRO, Cabinet papers, CAB 29/136, Minutes of the London Conference, July 1931; Wandycz, *The Twilight of the French Eastern Alliances*, p. 204.
- 74 BDF, Délibérations du Conseil Général, 6, 13 August 1931; Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads*, pp. 345–6.
- 75 Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads*, p. 363.
- 76 MF, B31728, de Fleuriau to Briand, no. 594, 2 October 1931; *ibid.*, no. 581, 18 November 1931.
- 77 BDF, Délibérations du Conseil Général, 23 October 1931; *ibid.*, Convention du 7 décembre 1931, note no. 22.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 7 October 1931; PRO, FO371/15682, W12411/10755/50, Report of Leith Ross-Moret interview, 7 October 1931.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 4 December 1930.
- 80 MF, B32302, Foreign Office draft print, c. 8 April 1932, statement by Flandin, 4 April 1932.
- 81 The primary purpose of most of these loans and credits was to prop up currencies on the gold standard, although the gold standard was as much a political as an economic project. *Ibid.*, B32307, Note for the minister, 28 January 1932.
- 82 MAE, SDN UE 24, Flandin note, 10 March 1932.
- 83 A.François-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Berlin*, Paris, Flammarion, 1946, p. 9.
- 84 MAE, Papiers Tardieu 523, Report of the President of the Council, Franco-German Economic Commission, 25 February 1932.
- 85 W.Edge, *A Jerseyman's Journal. Fifty Years of American Business and Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1948, p. 207; J.P.Moffat, *The Moffat Papers: Selections from the Diplomatic Papers of Jay Pierrepont Moffat, 1919–1943*, ed. N.H.Hooker, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1956, p. 47; DBFP, 1919–1931, 2nd ser., vol. 2, 1931, Lindsay to Reading, 16 October 1931, no. 659; R.H.Ferrell, *American Diplomacy in the Great Depression: Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy, 1929–1933*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957, p. 200.
- 86 G.Warner, *Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968, pp. 47–50, correctly stresses the fruitlessness of the visit, but see Laval's own view in PRO, FO371/15198, C8227/172/62, Tyrrell to Simon, no. 13, 5 November 1931.
- 87 PRO, CAB 24/235, C.P.425(32), Tyrrell to Simon, 8 December 1932.
- 88 Vaisse, *Sécurité d'abord*, pp. 331–4

- 89 PRO, FO371/16663, C49/1/62, Campbell to Foreign Office, no. 1717, 29 December 1932; E.Herriot, Jadis, vol. 2, *D'une guerre à l'autre 1914–1936*, Paris, Flammarion, 1952, pp. 355–6; G. and E.Bonnet, *Histoire politique de la Troisième République*, vol. V, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, p. 132; M.Soulié, *La Vie politique d'Edouard Herriot*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1962, pp. 411–15.
- 90 D.E.Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930–1939*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 42, points out that the east European countries were persuaded to make certain tariff concessions of special value to France.
- 91 Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances*, pp. 223–9; J.Bariéty, 'Der Tardieu-Plan zur Sanierung des Donaauraums (Februar–Mai 1932)', in *Internationale Beziehungen in der Weltwirtschaftskrise 1929–1932*, eds. J.Becker and K.Hildebrand, Munich, Verlag Ernst Vogel, 1980, pp. 361–87.
- 92 MF, B32307, Bonnet note for Herriot, 30 September 1932.
- 93 Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 53–4.
- 94 MAE, RC B-IE 47, Le Trocquer to Chautemps, 24 November 1937.
- 95 Flandin, *Politique française*, p. 63.
- 96 PRO, CAB 24/229, C.P.101(32), 'The economic reconstruction of Central Europe', memorandum by Foreign Secretary, 14 March 1932; PRO, CAB 23/70, conclusions 18(32)1, 16 March 1932; PRO, T172/1788, Notes of First Session of Four-power Conference, Foreign Office, afternoon, 6 April 1932.
- 97 'Wanted—leadership', *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1932; 'Belgian-Dutch tariff agreement', *The Statist*, 25 June 1932, p. 1057; 'Netherlands-Belgium trade agreement', *The Economist*, 25 June 1932, p. 1404; 'Mr Lloyd George and Hoover Plan', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1932; 'Sir Walter Layton on prosperity' and 'The way out', *News Chronicle*, 2 August 1932.
- 98 *Manchester Guardian*, 'French tariffs', 16 June 1932.
- 99 MAE, SDN UE 18, Massigli to Herriot, 30 July 1932.
- 100 PRO, T208/149, Siepmann, [Bank of England] minute, 30 December 1932.
- 101 Not without reason, they regarded France in the 1920s as economically more liberal than Britain. MAE, SDN IJ-QEF 1195, statement by Serruys in *Comptere rendu de la reunion inter-ministerielle du 26 février 1926 chargée de la préparation de la Conference internationale économique*. See also, Boyce, *British Capitalism at the Crossroads*, p. 504 n 142.
- 102 MAE, Relations Commerciales 1918–1940, B-Informations économiques 55, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, no. A/1, 1796, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 January 1923; MAE, 261-Papiers Seydoux, 38, Seydoux to de Fleuriau, 11 October 1926; MAE, 261-Seydoux, 39, de Fleuriau to Seydoux, 11 February 1928; MAE, 261-Seydoux, 39, de Fleuriau to Seydoux, 15 March 1928; MAE, Y Internationale 1918–1940, 630, Massigli to Briand, no. 116, 21 September 1928. The complaints of the Quai d'Orsay are remarkably like those of the Foreign Office; see R.Boyce, 'Economics and the crisis of British foreign policy management, 1914–45', in *Decisions and Diplomacy: Essays in Twentieth-Century International History*, eds. D.Richardson and G.Stone, London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 9–41.
- 103 PRO, FO371/6977, W13133/30/17, Hardinge to Curzon, 19 December 1921.

RENÉ MASSIGLI AND GERMANY, 1919– 1938

Raphäelle Ulrich

René Massigli (1888–1988) was among the three or four most important officials in the French ministry of foreign affairs in the inter-war period. He spent World War I studying the German press in order to report to the Quai d’Orsay what was happening and being said behind the enemy’s lines. During World War II, when the principal enemy was again Germany, he became responsible for the foreign policy of Free France under General de Gaulle. Between these two conflicts France’s external policy was virtually fixated upon the ‘German problem’: how to re-establish peaceful relations with Germany, how to integrate this rough-edged neighbour into a stable system, how to create the conditions for French and European security. In the two decades 1919–39 this was the central question for France and the one on which everything turned—from reparations to western and eastern alliances, from the Ruhr occupation to the Sudetenland crisis, from the era of Versailles to that of Locarno and of Hitler.

During these two decades Massigli played a central role in both the formulation and the implementation of French foreign policy. For ten years he was the secretary-general and chief problem-solver of the Conference of Ambassadors, the Allied organisation charged with the execution of the treaties of 1919. Subsequently he rose towards the summit of the foreign ministry hierarchy, becoming head of the French service of the League of Nations in 1928, deputy director of political affairs in 1933, then director in 1937, the highest post at the Quai d’Orsay after that of the secretary-general, Alexis Saint-Léger Léger. Meanwhile, he participated in numerous international conferences, several of which dealt mainly with Germany, such as Cannes and Genoa in 1922, London in 1924, The Hague in 1929 and the disarmament conference in 1932–4.

Not actually posted to Germany but deployed in the central administration in Paris, he gained close familiarity with German questions without ever treating them in isolation from wider issues. He was a supporter of the multilateral diplomacy which emerged after 1919 through the agency of the League of Nations and the almost endless series of international conferences that took place. Hence it became and remained a constant feature of his approach throughout the inter-war period to treat the German question within a European framework, and inversely to assume that questions of national security, collective security and the League of Nations could be resolved only within a stable relationship with

Germany. However, after 1936 his attitude altered: he no longer sought peaceful Franco-German relations, but tried to ensure resistance to aggression. His attitude towards Germany coincided with the major shifts of French foreign policy—from the policy of fulfilment of treaty agreements to détente, to strained relations with the Third Reich. But it also displayed a certain number of distinctive features which deserve prominence, and shall be examined in the present chapter.

From before the Treaty of Versailles, which fixed its postwar territorial and military status, Massigli was closely familiar with Germany. He spent half the war in Bern, in the press office belonging to the *Maison de la Presse* which was established by Philippe Berthelot, secretary-general of the ministry of foreign affairs. This office, where André François-Poncet, the great French ambassador to Germany in later years, also worked, examined the German and Austrian press, which was no longer distributed in France, and sent analyses to Paris. Through this work Massigli gained a thorough knowledge of Germany, its mentality, its institutions and its political system, the troubles it faced on account of the war, and its expansionist ambitions towards Austria and south-east Europe.¹ Doubtless what he learned during these war years informed his diplomatic activity during the inter-war period. Meanwhile, from the peace conference onwards he became an expert on German questions, among other issues.

Although he was never the only or even the principal German specialist at the Quai d'Orsay, Massigli remained involved in German questions during the whole of the inter-war period. More interesting, perhaps, is the fact that at no time was he responsible for bilateral Franco-German relations, and in his successive generalist roles—in the Conference of Ambassadors, the French service of the League of Nations, and as deputy director and director of political affairs at the Quai d'Orsay—he never approached the German problem except from a European or general point of view.

1919–25

In the years 1919–25 Massigli was both a vigorous executor of the Treaty of Versailles and at the same time an effective intermediary between France and Germany. Even in 1919, when he entered the diplomatic profession as a modest secretary, his unofficial functions were by no means negligible. Although the Allies did not allow a German delegation to be present during the preparation of the Treaty of Versailles, the Germans had intermediaries through which to make their grievances and claims heard. Thanks to his experience at Bern, Massigli was called upon to serve in this capacity. Officially the Allies did not negotiate with Germany. Unofficially the Germans drafted proposals or claims which they transmitted to the Allied delegations by the francophile German intellectuals Redlich and Georg Bernhard, and by Massigli.² It was in a similar spirit that he participated in an unofficial fact-finding mission to Germany in the spring of 1919. Emile Haguénin, Oswald Hesnard and René Massigli, three German experts, travelled to Germany while the peace conference took place in Paris, to

meet Germans from different milieux and opinions, and to observe the state of disorganisation and despondency of the country. Despite the break in diplomatic relations, France was anxious to avoid losing touch with Germany.³ Although still of junior rank in 1919, Massigli thus performed an important listening role; throughout his career he was to remain attentive to what was being said and done in Germany.

In the immediate postwar years he was part of the Allied contingent responsible for constraining Germany and subjecting it to the terms of the peace treaty. The Conference of Ambassadors, of which he was the secretary-general during the whole of its existence, was created to succeed the supreme Allied Council (which met only until the beginning of 1920). Its main purpose was to impose the peace treaties upon the defeated powers and to verify their application. The conference existed from 1920 to 1931. It ceased to be active after Locarno and even less so from 1927, but in its first years it sought to put into practical application aspects of the peace treaties as diverse as the fixing of the German frontiers, the division of Upper Silesia, the conflicts over Vilna and Memel, the redrawing of the Austrian and Hungarian frontiers, the various related plebiscites, and the many questions associated with the disarmament of Germany and the other central powers.⁴ Massigli, as secretary-general of the conference, which met in Paris, became its central figure, personally carrying out a large part of its work. So far as Germany was concerned, the most important points dealt with by the conference were the division of Upper Silesia and the disarmament clauses in Part V of the Versailles Treaty.

Disarmament was an especially difficult question, not least because it exposed divisions among the Allies. The conference had the ambitious task of securing the reduction of German military personnel to 100,000 men, the handing over of war material and the dismantling or halting construction of certain fortifications, as well as of ensuring that Germany did not rebuild a powerful army and war industry. These objectives gave rise to numerous disputes, and Massigli, at this time a zealous executor of official French policy, was kept busy dealing with them. During the first years, 1920–1, Germany was obliged to disarm its military forces, although not to abandon its military-industrial potential. Between then and the détente of 1924–5, however, the conference made little further progress because of German chicanery, and the disagreement between the French, who wanted to pursue disarmament so far as the treaty allowed, and the British, who saw no value in endlessly harassing Germany.

What was Massigli's role in the Conference of Ambassadors, and what attitude did he take towards Germany in the six years that separated the entry into force of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno conference? Massigli was well known among the German representatives in Paris, who often discussed issues with him, but he was not yet a ministerial adviser or in a position to define or shape France's German policy. Nevertheless, along with Jules Cambon and later Jules Laroche—two older and more highly placed diplomats—he enabled the Conference of Ambassadors to settle a number of outstanding problems between Germany and

the Allies. Massigli was guided by certain principles from which he never departed: to be open to German requests and to seek to satisfy them by compromises while upholding the essential principles; more importantly, to preserve the entente among the wartime Allies and to struggle, albeit without illusions, to halt Germany's remilitarisation and to uphold treaty rights which formed part of international law.

Jürgen Heideking notes in his study of the Conference of Ambassadors that, thanks to Laroche and Massigli, it succeeded in finding, often after laborious negotiations, a compromise between the policy of strict fulfilment of the treaties and sanctions pursued by Raymond Poincaré, and the policy of détente practised by Aristide Briand and Austen Chamberlain. If it did not halt the recrudescence of German military power, this was due above all to the contradictions of the Treaty of Versailles.⁵ But in any case the work of the conference was bound to be difficult, since Germany did not willingly accept the terms of the treaty, and the Allies' accusations of bad faith were not always unfounded. The German diplomatic documents on several occasions nevertheless render indirect homage to Massigli. He appears as an approachable man who did not refuse dialogue with his German adversaries or partners, and who, without always yielding, was prepared to seek a compromise whenever possible.

Right from these first postwar years Massigli's attitude towards Germany appears to have been nuanced. Although he strongly supported the disarmament of the *Reichswehr*, he was not an enemy of Germany and advocate of revenge. Writing under a pseudonym in *L'Ere Nouvelle*, shortly after the Kapp putsch in the spring of 1920, he vigorously denounced 'the revival of [German] militarism', claiming that many German officials, industrialists and financiers along with the *Reichswehr* had hoped the putsch would succeed, and that it was the working class and trade unions who had defeated it. He believed that a real desire for democracy existed in Germany, but that it was to be found in the masses, not in the army or among ruling classes.⁶

Writing in the same journal in June, he expressed anxiety about the resurgence of the right in the German parliamentary elections; and subsequently he warned of the danger to Weimar democracy from a reactionary Bavaria, and the growing influence of the great industrial combines and big businessmen such as Hugo Stinnes and Otto Wolff.⁷ As he indicated to Haguenin and Hesnard,⁸ his decision to engage in journalism arose from his concern that French opinion was ill-informed on German questions. By the same token he was impatient for France to develop a coherent policy towards Germany rather than leaving its politicians, soldiers and diplomats to plough their separate furrows.⁹ His own view, as he explained several times to Hesnard, was that the Allies should be reasonable in their demands, but that Germany must faithfully carry out the terms of the treaty and above all the obligation to disarm the *Reichswehr*.

the touchstone for Germany is the execution of the Treaty, or at least, since I am prepared to believe that certain of its clauses cannot be applied, to give evidence of goodwill in its execution....¹⁰

[T]he starting point must be the disarmament of the *Reichswehr*.¹¹

Hesnard, who was in Germany, from 1920–1 regularly advocated the formation of a Franco-German entente and encouraged Massigli in this direction.¹² The influence on Massigli's thinking became evident later, at the League of Nations and the various international conferences that he attended.

Like his mission to Germany in the spring of 1919, Massigli's second visit also took place in extraordinary circumstances. In September 1923, in the midst of the Ruhr crisis, he was sent to investigate the potential of the Rhenish separatist movements.¹³ This he was well qualified to do, since from the time of the Armistice he had closely followed developments in the Rhineland for the Conference of Ambassadors.¹⁴ However, the report he prepared after his twelve-day visit was distinctly reserved, acknowledging frankly that the movements lacked unity, depth, effective leaders or a coherent programme. Above all, he doubted the willingness of the Rhineland's population to separate itself completely from the rest of Germany, and affirmed that in a parallel situation France would doubtless extend financial and economic support to the threatened region and at the very least seek to defend its reputation. Massigli himself did not try to provoke separation, but merely to watch and await developments. Once again, he displayed no predisposition to fight Germany or bring it to its knees by every available means.

Between Versailles and Locarno, Massigli did not yet belong to the inner circle of decision-makers at the Quai d'Orsay. All the same, his career path was noteworthy and unusual in that his functions invariably involved multilateral diplomacy—in the Conference of Ambassadors, the numerous international conferences of the period and later the League of Nations. As a result he approached Franco-German relations as part of a larger system, shaped by crucial factors such as the entente among the wartime Allies, the problem of Europe-wide security and the economic questions debated at Cannes and Genoa in 1922, and in London in 1924. Influenced by Philippe Berthelot, Emile Haguenin and Jules Laroche, he sought to reach out to Germany, albeit without jeopardising French security or sacrificing the essential clauses of the peace treaties.

1925–30: MASSIGLI, GERMANY AND THE 'SPIRIT OF LOCARNO'

The second half of the 1920s is commonly regarded as a new era on account of Aristide Briand's influence, the 'spirit of Locarno', the advent of collective security, and the Franco-German détente. Massigli, who had gained considerably more influence within the Quai d'Orsay on becoming head of the French service of the League of Nations, played his part in this evolution, being one of the

proponents and leading executors of Briand's policy. Was this the pursuit of an illusion, as is sometimes claimed? It is impossible to be certain, but there does appear to have been a real possibility of 'peaceful coexistence', even entente, between France and Weimar Germany, which is now obscured by the shadow cast by Nazism and the events of the 1930s. As Raymond Poidevin and Jacques Bariéty have written, between 1926 and 1928 détente was a reality: a new climate reigned, even if the diplomats did not know exactly where it would lead.¹⁵ For Massigli at least, the pursuit of détente was not a change of heart but the pursuit of a consistent policy. Moreover, he abandoned none of his *méfiance* towards the anti-democratic leaders of the *Reichswehr* and big business, and along with his close colleagues—Berthelot, Laroche, Seydoux—remained acutely concerned to preserve France's security guarantees and avoid compromising the future.

Georges-Henri Soutou, writing in *Relations internationales*, has recently observed that before 1930 Massigli identified more closely with Briand's policy than many of his colleagues.¹⁶ Massigli, in retirement, explained to Professor Soutou that 'Briandism had the great merit of drawing a good number of European states towards the French viewpoint'.¹⁷ The essential feature of Briand's policy was its acceptance of rapprochement with Weimar Germany, although Massigli and some of his colleagues felt that it must be pursued only within a broad European framework and a system of collective security. Once again, his attitude towards Germany was consistent: the bilateral rapprochement should never be purchased at the expense of other parts of Europe, such as Britain or central and eastern Europe, or of Europe-wide stability.

During this period Massigli participated in a range of activities: the continuing chores of the Conference of Ambassadors, preparatory work for important conferences such as Locarno and The Hague, and liaison between the Quai d'Orsay and the League of Nations. As for the German question, which remained prominent throughout, the great conundrum was how to construct a stable Franco-German relationship in which France did not feel threatened, within a broad European framework. Several choices were theoretically possible between the extremes defined by Poincaré and Briand. Massigli's political education, his intimate knowledge of German questions and his postwar experience predisposed him to seek negotiated solutions and general agreements rather than pursue the traditional approach of bilateral relations and strict application of treaty commitments.

In February 1925 Germany proposed through diplomatic channels a pact wherein it would recognise and guarantee its western frontiers and, implicitly at least, renounce further claims on Alsace-Lorraine. This marked the first step which led eight months later to the Locarno treaties. Massigli was involved from the outset as one of the inner group at the Quai d'Orsay. The group's members included Jules Laroche, director of political affairs, Charles Corbin, deputy director for Europe, Henri Fromageot, the ministry's chief legal adviser, Jacques Seydoux, deputy director of commercial affairs, and Philippe Berthelot, who returned at the same time as Briand to the Quai d'Orsay (April 1925); together

with the key ambassadors Aimé de Fleuriau in London and Pierre de Margerie in Berlin.¹⁸

Laroche now relied upon Massigli as one of his main advisers on Germany. The memoranda Massigli drafted at this time confirm that he generally welcomed Germany's initiative, albeit with reservations, which corresponded closely with his attitude before 1925. In his view, the initiative deserved close examination, since it represented a chance to consolidate European peace, which was a prize of inestimable value. Germany's willingness to renounce its claim on Alsace-Lorraine was a very positive step. The initiative also created the possibility of a Franco-British treaty or at least a guarantee of some sort from Britain, which France had been seeking since 1919 and which had once again evaded its grasp in 1924 when the Geneva protocol was abandoned. Massigli nevertheless believed that the German initiative must be approached cautiously and locked into place by a network of guarantees including ententes with Britain and Belgium,¹⁹ Germany's entry into the League of Nations (a point which he particularly stressed), progress on German disarmament and on the Rhineland occupation, and the maintenance of France's eastern alliances.²⁰

He was not the only one to qualify his welcome of the German initiative. In fact, the French reply—as well as the British—which was issued in June 1925 after a delay of some four months, indicated concern for the League of Nations and collective security; Anglo-Belgian-French solidarity; the maintenance of the eastern alliances; and extending assistance if or when necessary to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Could France trust Germany to respect the stability of eastern Europe and the frontiers established in 1919? Massigli was by no means sure, and writing privately to Laroche from Geneva, on 8 September 1925, he betrayed his disquiet.²¹ The Poles and Czechs, he observed, had reason to be disturbed by the negotiations under way for a western pact. It would be dangerous to sign it before the eastern negotiations had reached a more advanced stage, with satisfactory guarantees extended to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Thus once again he displayed his anxiety to see Germany contained, to abjure the temptation to create a western security system at the expense of security in eastern Europe, and hence to treat the German problem within a general European framework. In October 1925 he travelled to Locarno with Briand and other artisans of the agreement that was to inaugurate the new era. Doubtless he shared the hopes and pride to which the treaties gave rise, but even at this time he did not completely set aside his apprehensions.

The years that separated Locarno from the economic crisis and the onset of new European tensions were a period of relative calm for the diplomats of Europe. Massigli continued his work in the Conference of Ambassadors and meanwhile specialised in multilateral questions, particularly those involving the League of Nations and economic rapprochement within Europe, representing France at several of the international conferences held at this time.

The Conference of Ambassadors, which became less active after Locarno, ended by becoming incarnated in Massigli himself.²² Nevertheless it was still

responsible for settling a number of questions, the most important of which concerned Germany and its disarmament. Since before Locarno, Massigli had insisted upon including in negotiations with Germany the provision for League control over German disarmament, including the right to carry out inspections.²³ In this respect he was firmer than either Fromageot or Seydoux. But he was also one of the authors of a protocol, signed on 16 November 1925 by Allied and German representatives, which accepted that Germany had disarmed sufficiently to justify the Allies' decision to begin the evacuation of the first occupation zone of the Rhineland (Cologne).²⁴ The Conference of Ambassadors thus reflected the 'spirit of Locarno', while confirming its desire for a political solution to the question of German disarmament.

In early 1926 protracted negotiations began for an agreement between the Allies and Germany on the regulation of air power, another issue that keenly exercised Massigli.²⁵ That year and the next, his time was taken up with sensitive issues such as Allied military control in Germany through the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission in Berlin,²⁶ fortifications in eastern Germany, which both the French and the Poles wished to see dismantled, and the status of the German police and the presence of quasi-military forces in the Rhineland.²⁷ The same challenges remained, along with frequent tensions between British and French representatives. Was it necessary, he was obliged to ask, to close one's eyes to Germany's many minor violations of the peace treaties in order to avoid souring international relations? Or alternatively, should France stand firm in insisting upon strict adherence to the disarmament clauses? Massigli, as secretary-general of the conference, sometimes leaned towards firmness à la française, sometimes towards a compromise between the French, British and German positions. His uncertainty continued until the start of the 1930s. The Conference of Ambassadors, when it ceased meeting in 1931, indeed stated that it was unable to issue the ex-enemy states with a clean bill of health on the issue of disarmament and, in particular, that it was impossible to disregard Germany's military renaissance. Massigli was under no illusions on this score. Nevertheless, in the late 1920s, he, like many other diplomats and statesmen, was prepared to believe in Weimar Germany's evolution as a democratic power.

Massigli, who regarded Germany's admission to the League of Nations as essential, played an important role in the negotiations in 1926 that made admission possible. It was, he believed, indispensable for France's security to include Germany within a collective security system that was complementary to Locarno and that Germany freely accepted. To request precise commitments from Germany against aggression was also to deflect it from the Russian temptation—the Soviet Union not at this time entering into French security calculations. Massigli insisted on this point and sought to facilitate the entry of a reluctant Germany during the dispute over the allocation of seats in the League Council.²⁸ Once again, his attitude appears consistent: extending a hand to Germany, whose preoccupations he well understood, but only within a multilateral system providing France with guarantees of security.²⁹ In this respect, it seems, he

occupied the middle ground in French external policy, which unfortunately was to be undermined by the crisis at the start of the 1930s and the resurgence of German nationalism.

It was within the same perspective that Massigli collaborated in the proposal for European union launched by Aristide Briand, then French premier and foreign minister, in his famous address at the annual League Assembly in Geneva on 5 September 1929. The address, in which Briand called for 'a sort of federal relationship' among the European countries, was followed by a French memorandum on the possible bases of co-operation, which was circulated on 17 May 1930. Massigli helped to edit the memorandum after two different drafts were prepared by Alexis Léger, the political director of the foreign ministry, and Jacques Fouques-Duparc of the French service of the League of Nations.³⁰ However, he revealed a degree of scepticism, even a reluctance to be involved, in face of the vagueness of Briand's initiative; nor to be sure was he alone in this.

In 1929–30 Massigli was witness to new Franco–German tensions arising from controversy over disarmament, which followed the withdrawal of Allied military observers from Berlin, over the Saar, and the early evacuation of the third and last occupation zone in the Rhineland.³¹ To add to the gloom, the German response to the French memorandum on European federation was distinctly cool. In August 1930 Massigli, in the name of the Conference of Ambassadors, officially set aside a number of Allied demands in order to sign a protocol on disarmament with Clodius of the German embassy in Paris.³² On this occasion the Quai d'Orsay overrode the reservations of the French high command in asserting its policy, which greatly pleased the *Reichswehr*.

During 1925–30 Massigli appears to have been uncertain of the direction of events, which indeed was far from clear. There was of course the 'spirit of Locarno', which he could only welcome.³³ But by no means all the outstanding problems had been resolved, as he and his watchful colleagues were well aware.³⁴ In particular, German disarmament, as called for by the Treaty of Versailles, remained incomplete. As secretary of the Conference of Ambassadors, he sought to preserve the entente among the Allies and to find acceptable compromises between them and Germany. Within the French service of the League of Nations and at various international conferences, he consistently pursued multilateral relations, economic rapprochement and the construction of a stable European system.

1930–5

Franco–German relations sharply declined in the first half of the 1930s, starting well before Hitler's advent to power when the still unresolved problems of the 1920s were aggravated by the economic crisis and resurgence of German nationalism. The turning point, the years 1928–31, is described with precision in Franz Knipping's excellent account. It was followed by the tension-ridden start of the disarmament conference and the granting of equality of rights to Germany in

December 1932, then by Hitler's advent to power in January 1933 and his first brutal initiatives—withdrawing Germany from the League of Nations, attempting the *Anschluss* with Austria and reintroducing conscription. Massigli, acting in a manner consistent with his functions as head of the French service of the League and at the disarmament conference, continued to insist upon security and general European stability as the foundation of French external policy.

In 1930 French leaders began to planning for the forthcoming disarmament conference. By August of that year, Massigli and his colleagues accepted the likelihood of a confrontation between the French and German theses, and the German demand for the suppression or at least modification of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles.³⁵ By the year's end the preparatory committee's work had exposed the fundamental difference between the position of the Germans, who claimed to have disarmed and demanded that others should do so as well—if only to create a pretext for rearming—and the position defended by the French, who were anxious to avoid any reduction in their security. At the end of the committee's work, Massigli, the French delegate, insisted on the fact that for France disarmament must be subordinate to security.³⁶ In this respect he was a perfectly orthodox interpreter of government policy, which since 1924 had been based upon Edouard Herriot's triad, 'arbitration, security, disarmament'.

From March 1931 Franco-German relations declined further after the revelation of plans for an Austro-German customs union, which was seen in Paris as a scarcely disguised attempt at *Anschluss*. This, as Knipping observes, destroyed French confidence in Weimar Germany and resulted in a nearly complete political standstill, with grave consequences for the forthcoming disarmament conference. France, still virtually unaffected by the economic crisis, was nevertheless in a position to offer economic assistance to Germany in exchange for political détente. Massigli gave some time to a possible deal, as notes probably drafted in the summer of 1931 indicate. He himself was not in principle hostile,³⁷ and Pierre Laval, the premier, made this a central part of his policy, proceeding on the assumption that Franco-German rapprochement could be obtained by means of economic and financial co-operation.³⁸ He was ready to grant large concessions, but the Quai d'Orsay was careful to see that a number of conditions were first attached.

The disarmament conference, which opened in Geneva in February 1932 and was, if not destroyed, then at least paralysed by the French note of 17 April 1934 breaking off deliberations, dominated the diplomacy of the period as well as contemporary Franco-German relations.³⁹ Here too Massigli was a prime mover, since in addition to his functions as head of the French service of the League of Nations, he had also been involved throughout the conference preparations, and attended as deputy leader of the French delegation. Disarmament, in his opinion, was essentially a political rather than a technical problem, and he devoted his efforts to ensuring that France did not become isolated in face of German demands, even if it meant offering Britain and Italy concessions on naval issues.⁴⁰ At the outset he was absolutely opposed to the abandonment of Part V of the Treaty of

Versailles and thus to granting Germany full equality of rights in the field of defence.⁴¹ Subsequently he retreated somewhat from this position, and joined German delegates in the search for an agreement.⁴²

In the summer of 1932 the Quai d'Orsay and Ambassador François-Poncet both pressed Herriot to enter into bilateral conversations with Germany.⁴³ Massigli strongly preferred multilateral conversations which included Britain. He was well aware that the equality of rights (*Gleichberechtigung*), which Herriot had conceded against his better judgement on 11 December 1932, created serious ambiguities and future difficulties for France,⁴⁴ above all in its relations with its east European allies. He was also disturbed to see Britain assuming the role of arbiter between France and Germany, and more often than not tending to favour Germany.⁴⁵ What, he was bound to ask, had happened to the Franco-British entente?

The year 1933 was catastrophic for France,⁴⁶ whose foreign policy at the disarmament conference and elsewhere was completely dislocated, indeed struck by 'a kind of lethargy',⁴⁷ after Hitler's accession to power and Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. Massigli, while not being excessively pessimistic, soon appreciated the threat of a German-Italian rapprochement at Geneva and elsewhere.⁴⁸ From the time of the break with Germany at the end of 1933, he joined advocates of a policy of firmness towards Germany. Others, including François-Poncet, remained hopeful of renewed dialogue with Germany since, to them, German rearmament was in any case inevitable.⁴⁹ But most of the diplomats of the Quai d'Orsay stood four-square with the foreign minister, Paul-Boncour, who favoured a policy of firmness, and Massigli now held that further negotiations with Germany offered no hope for France. The same view was shared by the high command and a large number of deputies. Nevertheless, the note of 17 April 1934, in which France pointed to German rearmament and stated that henceforth it must rely upon itself for security, was not unanimously endorsed in French governing circles. Massigli, representing the Quai d'Orsay in most of the crucial deliberations during April 1934, would have preferred a convention controlling and limiting German rearmament to a complete break that left Germany's hands free.⁵⁰ In conversation with Professor Soutou in 1983, he affirmed that the foreign minister, Louis Barthou, and the Quai d'Orsay hoped that if there were to be a break in relations, it would not be blamed on France.⁵¹ But at the insistence of the president, Gaston Doumergue, and the high command, it was the supporters of a break who prevailed.

Massigli was obliged to witness the deterioration in Franco-German relations, the advent of Hitler, the failure of the disarmament negotiations—where he was however a protagonist of the French position—and the threat of German rearmament which Hitler publicly acknowledged in March 1935. He was now at the centre of the diplomatic machine, was well informed and frequently displayed impressive farsightedness; but he was not a politician and was obliged to respect the decisions of his ministers, the Cabinet or the *Conseil supérieur de la Défense nationale*. His outstanding quality was his perceptiveness. One example will

perhaps suffice: his note of 11 December 1933, written at a time when many Frenchmen, even those in high places, harboured illusions about Hitler.⁵² Massigli predicted that Germany, in discussions with France, would seek to resolve specifically Franco-German issues and to keep its hands free in the rest of Europe. France, he insisted, must affirm that all problems were linked and of relevance to the whole of Europe. As he wrote, 'There is nothing to be gained in giving satisfaction to Germany on an issue, only to find oneself later confronted with increased demands and new pressures.' The only solution was to insist upon specific commitments from Germany and its return to the League of Nations. This was the contrary of the policy later known as appeasement.

1935–8

The historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, writing on the period 1932–9, described René Massigli as 'one of the most forceful individuals in the Quai d'Orsay' and 'the leading advocate of an effective resistance to Hitler', as well as 'a loyal supporter of the League of Nations', as described above.⁵³ It was in the second half of the 1930s, and more precisely after the remilitarisation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936 that he took the clearest stand against further concessions. For him it was not so much a turning-point as a tragedy: in his view, the absence of any riposte to Hitler's provocations was bound to lead fatally to war. But his call for a policy of firmness was largely ignored. It was, in fact, to cost him his post.

Massigli, along with several other colleagues, had long suspected Hitler of wanting to reoccupy, perhaps in stages, the demilitarised zone. The reports of French consuls in the zone provided advance warning, and Massigli, as his papers make clear, had already posed the question of France's response to German action. Initially, when the remilitarisation occurred on 7 March, Massigli was guided by several principles: to call upon the League to act,⁵⁴ to tighten the links among the Allies (Britain and Belgium essentially), and above all not to allow this flagrant violation of the treaties of Versailles and Locarno to pass without response.

This is not the place to describe the chain of reactions—or rather the absence of reactions—which ended with the diplomatic humiliation of France and its Locarno allies. Considering only Massigli's attitude,⁵⁵ he was responsible for drafting the radio address by the premier, Albert Sarraut, which contained the sentence, 'We will not expose Strasbourg to the fire of German guns.'⁵⁶ Sarraut thus seemed committed to replying with force, although it goes without saying that he did no such thing.

On 10 March the Locarno powers minus Germany (France, British, Belgian and Italian delegates) gathered in Paris. France was represented by the foreign minister, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Joseph Paul-Boncour, minister of state responsible for League affairs, Alexis Léger, now secretary-general at the ministry of foreign affairs, and Paul Bargeton and Massigli, respectively political director and deputy political director; Britain by Eden and Halifax along with several senior officials.⁵⁷ Flandin seemed disposed to support military sanctions while

Eden expressed reserves. In an important note of 12 March, Massigli attempted to show, for the benefit of the British, 'the practical consequences of a cave-in of the Western powers', in the Far East but above all in the whole of central and eastern Europe which were threatened with being drawn voluntarily or involuntarily into Germany's orbit. He concluded with the striking phrase, 'The fundamental question now is whether Europe will or will not become German.'⁵⁸

As before, he placed the German problem within a global perspective and saw well beyond the immediate situation, above all towards the consequences for central Europe. But when representatives of the Locarno powers reconvened in London from 12 to 19 March, the French position was whittled away, and Flandin was unable to obtain Eden's agreement to intervention. In the telegrams he sent from London, Massigli betrayed a degree of bitterness towards Britain, whose support seemed seriously inadequate. But it must not be forgotten that many French leaders also regarded armed intervention as impossible or undesirable: the military believed itself to be inferior to the German army, and the politicians refused a general mobilisation only a few weeks before the legislative elections. On 19 March Britain agreed to extend its guarantee to Belgium and France in case of German invasion. This was some compensation, but their defensive plans went no further.

On 31 March the German government proposed a so-called 'peace plan', which scarcely masked its ambitions. Massigli, in a 'Critical analysis of the German plan of 31 March 1936', denounced in ringing terms the sanctioning of the German *fait accompli*, the 'negation of the principles of the League of Nations', the 'derisory' or 'equivocal' German proposals, and the absence of 'any economic proposal, as if the problem was not urgent'. In his usual tone, he concluded grimly, 'the plan points towards the reconstruction of Europe; but it will undoubtedly be a German Europe'.⁵⁹ It was a brilliant note, but it had no more effect than earlier ones.

Subsequently, as Duroselle explains, the discussions drifted aimlessly on and Massigli became aware that nothing would be done. He had known this already, within days of the Nazi initiative⁶⁰ and in spite of the apparent determination of his minister, Flandin. He continued in the following months to underline the grave consequences for Europe of inaction in face of Hitler's *faits accomplis*,⁶¹ but it was too late for the Rhineland. French opinion had lost interest in the question and was now immersed in the 1936 legislative elections.

From the Rhineland crisis to Munich, from 1936 to 1938, Massigli continued his work for a moribund League of Nations and a French diplomacy that had been overtaken by events. The Quai d'Orsay continued to seek a solution through closer relations with Britain, overtures to the Soviet Union, and eventually economic concessions, even colonies, to the Reich.⁶² Massigli participated in deliberations on these various proposals, but it is clear that he had no faith in any of them.⁶³ According to the diplomat Armand Bérard, Massigli had tears in his eyes when he heard the news of the *Anschluss* in March 1938.⁶⁴ Europe's prospects were becoming more and more grim.

The Czech crisis of 1938 seemed to be a repetition of the drama of 1936.⁶⁵ As in 1936, Massigli's papers—on the worsening situation in the Sudetenland, Hitler's provocations and hidden intentions, Czechoslovakia's international position, the consequences of a new climb-down for France and the rest of Europe—show him firm, lucid and pessimistic. In particular, he made clear that if Czechoslovakia were to be neutralised by a non-aggression pact with Germany, as Britain suggested, it would soon be absorbed by Germany, in which case probably 'neither Romania nor Hungary nor even Poland could long resist Berlin's domination'; and in the longer term this would place France and Britain in grave danger.⁶⁶

Several times he spoke out against the idea that offering immediate satisfaction to Germany would end the crisis and avoid a war. Two memoranda by Massigli, on 17 and 19 September 1938, set out sombrely and prophetically the 'Consequences for France of the weakening of Czechoslovakia': it would undermine France's prestige, its influence (including intellectual influence) in eastern Europe, weaken its military position (Czechoslovakia being France's only solid and effective ally in the east), aggravate Franco-Italian tensions and the Spanish crisis; and in rewarding German aggression, it would merely encourage Germany to demand more.⁶⁷ But once again, Massigli did not represent the dominant mood in the Quai d'Orsay. He was leader of the advocates of a policy of firmness vis-à-vis the Reich, but his minister, Georges Bonnet, his superior, Alexis Léger, and the appeasers of the Quai d'Orsay were determined to find means of avoiding war. Massigli thus had little margin for manoeuvre.⁶⁸

Massigli's opposition to appeasement, to Georges Bonnet and to Alexis Léger was the immediate cause of his removal from the Quai d'Orsay. In October 1938, only days after the 'cowardly retreat' of Munich, Bonnet in a major diplomatic reorganisation sent Massigli as ambassador to Ankara, a move which appeared strongly like a dismissal. Massigli had supported a relatively consistent line since 1935 under different ministers, but this time the disagreement between him and his chiefs was too glaring and several people were glad to see this hard-line anti-appeaser rusticated from Paris. At Ankara, however, far from distancing himself from European problems and the threatened war, he devoted his energies to the conclusion of a Franco-British-Turkish alliance in order to deter Turkey from being drawn in its turn towards Germany. As before, he continued to approach the problem of France's security in face of the dictators with the same global and European vision.

Between 1919 and 1938 Massigli's thought and action vis-à-vis Germany thus underwent several breaks or at least major shifts, marked by the Locarno agreements in 1925, the failure of the disarmament conference and Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1934, and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936. They also displayed a slow evolution from the rigidity which featured in the first postwar years to a more flexible stance during the Briandist phase of his career, then a return to one of mistrust and resistance in the years 1936–8. It can be said that Massigli was often in advance of colleagues on German

policy, thanks to his close familiarity with Germany since 1916 and awareness of German preoccupations from well before Locarno, and that he was quick to appreciate the special character of the Hitler regime and the threat it posed to a succession of countries in Europe. He was prepared to explore a series of possible approaches: co-operation, multilateralism and attempts at disarmament and collective security, followed by—to employ a word of more recent vintage—containment. But as a senior official, Massigli never represented French external policy on his own. It was more fully incarnated in the great contemporary statesmen, Poincaré, Briand, Barthou and Blum. Massigli's role was that of loyal servant, discreet innovator of policy—and Cassandra. It was perhaps in 1936–8 that Massigli most impressively displayed his clarity of view. Sadly, it was also the time when he had the least influence on policy.

NOTES

- 1 Among other subjects, he prepared notes on the German Socialists, regional differences and German investments in eastern Europe. MAE, Papiers Massigli, vols 1–3.
- 2 *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945 (ADAP)*, Serie A, Band I, no. 244; *ibid.*, Band II, nos 14, 37, 53.
- 3 MAE, Série Europe 1918–1940, Sous-série Allemagne 1918–1929, vols 6–9.
- 4 See the very thorough study of the conference of ambassadors, J.Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten. Die Pariser Botschafterkonferenz der alliierten Hauptmächte und die Probleme der europäischen Politik 1920–1931*, Husum, Matthiesen Verlag, 1979.
- 5 Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten*, p. 337 and various.
- 6 *L'Ere Nouvelle*, 17 April 1920, pp. 468–70.
- 7 See for instance *ibid.*, 10 October 1920, pp. 1469–71; MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 99, letter to Laroche, 13 July 1923.
- 8 MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 98.
- 9 *ibid.*, letter of 16 April 1920 to Haguenin.
- 10 *Ibid.*, letter of 25 February 1920 to Hesnard.
- 11 *Ibid.*, letter of 16 April 1920 to Hesnard.
- 12 *Ibid.*, letter of 25 February 1921.
- 13 MAE, Série Europe 1918–1940, Sous-série Rive gauche du Rhin, vol. 32, 29 September 1923.
- 14 As is indicated by the numerous documents that he received from Allied High Commission for the Rhineland and its president, Paul Tirard.
- 15 R.Poidevin and J.Bariéty, *Les Relations franco-allemandes 1815–1975*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1977, p. 271.
- 16 G.-H.Soutou, 'La perception de la puissance française par René Massigli en 1938', *Relations internationales*, 1983, spring, 33.
- 17 MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 103, Massigli letter to G.-H.Soutou, 1983.
- 18 For the negotiation of the Locarno treaties, see MAE, Série Europe 1918–1940, Sous-série Grande-Bretagne 1918–1929, vol. 72 and various ('Pacte de sécurité').
- 19 See C.Wurm, *Die französische Sicherheitspolitik in der Phase der Umorientierung 1924–1926*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1979, p. 257.

- 20 See, for example, MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 7, note on the German proposals, 16 February 1925; MAE, Série Europe 1918–1940, Sous-série Grande-Bretagne 1918–1929, vol. 73, note of 6 March 1925; *ibid.*, draft instructions to London, Rome, Brussels, 12 March 1925.
- 21 MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 99.
- 22 Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten*, pp. 36–7, 299, 310.
- 23 Wurm, *Die französische Sicherheitspolitik in der Phase der Umorientierung*, p. 503; ADAP, Serie A, Band XIV, no. 141 (13 October 1925); *ibid.*, Serie B, Band 1–1, no. 28 (7 January 1926), etc.
- 24 Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten*, pp. 270–2; ADAP, Serie A, Band XIV, no. 233 (11 November 1925), 270 (28 November 1925), etc.
- 25 Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten*, pp. 274–7; ADAP, Serie A, Band XIV, nos 245 et 268; Serie B, Band 1–1, nos 25, 28, 44, 108, 130, 135, 136, 149, 167, etc.
- 26 See, for example, the note on various issues likely to be raised in conversation with Stresemann, in MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 7, 15 September 1926.
- 27 For more detail, see Heideking, *Areopag der Diplomaten*, part 3, ch. 1, ‘Die Abrüstung Deutschlands’.
- 28 See, for example, ADAP, Serie B, Band 1–1, no. 156, 10 March 1926.
- 29 See, for example, the note of the Conference of Ambassadors, ‘Plan général d’une négociation franco-allemande’, MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 7, 8 October 1926.
- 30 On this subject, see MAE, Série S.D.N., Union Européenne, vols 1–4; F.Knipping, *Deutschland, Frankreich und das Ende der Locarno-Ara 1928–1931*, Munich, R. Oldenbourg, 1987, pp. 155–61. Massigli himself discusses it very briefly in the preface to his memoirs, *Une comédie des erreurs*, Paris, Plon, 1978, pp. 11–13.
- 31 See Knipping, *Deutschland, Frankreich und das Ende der Locarno-Ara*, chs 3–5.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 175–80.
- 33 See his own assessment in, ‘Note au sujet des accords de Locarno’, MAE, Papiers Massigli, vols 7, 9 November 1925.
- 34 It was Massigli who observed, ‘There are three different things, *l’esprit de Locarno*, *der Locarnogeist* and the spirit of Locarno.’
- 35 MAE, Série S.D.N., Désarmement, Note de Massigli du 4 août 1930, cited in Knipping, *Deutschland, Frankreich und das Ende der Locarno-Ara*, p. 180.
- 36 Knipping, *Deutschland, Frankreich und das Ende der Locarno-Ara*, p. 188.
- 37 MAE, Papiers Massigli, vol. 13, 29 June 1931 (‘Le problème actuel franco-allemand peut se résumer comme suit: Comment faire coïncider l’application d’un plan d’assainissement économique avec des mesures susceptibles d’amener un assainissement politique?’). See also M.Vaïsse, *Sécurité d’abord. La politique française en matière de désarmement, 9 décembre 1930–17 avril 1934*, Paris, Sorbonne/Pedone, 1981, pp. 107–12.
- 38 F.Kupferman, *Laval*, Paris, Balland, 1987, pp. 91–5.
- 39 The fullest account of the conference is in Vaïsse, *Sécurité d’abord*.
- 40 *Ibid.*, for example, pp. 215, 321.
- 41 *Ibid.*, pp. 226–67.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 255–6.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 280 and various.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- 45 J.-B.Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France. La décadence, 1932–1939*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1979, pp. 42, 66, 94.

- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 55 and various.
- 47 'Déjà réduite à une position défensive au cours de l'année 1933, la diplomatie française, confrontée à une série d'initiatives allemandes et à un revirement de ses principaux alliés, sollicitée dans des sens violemment opposés par l'opinion française, est frappée d'aboulie. Elle se raccroche à la S.D.N. et à une politique genevoise comme à une bouée de sauvetage.' Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, p. 483. See also Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 93.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 49 Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord*, pp. 499–502, 535.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 561–7.
- 51 MAE, *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 103.
- 52 'Conversations franco-allemandes', MAE, *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 13, 11 December 1933.
- 53 Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 275.
- 54 See the note of the same day in MAE, S.D.N., vol. 756, 7 March 1936.
- 55 This is discussed in Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, pp. 168–79. See also the *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, and, for a more detailed picture from the archives, MAE, S.D.N., vols. 756 to 762.
- 56 Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 172. See also Soutou, 'La perception de la puissance française par René Massigli en 1938'; and A.Peyrefitte, *Rue d'Ulm*, Paris, 1994, p. 391.
- 57 MAE, S.D.N., vol. 757, pp. 152–64.
- 58 *Ibid.*; also published in the DDF, in the *Papiers Massigli*, and cited in Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 175.
- 59 MAE, S.D.N., vol. 759, pp. 235–49, and *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 7.
- 60 See B.de Jouvenel, *Un voyageur dans le siècle*, vol. 1, Paris, R.Laffont, 1980, p. 258.
- 61 MAE, *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 7, p. 217 and various.
- 62 On the Quai d'Orsay's drift towards appeasement, see M.Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era*, Oxford, Berg, 1996.
- 63 See, for example, 'Eléments pour une conversation avec M.Eden', MAE, *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 7, 20 January 1937; and his dossier on German colonial demands, *ibid.*, vol. 13, March to November 1937.
- 64 A.Bérard, *Un ambassadeur se souvient: au temps du danger allemand*, vol. 1, Paris, Plon, 1976, p. 371.
- 65 See Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, ch. 11, and the major study of Yvon Lacaze on Munich, as well as the article 'Munich' by J.-P.Azéma, in J.-P.Azéma et F.Bédarida (eds), *1938–1948. Les années de tourmente. Dictionnaire critique*, Paris, Seuil, 1995; and *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 19.
- 66 MAE, *Papiers Massigli*, vol. 19, note of 8 July 1938.
- 67 *Ibid.* (the second is cited by Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 349).
- 68 See the articles by G.-H.Soutou and J.P.Azéma cited above (nn56, 65).

FRANCO-ITALIAN RELATIONS IN FLUX, 1918–1940

Pierre Guillen

Ten months after the outbreak of World War I Italy abandoned the Triple Alliance and joined the struggle against the Central Powers as a member of the Triple Entente. This was the realisation of an objective doggedly pursued by French diplomacy since the formation of the Triple Alliance: to detach Italy from Germany. In the view of French leaders, the solidarity established between France and Italy during the war should have constituted the basis for a close entente afterwards, enabling them to strengthen French influence in Europe and in particular to keep Germany in check. In the event, of course, Germany's power was soon restored, and menaced the European order established in France's favour at Versailles. In May 1940, nine months after the outbreak of World War II, Italy acted in a manner precisely the inverse of 1914, abandoning non-belligerence to enter the war against France and Britain on Germany's side.

Nevertheless, on several occasions in the inter-war period negotiations took place between Paris and Rome, and agreements were reached, although no lasting arrangements were established. The history of Franco-Italian relations in this period comprised a succession of phases of tension and phases of rapprochement. The phases of rapprochement corresponded to the times when the French and Italians judged their interests to outweigh their differences and to warrant mutual concessions; the phases of tension were marked by French irritation in face of Italian claims, and by Italian disappointment at French refusal to take their claims into account. Generally speaking, these alternations occurred because, although French leaders favoured an entente with Italy, they were not prepared to pay the price that Italy demanded.

In the aftermath of World War I, French policy towards Italy was contradictory. Its first aim was to consolidate the benefits secured by the war, by taking advantage of the defeat and temporary eclipse of Germany to impose French influence over Italy and bind it firmly to France. This objective was pursued by a combination of economic and cultural means.

On the economic front, France harboured the illusion of being able to take the place formerly occupied by Germany in the Italian market. The links forged between the French and Italian economies during the wartime struggle, their common interest in the question of German reparations and inter-Allied war debts, France's current prestige and pre-eminent position on the Continent, all

these features of the time were expected to facilitate the development of French interests within the Italian economy, and thus to align Italy with French policy. But this objective of French officials was not shared by French businessmen. They refused to invest, initially because of the postwar crisis that engulfed Italy, and later as the result of Mussolini's seizure of power in 1922. The future of the regime was too uncertain and hence too hazardous to warrant their investments.¹

Postwar French cultural policy in Italy was governed by the idea that the long Italo-German intimacy, Italy's attachment to the Triple Alliance and its reluctance to break with Germany were explained by the ascendancy, indeed the fascination, that German culture exercised over Italian élites. Hence the determination of French leaders to exploit the new conditions created by their common victory in 1918, in order to supplant German with French culture. But the considerable efforts of the Quai d'Orsay, the French embassy in Rome and its consulates in regional capitals quickly ran up against renewed German influence; as well as the unfortunate effects upon Italian opinion of the disagreements between the two governments at the peace conference and the hostile reactions of numerous Italian intellectuals and academics, who, deeply imbued by nationalism, denounced what they regarded as French cultural imperialism and called for a policy of ridding Italian culture of French influence.² Thus neither on the economic nor the cultural fronts did the French offensive in Italy produce significant results.

In any case, these approaches would have been obliterated by the other element of French policy towards Italy. At the peace conference and in subsequent years the French government treated Italy offhandedly, not as a precious ally but as little more than a nuisance, whose recriminations were misplaced and whose claims were contrary to French interests. The fate of the Balkans and the sharing out of the former colonial territories of the Central Powers were the two principal bones of contention.

The Italian programme of domination of the Adriatic was incompatible with the pro-Yugoslav policy of France. In Italian-Yugoslav disagreements, French diplomacy invariably supported Belgrade against Rome, for the possibility of extending French influence through Yugoslavia into the Danube and Balkan regions of Europe was judged to be more valuable than Italian friendship. France thus appeared to be an obstacle to Italian aspirations. At the end of World War I Italian and French troops and warships frequently confronted one another, not only over Fiume but also on the Balkan side of the Adriatic coast, where Italy disembarked forces and the French army of the east, supporting the Greeks and Yugoslavs, sought to resist them. From this time the theme developed in Italy of its encirclement by the Franco-Yugoslav alliance. Scarcely had the threat from the Austro-Hungarians been removed when the Italian people found themselves confronted by this new menace.

So far as overseas territories were concerned, the French government refused to fulfil the promises, made during the negotiation of the Treaty of London in 1915, on Djibouti, the railway to Addis Ababa, and the frontiers of Libya. Moreover, it refused Italy a voice in the disposal of the former German colonies or of the

remnants of the Ottoman empire. Discontent, Italy in turn opposed the granting of mandates to France in the Levant, at least until it obtained a convention assuring the status of its nationals, which the French government refused in order to avoid a repetition of the problem created by similar conventions in Tunisia.³ The French attitude thus seemed to justify the Italian nationalists and Fascists who denounced France as the principal cause of their 'mutilated victory'. It provoked explosions of francophobia among the Italian population, making it difficult to sustain the entente policy which Paris and Rome, from the spring of 1920, claimed to pursue.

Mussolini's seizure of power and the advent of the Fascist regime did not initially modify the bases of Franco-Italian relations, although Mussolini's personality and his new diplomatic orientations most certainly aroused apprehension in Paris. The Quai d'Orsay, moreover, was convinced that the new regime would not last long, and that it would therefore be imprudent to establish close relations with it. It took some time for the Rome embassy to persuade Paris that Fascism was not a passing phenomenon.⁴ But the premier, Raymond Poincaré, remained intensely distrustful of the external policy of the Fascist regime. In the autumn of 1923, at a time when he had the benefit of Italy's support in the Ruhr occupation, he severely criticised Italian claims and condemned 'the increasing megalomania which appears with regrettable frequency in Franco-Italian relations'. Poincaré mentioned the Italians' 'colonial appetite' and their interest in certain French territories, as well as their intrigues undertaken with the purpose of breaking up the Little Entente. He refused all negotiation of an entente which would require France to make concessions detrimental to its national interests.⁵

Nevertheless, during the first half of the 1920s Franco-Italian relations continued on a reasonably friendly basis. The Quai d'Orsay noted with satisfaction that Mussolini did not attempt to alter the prudent policy pursued by Italy in the Adriatic and the Balkans since December 1920. If the Duce's brutal reaction in the Corfu affair in August to September 1923 caused brief disquiet, French statesmen were reassured when Mussolini eventually agreed to a negotiated international settlement.⁶ The Italo-Yugoslav treaty of friendship, signed in January 1924, seemed to mark an end to Franco-Italian disagreements with respect to Yugoslavia. Yet another contribution to appeasement was the agreement of September 1923 wherein Italy dropped its opposition to French mandates in the Levant.

Vis-à-vis Germany, Mussolini, for the time being at least, shared French fears as to the danger it posed to European peace from its revived power and revanchist ambitions. Italian policy on reparations was aligned to that of France, and Italy supported Poincaré in the Ruhr occupation. In 1923 the Duce went so far as to propose negotiations for a general entente based upon closer political and economic collaboration. Negotiations for a treaty were begun, suspended, revived, and a text was eventually drafted, but not signed.

Relations between the two countries deteriorated from 1924. It was true that their solidarity persisted vis-à-vis Germany, that Italy participated in the Locarno conference of October 1925 and was a signatory of the Rhineland pact; with Britain it guaranteed the Franco-German and Belgian-German frontiers. But France and Italy remained divided by numerous issues which ruled out any prospect of a durable entente. The dispute over the Mediterranean was intensified by the Tangiers question: Italy demanded a share in the administration of the International Zone, backing its claim by sending three warships to Tangiers. Italian-Yugoslav reconciliation also proved short-lived. Italy renewed its policy of attempting to encircle Yugoslavia, and France negotiated a treaty of alliance with Yugoslavia which was initialled in April 1926.

Meanwhile, following the victory of the *Cartel des Gauches* in the French legislative elections of May 1924, the parliamentary majority that supported the government was comprised of centre-left parties hostile to the Fascist ideology and regime, and openly sympathetic to Italian political refugees in France. Mussolini accused the French government of complicity in the violent campaigns mounted by elements of the French press against Fascist Italy and its leader, and in the intrigues of 'anti-Fascist criminals', that is to say political refugees or *fuorusciti*, who had been welcomed in large numbers into France. Repeated Italian demands for repressive measures against the offending French journals and the anti-Fascist émigrés produced no result, leading Mussolini to denounce the attitude of the French government: constrained by the majority of the *Cartel des Gauches*, the government was bound to appear to be associated with the machinations of the *fuorusciti*.⁷ During 1926 tension mounted between the two countries. In response to a visit to the Italian community in Tunisia by Italo Balbo, the young under-secretary for air in the Fascist government, France carried out major naval manoeuvres near Bizerta. After anti-French demonstrations in the larger Italian towns and several frontier incidents which followed two attempts on Mussolini's life, the French government reinforced the Mediterranean fleet and sent troops to the frontier.

The fall of the *Cartel des Gauches* in July 1926 and the formation of a centre-right government of national union, in principle less ill-disposed towards the Fascist regime, marked the beginning of a limited détente. Yet the initiative for rapprochement did not come from the new French government, whose leader, Raymond Poincaré, remained as suspicious of the orientation of the Fascist regime as he had been in 1923; it was Mussolini who took the first step.⁸

The Duce hoped, in return for his willingness to collaborate with France, to obtain compensation in the Mediterranean. In particular, he looked for participation in the administration of Tangiers, rectification of the Libyan frontier, and the extension of the conventions of 1896 on Tunisia, which France had notified its intention of terminating in the immediate aftermath of the war. Financial and economic factors also pushed him towards a rapprochement. Besides Franco-Italian solidarity on questions related to German reparations and inter-Allied debts, Italy sought French assistance to stabilise the lire, to finance

industrialisation, especially its hydroelectric projects, and to restore its balance of payments by developing the exchange of manufactures and primary products between Italy, France and their colonies.⁹ The potential also existed for co-operation in the demographic sphere: France hoped to fill the gap created by the war by attracting Italian workers, while Italy, after the United States introduced severe restrictions on immigration in 1923, sought to encourage a substantial flow of emigration towards France and its colonies.

Mussolini made overtures to France in October 1926. He underlined France's and Italy's mutual economic and political interest in a rapprochement enabling them to contain the revival of the German danger. In spite of encouragement from Ambassador Besnard, an advocate of concessions to Italy to keep it at arm's length from Germany, Paris did not follow up Mussolini's approach. In 1927 the aggravation of Italo-Yugoslav tensions and the signature in November of the Franco-Yugoslav treaty, followed by anti-French demonstrations in Italian towns, turned the French government further away from engaging in conversations.

Italy nevertheless returned to the charge, and in January 1928 it specified the concessions France would be expected to make in return for a durable entente. Like Besnard, the new ambassador in Rome, Henri de Beaumarchais, advised against closing the door to negotiations and in favour of certain concessions to Mussolini, who might otherwise turn towards Germany. Aristide Briand, the foreign minister, reacted cautiously. He excluded any treaty of alliance that diverged from the Locarno policy and the spirit of Geneva, or was incompatible with the French diplomatic system, which rested upon a close entente with Britain and treaties of alliance with Poland and the states of the Little Entente. As for Italian claims, he was not prepared to consider any that affected important French interests. In a general way, Briand wondered if 'the requirements of the Fascist regime's policy of prestige were compatible with a durable and reliable entente with France'.¹⁰ Poincaré, the premier, maintained a similar stance. He was not prepared to go beyond a general treaty of arbitration and friendship, and was intransigent in his opposition to any concession to Italian demands.¹¹

Anxious to avoid a rupture, the Quai d'Orsay prepared two texts making a few concessions to Italy on the conventions on Tunisia and the frontiers of Tripolitania. These modest proposals, submitted in December 1928, caused intense disappointment in Rome. Mussolini regarded it as useless to pursue the conversations, in spite of pressure from the British government, which, at the request of the French government, indicated to Rome the importance London attached to the resolution of Franco-Italian differences and the completion of the negotiations. However, in order to shoulder France with responsibility for the failure, the Italian government, in July 1929, advanced new proposals. The Quai d'Orsay brushed them aside, reckoning that Mussolini was not serious and playing a dangerous game with France. His only goal, officials believed, was to disrupt French relations with Yugoslavia and Germany. For France to engage in negotiations with Italy in these circumstances would be to fall into his trap.¹²

Did France miss the chance, in 1926–9, to establish a Franco-Italian entente and thereby alter the subsequent course of European politics? There were, in fact, numerous reasons for the failure to secure a tentative rapprochement at this time. At the economic and financial level, the crisis of the franc, which lasted until 1927, left France incapable of providing the financial assistance that Italy sought. Italy thus had no alternative but to look for support from the Anglo-American financial markets; this in turn led it to abandon France on the German reparations and inter-Allied debt questions, decisions strongly resented in Paris.

At the political level, the French government at this time gave priority to rapprochement with Germany. Italy's absence from the informal negotiations leading to the creation of the International Steel Entente in 1926 was an illustration of this preference. The French government was not prepared to pay a substantial price for a Franco-Italian entente, which it regarded at this time as a matter of only secondary importance. This was why Poincaré and Briand refused any concession in the Mediterranean or colonial spheres, including Tangiers, Tunisia and the frontiers of Tripolitania. To abandon Tibesti, mooted as one possible concession, would give Italy access to Lake Chad and threaten to divide French West Africa from French East Africa. Above all, France was not prepared to withdraw its support from Belgrade, at a time of intensified Italo-Yugoslav friction. Rome mounted a vigorous new attempt to penetrate the Balkans and encircle Yugoslavia, by assisting Macedonian separatist organisations, secretly supplying arms to Hungary as an encouragement to its revisionist ambitions, and signing treaties with Albania, Romania and Hungary. Paris, anxious in particular about Yugoslavia, which it regarded as an essential element of the Little Entente, one of the pillars of its alliance system in Europe, sought to counter the development of Italian influence in the Danubian and Balkan countries. Divided between clients of France and of Italy, the region became a place of confrontation between the policies of Paris and Rome. This, along with colonial problems, was regarded by French leaders as an insurmountable obstacle to any entente with Italy.

For Poincaré, Briand and senior officials of the Quai d'Orsay, Mussolini's motive in encouraging comprehensive negotiations with France was almost certainly to weaken the Franco-German axis then in the process of consolidation, and to dislocate the Little Entente system so as to leave his own hands free for the pursuit of a revisionist policy. French politicians and statesmen were condescending and ill-disposed towards Italy. They were not prepared even to consider sacrificing the current reconciliation with Germany, and the diplomatic system on which French security was based, for the sake of an uncertain and far from satisfactory offer of Italian friendship.

In the years 1930–2, Franco-Italian relations declined to a new low. From time to time the activities of anti-Fascist refugees in France again provoked conflicts. Mussolini, the Fascist party and the Italian press denounced the French government for allegedly allowing terrorist plots against the Italian state to be prepared within its frontiers. In turn, the French press engaged in polemics with

the Italian press on the subject. The French authorities, who sought to contain, even suppress, the intrigues of the Italian political refugees, were astonished by the vitriol of the Italian press attacks and accused the Italian leadership of bad faith.¹³

Meanwhile, the vaguely revisionist ambitions of Italian diplomacy continued to disturb the Quai d'Orsay. The question of naval parity, demanded by Italy, led to a naval arms race between the two countries on the eve of the London naval conference in 1930. Italy justified its demand for parity by the need to protect its access to raw materials which came largely by sea. France responded by claiming that various considerations, notably its close links with North Africa, required that its navy should be superior to that of Italy. The confrontation over this issue ended all collaboration at Geneva between the French and Italian delegations. On their side, French military chiefs were disturbed by the improvements of Italian armaments, notably the rapid development of aviation. They saw the doctrine of the Italian general, Douhet, which stressed the primacy of the air force in future conflict, as a threat directed against France.¹⁴ Henceforth, the plans of the French high command took into account the possibility of a war in which France would have to fight Italy in alliance with Germany.¹⁵ This hypothesis seemed to be reinforced by the fact that in the debates and votes at the League of Nations, Italy now systematically sided with Germany. The rise of Nazism in Germany culminating in Hitler's accession to power in January 1933, however, radically altered the situation. Driven by a common fear of the German peril, Paris and Rome once again renewed attempts to forge a Franco-Italian entente.

Edouard Herriot, the Radical leader, speaking to the party congress in 1930 declared that a rapprochement with Italy was out of the question since it had 'rejected friendship on principle'. But when the Radicals once again formed a government in June 1932, they promoted a rapprochement with Italy. Despite warnings and appeals for caution from leading Italian political émigrés, successive Radical governments sought a general entente with Italy.

Senator Henry de Jouvenel, appointed special envoy to the Italian government in December 1932, was called upon to undertake and complete negotiations for an entente. The nature of the mission changed when Mussolini in March 1933 proposed a pact of friendship and co-operation between the four European great powers. The Italian proposal sharply diverged from the principles of French diplomacy. Jouvenel, however, succeeded in modifying it to suggest that it marked Italy's return to a policy of European solidarity, and presented it as a success for French diplomacy. In spite of hostility from elements of the French press and politicians on the left wing of the Radical party, as well as the countries of the Little Entente, Jouvenel persuaded the government to adopt the Italian proposal thus modified as its own.¹⁶ The Four Power Pact, signed in June 1933, established collaboration between France, Britain, Italy and Germany in the interests of political stability and an end to the economic crisis. For France and Britain, its central purpose was to induce Italy to join them in containing Germany.

The negotiations of the Four Power Pact produced a measure of détente in Franco-Italian relations. The decline in suspicion and hostility and the increased understanding created favourable conditions for the revival of a dialogue. Louis Barthou, the French foreign minister from February to October 1934, sought to go further in the direction of rapprochement with Italy, in conformity with his policy of strengthening France in face of Germany by means of new alliances.¹⁷ The failed *Anschluss* attempt by Germany in collaboration with Austrian Nazi supporters in July 1934 led to a stronger assertion of Franco-Italian solidarity. French leaders, alarmed by the German peril and favourably impressed by Mussolini's firmness in the crisis, now seemed disposed to make the concessions they had hitherto refused.

Barthou's assassination in October did not interrupt the process already under way. His successor, Pierre Laval, visited Rome in January 1935 and signed several agreements with Italy.¹⁸ On the colonial front, France conceded to Italy territory hitherto claimed for Tunisia and on the Somali coast. It also agreed to postpone by several decades the abolition of the conventions on minority rights for Italians in Tunisia. Did Laval, during his conversations with Mussolini, concede him a free hand in Ethiopia? The question remains a matter of controversy. The position of the Quai d'Orsay set out by Laval in Rome was the following: the French government accepted that Italy could establish a protectorate over Ethiopia, but on condition that it was imposed by peaceful means. From the Italian minutes of the meeting, however, it is apparent that Laval was imprecise and confused in his statements, and that Mussolini believed that he had received a completely free hand.

As regards Germany, the agreements reached at Rome formed the basis of an entente in the event of a further threat against Austria. The two leaders also agreed that the political entente should be complemented by a military convention. Shortly afterwards the two high commands embarked upon conversations, and the minutes of the Gamelin-Badoglio conversations of 27 June 1935 indicate that the participants expected that a military convention would soon be signed.¹⁹

The Rome agreements were strongly welcomed in France, and were ratified by parliament in March 1935 by only nine votes short of unanimity. The will to create a united front with Mussolini against Hitler prevailed over all other considerations, even in left-wing circles where the influence of Italian political émigrés had been strong. Only the Communists refused to welcome the agreements. Among the Socialists, while the change of attitude was less complete than among the Radicals, the Führer had by now largely replaced the spectre of Matteotti; the struggle for peace took priority over the struggle against Fascism.

The Stresa front, formed at the meeting of Laval with Ramsay MacDonald, the British prime minister, and Mussolini on 11 April 1935, appeared to crown the efforts of the two great democratic powers of Europe to anchor Italy at their side. The leaders of the three powers protested against Germany's unilateral

denunciation of treaties and confirmed their fidelity to the Locarno agreements. But only a few months later the Ethiopian war abruptly overturned their work.

After the outbreak of war in October 1935, France initially sought to avoid conflict with Italy, hoping to complete the negotiations for the military convention which the high command insisted upon, and in order to safeguard the Stresa front. The government was supported in this policy by politicians on the right and extreme right who were influential in French political circles and remained strongly sympathetic to Italy. They took the view that Ethiopia was a slave state, whereas Italy was fighting on the side of civilisation. This was the sense of the manifesto of the philofascist intellectuals published in Paris on 4 October 1935. The French government therefore devoted itself to resisting the extension of sanctions, which had been approved by the Assembly of the League of Nations on 9 October. Paris refused to associate itself with naval measures, and opposed the embargo on petrol and the closure of the Suez Canal. In concert with London, it sought a compromise, which led to the Hoare-Laval plan of December 1935.

The French government had nonetheless endorsed, albeit half-heartedly, the vote of sanctions against Italy. Besides it was obliged to take into account the views of the Radicals, whose place at the centre of the political spectrum made them an essential element of all parliamentary majorities, and who remained attached to the ideology of the League of Nations. And since it was an unalterable principle of French diplomacy throughout this period not to become estranged from Britain, the government was also affected by the upsurge of British public opinion that led Britain to stiffen its position towards Italy.

Nevertheless, France continued to hedge, for the German reoccupation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936 made it more necessary than ever to restrain Italy from siding with Germany. The new Popular Front government, which took office in May 1936, also found itself in an awkward predicament on account of the war. Although very hostile to Mussolini and the Fascist regime, it saw no choice but to associate itself with Britain at the start of July in the lifting of sanctions against Italy. Léon Blum, the premier, advanced the idea of a new Locarno and invited Italy and Germany to a conference intended to produce guarantees for the stability of western Europe under the auspices of the League of Nations.²⁰

In vain, disappointed by France's attitude during the Ethiopian affair, Mussolini decided to seek a rapprochement with Germany. He harboured a strong grudge against the French leaders, whom he accused of having deceived him. On 28 December 1935, Italy announced that it would not ratify the Rome agreements of January 1935, and was not prepared to pursue the military convention, then still under discussion. The victory of the Popular Front in France in the spring further damaged Franco-Italian relations. The parties that composed the new majority were ill-disposed towards Fascist Italy and its leader, and provided a ready ear to the warnings of Italian political émigrés who sought to halt a Franco-Italian rapprochement.²¹ Mussolini drew the conclusion that the French state was unalterably hostile to Italy. Speaking in Milan on 1 November 1936, he presented

the Italo-German entente as the axis around which the other powers of Europe must henceforth turn.

Thereafter Italy drifted more completely into Germany's orbit. How did French leaders react? Two tendencies emerged. For some, it was apparent that Mussolini had already tied his fate to that of Hitler, and hence it would be pointless to try to woo him by concessions; firmness should prevail. For others, it was essential to seek a *modus vivendi* with the Axis powers in order to preserve the peace; this assumed that German policy would become less aggressive and that Mussolini could exercise a moderating influence upon Hitler.

This second tendency was reinforced by the British government's appeasement policy. In the course of 1937, Neville Chamberlain, the new prime minister, sought to persuade the French government of the need to improve relations with Italy in order to detach it from Germany. While declaring in December 1937 that it was not opposed to Britain initiating negotiations with Mussolini, the French government itself was reluctant to act. The Anglo-Italian negotiations resulted in an agreement on 16 April 1938; and Chamberlain increased the pressure on the French government to follow the same course.²² The government initially refused, setting out as a precondition that Italy should end its intervention in the Spanish civil war. However, at the end of April or beginning of May the foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, a partisan of rapprochement with Italy, undertook preliminary conversations with a view to opening negotiations. Progress was interrupted because of difficulties created by the war in Spain.²³ But in any case Mussolini seemed unenthusiastic about talks with France. His plan was to separate France from Britain, to undermine Franco-British solidarity and to isolate France, for his ambitions in the Mediterranean were directed above all against his Latin neighbour.

The role played by Mussolini in the Sudeten crisis and the Munich conference, where he adopted a moderate and conciliatory posture towards Hitler, renewed hope in Paris that Italy could be separated from Germany. At the start of October 1938 France named André François-Poncet ambassador to Rome—for three years it been represented only by a chargé d'affaires—and recognised Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. However, François-Poncet, whose mission was to renew links with the Italian government, found himself confronted, only three weeks after taking up his post, by a crisis that appeared to complete the rupture between the two countries. In the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations, representatives of the Fascist party clamorously demanded that France hand over Tunisia, Corsica and Djibouti, to which demonstrators added Savoy and Nice. On 3 December, Ciano declared to François-Poncet that the Rome agreements of January 1935 must be reviewed. An official note of 17 December from the Italian government declared the agreements to be 'overtaken by events'.²⁴

A powerful current of italophobia emerged in France, where the Fascist demands for territorial concessions aroused strong expressions of hostility to Italy in political circles and public opinion. Perplexed, the French government was obliged to wonder about Mussolini's motives. With the backing of Germany, did

he in fact seek annexations at the expense of France? Or, hoping to negotiate, had he made ambitious demands in order to secure more modest concessions? It was the latter interpretation that the partisans of Franco-Italian appeasement favoured. Refusing to lose hope, they believed that Mussolini had been rebuked by Hitler, because the rupture between Rome and Paris had displeased the Führer, and that Chamberlain had made it clear that Britain would not break with France, while visiting Rome in January 1939. They persuaded themselves that the Duce, with the prospect of concessions available to him, would no longer dismiss negotiations with France.

The French government was hesitant and divided. The premier, Edouard Daladier, and the 'italophobe party' in the government faced pressure from the 'italophile party' led by the foreign minister, Bonnet, and from the British government, which continued to stress the urgency of a rapprochement between Paris and Rome.²⁵ In face of this dual pressure, Daladier accepted that an exploratory mission should be confided to Paul Baudouin, director of the *Banque d'Indochine*, who intended to visit Rome on financial business. Baudouin's task was to draw out the Italians on their demands, in order to see if an agreement was possible. The visit duly took place, but Daladier on 9 February 1939 decided against following up Baudouin's exploratory conversations.²⁶

London waited impatiently. At the end of April, the end of May, then in July at the start of the Polish crisis, the British government implored the French government to reconsider its position vis-à-vis Italy. The view from London was that the Duce was seeking to escape the grip of Germany, and it was essential that France should offer him 'reasonable satisfaction' in order to save the peace. Daladier, however, remained unshakeably opposed.²⁷

Mussolini's claims were in fact relatively modest: Italian participation in the administration of the Suez Canal Company, free port facilities at Djibouti and the maintenance of the conventions of 1896 in Tunisia. Daladier, however, repeated to London that it was impossible for France to concede anything. In order to justify his attitude, he invoked the state of French public opinion, which was aroused against Italy for having wounded the national pride. According to Daladier, any government that entered into negotiations with Italy, intending to pursue appeasement at the expense of the empire, would soon be overturned by parliament. In any case, he was convinced that Chamberlain was misled as to the possibility of detaching Mussolini from Hitler. He was encouraged in this view by the firmness of the Quai d'Orsay, where the secretary-general, Alexis Léger, and the director of political affairs, René Massigli, held that any initiative or compromise would be considered by Mussolini merely as evidence of weakness and would encourage him to increase his demands.

Once the war against Germany had begun, the French government became mainly concerned to see that Italy should continue its self-styled policy of non-belligerence. Most French leaders persisted in the illusion that Italy would remain outside the war. Those who held that no compromise was possible with Mussolini because he was now tied to Germany and an irreconcilable enemy of France, and

who in consequence advocated a firm line, were a small minority. At the first session of the supreme inter-Allied council on 12 September 1939 they were effectively marginalised.

Among the partisans of conciliation, two attitudes can be distinguished. A small group, relying upon the precedent of 1914–15, recommended that large colonial concessions should be held out to Italy in order to ensure that it remained neutral and perhaps even to persuade it to switch camps. However, most French leaders, including in particular Daladier, were unhappy with the idea of rushing to place gifts at Mussolini's feet. Their view was that, not knowing what the Duce would finally decide to do, the most they could do was maintain contacts, encourage conversations, and show their readiness to begin negotiations if the opportunity arose.

Throughout the 'phoney war', this was the policy the French government maintained. French leaders persuaded themselves that Mussolini, facing conflicting pressures, would not dare to break off relations with them. The assurances offered by Galeazzo Ciano, the foreign minister, and Raffaele Guariglia, Italian ambassador in Paris, both of whom were partisans of neutrality, led to an over-estimation of the influence of the anti-war element in Italy.²⁸ The French government endeavoured to persuade Rome that its interest was to remain outside the conflict. For this purpose it multiplied its efforts to demonstrate France's good intentions and willingness to go along with various agreements, so as to create a basis of friendship and thereby discourage Italy from allying with Germany.

Important economic and financial agreements were signed at San Remo on 14 and 15 September 1939 by Alphand and Giannini, respectively directors of economic affairs at the French and Italian ministries of foreign affairs. Certain of the agreements were devoted to accommodating Italy within the blockade now imposed on Germany. Italy was enabled to continue importing goods on the promise that it would not re-export them to Germany. Along with agreements on maritime and rail transport were several other more important ones calling upon Italy to supply industrial goods for the French war effort, in exchange for foreign exchange and raw materials from France. Major contracts were signed by the French ministries of armament, air and navy. The orders amounted to more than four billion francs, and included aircraft, aircraft engines and Fiat trucks. The Italian goods began to arrive at the start of 1940, and deliveries continued until several days after the German breakthrough at Sedan.²⁹

How, in these conditions, could French leaders know that Italy would irrevocably align itself with Germany? In fact, everything depended upon the evolution of the military operations. As Ciano confided to François-Poncet, 'Don't waste your time making propaganda. Win some victories and we will be on your side. Otherwise, we will be against you.' But this time, after Sedan, there was no new miracle of the Marne. The collapse of the French military in May persuaded Mussolini that he had no alternative but to commit himself definitively to Hitler.

However, until the end, the French leaders retained the hope that Italy would not enter the war. It was only in April 1940 that they began to have serious doubts. Alarmed, the new premier, Paul Reynaud, proposed to meet Mussolini for comprehensive negotiations between the two countries. Mussolini disdainfully dismissed the proposal.³⁰ Daladier, now minister of defence, similarly sent an envoy to Rome, and the president of the Republic, Albert Lebrun, appealed to King Victor Emmanuel III to intervene. Other French leaders advised measures of intimidation, notably naval demonstrations. The stunning success of the German offensive led the French government into a desperate attempt to make contact with Mussolini. When he evaded their approach, they sought a neutral country such as the United States to enquire of the Duce what he wanted of France. Roosevelt was sounded out and on 27 May he agreed to make an approach, which however produced no result.

With the collapse of the military front, the French government gave less attention to stopping Italy from entering the war than to persuading Mussolini to mediate with Germany in order to end the fighting on reasonably tolerable conditions. What price would have to be paid? Some recommended 'an initiative in Rome to offer the necessary sacrifices', that is to say volunteering important concessions in the colonial sphere. Reynaud and the Quai d'Orsay were sceptical of this approach and Britain was strongly unfavourable, but Daladier, pushed by General Maxime Weygand, the new commander-in-chief, who insisted upon the desperate character of the military situation, held that France must pay any price to hold back Italy from entering the war. He was prepared to offer the cession of Djibouti, an expansion of Libya at the expense of Chad, and even a sort of Franco-Italian condominium over Tunisia. The Cabinet accepted these proposals on 27 May, then reversed itself after the British government was consulted and made known its absolute opposition. The government had to be content with a note, handed to the Italian ambassador on 30 May, which was restricted to generalities and made no precise offers.³¹ This belated attempt at appeasement was however redundant, because that same day, on 5 June, Mussolini took the decision to enter the war.

French efforts to restrain Italy had no chance of success. Since his meeting with Hitler at the Brenner Pass on 18 March 1939, Mussolini had decided to enter the war. The French government's actions from this point were thus wholly futile. It had not been able to stop Italy entering the war, nor had it secured Mussolini's mediation in the effort to limit German demands. On the contrary, it was Hitler who had insisted that Mussolini must moderate his appetites.

This fiasco was predictable. French leaders had never been able to define a clear and coherent policy towards Italy, so divided were they by their divergent visions of Mussolini and of Fascist Italy, and by their differing conceptions of the posture they should adopt towards them. Apart from a few lucid spirits who were powerless to affect the outcome, the majority of French decision-makers held a rather distorted view of Mussolini, his regime and the relative influence of different elements within Italy. They did not realise that since 1936 Mussolini,

obsessed by the example of Hitler, had decided to pursue an aggressive policy of prestige, of affirmation on the international scene, and regarded France as an obstacle to be removed. Nor were they properly aware of the evolution of the Fascist regime in the direction of increasing authoritarianism and the growing domination of the Duce and the Fascist party on the machinery of the state and Italian society. French leaders nourished two illusions: first, that a few modest concessions would suffice to make Mussolini better disposed towards France; and second, that the 'reasonable' forces would have sufficient weight to induce Mussolini to accept conciliation and separate himself from the Führer. On these two points they completely miscalculated. Yet they adhered to this scenario despite the adverse course of events, and in their desperation clung to it until the end.

NOTES

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IN DEFENCE OF THE MAGINOT LINE

Security policy, domestic politics and the economic depression in France

Martin S.Alexander

Few military projects have had as much opprobrium heaped on them as has the Maginot Line. For those who like their history crudely deterministic, the fortifications that France built between the wars and named after André Maginot—war minister when the decision was made for their construction—were responsible for French defeat in 1940. Accused of fostering an insidious, corrosive ‘Maginot mentality’, the Maginot Line stands widely condemned. It has been charged with leaving France supine and immobile in 1940, lulled into a false sense of security and as paralysed as a rabbit caught in the glare from a car’s headlights. For authors of such a mind, no further inquiry need be pursued into the French defeat. They have their explanation: France unwisely relied on the Maginot Line and so France fell.

For others who have been prepared to concede some strategic utility to the fortifications—at least in theory—a superficially more subtle but equally unhelpful argument has been fashioned. At its most uncompromising, it appears in *The Collapse of the Third Republic* by the influential American journalist and author, William Shirer. Shirer spent much of the 1930s observing the growing bravado of the Nazi regime at close quarters, whilst working as CBS correspondent in Berlin. The ‘trouble with the Maginot Line’, wrote Shirer, ‘was that it was in the wrong place’. But this is, as a woolly-minded substitute for strategic analysis, a ‘verdict which defies useful comment’, in the hard-hitting remark of John C.Cairns.¹

What is not in doubt is the extent to which the Maginot Line—once an admired and sophisticated example of leading-edge military science—has acquired a singular prominence in what might be called the popular pantheon of military follies. The Maginot Line long ago ceased to be merely a matter of historical fact; it acquired the status of an explanatory myth. It has become too, for many, a metaphor for military incompetence. An example of a respected contemporary author unable to resist a jibe at the fortifications is Alistair Horne. His book on the defeat of 1940, *To Lose a Battle*, has long enjoyed enviable success with the reading public. Indeed, it was published in a French imprint, as well as in a fresh English-language reprint, for the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of France in 1990. Yet these latest editions are entirely devoid of any updating to incorporate sources from the French archives opened since the book first appeared in 1969.

Consequently, Horne continues to exercise an unfortunate influence, peddling the view that 'Rapidly the Maginot Line came to be not just a component of strategy, but a way of life.'²

As a supposed instance of military ineptitude, few strategic concepts have been as oft-cited as the Maginot Line in support of the glib adage that armed forces prepare for their next war with the tools and thinking of the last. Indeed the Maginot Line has been invoked by commentators in the Cold War and post Cold War eras. These references have, however, generally taken forms which display disturbing intellectual flaccidity. The tactical nuclear weapons capability which France developed in the 1970s was described as a 'Nuclear Maginot Line'. The image which this analogy strove to create was of the French ability to put down an impenetrable wall of nuclear devastation at some ill-defined location in eastern Germany or Poland, to shield France in the event of a successful Warsaw Pact attack upon what was then Nato's central front.

There are other examples of the conjuring-up of a Maginot analogy from the post Cold War period. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 prompted a flurry of comparisons with the inter-war years. Saddam Hussein's challenge to the Gulf emirates was readily likened to Hitler's subversion of the established European order during the 1930s. The Allies in the Gulf spent the months from August 1990 to January 1991 unable to contemplate substantive negotiations with Saddam Hussein because they were haunted by the 'Munich syndrome'. US President George Bush proclaimed in televised broadcasts and press conferences that the 'lesson' of Munich was that appeasement does not pay for those doing the appeasing. The parallels with the 1930s were elaborated after military operations began against Iraq in January 1991. In particular, Western journalists, speculating on prospects for the land battle to liberate Kuwait, compared the static defences constructed by Iraqi troops on the Kuwaiti-Saudi border with the Maginot Line's intended role in an earlier era. In this analogy, the German success in outflanking the Maginot Line through the Ardennes and Belgium stimulated Allied confidence in their power to break down and out-manoeuve the Iraqi forces entrenched in southern Kuwait. Saddam Hussein, according to some, erred by repeating the French 'mistake' of 1939-40, tying Iraqi defences to a linear and immobile set of forward positions. Like France in 1940, the Iraqis in Kuwait were defeated by a mechanised army that undertook an outflanking manoeuvre, a sort of updated blitzkrieg to bypass Iraqi fixed defensive positions.³

The Maginot Line has, it would seem, come to be invoked as a code for the failure of strategic imagination; as a blueprint for defeat. In the argument of 'Irving M.Gibson' (a wartime pseudonym of Arpad V.Kovacs):

The Maginot Line mentality gradually emasculated French foreign policy and made the rise of Hitler, the remilitarization of the Rhineland and all the rest of German aggressive acts possible.... The sum total of it all was a passive attitude which took hold of the French national mind, giving it a

sense of false security and in its ultimate effect creating an atmosphere in which the dry rot could spread in all branches of the French army.⁴

Quite aside from the mixed metaphors to be unscrambled here, polemic of this type makes abundantly plain how deep is the encrusted prejudice and *a priori* thinking which obscures the historical record of the Maginot Line.

The 'trouble' with the Maginot Line—if trouble it was—lay not in any creation of a defeatist 'Maginot mentality', nor in the fortifications being mislocated. The problem for the Maginot Line's historical reputation stems, rather, from a refusal by commentators to assess the French decision to adopt static defences historically. Those decisions must be understood in the context of the international political and economic climate of the later 1920s. In stark terms: the Maginot Line has been censured for failing to save France from defeat in the conditions that obtained in 1940. Yet it was actually designed to save France from invasion in the conditions that obtained in 1930 or which could reasonably be predicted to obtain in 1935.

What needs emphasis is that a guarantee of the future integrity of France's frontiers was the unalterable, inescapable, demand made of French strategists after 1918. It was a rational demand. It was, too, eminently reasonable. It is as easy to understand as it was difficult for French strategists to achieve. The Maginot Line came to form the chief element—but never the only one—in French attempts to meet this challenge. Frequently maligned, even more commonly misunderstood, the thinking behind the line's adoption and construction forms the concern addressed in this chapter.

POSTWAR PSYCHOLOGY AND THE RATIONALITY OF FORTIFICATIONS

To the French, the construction of a sophisticated system of fixed defences along their border with Germany was compellingly attractive. Economically as well as demographically, France had been bled white by her struggle to survive in 1914–18. Consequently she desired security above all else. Security was more than a new watchword, it was elevated to a new creed. A recurring cry in the rhetoric of parliamentarians as often as in the writings of the French press, the *fons et origo* of all French thinking about military strategy was the craving for security—*sécurité d'abord*.⁵

The Paris peace settlement had been conceived by the French as a vehicle to arrive at this desired destination of security—a vehicle and also an international legitimization of French dominance over a prostrate Germany. But the Versailles Treaty was a disappointment. For no group was this more true than for the hard-nosed French military commanders. It is strange, with hindsight and in the knowledge that a further world war ensued, to think that the terms accepted by Georges Clemenceau were censured for their excessive leniency, their 'softness', by some of the French in 1919. Yet many French generals sought the permanent

dismemberment of Germany, coupled to long-term Allied military occupation and territorial annexations by France, notably of the Rhineland. These hard-liners, the *durs*, rallied around the Allied supreme commander, Marshal Ferdinand Foch and his irascible, right-wing chief of staff, General Maxime Weygand.⁶

Where the French had sought to engineer a Carthaginian peace, Versailles penalised Germany only by a temporary Allied military occupation of the Rhineland—an occupation originally designed to last for fifteen years. Even this was curbed after the Thoiry accords of 1926 between Germany's Gustav Stresemann and French foreign minister Aristide Briand, and the conclusion of the Young plan on German war reparations of 1929, whereby the Allied Control Commission in Germany was wound up and agreement was reached to withdraw the last Allied military detachments from Germany in 1930, five years ahead of the Versailles schedule.⁷

Soon after the end of World War I, therefore, France had to confront the fragility and impermanence of the security arrangements she had obtained. Judith M. Hughes notes

Regardless of the defects in France's military machine the country's position remained unimpaired so long as French troops were stationed on German soil...and thus the initial battle, the one that might produce a stabilized front, would be fought on German territory.⁸

In the medium and longer terms, however, French statesmen as well as strategic planners had to confront the possibility of German revanchism after the Allied withdrawal from Germany.

Facing such a future, France found herself handicapped by two debilitating weaknesses. First, she had a far smaller population than Germany—and one characterised by a rising median age and a stagnant fertility rate, exacerbated through the blood-letting of 1914–18. World War I cost the French 1,382,400 male dead or missing in action—16.4 per cent of those mobilised. The great bulk of this loss fell among men aged between 20 and 35. A further 3,594,889 men were wounded. This appalling decimation had been inflicted on a total population of just thirty-nine million, contrasting with a greater Germany's population of some seventy million.⁹

Second, France's industrial base was markedly inferior to that of Germany. Moreover, this weakness was itself exacerbated by cruel quirks of geography which had placed most of the key French resources of coal, iron ore and heavy industries hard by the Franco-German and Franco-Belgian frontiers. The appearance in World War I of a new primacy—a primacy of industrial resources—dictated the French attitude to defence of their frontiers after 1919. French leaders had to ensure that their country could stop Germany ever again carrying out a deep incursion into French territory, of the kind that had nearly proved fatal in 1914. Particularly alarming to the French was the fact that ten of their frontier *départements* had been wholly or partly occupied by the onrush of the

Kaiser's armies in August to September 1914. To this brutal reminder of the power of the German war machine, the French strategists of the 1920s had to add the realisation that the frontier regions included raw materials and manufacturing capacity most essential to the waging of modern industrialised war. The Nord, the Pas-de-Calais, the Meuse, Meurthe-et-Moselle, along with the recaptured *départements* of Lorraine, contained, to an unhealthy degree, the wherewithal for France to make war in the twentieth century.¹⁰

Construction of the Maginot Line thus resulted not simply from an elemental need to put concrete rather than the *poitrines* of French *poilus* in the firing line in any future war with Germany. This was, to be sure, a reaction to the bloody failure in 1914 of the offensive doctrines espoused by the tactical school of Foch, Grandmaison and Joffre, and to the carnage which subsequently ensued. 'The decision to build a defensive line,' as Maurice Pearton has noted, 'rested on more than the tactical lessons drawn from the war; it was also an attempt to use engineering to overcome deficiencies in manpower deriving from a falling birthrate.'¹¹

Based on the experience of the Western Front, the French believed in the 1920s that all future wars would be attritional and lengthy. They estimated that war would demand the total mobilisation of national resources in a managerially administered *économie de guerre* or war economy.¹² In the event of a new Franco-German conflict, it would be literally a matter of life and death—of national survival—to deny Germany another deep penetration of north-eastern France at the outset. After 1919, a new slogan, a new dogma, entered the French military lexicon. The ark of the covenant was now *assurer l'inviolabilité du territoire*, the 'assuring of the inviolability of the national territory'. The phrase would be repeated *ad nauseam* in the vocabulary of the *Etat-Major de l'Armée*, the army general staff, in private diaries and parliamentary debates.¹³ As the French army organisation law of 1928 stressed in its Article No. 1: 'The military organisation of the country has as its essential objective the safeguarding of the integrity of the national territory.'¹⁴

The shape of French inter-war strategy was determined by this concept. Whatever else was attempted, defensively or offensively, the baseline for post 1919 military planning was the sanctuarisation of metropolitan France. Underpinning all strategic thought was the quest to form an impermeable cordon, an impassable barrier, to prevent Germany ever again reaping a reward from aggression. An unbreakable front, coupled to the belief that modern weapons presented decisive advantages to defensive forms of warfare, was intended to allow the unimpeded mobilisation of French reservists, industrial manpower and economic resources. It was estimated that the 'art of war' so beloved of late nineteenth-century French students of Napoleon and Jomini had been swept brutally away. In its place, in what amounted to a negation of the traditional meaning of strategy, the world had moved to a point where warfare had become a high-technology science, or a technocratically managed extension of big business.¹⁵

Victory was no longer expected to result from the intuition and genius of generalship, but from the harnessing of the economic, and especially industrial, muscles of a nation. The logical extension of this reasoning appeared in a later and infamous Allied propaganda poster, in the phoney war of 1939–40. Implying the inevitable defeat of Nazi Germany, through a map that contrasted the small area of central Europe under Hitler's control in 1939 with the vast extent of the Anglo-French empires, the poster straightforwardly proclaimed: 'We shall win because we are the strongest' (*Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts*).¹⁶ With a mode of thought founded on these premises, 'the job of French strategists', in the words of Richard D. Challener, became little more than to prepare the defence and guard against the initial attack. 'In this way came about the Maginot Line.'¹⁷

The defences, then, possessed this overriding objective to protect French soil. They had, too, a secondary or subsidiary purpose—one which was thought to underpin the primary aim. This subsidiary purpose of the fixed defences was the making up of a short-weight between the military manpower available in France and the military manpower which French intelligence predicted could be mobilised by Germany. As Bradford A. Lee has explained: 'When they laid the foundations of a forward defence in the second half of the 1920s, the resource constraint that weighed most on their minds was a lack of manpower.' This was what Lee has termed a 'significant effort to maximise strength through the substitution of firepower for manpower'.¹⁸ Making a similar point, Pearton remarks that the Maginot Line 'was not intended to be a complete substitute for manpower, but merely a means of making France's diminishing resources go further'.¹⁹

In deciding to construct static defences along their common frontier with Germany, French strategic planners calculated that they might substitute a fixed obstacle for large bodies of troops. They might economise on men under arms in Alsace and Lorraine, and reap the benefit of more powerful troop deployments from their numerically smaller military forces in the areas of north-eastern France where manoeuvre was to be envisaged—and on other frontiers altogether, such as the metropolitan borders with Italy and Spain, and the North African frontier between French-controlled Tunisia and Italian-mandated Libya.

By protecting sectors of the Franco-German frontier with heavy, permanent fortifications, capable of being defended by comparatively small numbers of soldiers, the French posited the utilisation of the Maginot Line as a 'force multiplier'. France planned to rely for the defence of much of her north-eastern marches not on vast entrenched infantry armies, nor solely on steel, guns, concrete, barbed wire and mines. It planned to combine the two. As one retired officer wrote in 1929, during a debate over the fortifications in the veterans' journal *La France militaire*:

the part played by the passive defence of the frontier must always be much less than that of the active defence...let's remember that, much more than the expensive permanent works of fortification, success in the event of war

will be found once again in a good allround preparation of the army (discipline, training, armaments, material).²⁰

To an unprecedented degree, technology was intended to take the place of troops.²¹

THE MILITARY DEBATE ON THE NATURE OF THE MAGINOT LINE

Thus far in the rationale behind the Maginot Line, civilians and the military in the early and mid-1920s concurred, in the main, that these were the principles on which French defence should rest. Disagreements and disputes arose, however, about precisely *how* this form of security was to be implemented; about what type of fortification was to be adopted; and about the extent as well as the operational depth of the fixed works.

On these issues, there was no little discord among the military technicians themselves. One must emphasise that the so-called Maginot Line, the works actually constructed from 1930 to 1937, were the culmination of a full eight years of planning. Maginot himself had little to do with this planning. Indeed, it has often been commented that the defences should more accurately have been remembered to posterity as the 'Painlevé Line', named after the war minister who presided over their adoption in 1925–6. It took from 1922 to 1930 for the siting of the defences to be agreed and for their technical specifications to be determined.²² Maginot was the political tactician who won the essential parliamentary votes for funds to begin the works: 'He was the driving force that got them built in time. For their design, credit must be given exclusively to the French army.'²³

The initial studies commenced in 1922 with the creation of the Commission for the Defence of the Territory (*Commission de Défense du Territoire*). That led in 1924 to the establishment of the Commission for the Defence of the Frontiers, first under the presidency of Marshal Joseph Joffre, hero of the Battle of the Marne in 1914, and latterly under the presidency of General Adolphe Guillaumat, a former army commander from 1918. At length, the process culminated in the formation of a commission, the *Commission d'Organisation des Régions Fortifiées* (CORF), which was authorised to devise the detailed technical specifications, structure and siting of the fortified regions themselves. It was these fortified regions whose construction was the chief outcome of the earlier deliberations. It was their development which was to represent the major financial investment and engineering accomplishment of the entire Maginot programme.²⁴

Not until 1927 was the French army war council (the CSG: *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*), comprising the veteran marshals of 1914–18 and the army and corps commanders-designate, able to agree on the basic style of fortification to be erected. What was proposed, following CSG meetings throughout 1926–7, was the construction of two principal defensive regions—the *Région Fortifiée de Metz*

(RF Metz) and the *Région Fortifiée de la Lauter* (RF Lauter). Since these were discontinuous defensive zones, in between them was to be the area around the Saar river valley. This basin was to be protected by a series of underground mined sluices and prepared inundations—flooding organised in peacetime to allow the French high command to render the area waterlogged and militarily impassable to an enemy in time of war. Further to the south-east, where the Rhine formed a natural line for the Franco-German border, the river had its western banks reinforced by construction of a line of artillery casemates and machine-gun bunkers. These comparatively light fortifications profited from the geography already offered the French by way of the Rhine and the detonation charges pre-positioned for immediate demolition of the bridges at the outbreak of war.²⁵

Such was the configuration of the frontier defences reached by the CSG and the *Commission de Défense des Frontières* by late 1927. At this time nothing was proposed about France's border with Belgium, nor for her frontier with Luxembourg. Some perfectly rational thinking lay behind this apparent neglect. As General Paul-Emile Tournoux has explained, in what remains the most thorough study of the fortifications, the RF Metz and the RF Lauter were

not simply [conceived] as a slice of a battlefield on the frontier, but as a real instrument of manoeuvre at the disposition of the commander-in-chief.... Even in the event of an army's withdrawal behind the front, the commander would still retain the possibility of giving battle in depth without losing the support of this fortification.²⁶

In 1926–7 the French army staff was still planning in terms of a punitive action in response to German treaty violations; strategic doctrine presupposed an advance into the Rhineland-Palatinate to counter German aggression against Poland or the Little Entente—France's allies in eastern Europe. In such thinking, the RF Metz was envisaged as fulfilling a role as the hinge of the advance of the French field armies in the north and north-east; the RF Lauter was intended to cover the lighter defences of Alsace and the flank of operations launched from the Saarland.²⁷ From this rationale 'even Marshal Foch did not dissent. Indeed, throughout the discussions of defensive works, he sided with Guillaumat and consistently saw fortifications as offering support to the army's manoeuvres'.²⁸

Included, therefore, in the chorus of voices which conceived the fortifications in terms of discontinuous fortified zones were Foch, as well as General Marie-Eugene Debeney, chief of the army general staff from 1923–30, and Guillaumat, who presided over the Commission for the Defence of the Frontiers. This combination was not only authoritative, it was highly articulate. It drowned out the rivals such as Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain, who proposed an alternative concept of lighter but unbroken 'prepared battlefields' along the frontiers.²⁹

FORTIFICATIONS AND FINANCES: THE ECONOMICS OF THE MAGINOT LINE

The period from 1928 until January 1930 was principally concerned with debate over the resourcing required to permit construction of these heavy fortifications in the RF Metz and the RF Lauter, along with the Saarland inundations and the blockhouses along the western bank of the Rhine.³⁰ These were years in the course of which the fragile postwar French economy was recovering a measure of prosperity after the financial crisis of 1925–6. The franc had been permanently weakened by the exhaustion of France's foreign exchange and gold reserves, and the liquidation of her overseas investments to pay for the 1914–18 war; by the later 1920s, the French parliament and the *Banque de France* had set their faces against major new programmes of public expenditure. Financial stabilisation based on a revaluation of the franc and a return to a sustainable parity on the gold standard were the chief objectives of the conservative prime minister, Raymond Poincaré, who had been president of the Republic from 1913 to 1920. Poincaré had been recalled from retirement in 1926 precisely as a 'strong man'. He was one of the few French politicians whose reputation of successful leadership in 1914–18 survived the first, troubled postwar decade. His return was intended to reassure shaky public morale and restore international confidence in the sound management of the French economy.³¹

The restoration of a fixed and defensible parity for the currency, swiftly dubbed the *franc Poincaré*, imposed constraints on public policy, however. 'Sound finance' affected the funding of military projects. The difficulty was to persuade French taxpayers and voters—along with their parliamentary representatives—to shoulder the burden of a new and ambitious defence programme. This difficulty was exacerbated in the late 1920s because Weimar Germany had taken significant steps in 1925–6 to establish more normal and friendly relations with its neighbours, including France, through its signature of the Locarno Treaty and conclusion of the Thoiry agreements. By Locarno, in October 1925, Germany had agreed voluntarily to make no attempt by force to alter the western frontiers of Germany imposed at Versailles. In 1926 Germany had been admitted to the League of Nations. The era was marked by détente. It was also an era of financial anxiety in France—anxiety that helped ensure first that military security occupied a comparatively low place on the agenda of French governments, and second, that only a gradualist and unambiguously defensive strategy could be adopted by French military planners. In the view of one writer to *La France militaire* in February 1929, 'France is buckling under the burden of taxes. She can consent to only the most indispensable expenditures for her security.'³²

It was not until 14 January 1930, therefore, that the financial bill providing for the first phase in the construction of the fortifications subsequently known as the Maginot Line secured parliamentary approval. To re-emphasise a point made already, the very name itself—the Maginot Line—came about not because André Maginot had any significant part in the conception of the fortifications but rather

by dint of his tenure of the war ministry whilst the first credits, a tranche of 3.7 billion francs, were voted to permit the work to begin. Maginot himself took little part in deciding what precise configuration and technical specifications those fortifications should possess. Most ironic of all, Maginot took no part whatsoever in the implementation of the scheme that eventually bore his name, for he died in early 1932.

By coincidence, however, it was around the time of Maginot's death in 1932 that controversy and, at times open rupture, was generated between the French civilian and military institutions over the configuration and extent of the programme of fortifications. The reason behind the emergence of disagreement was two-fold. At one level, the French army chief of staff and, from January 1931, inspector-general and commander-in-chief designate for time of war, was Weygand. Foch's right-hand man during the 1914–18 war, linked to clerical and reactionary political circles, Weygand was intensely distrustful of and distrusted by the party politicians who dominated the Third Republic. In 1898–9, Weygand had subscribed to the fund opened to raise money to support the widow of Major Henry (the anti-Semitic officer who had committed suicide after discovery of the forgeries he had perpetrated in order to try to convict Dreyfus on charges of espionage and high treason). For French officers of the post-Dreyfus generation, a litmus test of their political predispositions was the question of whether or not they had donated money to the Henry fund. By this test, Weygand declared his conservative stance and his repudiation of the republic's concept of the place of the military subordinate to the civilian institutions of state.

Later, Weygand had been intimately involved at Foch's side in disputing what both officers regarded as the excessively lenient peace terms with Germany settled at Versailles in 1919. Weygand associated himself with right-wing officers, politicians, journalists and ideologues, who favoured, among other measures, the fomenting of Rhenish separatism, and the severing of the Rhineland from Germany followed by its permanent annexation to France. Weygand, along with Foch, condemned Versailles for failing to deliver the level of territorial and military security that they expected France to require as long-term protection against the risk of a rebirth of German power and revanchism. The temporary occupation of the Rhineland by the Allies in the 1920s was not regarded by this faction in France as a punitive peace—it was treated as a shameful betrayal of duty to France by the French and Allied civilian governments (even by the fiery Clemenceau).³³

Weygand was a stormy petrel in French civil-military affairs between the wars. He was, nevertheless, a soldier of the first significance, greatly respected as the custodian of the successes brought by his 1914–18 chief and mentor. 'I have the secrets of Foch', he was wont to comment knowingly, when faced by the least sign of opposition; few challenged his place as a key *héritier* of the triumphant marshals of 1918.³⁴ From 1931 to 1935, Weygand served as vice-president of the army war council and the CSG, and as commander-in-chief designate. In these functions he was France's senior active general. His was, therefore, the primary

responsibility for French defence in the years of Hitler's seizure of power and early challenges to the League and the Geneva disarmament conference in 1932–3. Weygand's attitude to fortifications and defensive strategy is, therefore, central to an assessment of the place of the Maginot Line in French inter-war strategic thought.³⁵

The year 1932 marked the onset of an acute crisis for the French military chiefs. Not only did January see the death of Maginot and February the opening of the Geneva disarmament conference, but in May 1932 a new Chamber of Deputies was also elected. The outcome of these elections wrought a change in the political balance of power in Paris. The international climate of optimism and détente engendered by Locarno and Thoiry had filtered through to French popular opinion and voting preferences. Turned out were the centre-right, dominated by tough nationalists with experience of high political office in World War I. It was a turning point. Politically, the era of World War I ended in France not in 1918 but here, in the early months of 1932, with the death or final political repudiation of the conservative centre-right nationalist leadership, personified by Poincaré, André Tardieu and Maginot.³⁶

In place of this political old guard came a new generation of the centre-left—politicians who, in many cases, had seen active service in World War I and who had been first elected to parliament in 1919 or 1924. It was the dawn of a new era. The 1930s was the decade of Edouard Daladier, Camille Chautemps, Georges Bonnet, Yvon Delbos of the Radical party, of Léon Blum, Vincent Auriol and Paul Faure of the SFIO Socialist party. From the elections of May 1932, the centre-left, dominated by the Radicals, formed a new government under the veteran Mayor of Lyon, Edouard Herriot. Benefiting from an electoral compact with the SFIO, and receiving support to form a government from a small but crucial number of neo-socialists who were separate from the SFIO, Herriot was able to constitute a ministry of the moderate centre-left, the *Cartel des Gauches*.

FORTIFICATIONS AND FINANCES: THE DEPRESSION AND THE MAGINOT LINE AS PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

The year 1932, however, possessed a further significance for French security. It witnessed the arrival in France of the ill wind of economic depression that had been blowing across the Atlantic since the Wall Street crash of October 1929. In sum, 1932 was a time when political sentiment in France swung sharply against the priorities of the military-conservative alliance on which Weygand had counted, and which had grown accustomed to directing French external and strategic policy since 1914. It was a time of crisis, and one that coincided with a political and generational changing of the guard.³⁷

State finances in France plunged into crisis, then, just after the centre-right had committed its successors to funding the lavish defensive fortifications on the

frontiers. The decision to construct static lines was now irrevocable. What was at issue was the impact of this pre-committed expenditure on other options and choices. The Maginot Line had become, not just for French defence but for French public programmes pure and simple, a question of opportunity cost.

The *Cartel des Gauches* governments responded to the economic crisis of 1932–4 by pursuing a drastic deflation.³⁸ This meant imposing swingeing reductions in public expenditure, with cuts in salaries and pensions of all state employees. Civil servants were hit hard. But the cuts also bit deeply into pay and conditions for military personnel, saw steep reductions in orders for weapons systems and led to the cancellation of the 1932 and 1933 divisional and corps-scale summer manoeuvres.³⁹ By 1933 these budgetary reductions had aroused ferocious hostility between Weygand, who contended that the future of the army as a combat-usable force was at stake, and the civilian political leadership. The snapping point was reached when Daladier's government in 1933 sought to cut costs by reducing the number of army officers by 5,000 whilst simultaneously announcing plans to slash military pensions and pay.⁴⁰

Whilst the axe of financial retrenchment fell on almost every head of public expenditure from 1932 to 1935, the Maginot Line almost alone remained sacrosanct. Politically, the support right around the hemicycle of the Chamber of Deputies for fixed defences may be ascribed to a quite straightforward and elemental factor. This was the universal desire among the French to secure their national territory definitively against a repetition of the German invasions of 1870 and 1914.⁴¹ As discussed earlier, the very agreement of French statesmen in 1926–9 that the forces of occupation in the Rhineland would be withdrawn in June 1930 made it essential that measures be hastened to ensure the long-term defensibility of France's eastern frontiers.

It has sometimes been said that the eastern fortifications were such a capital-intensive project that they mortgaged the future of the wider French defence effort in the shadow of Hitler. Did the burden of the Maginot Line catastrophically constrain the ability of French military policy-makers to respond flexibly and imaginatively to the challenge thrown down by Nazi Germany? Did the fortifications become a fatal burden both on the French defence budget—hampering rearmament and especially denying the funds for lavish re-equipment with mechanised forces and modern aviation—and on the nature of French military thought itself? Were the static defences responsible for creating a wider, insidious and eventually hidebound defensive conservatism, a so-called 'Maginot mentality'? And did this narrow outlook blinker the very way in which French statesmen, military chiefs and the public at large conceived of strategy?

Did the Maginot programme's costs exclude other, arguably more innovative and forward-looking, strategic options? Did the programme disastrously inhibit the modernisation of French operational and tactical battlefield doctrine, blinding the general staff to the possibilities inherent in the emergent technical capabilities of tanks, half-tracked vehicles, swift radio-telephone communications and ground-attack aviation? Did the Maginot Line consume vast financial appropriations

Table 9.1⁴⁵ Investments estimated, and made, for the work given the highest priority by the CORF.

<i>Year</i>	<i>CORF estimates of priority work (FFR. millions)</i>	<i>Credits actually committed to CORF work (FFR. millions)</i>
1930	930	450
1931	930	900
1932	980	1,020
1933	980	1,080
1934	1,000	670
1935	720	580
1936	-	300
Total	5,540	5,000

which might otherwise, and more fruitfully, have been invested in motorising and mechanising the army, and in providing France with a modern air force and air defence system? These questions are difficult to answer.⁴²

Schemes which fell outside the penumbra of the original, sacred Maginot programme of 1929–30 were vulnerable to financial re-appraisal. Negotiations over a proposed loan to Brussels in 1934, to assist Belgian construction of Maginot-style fortifications, point in this direction.⁴³ The French war minister, General Louis Maurin, refused a request in the army commission of the Chamber of Deputies to debate whether it might be ‘good politics’ for France to underwrite Belgian defensive programmes. This may reflect the unwillingness of French governments of the mid-1930s to pour additional resources into concrete at a time when their intelligence—the 2e Bureau and the *Service de Renseignements* (secret service)—were reporting Hitler’s creation of panzer divisions and his interest in mobile warfare.⁴⁴

The opportunity costs of constructing the Maginot Line demand careful consideration. The fixed defences erected along the French eastern frontiers may appear, at first sight, to have been expensive. Table 9.1 shows the investments estimated, and made, for the work given the highest priority by the CORF (the *travaux de première urgence*).

It has sometimes been argued that the main fortifications of the Maginot Line diverted French military appropriations away from more imaginative and up-to-date developments in land and air capability. Maurice Pearton has suggested that ‘its construction monopolised the French military budget, to the detriment of investment in weapons related to other possible strategies (particularly the use of armoured corps) as well as to the detriment of the dominant psychology of command’.⁴⁶ And Richard Griffiths, in his biography of Pétain, contended that the costs of the Maginot Line were disproportionate to the security that it could

purchase and, therefore, diminished the defensive capabilities obtained by France between the wars.⁴⁷

However, closer investigation of the economics of defence in inter-war France casts doubt on this interpretation. The fixed works facing Germany cost less than half the fourteen billion francs which the centre-left Popular Front government of Léon Blum voted on 7 September 1936 for a four-year plan to re-equip the army.⁴⁸ Strategically, the Maginot Line was excellent value for money as a force-multiplier. Even more important was the fact that, politically, the Maginot Line represented the best of all possible worlds for France in the early 1930s. Construction of the fortifications enjoyed near-unanimous approbation. The defences were enthusiastically endorsed by socialists and trade unions, just as they were by the conservative and nationalistic right. Left-wingers and anti-militarists saw the fortifications as a means to allow reduction of conscription without loss of national security. When the length of military service was cut down to twelve months in the army organisation law of 1928, the British military attaché in Paris, Colonel Henry Needham, remarked that 'Political pressure by the proletariat, as a matter of fact, had much to do with this reduction.'⁴⁹ The welcome shown to the barring of the French borders by Painlevé, Briand and Blum was matched by the warm embrace it received from Paul-Boncour and Daladier, and the support it obtained from Poincaré, Tardieu and Jean Fabry (Maginot's successor as president of the Chamber of Deputies' Army Commission, 1928 to 1935, and war minister in Pierre Laval's government of June 1935 to January 1936).⁵⁰

A political consensus was built to obtain, and then afterwards to protect from cuts, the budget to fortify the Franco-German frontier. Plainly, this consensus was a function of its time. Maginot had successfully manipulated a lingering and understandable fear of Germany in 1929–30, notwithstanding the improved relations based on Berlin's acceptance of the Young plan and French agreement to withdraw their Rhineland garrisons. As an official at the British embassy in Paris noted in September 1930:

the frequent speeches of the War Minister have tended to arouse public interest in the state of French defences. The martial, if not bellicose, tone of M. Maginot's speeches should, I think, be put down to his desire to create an atmosphere favourable to the voting of the necessary credits rather than to any provocative spirit.⁵¹

To contend that the francs invested in concrete and steel were misdirected is not only to overlook the strategic purpose of the Maginot Line but also to ignore the political context in which it was conceived and constructed. Strategically, French generals were quite rational in striving to protect the raw materials and heavy industries of Lorraine. They also knew of the importance of shielding or covering the army's two-week long mobilisation of reserves in the event of an international crisis.

Moreover, the fortifications in north-eastern France offered multiple political attractions. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that, in the political-psychological context of the later 1920s and early 1930s, no other significant defence programme was likely to command sufficient parliamentary acceptance. The Maginot Line's concrete and cupolas were products of the Geneva era. The preparatory sessions of the technical commissions, in readiness for the World Disarmament Conference, which opened in February 1932, were already under way when, in January 1930, the first tranche of the fortification credits was approved by the French parliament.

Against this backcloth, French military chiefs such as Pétain, Weygand and Gamelin embraced the concept of the Maginot Line. They approved of the defensive system not only because they genuinely believed in its strategic utility but also because they understood that nothing else was available to them in its stead. With hopes rising for disarmament, it was impossible for the French military to secure supplementary expenditures with which to procure new armour, artillery, aircraft or warships. Pithily summarizing government priorities, Henri Chéron, the finance minister, wrote on 24 January 1933 to dismiss a complaint from the navy that it was bearing excessive cuts. Chéron concluded:

The present circumstances require that we save the national finances in order to save the value of the currency. If we don't achieve this, all the credits that have been voted will be to no effect. This too is, in the very highest degree, a question of National Defence.⁵²

But the Maginot Line did not have to bear any economies. It had captured the imagination of the public and press. Defensive systems, not offensive ones such as tanks or aeroplanes, were popular. This was a bandwagon onto which the French high command could climb, but whose momentum they could not stop. To military commentators and parliamentarians, the Maginot Line's construction symbolized France's engagement in the ways of 'constructive deterrence'. Adapting terminology from the lexicon of late twentieth-century strategic studies, it may be said that France chose to secure herself through 'defensive defence' or 'non-provocative defence'. This denial by the French military of a policy of 'adventurism' was most famously expounded in the intervention of General Louis Maurin, the war minister, during the debate of 15 March 1935 in the Chamber of Deputies on the restoration of two-year conscription in France, to counter the announcement by Hitler of the re-introduction of compulsory military service in Germany. 'How could anyone believe that we contemplate the offensive,' asked Maurin, 'when we have spent billions to establish a fortified barrier? Would we be mad enough to go beyond this barrier to I don't know what kind of adventure?'⁵³

Traumatized by the blood-letting of 1914–18, its national energy and will-power depleted, France had no stomach for adventurous military strategies. The fortifications signified that France was a status quo power; what it had, it would

hold. Nothing more. This ensured that the fortifications would be acceptable to French taxpayers and to international opinion. Indeed, the defences were the only new military burden that the war-weary French would agree to assume, scarcely a decade after the guns had fallen silent over the Western Front.

France's military chiefs of the early 1930s, such as Gamelin and Weygand, grasped this reality. They knew that requests to parliament for money to refurbish the ground and air forces with the latest technologies of aggressive war would be doomed to fail—would have been scattered on the wind in a tempest of internal indignation and international outrage. Indeed, as early as February 1929, in the debate on the fortifications in the columns of *La France militaire*, it was acknowledged that 'these measures of pure defence will be warmly welcomed from the diplomatic and parliamentary points of view'.⁵⁴ France yearned to be left alone behind its growing *muraille*, its defensive rampart. And a sense of reassurance did indeed sweep through France's neighbours. Reporting to London in January 1929 on the French military estimates for the year, Needham, the British military attaché in Paris, concluded that 'This cannot be regarded as a militaristic budget, its sole object being to put France in a position adequately to defend herself in case of future aggression.'⁵⁵

The French were, knowingly, playing to the gallery in their presentation of the fortifications programme. And it was a domestic as well as an international gallery. But it was not the case that the senior commanders, such as Weygand and Gamelin, were doctrinally hidebound or unaware of the changes that technology was making possible on the modern battlefield. Rather, they were politicised generals—the former reluctantly and the latter as a matter of character. They appreciated the need to make a virtue of necessity. Before Hitler's public announcement of German rearmament and re-imposition of conscription in 1935, the Maginot Line represented the only programme of capital investment in defence for which a political majority in France could be obtained. As Pétain, then minister for war, emphasised during a debate in the Chamber on 14 June 1934: 'I insist on the immediate voting of these credits. They correspond to the profound feeling of the population which wishes to live in peace behind solid frontiers. The fortifications are the inscription on the ground of that will.'⁵⁶

Yet neither Weygand nor Gamelin aspired to hide the French army in a troglodyte world deep beneath the concrete and steel of the Maginot Line. Neither was so out of touch as to think that even security of a defensive kind was to be achieved by a wholly defensive arming and training of their troops. 'Gamelin was,' in the assessment of Paul-Marie de La Gorce, 'undoubtedly one of the French generals most favourably disposed to the offensive organization of the army through the use of mechanical power.'⁵⁷

But both Gamelin and Weygand knew that, in 1931–4, new fortifications were the military system which French parliamentarians had taken to heart. These officers understood that new fortifications were greatly to be preferred to no new defence expenditures at all.

Furthermore Weygand and Gamelin were wary of demanding premature rearmament against a German threat that was still no more than latent. They were conscious of living at a time of rapid changes in military technology. Wasting money on equipment that would quickly become obsolete was a constant anxiety for the French high command. It misses the point to remark, as Bradford A.Lee has done, that

From the end of 1927 to the middle of 1936, France spent 5,000 million francs on fortifications and only 3,400 million francs on weaponry. The expense of the Maginot Line thus cut across the simultaneous effort to substitute firepower for manpower.⁵⁸

Rather, it was to the credit of senior French commanders such as Weygand and Gamelin that they so lucidly discerned and attended to the danger of ‘instant obsolescence’. It should be recorded that these officers spared the French army from falling into the trap of equipping for a war that Hitler was not yet ready to unleash—a trap into which their imprudent counterparts in the French air force plunged headlong with their quickly outdated air rearmament Plans I and II between 1934 and 1936.⁵⁹

What did occur, however, is that the scale of expenditure on the Maginot Line compounded the difficulties that faced subsequent, supplementary programmes of fortifications. The commitment made by parliament in 1929–30 to the original Maginot programme became inviolable. But no such protection from the scrutiny of cost-cutting *inspecteurs des finances* or offensively-minded air force advocates extended to the sequelae to the original Maginot Line—the defences behind Luxembourg, the positions proposed on the Belgian border, the works projected for the Alps and Provence to face Italy. As Lee has quite correctly noted: ‘Except for the Maginot Line, all the elements that might have contributed to an expansion of military power were casualties of...prolonged budget-cutting.’⁶⁰

To measure the impact of budgetary stringency on post-Maginot fortifications proposals with any degree of accuracy is, however, thoroughly problematical. In part, the difficulty arises from imprecise use of terminology in the contemporary archival sources. If the cost of the Maginot Line were to be calibrated to pass muster from an auditor, it would be essential first to agree on what was meant by the designation ‘the Maginot Line’.

Unfortunately for the historian-cum-accountant this was a matter on which confusion rather than clarity reigned throughout the 1930s.⁶¹ Though properly a description only of the Lorraine defensive regions, the RF Metz and the RF Lauter, together with their supporting prepared inundations and interval defences, the term ‘Maginot Line’ underwent a creeping expansion. In time it had grown in common usage to encompass *all* defences along all of the French frontiers. According to Gamelin, it was

Table 9.2⁶⁴ Total spent, to 1939, on defensive works, for ‘Maginot Line proper’.

<i>Source</i>	<i>Cost of Maginot Line (1939 FFR millions)</i>
<i>Gamelin</i>	6,000 plus
Daladier Papers	6,800 (1930–9 inclusive)
Reynaud	6,200 (to 1937 only)
Rowe	7,000

around the year 1935 that the habit took hold of using this appellation. Its generalization coincided with the unveiling of a statue of ‘Sergeant Maginot’ at the side of the road from Verdun to Fort Douaumont [where Maginot had been severely wounded in 1916].⁶²

Contemporary imprecision is amply reflected in the archives and memoirs which must now form the documentary basis of any serious investigation of this controversy over cost. Sometimes the evidence of expenditure includes the costs of the mobile field pioneer parks (the *Parcs Mobiles du génie*), the engineering of the prepared inundations and the anti-aircraft measures of the *Défense Aérienne du Territoire* (DAT)—an independent metropolitan air defence command established in 1931, initially under the direction of Pétain. Sometimes it includes non-military items of recurrent rather than capital expenditure—items such as the salary costs of the fortress garrisons or the consumption of electrical power for the forts’ hoists, heating, lighting and ventilation systems. In other documents the figures provided refer purely to direct work on the fortifications and their armament.

It is to pursue a mirage, in short, to seek a definitive balance sheet of the price paid to build, fit out, garrison and maintain the Maginot Line. Some best estimates can, however, be suggested. The CORF, in 1938, calculated that the final cost of all protective work on the frontiers (including even some *travaux de 3e urgence* not scheduled till 1941–3) would total 9,610 million francs at 1928 prices (the gold-standard *franc Poincaré*).⁶³ In practice, the Maginot Line was constructed and completed under infinitely less stable financial conditions. Costs in the later phases were swollen by the effects of three devaluations, one in September 1936 and two in 1938. As far as can be ascertained, the total spent on defensive works down to 1939 (excluding the *Parcs Mobiles* and DAT) for the ‘Maginot Line proper’ in Lorraine, the Rhine, Jura and Alpine sectors, was some seven billion francs. This figure is confirmed by at least four sources, as indicated in Table 9.2.

To return to the controversy over the opportunity cost of the Maginot Line, it is hard to argue persuasively that the fortifications were injurious to mechanisation of the army or to air-force re-equipment. If the billions invested in concrete and steel between 1929 and 1935 had not gone into the positions constructed

opposite Germany, they would most likely have been lost to the French armed services altogether. In practice, in the early 1930s it was impossible for French military chiefs to choose between concrete and cavalry tanks, between barbed wire and bombers.

It is not that France suffered some colossal, collective failure of imagination in not debating such alternatives. The point is that the choices which would have been set against the fortification programme would not have been alternative weapons of war. The alternatives would have been projects in the economy's civil sector—whether schemes such as Tardieu's plan of 1930 for infrastructural re-equipment to invest five billion francs in modernising public utilities, or those from the left such as a widening of national insurance, pensions and welfare provision.⁶⁵ French defence chiefs settled for a strategy that made sense in terms of France's geostrategic-demographic vulnerabilities—and which was the only one to have any hope of parliamentary support in a period when many influential senators and deputies were set on wielding the axe against military spending. French strategy in 1914 had no large social group in its favour whose prospects of employment or income depended on the adoption of *that* particular strategy and no other. 'Seventeen years later the chosen strategy was advocated as an economic stabiliser in which many people had a direct interest, apart from their general concern as citizens with the security of the nation.'⁶⁶

Construction of the Maginot Line produced important incidental benefits for the French economy. Admittedly the first tranche of funds was committed at a time of Franco-German détente. But the extra expenditure was not considered wasted 'since the Maginot Line was viewed as a massive public works project which stimulated the economy and employment during the Depression'.⁶⁷ The fortifications programme amounted to a massive programme of public works—even if it was not explicitly conceived as such. Constructing such a complex defensive system served as an immense stimulant to the slump-hit local economies of Alsace and Lorraine.

Between 1930 and 1937, the Maginot Line generated scores of thousands of jobs. In the first instance the work benefited the primary sectors of the construction and transport industries; later, in a more diffused way, it benefited the steelworks, railway shops, artillery manufacturers, and the electrical, heating and plumbing trades. At least six local departmental economies were significantly sustained in the depression years, from Montmédy on the border with Luxembourg to Mulhouse in southern Alsace. Building the Maginot Line brought massive transfusions of public investment to labour-intensive industries all along the eastern borderlands of France. Indeed, as Pearton notes:

The argument that the project would create jobs was specifically used by André Maginot to deputies of the Left when soliciting support for his original bill in the Chamber of Deputies. It was no fault of his that only half of the labour eventually employed was French, the rest being Russian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish and German.⁶⁸

The fortifications were intended to provide military security for France; adventitiously or not, they also went far towards providing security of orders and security of employment. Entrepreneurs as well as employees came to welcome the way in which the fortifications' programme sheltered them from the bitter winds of the depression. The Maginot Line's impact on the political economy of north-eastern France during the depression is an overlooked dimension to its history. Bringing immediate prosperity and jobs, as well as longer term military security, to the *départements* of the Meuse, the Moselle, the Meurthe-et-Moselle, the Bas-Rhin and the Rhin, the Maginot Line was enthusiastically embraced by labour leaders and left-wing parliamentarians from eastern France.

French employers and workers engaged on the contracts to construct and supply, and the deputies and local government officials in the areas through which the line passed did not dissent from the strategic assumptions on which construction was based, and indeed formed a bloc of opinion in its support.⁶⁹

Economics had, in short, as great a part as strategic rationality in underpinning the consensus in favour of the line. And this consensus extended from the CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*) and the SFIO to the germanophobe nationalists of the political right.⁷⁰

To return to William Shirer's 'problem' with the Maginot Line: this was not in fact the line itself, but the problem of Belgium on its left flank. Here, again, rationality and economics were the major considerations that dictated the decision to make no effort to extend the Maginot Line from Luxembourg to the Channel coast. Psychologically, it was not felt to be politically possible to appear to cast the Belgians to the wolves. André Maginot himself sanctioned this doctrine. Asked about the French left flank, during his tenure of the war ministry in 1930 at the very start of the construction schedule, he declared: 'It is not possible for us to erect fortifications behind the territory of this friendly nation.'⁷¹

But it was not only a question of reassuring the Belgians that France would not sit behind her own defences and abandon Belgium to the mercies of a resurgent Reich—economics were a crucial factor in French defensive planning too. Gamelin, who as chief of the army general staff from 1931 to 1940 had the longest continuous responsibility for French defence between the wars, judged France unable to afford both stronger conventional forces and a programme of extended fortifications. He and his senior commanders sought more armaments and more 'punch' for the French army—not more concrete. 'Even Weygand,' as Judith Hughes has observed, 'who did not fully accept the orthodoxies of the 1920s...couches his defence of permanent fortifications in terms of providing a backstop for a French advance across the Belgian border.'⁷²

This conventional wisdom permeated the French high command and exerted an unbroken hold over French thinking about the extent of the Maginot Line from the time of the first studies in 1922 to the defeat of 1940. As Gamelin's one-

time chief of staff, General Emile Ricard, later explained, in regard to the Franco-Belgian border: obtaining 'effective protection [through fixed defences] for this part of the front would have demanded an effort truly disproportionate to the means we possessed'. Fortifications facing Belgium 'could only have been conceived as a device to enhance...the defensive combat power of the main battle corps deployed there'.⁷³ Maginot-grade defences from Montmédy to the Channel would, according to an estimate from Gamelin, have cost between ten billion and fifteen billion francs. This was a sum of a magnitude that France did not possess, over and above the investments required for renovation of the field army, expansion of the air force and modernisation of the navy.⁷⁴ By 1937, judges Anthony Adamthwaite, 'given the state of the French economy, it was clearly too expensive to extend the Maginot Line to the Channel ports'.⁷⁵

This is a wholly proper emphasis on the way in which French public finances were stretched to their limits by the burgeoning demands of defence—inflicting terminal damage in the process on the social projects dear to Blum's Popular Front.⁷⁶ But on the Franco-Belgian border the French faced two further intractable difficulties with which Adamthwaite does not sufficiently reckon. The former was geological; the latter geopolitical.

On the first count, and partly explaining the much higher estimated cost of a north-western Maginot Line extension, French army engineers were faced with waterlogged terrain that was wholly unsuited to heavy fortifications.⁷⁷ On the second point, the French had essential industrial concentrations close behind the frontier. These industries could not be abandoned to German use, or even deliberately sabotaged, without representing a dangerous self-inflicted wound to French capacities to sustain a modern industrialised war over a duration of several years. Moreover, any military strategy of defence in depth by mobile and mechanised forces likewise implied that the industries of Lille, Douai and Valenciennes were to be destroyed or abandoned. As Judith Hughes has remarked, a disservice has been done to serious analysis of the Maginot Line and the French strategic dilemma between the wars by armchair strategists who have censured inter-war French generalship for failing to adopt plans for defence by manoeuvre inside France itself:

In suggesting that French military leaders should have prepared to mount massive counter-attacks, critics have too often overlooked the locale of their hypothetical manoeuvres. A strategy that depended on counter-offensive operations by heavy armoured divisions would have designated Northern France as the major battlefield.⁷⁸

Such an outcome, Hughes does not need to add, would have been politically unacceptable to a French nation which had endured four years of warfare on its soil in 1914–18.

Thus every French government between the wars faced a dilemma. Their military commanders inherently distrusted the offensive form of war and

specifically regarded improvised and unprepared encounter battles between opposing armies on the move as the most uncontrollable and therefore the most dangerous form of military operations known to man. Yet no French politician, taking cognisance of this warning, could embrace the alternative of positional defence—still less of a *manoeuvre en retraite*—when this would mean luring an invader to a fight on French soil. This left France with no politically acceptable option but that of resolute forward defence on the Maginot Line in the north-east, coupled with a dash forward to what Gamelin in 1936 termed the ‘protective glacis’ of the Liège forts, the Albert Canal and the Belgian Meuse.⁷⁹ Right down to the disasters of 1940 France saddled herself with a hazardous defensive strategy. As Jacques Néré has reflected, what the governments from Tardieu to Reynaud, and the military commanders from Pétain to Gamelin, resolved to accept was the

risk...that Belgium would call for France's help...too late to entrench the defence at...the Meuse and the Albert Canal. Hence the entire security of France rested finally on the arrangements of a neighbouring state which was too weak to defend itself.⁸⁰

CONCLUSIONS

That this dilemma proved insoluble was not the fault of the Maginot Line. The French strategists of the inter-war era were never so naive as to imagine fortifications providing all the security France required on their own. As Maginot himself said, intervening in the debate in the Chamber of Deputies of 10 December 1929 on the bill to finance the initial construction work on the frontier:

We could hardly dream of building a kind of Great Wall of France, which would in any case be far too costly. Instead we have foreseen powerful but flexible means of organizing defence...taking full advantage of the terrain.⁸¹

The static positions on the Franco-German frontier were intended to be a shield. However, Maginot realised that a sword was also required. France, he understood, needed mobile and strongly equipped field armies that could manoeuvre in the spaces on the left flank of the Maginot Line. ‘Maginot, in speeches of the greatest frankness...repeated again and again that only the north-east defences existed, as a measure of security to replace the French occupation of the Rhineland.’⁸² Guillaumat too, presiding over the Commission for the Defence of the Frontiers that took charge of the specification and siting of the defences, had warned that:

a wall of France is a dream, in financial terms...and could be a danger from a military point of view. It could lead to the subordination of all war plans... to existing or projected fortifications [*une muraille de France est un rêve*

*financièrement...et peut être un danger au point de vue militaire. Elle peut amener à subordonner tout plan de guerre... à la fortification existante ou ébauchée].*⁸³

Account must be taken of the precautions of the French military chiefs of the 1920s against expecting too much of fixed fortifications. Something much more sophisticated, more satisfying, than a 'Maginot mentality' must be found as an explanatory framework for the French collapse of 1940. To understand the roots of the military debacle suffered by France and Britain in 1940, it seems more fruitful to investigate the defects of the sword rather than continue to assign blame to the shield. What needs further attention are the reasons why, as Germany's armoured columns pressed swiftly westward to the Channel, the Allies found such difficulty in 'delivering the right type of counter-attack at the right place at the right time'.⁸⁴ Defective communications, inadequate command and control arrangements, the shortcomings of intelligence, poorly adapted logistics systems are all elements of the military defeat of 1940 which would still benefit from more scholarly research.

The Maginot Line did its job much better in 1940 than did French wireless-telegraph systems, rail and road movement staffs and quartermasters. Apart from the small outworks at La Ferté and Fermont (officially designated *petits ouvrages*) on the western extremity of the Maginot Line near Montmédy, no fortified works fell to German assault in 1940.⁸⁵ Indeed, fulfilling one part of their purpose in textbook fashion, the main fortified regions, the RF Metz and the RF Lauter, impressed German military observers. In January 1935 an appreciation by the *Truppenamt* reported that the construction to that date had increased French defensive strength three-fold. And five years later the Maginot Line was still deterring German commanders and channelling their offensive plans against the western Allies. Not until February 1940, after the crash-landing of a plane carrying staff officers delivered copies of the German scheme of attack into Allied hands, did the Germans discard a plan that conformed to French preferences for battle in Belgium and Holland, beyond the French frontier defences.

The Maginot Line did not succumb. Its main *ouvrages* were acknowledged to be too tough to crack with the tools available to the German army and air force of 1940. Since it channelled and constrained German options, German strategy had to find a way, right down to 1940, to bypass it.⁸⁶ In the perceptive words of a contributor to the debate eleven years before, about the type of defences France required: 'Fortification, no doubt, does not win battles, but it can permit armies to avoid losing them.'⁸⁷

In search of a propaganda effect, Josef Goebbels stage-managed visits by senior German commanders to the great forts of the line. But he could do so only after the armistice of 22 June 1940 had peacefully delivered them into German hands. Filmed by German official newsreel crews, the effect of these propaganda newsreels was not quite the one intended in Berlin. In displaying the silent power of the fortifications over which the jack-booted German warlords strutted for the

cameras, the film served, more than anything else, to underline what a formidable obstacle the Maginot Line would have been for the Wehrmacht.⁸⁸

In a couple more respects, too, the Maginot Line could claim success. First, late in 1944, many of the fortifications were reoccupied. This time, however, the guns of the Maginot Line were trained westwards. In their new role, they formed part of the German defences that were improvised to block the advance of the Allied forces chasing eastwards across France to close in on the Third Reich. In their only authentic test under combat conditions, the fortifications proved true to their unfulfilled promise of 1940. Most notably, in October to November 1944 they comprehensively stalled the eastward progress of General George S. Patton's US Third Army. Resisting American artillery, armour and air power, these French forts—though designed to withstand the offensive military technology of a generation before—became an awkward thorn in the side of the Americans. The German adaptation of the Maginot Line played a vital part in setting up the opportunity for Hitler's final counter-offensive in the West, the Battle of the Bulge.⁸⁹

Second, the Maginot Line's deep and air-conditioned ammunition magazines proved to be an ideal location in which France could store its tactical nuclear warheads in the 1970s and 1980s. The depots deep inside the old *ouvrages* spared NATO the political controversy that would surely have erupted if secure and nearby alternative storage sites had needed to be designed, either in eastern France or in the French-garrisoned zone of Baden-Württemberg within Germany.⁹⁰ Intriguingly, the Maginot Line's story concerns not only the decline and fall of France as a great power between the world wars, but also France's revival as a power during the Cold War—through a quite different type of Franco-German relations.

NOTES

- 1 W.L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940*, New York, Secker and Warburg, 1969, p. 184; J.C. Cairns, 'Some recent historians and the "strange defeat" of 1940', *Journal of Modern History*, 1974, 46, pp. 60–85 (quotation, p. 66).
- 2 A.A. Horne, *To Lose a Battle. France 1940*, London, Macmillan, 1969, p. 29.
- 3 'La Ligne Maginot de Saddam Hussein', *Le Monde*, 19 January 1991, p. 1.
- 4 I.M. Gibson (pseudonym of A.V. Kovacs), 'Maginot and Liddell Hart: the doctrine of defense', in E.M. Earle (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy, Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1942 and 1971 (paperback reprint), pp. 365–87 (quotation, p. 372).
- 5 See M. Vaïsse, *Sécurité d'abord. La politique de la France en matière de désarmement, 9 décembre 1930–17 Avril 1934*, Paris, Pedone, 1981; also the review of this work by P.-H. Laurent, which cites Vaïsse's book as 'an outstanding example of academic history...the richest, best-documented one-volume study of the interwar French

- disarmament controversy and...an indispensable work for every student of this once again contemporary problem', in *American Historical Review*, 1982, 87, 5, p. 1400.
- 6 The most helpful discussion of these debates remain D.R.Watson, *Georges Clemenceau: A Political Biography*, London, Eyre Methuen, 1974, pp. 332–65; J. Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945*, London and Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975, pp. 11–38; J.C.King, *Foch versus Clemenceau. France and German Dismemberment, 1918–1919*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1960; S.Marks, *The Illusion of Peace. International Relations in Europe, 1919–1933*, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1977.
 - 7 On French objectives during 1914–18 for the postwar treatment of Germany see D. Stevenson, *French War Aims against Germany, 1914–1919*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982. On the Allied Control Commission, see Gen. C.Nollet, *Une expérience de désarmement; Cinq ans de contrôle militaire en Allemagne*, Paris, Gallimard, 1932; Col. T.B.Mott, *Twenty Years as a Military Attaché*, London, Oxford University Press, 1937; Gen. J.H.Morgan, *Assize of Arms: being the story of the Disarmament of Germany and her re-armament (1919–1939)*, preface by Lt.-Gen. Sir G.M.W. Macdonogh, New York, Oxford University Press, 1946; Gen. J.Mordacq (Clemenceau's military chief of staff in 1917–19), *La Mentalité allemande. Cinq ans de commandement sur le Rhin*, Paris, Plon, 1926; Col. J.Minart, *Le Drame du désarmement français (ses aspects politiques et techniques). La revanche allemande (1918–1939)*, preface by G.Bonnet (French Foreign Minister, 1938–9), Paris, La Nef, 1959.
 - 8 J.M.Hughes, *To the Maginot Line. The Politics of French Military Preparation in the 1920s*, Cambridge MA., Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 188.
 - 9 D.Kirk, 'Population and population trends in modern France', in E.M.Earle (ed.), *Modern France: Problems of the Third and Fourth Republics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951, pp. 313–33. Cf. R.Tomlinson, 'The "disappearance" of France, 1896–1940. French politics and the birth rate', *Historical Journal*, 1985, 28, 2, pp. 405–15; R.A.Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster. The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919–1939*, Hamden CT, Archon Books, 1985, p. 72; D.Porch, 'The French army in World War I', in A.R.Millett and W.Murray (eds), *Military Effectiveness*, London and Boston, Allen and Unwin, 1988, 3 vols, I, pp. 190–228.
 - 10 Excellent analyses of these difficulties facing French defensive planners after 1919 are provided in R.J.Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933–1940*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 13–23, 29–32; and Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, pp. 41–7.
 - 11 M.Pearton, *The Knowledgeable State. Diplomacy, War and Technology since 1830*, London, Burnett Books, 1982, p. 211.
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 - 15 Michael Geyer's conceptualisation of this change to what he terms the 'age of industrialised war' or 'machine warfare' is analytically useful here: see M.Geyer, 'German strategy in the age of machine warfare, 1914–1945', in P.Paret (ed.),

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 - 18 B.A.Lee, ‘Strategy, arms and the collapse of France, 1930–1940’, in R.T.B. Langhorne (ed.), *Diplomacy and Intelligence during the Second World War: Essays in Honour of F.H.Hinsley*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 43–67 (quotations, pp. 56, 57, 58).
 - 19 Pearton, *The Knowledgeable State*, p. 211.
 - 20 Colonel Y.Z., ‘Défense des frontières’, *La France militaire*, 1 February 1929.
 - 21 There is an instructive British explication of these objectives of French military planners in Field Marshal Sir A.Montgomery-Massingberd (chief of the imperial general staff) to Lord Halifax (Secretary of State for war): ‘Report on a visit to the French army’, 17 August 1935, Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 158/5, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College, London. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for permission to use this material. Cf. Colonel F.G. ‘Paddy’ Beaumont-Nesbitt (British military attaché, Paris, 1936–8): ‘Report on the French army’, 5 July 1937, in Foreign Office: General Correspondence, FO 371, 20694, C5048/122/17, Public Record Office, London (hereafter, PRO). A perceptive report by General Sir Alan Brooke, then commanding II Corps of the British Expeditionary Force in France, on visiting the Maginot Line forts of Welchtenberg on 20 December 1939, and Hackenberg on 6 February 1940, appears in Sir A. Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–1943. A Study Based on the Diaries and Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal the Viscount Alanbrooke*, London, Reprint Society, 1958, pp. 63–4.
 - 22 See Gen. P.-E.Tournoux, *Défense des Frontières. Haut Commandement-Gouvernement, 1919–1939*, Preface by Marshal A.Juin, Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1960, pp. 13–135.
 - 23 V.Rowe, *The Great Wall of France: The Triumph of the Maginot Line*, London, Putnam, 1959, p. 58.
 - 24 See Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, pp. 48–57. Cf. Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, pp. 39–186, 196–9, 201–4; Tournoux, *Défense des Frontières*, pp. 31–77.
 - 25 For the CSG’s deliberations see Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, ‘Procès-verbal de la séance du 15 décembre 1925’, Carton 1N 21, vol. 15, pp. 103–21; ‘Procès-verbal de la séance du 19 mars 1926’, Carton 1N 21, vol. 15, pp. 142–57, Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre (hereafter, SHAT), Vincennes; Tournoux, *Défense des Frontières*, pp. 78–114; Rowe, *The Great Wall of France*, pp. 26–60.
 - 26 Tournoux, *Défense des Frontières*, p. 54.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 332–5; Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, pp. 192–4, 196–7, 202–3; Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster*, p. 67.
 - 28 Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, p. 203.
 - 29 The disagreement between Pétain and his colleagues, and the former’s failure to win the argument, is explained in Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, pp. 198–201. Cf. Mysyrowicz, *Autopsie d’une défaite*, pp. 76–81, 114.
 - 30 There are two excellent studies of the domestic political debate in France over the urgency, scheduling and cost of the fortifications’ programme: P.Géroudet, *Le*

- Parlement et l'armée: la commission de l'armée de la Chambre des députés 1928–1936*, Paris, P.Géroudet, 1990; and J.-L.Gentile, 'Le parlement français et la montée du Nazisme, 1918–1933', Paris, unpub. diss., doctorat de 3e cycle, Université de Paris IV, Sorbonne, 1976.
- 31 See T.Kemp, 'The French economy under the Franc Poincaré', in J.C.Cairns (ed.), *Contemporary France: Illusion, Conflict and Regeneration*, New York, Franklin Watts, 1978, pp. 66–91; also M.Wolfe, 'French interwar stagnation revisited', in C.K. Warner (ed.), *From the Ancien Régime to the Popular Front: Essays in Honor of Shepard B.Clough*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1968, pp. 159–80.
- 32 Colonel Y.Z., 'Défense des Frontières', *La France militaire*, 1 February 1929.
- 33 See P.C.F.Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 9–33; J.Weygand, *Weygand, mon père*, Paris, Flammarion, 1970, pp. 142–65; B.Destremau, *Weygand*, Paris, Perrin, 1990, esp. pp. 131–6, 142–5.
- 34 The description of Weygand and Gamelin (Joffre's former chief of operations from 1914–16) as the 'inheritors' of the aura of invincibility attached to the French marshals of 1918 is from J.Nobécourt, *Une histoire politique de l'armée: I: de Pétain à Pétain, 1919–1942*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1967, p. 197.
- 35 For this attitude see Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 36–82.
- 36 There was the passing of a generation of French civil and military leadership. Foch and Clemenceau had already both died in 1929. The years 1932–4 saw a further decimation of the proven and experienced political élite, with the retirement of Tardieu after his defeat in the May 1932 elections, and the deaths of Maginot, Briand, Poincaré and Louis Barthou, as well as of two prestigious World War I marshals, Joseph Joffre in 1930 and Hubert Lyautey in 1934. The net result was to enhance further the malign influence of Pétain, the only surviving and active member of the leadership of the *génération du feu*. See R.Binion, *Defeated Leaders: the Political Fate of Caillaux, Jouvenel and Tardieu*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1960; J.F.V.Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré*, Cambridge University Press, 1997; R.Griffiths, *Pétain*, London, Constable, 1970, pp. 158–203; G.Warner, *Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968, pp. 132–48; P.Varillon, *Joffre*, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1956, pp. 595–602.
- 37 As Bankwitz perceptively observes:

Confronted with a *revanchard* Germany, Weygand at this time must have felt himself to be the last representative of the old order of 'strong men'—the Poincarés, the Maginots, the Barthous—all of whom had disappeared by the end of 1934. Their places were now taken by the political jugglers, the *uomini di combinazione* he despised: the Lavals, the Flandins, the Gamelins.... Weygand and other military leaders now began to prepare themselves either deliberately or unconsciously for two eventualities. The first was the oncoming war with the hereditary enemy. The second was the inevitable collapse of the civil authority at home.

Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations, pp. 206–7

- 38 See J.Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France, 1932–1936*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985; R.F.Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France. Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 84–119; M.Vaïsse, ‘Le mythe de l’or en France: les aspects monétaires du New Deal vus par les français’, *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 1972, pp. 463–79; F.Caron, *An Economic History of Modern France*, London, Methuen, 1979, pp. 258–64; T.Kemp, *The French Economy, 1913–1939: The History of a Decline*, London, Longman, 1972.
- 39 See Colonel T.G.G.Heywood (British military attaché, Paris): ‘Annual report on the French army for 1933’, FO 371, 17652, C1948/85/17, PRO; ministre de la Guerre: ‘Note sur la nouvelle réduction de 202 millions apportée au Budget de la Guerre’, 23 January 1933, Joseph Paul-Boncour Papers, Archives Privés, Cote AP 20/20, dossier 02, Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter, AN); ‘Note pour le Président: principes des nouvelles réductions sur le Budget de l’Air’, 1933 (undated), *ibid.*; notes by Paul-Boncour on expected war ministry budget deficit and measures to be taken, 1933, *ibid.*, dossier 04.
- 40 The resultant bitter civil-military clash is expertly analysed in Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations*, pp. 83–115.
- 41 See Gentile, ‘Le parlement français et la montée du Nazisme’, pp. 117–61.
- 42 Most of these criticisms are explicit or implicit in the essay by Lee, ‘Strategy, arms and the collapse of France’, esp. pp. 56–9, 63–7. Lee argues (p. 67) ‘that financial constraints, by delaying the onset of French rearmament in the first half of the 1930s, left France short of what she needed to have in 1940’. This ignores the two central problems facing French strategic planners in the early 1930s: first, that parliamentary support for major weaponry and military vehicle programmes was unobtainable in the politico-economic context of the early 1930s; and second, that war material produced by a French rearmament drive between 1930 and 1935 would have been largely obsolete by 1940.
- 43 This proposal received its main impetus from Tardieu. Whilst prime minister, from February to May 1932, he argued in favour of lending Belgium 1,000 million French francs to finance a comprehensive programme of fortifications in eastern Belgium. A second initiative of the same sort was attempted in 1934, involving *démarches* between Pétain (then French war minister) and Lucien Lamoureux (then French minister of commerce). See Gamelin, written submission to the Vichy Supreme Court of Justice at Riom: ‘La politique étrangère de la France 1930–9 au point de vue militaire’, Blum Archives 3 BL 3, dossier 1, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris [hereafter FNSP], p. 4. I am grateful to Professor Nicole Jordan, University of Illinois, Chicago, for this reference. Further evidence of Tardieu’s commitment to this scheme occurs in: ‘La question du système fortifié à créer sur notre frontière de Belgique: notice historique du général Gamelin’, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 7, SHAT, p. 7; CSG, ‘Procès-verbal de la séance du 4 juin 1932, Carton 1N 21 CSG, vol. 16, p. 204, SHAT; Gen. M.-G.Gamelin, *Servir*, Paris, Plon, 3 vols 1946–7, II *Le Prologue du drame. 1930-août 1939*, pp. 69, 71; L. Lamoureux, unpublished, *Souvenirs politiques, 1919–1940*, ch. VII, ‘Le cabinet Doumergue, 1934’, section ‘Autres accords—Belgique’, microfilm 31, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Université de Paris X, Nanterre.
- 44 See République Française: Commission de l’Armée de la Chambre des Députés. 15e législature (1932–6): ‘Procès-verbal de la séance du 21 mars 1935: audience de

- M. le général Maurin, ministre de la guerre', pp. 15, 38–40, 15e Lég. Carton 5 bis, dossier VIII, Archives de l'Assemblée Nationale, Palais Bourbon, Paris.
- 45 Figures in left-hand column from CORF estimates paper, 27 September 1938, in EMA/3e Bureau, unnumbered carton labelled 'CORF, 1927–35', SHAT; right-hand column from 'Note sur les crédits d'organisation défensive des frontières, 1930–38', 23 June 1938, Papiers Edouard Daladier, 4 DA 7, dossier 7, sub-dossier c, FNSP. Note that figures in the right-hand column refer only to the Lor`raine, Rhine and Alpine sections of the frontiers; they exclude expenditures on defences in the Nord and the Jura. The document fails to indicate whether the sums quoted are adjusted to allow for the devaluations of the franc of September 1936 and May 1938.
- 46 Pearton, *The Knowledgeable State*, p. 213.
- 47 Griffiths, *Pétain*, pp. 136–7.
- 48 For detailed costings of the 7 September 1936 rearmament plan, by year and by categories of equipment procured, see Gen. L. Colson (chief of French army staff, 1935–9; chief of staff, army of the interior, 1939–40; war minister in the first Pétain government, June–December 1940): 'Coup d'oeil rétrospectif sur les armements français de 1919 à 1939', in Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224 Carton 7, SHAT. Cf. Gamelin, *Servir*, I, *Les armées françaises de 1940*, pp. 220–2; testimony of Robert Jacomet (Secretary-General, French war and national defence ministry, 1936–40), 18 July 1947, to the French Fourth Republic's post-1945 parliamentary commission of inquiry: *Commission d'enquête parlementaire sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950–1, vol. I, pp. 199–200.
- 49 Needham, despatch to War Office, London, 26 October 1929: 'The future organization of the French army', FO 371, 14069, W10437/158/17, PRO.
- 50 See Gentile, 'Le parlement français et la montée du Nazisme', pp. 139–41.
- 51 Campbell to A. Henderson (foreign secretary), 9 September 1930, FO 371, 14902, W9268/38/17, PRO.
- 52 Chéron to minister of Marine, 24 January 1933, Paul-Boncour Papers, AP 20/20, dossier 04, AN.
- 53 Maurin's statement is found in République Française: *Journal Officiel. Chambre—Débats*, 15 March 1935, p. 1045.
- 54 Colonel Y.Z., 'Défense des Frontières', *La France militaire*, 1 February 1929.
- 55 Needham, despatch to War Office, London, 21 January 1929: 'The French army budget for 1929', FO 371, 14069, W613/158/17, PRO.
- 56 Pétain's intervention reported in the conservative newspaper *L'Echo de Paris*, 15 June 1934, quoted in Griffiths, *Pétain*, p. 136.
- 57 P.-M. de La Gorce, *The French Army: a political-military history*, London and New York, George Braziller, 1963, p. 294 (original French edn, *La République et son armée*, Paris, Arthème Fayard, 1963, p. 376.)
- 58 Lee, 'Strategy, arms and the collapse of France', p. 59.
- 59 See R. Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français, 1935–1939*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982, pp. 54–7, 59–61, 79–81, 245–7; J.A. Gunsburg, *Divided and Conquered. The French High Command and the Defeat of the West, 1940*, Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1979, pp. 19–20, 29; J.A. Gunsburg, 'Armée de l'Air versus Luftwaffe, 1940', in *Defence Update International*, 1984, 45, pp. 44–53.
- 60 Lee, 'Strategy, arms and the collapse of France', p. 64.
- 61 See Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français*, pp. 53–4, 57, 61–2.
- 62 Gamelin, *Servir*, II, p. 184

- 63 CORF estimates paper, 27 September 1938, cited above, n 41.
- 64 Sources: Gamelin, 'La question du système fortifié à créer sur notre frontière du Nord: notice historique du général Gamelin', Fonds Gamelin 1K 224, Carton 7, SHAT; Daladier, 'Note sur les crédits d'organisation défensive des frontières, 23 June 1938, Papiers Daladier, 4 DA 7, dossier 7, sub-dossier c, FNSP; Reynaud, 'Dossier sur le montant des crédits mis à la disposition du département de la guerre de 1919 à 1937 inclus', p. 31, Papiers Paul Reynaud, Cote 74 AP, Carton 12, Archives Nationales, Paris; Rowe, *The Great Wall of France*, pp. 52–8.
- 65 On Tardieu's *Plan d'outillage national* of 1930, see Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*, pp. 90–2; also M. Clague, 'Vision and myopia in the new politics of André Tardieu', *French Historical Studies*, 1973, VIII, 1, pp. 105–29; on Popular Front proto-Keynesianism and strategies for demand-management, see J. Colton, 'Politics and economics in the 1930s: the Balance Sheets of the "Blum New Deal"', in Warner, *From the Ancien Régime to the Popular Front*, pp. 181–208. Cf., on Blum's policy of expanding consumer purchasing power and the tension between the Popular Front's domestic agenda and the country's need to rearm, J. Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934–38*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 160–83, 190–201.
- 66 Pearton, *The Knowledgeable State*, p. 214.
- 67 *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 Some awareness of this dimension to the Maginot Line emerges in Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*, pp. 69–71, but is not explored in depth. It is completely ignored in the analysis of the French economy and public finances in the inter-war years in Caron, *An Economic History of Modern France*, pp. 248–58. Interestingly, Rowe has written in *The Great Wall of France*, p. 57, that André Maginot's 'fault was an obsession with the defence of his ancestral province.... His greatness was bounded by his deep-rooted local patriotism'. This hints that Maginot himself—a deputy for the frontier *département* of the Meuse—sensed the 'porkbarrel' gains he might personally derive at election time from construction of the fortifications in his own locality, by workers who were also his constituents.
- 71 Maginot speech reported in *The Times*, London, 18 February 1930.
- 72 Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, p. 218.
- 73 Etat Français: Cour Supreme de Justice de Riom: 'Commission rogatoire: procédure de Me. René Baraveau. Déposition du général Emile Ricard, le 9 décembre 1940': annexe ('Note sur l'importance des travaux d'organisation défensive exécutés par les armées françaises de septembre 1939 à mai 1940'), Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 5, dossier 1, SHAT.
- 74 'La question du système fortifié à créer sur notre frontière de Belgique: notice historique du général Gamelin', Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 7, SHAT.
- 75 A. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, London, Frank Cass, 1977, pp. 161–2.
- 76 A point strongly emphasised in R. Frank, 'Le Front Populaire a-t-il perdu la guerre?', *L'Histoire*, 1983, 58, pp. 58–66.
- 77 See reports to Weygand from senior officers of the French army's engineering inspectorate in CSG Carton 45 ('Défense des Frontières, 1930–39'), folder labelled '1930', SHAT.

- 78 Hughes, *To the Maginot Line*, p. 227.
- 79 The phrase quoted occurs in Gamelin's exposition to the CSG of the unavoidable need to prepare a dash by the French 1st Army into Belgium to try to join the Belgian troops defending the line of the Albert Canal and Meuse: 'Séance d'études du 15 octobre 1936', Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 8, dossier labelled 'Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre: réunions, 1930-38', SHAT.
- 80 Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France*, pp. 97-8.
- 81 Maginot to the Chamber of Deputies, 10 December 1929, quoted in Rowe, *The Great Wall of France*, pp. 49-50.
- 82 Rowe, *The Great Wall of France*, p. 52.
- 83 Guillaumat quoted in Gentile, 'Le parlement français et la montée du Nazisme', p. 127.
- 84 Lee, 'Strategy, arms and the collapse of France', p. 62.
- 85 See Colonel R.Rodolphe, *Combats dans la Ligne Maginot*, Vevey, Switz., Klausfelder, 1975.
- 86 Pearton, *The Knowledgeable State*, p. 214.
- 87 'La Défense des Frontières', *La France militaire*, 3 January 1929.
- 88 See Tournoux, *Défense des Frontières*, pp. 342-4: (Annex II: 'La Ligne Maginot vue par le Haut Commandement allemand'). Cf. how, on the eve of war in 1939, British newsreels vaunted the strength and complexity of the Maginot Line with its 'underground cities of men and machines', its self-supporting 'soldier technicians', subterranean monorails, electrical power and living quarters, in Gaumont British and Movietone newsreels: Gaumont British 511 'The Defence of France: No. 1 The Maginot Line: 21 November 1938', excerpted in *Our Great Ally France, 1938-1940*, P.M.H.Bell and R.White (eds), Inter-University History Film Consortium: Archive Series, no. 4.
- 89 See A.Kemp, *The Maginot Line: Myth and Reality*, New York, Military Heritage Press, 1988, pp. 102-5.
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 106 (where Kemp alludes obliquely to the use of Maginot forts during the 1970s and 1980s to stockpile nuclear warheads, noting coyly that, 'Many of them are still unapproachable as they are used for the storage of destructive military hardware [*sic*].')

A DOUCE AND DEXTRIOUS PERSUASION

French propaganda and Franco-American relations in the
1930s

Robert J. Young

In June 1928 the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, received an encouraging report from his ambassador in Washington. American opinion of France was now much improved, thanks to the current project by Briand and the American Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg to outlaw war as a device for resolving international differences. According to Ambassador Paul Claudel, any morally inspired group in America—and there were many—was firmly behind the idea of making war illegal. And because the idea was good, and France was associated with the idea, then France too, was good and worthy of praise. For the past six months, the ambassador observed, France had been the darling of the press world; and where once her diplomats had been received in the State Department with hostile stares, they now encountered friendly smiles.¹ It was unnecessary to elaborate on the importance of such a development, for America's contribution to the winning of the last war, and its potential for helping avert or win the next, assured it high station among France's diplomatic objectives.

But the mood proved ephemeral. In September 1930 the charge d'affaires, Jules Henry, noted that Americans were still impressed by the conciliatory nature of French foreign policy in Europe; but 1931 was to produce more mixed responses.² The French consul in Chicago thought that the American public mood remained in France's favour; however, Claudel knew that things were getting uglier over the issue of France's war debts to the United States. In August of that year he protested against the recent language of Senator Reed Smoot—language directed at France for defaulting on its debts while gouging Germany of reparations. Indeed, Smoot had called France a Shylock bent on extracting the last pound of flesh from the Weimar Republic.³

For the next two years, 1932 and 1933, France's image suffered indignity after indignity. Much of the problem came from the economic crisis—the collapse of the stock market in October 1929, the onset of the Depression in America, and the landmark refusal of the French parliament to make its scheduled debt payment on 15 December 1932. Well before then, however, there had been clear signs of an *effondrement*. Earlier that spring a prominent American francophile had warned French officials of an escalating anti-French current in American public opinion; and in September a sympathetic Walter Lippmann had taken pains to explain to Jules Henry why American opinion was so 'hostile' towards France.⁴

Certainly by January, the month Hitler came to power, the press director at the Quai d'Orsay believed that American opinion of France was worse than it had been for a long time.⁵

Although the explanations for this collapse are not central to the current study, there is reason to note the enduring fragility of France's relations with the American Republic. The fact is that the enthusiasm inspired by that breath-taking project to outlaw war had been preceded by more disgruntled readings. It was unsurprising, for the Franco-American well had been poisoned by several issues. There was the unresolved fiscal question, at the root of which was France's insistence on linking its war debt payments to the United States with the reparations payments that Germany owed to France. There was the disarmament issue made, from France's perspective, by an America deaf to French security concerns. There was the imperial issue, with Americans offended by France's undiminished colonial ambitions, and Frenchmen suspicious of America's own imperial appetites. But above all else, there was in the United States a fear that underneath its old-world finery Europe remained a snakepit. Europeans would fight again, as soon as they recovered their strength; and France would do her best to embroil America. By fair means or foul.⁶

That is why there was something very familiar, in the acerbic quality which Franco-American relations managed to recapture in 1932–3, once the glow of the Briand-Kellogg pact had been extinguished. More perplexing than the reasons behind this descent, therefore, are the reasons behind the subsequent *ascent* in relations. For the fact is that Franco-American relations slowly improved in the period after 1933, and with them American perceptions of France. It is this recovery which is central to the current study. And at the heart of the latter is the little known subject of French propaganda efforts in the United States.

The subject is large and complex, and thus it is well to demarcate what is intended here, and what is not. The focus is on the French foreign ministry and, more specifically, on the two departments most engaged in public image-making: namely the *Service d'Information et de Presse*, and the *Service des Oeuvres Françaises à l'Étranger*. The former's responsibilities were two-fold. The first was to influence perceptions of France by providing information to the foreign press—either through direct contact with journalists in Paris or through information channelled through the embassies and consulates abroad. The second was to contribute to informed decision-making in Paris by preparing synopses of foreign press coverage of France.⁷ The *Service des Oeuvres* was the brain centre of the ministry's peacetime propaganda between the wars. An agency of the powerful *Direction* for political and commercial affairs, *Oeuvres* assumed primary responsibility for the French state's public image anywhere in the world and in most fields of creative endeavour. It consisted of four sections: one for education (*écoles*), one for literary and artistic activity, one that grouped tourism, sports and cinema, and one which picked up whatever remained (*diverses*).⁸ The documentation for this chapter is primarily that of the *Service des Oeuvres*—either that derived from the foreign

ministry's archival collection at Nantes or from *Oeuvres* material in the Paris-housed 'Amérique' series.

What is only glimpsed here are other facets of the Quai d'Orsay's propaganda activities, principally in relation to other government ministries. The commerce ministry, for instance, assumed primary responsibility for foreign trade, including its promotion in the form of advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Public Works had an interest in promoting train travel in France—travel by tourists whose money also attracted the attention of the commerce and foreign ministries. The war ministry, for its part, had a special stake in France's military reputation abroad, a stake which partly explains its grip on state cinematic enterprises and its determination to involve itself in the handling of sometimes delicate foreign cinema questions. But most prominent of all, at least for the personnel of *Oeuvres*, was the ministry of education and fine arts, an organization which shared intimately in the Quai's efforts to promote the French language and French culture abroad.

Given this range of activity and the attendant volume of documentation, there are strict limits on what can be undertaken here. First, and consistent with the aims of this book, one must address what might be called the 'French way' in propaganda, at least in America. That immediately raises the question of the 'choices' which lay before contemporary decision-makers. Second, by means of a tightly constrained analytical survey, and a selective one, this chapter explores some of the reasons why French imaging in America recovered from the slump in 1932–3, so much so as to produce a wave of public sympathy for the French Republic by 1938–9.⁹

A final word of introduction. I employ the word 'propaganda' without hesitation, simply following the fashion of the French diplomats. However much they may have recoiled from the risks of *propagande* in America, they nonetheless turned their skills and resources to such an enterprise, and spoke openly of their work—at least among themselves. For them, as for subsequent theorists, there were two basic approaches to propaganda.¹⁰ While both seek to be subtle—not always with success—one essentially tries to deceive its targets, the other to inform. *Oeuvres* was inspired by the latter, the more so as its preoccupation was with cultural rather than political propaganda.

Choices were little in evidence early in 1933, when the mood in America had so soured against France. Indeed, there was no choice but to do something, especially given the concerns articulated by French residents in the United States and by sympathetic Americans. Greater effort was required in the related fields of propaganda and counter-propaganda; on that there was sweeping consensus. But the fact was that a set of rigid assumptions precluded any wide-ranging debate about strategies. In fact, French diplomats were convinced that there was little room for manoeuvre, a conviction worthy of impartial hearing.

One option, theoretically, was a more aggressive, combative, manipulative propaganda—strident, if not actually dishonest. In real terms, however, the Quai d'Orsay was convinced that such a strategy would be counter-productive. Recalling German and Austrian propaganda of 1917–18, they satisfied themselves

that its clumsiness and its lies had disgusted American officials and the public alike.¹¹ Indeed, if French diplomats subscribed to a single truth, it was that Americans had developed not only a terrible loathing of propaganda, but an attendant fear that lies would again dupe them into entering a second European bloodbath. The long-serving Ambassador Jules Jusserand had said so repeatedly in the 1920s, a pronouncement made axiom under his successors, Paul Claudel, André Laboulaye, Georges Bonnet and René de Saint-Quentin. All were convinced that the systematic use of exaggeration and distortion would backfire in a society that, as a casualty of war, had learned to distrust foreign 'news'.¹² And that conviction increased the longer the Nazis were in power. By early 1939, what Saint-Quentin called German 'indiscretions' had caused Americans to associate propaganda with subversion and espionage—an association which further complicated the task of simple, and more innocent information provision.¹³

In a sense, Paul Claudel presided over France's fall from grace after the heady days of 1928–9; and perhaps for that reason he was reluctant to read too much into it, or to prescribe radical counter-measures. In one assessment of February 1932, he reminded Paris that there were, after all, perfectly genuine differences of opinion between France and America—over issues like debts and disarmament—and that no cosmetics would change the fact. The worst France could do, 'the worst of all', would be to resort to the propaganda of accusation and denial. If diplomats carried out this campaign, they would forfeit their effectiveness as diplomats. If private agents were recruited, there would be public indignation over clandestine efforts at opinion tampering. Instead, the ambassador advised, France should continue her discreet but effective efforts in the field of cultural propaganda. It was these that would continue to pay large sentimental dividends among the American élite. Summarizing its situation in America, Claudel maintained that France was actually in an enviable position. 'They mistreat us, they insult us, they curse us, but they admire us.'¹⁴

But admiration was less in evidence by the autumn of 1933, six months after Laboulaye succeeded Claudel. Indeed, it did not take Laboulaye long to conclude that France was as much a victim of hostile propaganda as of America's depressed economic circumstances. The work of pro-German and pro-Italian sympathisers, this campaign needed to be countered. But not by bluster or unsubstantiated charges. Like his predecessors, the ambassador argued that success depended on accurate, up-to-date, complete and impartial information. Half-truths were deadly, he warned, particularly in a country where 'the least mistake or an excess of zeal' could compromise all previous efforts to polish France's image in America.¹⁵

A third axiom complemented the belief that Americans were hypersensitive to foreign propaganda and that, accordingly, the only choice for France was a genuine information campaign. It addressed the ideal of having American citizens serve as public voices for France, service volunteered from a genuine sympathy rather than purchased or in any way extorted. As foreign ministry experts expressed it, the objective was to be as 'invisible' as possible, chiefly by convincing prominent Americans to plead France's case in the American press.¹⁶

Likely candidates for such a role included journalists and politicians, people from the world of higher education, business and the arts, and those with particularly strong francophilic credentials—for instance, Americans active in the *Fédération de l'Alliance Française*, the France–America Society, the French Institutes of New York or Washington, the American Society of Teachers of French, the Paris-based *Comité Protestant des Amitiés Françaises* or the *Société des Gens de Lettres*. Provide such people with lots of solid information, translated into recognisable English, and let them do the job. This, at least, was at the top of the Quai d'Orsay's list of desiderata.

Ironically, it was this very ideal which opened some room for debate among French policy-makers, and thus some element of choice. No one disparaged the recruitment of the American *Élite*; francophiles by education and personal experience, articulate and influential, people such as these offered services coveted by all. But there were individuals in Paris and on the ground in America who were mindful of liabilities within this strategy, and who helped broaden French propaganda efforts in the years after 1933. For one thing, concentration on the traditional *élite* had meant a concentration of effort in the eastern United States, at the expense particularly of the mid-west and western states where knowledge of France was rudimentary and francophobia most developed. For another, the emphasis on *élite* culture—the culture of classical literature, art and music—obscured the fact that radios and moving pictures were the new media of popular culture. Finally, and underlying both observations, there was a growing appreciation among French observers that official opinion in Washington—however well informed—was to a considerable extent the hostage of public opinion—however well informed. Ultimately, it was this recognition which helped improve the balance in French propaganda efforts in the United States—that is to say a better balance between *élite*-addressed and mass-addressed efforts at persuasion.

Coincidentally or not, two of the strongest appeals for rethinking came from the consulates in New York and San Francisco. In March 1932 Charles de Fontnouvelle urged his superiors to study the work of the German consulate in New York, a facility which offered a large information resource to the American public, and which nourished select newspapers with data best designed to illustrate Germany's case.¹⁷ In January 1933 his counterpart on the west coast, Méric de Bellefon, responded enthusiastically to queries from Paris about ways in which French propaganda could be made more effective. Give us more money and more personnel, he replied, at least enough to counter Germany's well-funded campaign against France. The minimum, he suggested, was a press bureau in the consulate, an office which could refute German accusations and quickly despatch the data-supported argument to consulates in Seattle, Portland and Denver. More could also be done in the fields of radio—where the Germans and Italians enjoyed a great lead—and of film, especially the kind of documentaries which featured French science and technology, industrial competence and modern touristic facilities. Somehow, he said, we have to show that France has

more than fashion houses, nightclubs and old churches. All this, he acknowledged, would cost money; but in his view there was not a moment to lose. Now was the time for the ministry to draw upon its secret funds and so rescue the country's sagging fortunes in America.¹⁸

Among the most public devices for cultivating American sympathies was admission to—or promotion within—the *Légion d'Honneur*.¹⁹ To be sure, not everyone liked the practice, especially not the francophobic press lord, William Randolph Hearst, who saw the distribution of such awards as vulgar attempts to influence American opinion.²⁰ Others, evidently, saw no danger. Some notable award winners included Presidents Sproul, Scott, and Smith of the University of California, Northwestern University and Louisiana State respectively—all for their advancement of French language facilities on campus; Chauncey McCormick, vice-president of the Chicago Museum of Fine Arts, for his special promotion French culture; Frank Polk, former Under Secretary of State, for years of sustained support to the cause of France; the businessman and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, for providing low-cost space for a *Maison de France* in New York's new Rockefeller Center; the journalist Walter Lippmann, for years of fair and impartial reporting on France, principally in the pages of New York's *Herald Tribune*.²¹ Each of these awards—and there were many others—was normally presented in the course of some public exercise, either by the French ambassador or by one of the French consuls. Typical, too, was attendant press coverage of such events, almost certainly by either the *Courrier des Etats-Unis* or the *Courrier du Pacifique*, and often enough by papers such as the *New York Times*.²²

Equally public, if on a lesser level of *éclat*, were the innumerable occasions when the French government contributed to educational institutions in the United States. The latter ranged from primary schools to colleges and universities, and included both the publicly and privately financed. In New England alone, there were twenty-two French-aided private colleges and boarding schools, comprising over 2,000 students, not to mention the many parochial schools from parishes bearing names like St. Louis or St. Joseph. Here, students received intensive instruction in the language and culture of France, and thus were themselves subjects of special interest to the French foreign ministry.²³ That interest was expressed in many ways: books for the libraries, gifts of porcelain for the display cases, medals and special performance diplomas for academic achievement, scholarships for future study—most of them presented by some official from the embassy or nearest consulate.²⁴ Similarly open was some of the support for New York City's French *Lycée*, an institution that offered a comprehensive French language curriculum taught, mainly, by teachers educated in France. While it may not have been widely known that several salaries were absorbed annually by the French ministry of education—supplemented by smaller amounts from the Quai d'Orsay—certainly members of the American-run French Institute, where the *Lycée* was first located, were fully apprised of the assistance provided by the French government.²⁵

That government's interest was even more acute at the post-secondary level. Working in concert with the *Office National des Universités et Ecoles*—itself a department of the education ministry—the Quai d'Orsay tended this potentially rich field. It assisted in the short-term appointment of French educators to institutions such as the University of California, Smith College and Wheaton College. It co-funded scholarships to mark the centenary of the University of Delaware. It furnished funds for special guest lectures by French academics on countless American university campuses—including that of Jules Romains to the *Maison Française* at Mills College in California and André Siegfried at Columbia.²⁶ It also assisted in the arrangements for Franco-American student exchanges, and thus was party to discussions about how best, and how fully, to prepare France's America-bound young ambassadors—many of whom were judged too ignorant of contemporary issues to be able to hold their own against their carefully trained German counterparts.²⁷

While much of this effort was designed to be as public as possible, some of it was deliberately *sub rosa*. It was fine to award prizes to worthy American students, fine to contribute books to their libraries, but less was said of the direct, if often modest, financial subventions accorded to institutions such as the Assumptionist Colleges in Worcester, Massachusetts or Woonsocket, Rhode Island.²⁸ Indeed, reticence on funding matters was commonplace, a quality which reflected fear of an American backlash—one which the Hearst press would have been overjoyed to incite. Accordingly, for much that was overt, there was as much covert.

This is not to say that the concealed was necessarily all that explosive. It did not require much imagination to suspect a link between the Quai d'Orsay and the *Compagnie générale transatlantique*, or 'The French Line', whose New York office, like that of the consulate, was in the Rockefeller Center's *Maison de France*. Less imagination still, once it were known how frequently the steamship line lowered its fares for distinguished French visitors to North America or for France-bound American students. Nor did it require the especially intuitive to appreciate how effectively ships like the 'Normandie' had been transformed into exhibition palaces for French interior design, or cinema galleries for the latest French films.²⁹ Contrary to the apprehensions of the foreign ministry, it is doubtful whether certain knowledge of its subventions to the company—for the sake of reducing the fares of approved travellers—would have provoked much surprise in the United States; any more than had there been disclosure of the annual subvention awarded to the New York based French Chamber of Commerce—of which the ambassador was honorary president.³⁰

More sensitive, potentially, were the ministry's annual infusions to the two principal French-language newspapers in the United States, the New York published *Courrier des Etats-Unis* and San Francisco's *Courrier du Pacifique*.³¹ The fact that they were published in French clearly constrained their impact on American opinion, and in that sense reduced the gravity of identifying foreign assistance. However, they were newspapers that were read by American citizens as well as by French residents in America, and in that sense they represented a

delicate issue—the more so as some 2,000 colleges and universities subscribed to the New York paper alone.³² For that reason, the *Service d'Information et de Presse* hoped to find another formula for assisting the financially marginal papers—ideally through the advertising budgets of French companies operating in the United States. And the chief incentive for doing so was what one official called the Americans' 'instinctive repugnance for government-funded propaganda'.³³ That said, one can better appreciate the anxiety when one discovers how common was the practice, for subventions were accorded to a number of other sympathetic journals—including Chicago's *Chanteclair* and New York's *The French Say* and *La Semaine a New York*—as well as to particular works like an American-published pamphlet entitled *Why Study French?*³⁴

Sensitivities of a related order applied to French activity in the fields of cinema and radio broadcasting. Both developed rapidly from the mid-1930s, and both involved combinations of high-and low-profile work. In the case of cinema, part of the strategy had a counter-propaganda character—quiet protests to the Hollywood studios or to the Association of Motion Picture Producers and Distributors about forthcoming American films that in some way sullied the image of France. It was true, for example, of 'Beau Geste', which the French regarded as a caricature of the French Foreign Légion, and which was actually banned in France in 1927.³⁵ But there were many lesser incidents, of the sort which saw the government demand a change in title—that of 'Indecent', a film based on *Madame Bovary*, or that of a Fox film which was to be released as 'The Worst Woman of Paris'—or the removal of offending portions of a film—of the sort that did get some changes in the 1939 version of 'Beau Geste'.³⁶

More positively, diplomats drew attention to French-made films—such as 'Marius' and 'La Couturière de Lunéville'—by arranging for special showings in the embassy or consulates, by attending New York and Washington premières of new releases from Paris, and by covering some of the promotional and distribution costs of such films.³⁷ Promising, too, was the fact that between 1934 and 1935 the number of French-made films shown in the United States increased from seven to nineteen—still a far cry from the fifty-nine German films, but an eye-catching increase nonetheless.³⁸ More innovative, and potentially more useful for being at arm's length from the government, in 1938 the New York French Chamber of Commerce created a French Cinema Center for the marketing of commercial films and the distribution of state-supported documentaries. In keeping with such ambitions, by early 1939 the centre had circulated close to 5,000 copies of its film catalogue among a wide assortment of American schools.³⁹

Radio broadcasting was another area which the French government explored in the 1930s, partly under the inspiration of American networks. The Columbia Broadcasting System, for example, ran a series in 1930 in which foreign diplomats had a chance to speak to the American public, a series which Jules Henry used to explain France's position on debts and disarmament. And two years later, the retired ambassador, Jules Jusserand, did much the same thing courtesy of a

transatlantic broadcast from Paris.⁴⁰ But the fact was that French agents saw themselves trailing their competitors. For reasons unfathomed by Ambassador Laboulaye in 1935, there were fewer long-wave retransmissions of French musical programmes in the United States than there were of programmes from other European countries; and the short-wave broadcasts of *Radio Colonial* were compromised by reception problems and inadequate advance notice. As a result, the estimated twenty million Americans with shortwave receivers were largely unaware of France's radio presence—a condition that, Laboulaye pointed out, spoke directly to 'our influence and our propaganda in America'. Four years later the situation had shown modest improvement. There were still complaints about the dated quality of French news services, as well as the around-midnight transmission times, but at least readers of the English-language *La Semaine a New York* could find a schedule for upcoming programmes, and the reception problems had been solved by the new world-service facilities of *Paris-Mondial*.⁴¹

On a different and more renowned plane than French-language newspapers, cinema or broadcasting was the *Alliance Française*, a network which the French government publicly acclaimed and privately funded through the fiscal resources of the *Service des Oeuvres*. Claudel believed that no expenditure was more justified than that awarded to the umbrella organisation—the *Fédération d'Alliance Française aux Etats-Unis et au Canada*—a body which determined the level of support accorded to the more than 200 local chapters across the continent.⁴² It was there, at the local level, that committed American francophiles promoted interest in the French language, knowledge of French culture and understanding of France's position in the world. To that end, they not only operated under the patronage of the ambassador or nearest French consul, and offered such officials opportunities to address sympathetic audiences, but they also welcomed a host of officially sponsored French visitors—academics and writers, musicians and artists, soldiers, physicians, architects, journalists; people prominent enough to attract healthy audiences and positive media attention.

Less public, however, was the funding which brought such goodwill ambassadors before predominantly American audiences, courtesy of the French state.⁴³ That assistance was invoked in several ways, including the funds distributed by the *Fédération* to the host chapters of the *Alliance Française*, and by means of reduced steamship fares offered by the *Compagnie générale transatlantique*. Sometimes funds were made directly available to prospective travellers, as they were to Léon Vallas for a lecture tour sponsored by the *Fédération*, to the US-bound architect Maurice Barret, and to the renowned pianist-teacher Nadia Boulanger.⁴⁴ Sometimes they came, indirectly, through a specific sponsoring organisation, as was the case for Victor Monod, a theologian supported by the *Comité Protestant des Amitiés Françaises à l'Etranger*.⁴⁵ More often the funding came through the intermediary services of a Paris-based body called the *Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques*.⁴⁶

It was not a private organisation. Indeed, its small administrative council was controlled by senior officials from the foreign ministry and from education and

fine arts. Through its *Comité d'action artistique*, the association administered large annual subventions from the fine arts department and from the foreign ministry's *Service des Oeuvres*. Why it did so was explained clearly enough in one report which said that the association had been created by the two ministries to 'facilitate' the work of the fine arts' *Service d'action artistique à l'étranger*, which was intended to mean that the association would have greater 'financial autonomy' and greater 'flexibility' than any government department.⁴⁷ And so it seemed to any casual observer that it was this 'Association', from its offices on the rue Montpensier, not the foreign ministry on the Quai d'Orsay, that was responsible for 'facilitating' in 1933 the travelling exhibition of old French instruments, and the concert appearance in St. Louis of composer Daniel Lazarus; in 1936 the American concert tour of the violinist Mlle Radisse; in 1938, the New York appearance of the Théâtre de Quatre Saisons; or in 1939, the lectures of M. Sterling, a Louvre painting expert.⁴⁸

The same tension between what was public and what preferably private, expressed itself in the final example of French propaganda activity in America. This was what eventually came to be called the French Information Center—but only after a decade of dithering by officials fearful of antagonising the American public. There had been such an office in New York during the days of France's wartime Commissariat; and there had been attempts to revive some of its functions in the early 1920s by the French consul general in New York.⁴⁹ But both had aroused American suspicions, despite assurances that the goal was only to inform Americans, not to mislead them. And for that very reason, because no assurance had sufficed, there had been no strong disposition within the Quai d'Orsay to reopen the issue.

But the onset of the Depression and the attendant worsening of relations, both diplomatically and in the public perception, dictated some kind of response. By the end of 1932 it was clear that France's image in America was badly tarnished, a conclusion which suggested that the current emphasis on gentle and slower acting cultural propaganda needed to be supplemented with something more forceful and immediate—but without bringing down a shower of public wrath. That conclusion, together with that standing apprehension, defined the foreign ministry's American horizons between 1932 and 1936. Once again, the primary goal remained obvious to all. Anti-French feelings were inspired by misunderstanding and ignorance. What was needed was an abundance of accessible, precise, up-to-date information in English, on every facet of French life and culture. It was precisely how this was to be done that generated much discussion and some debate within the foreign ministry.

One option was offered by private public relations companies in the United States, companies contracted to put across the French point of view in a range of American media. Such was the service provided in 1931 by an agency directed by a francophile named Mrs Moon Jones. Mindful of rising anti-French feeling, the *Service d'Information et de Presse* engineered the contract with this American firm, a firm already employed by the advertising department of 'The French Line'. In

brief, the agency was to insert appropriate materials on France among the corpus of articles it regularly supplied to some 2,000 American newspapers and magazines. Thus, by the calculations of foreign ministry officials, positive news of France—including informed retorts to accusations falsely levelled against it—could find their way to media in Alabama and Colorado, as well as to the larger presses of New York and Boston.⁵⁰ A similar mission fell to another female American publicist and ardent francophile by the name of Thérèse Bonney. Founder of her own press agency, and for a time employed by the French Gallery in New York's *Maison de France*, Miss Bonney worked diligently for France throughout the 1930s. American and French-trained in fine arts, she made a particular speciality of photographic journalism, and succeeded in placing much of her France-centred work in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Comoedia*, *Fortune* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁵¹

Nevertheless, despite such well-intentioned efforts, pressure mounted on the *Service d'Information*. Complaints increased about the shortcomings of French propagandist activity in the United States. This time they led to an official if cautious approach to members of the board at the *Institut Français* in New York. Would the institute countenance a French information service within its walls? Reporting on that initiative at the end of June 1933, Ambassador Laboulaye again recalled the risks of clumsy propaganda. He, like William Guthrie, member of the board and long-time president of the *Comité France-Amérique*, believed in the necessity of improving the distribution service of French information in America; but both concluded that the creation of such a service at the institute would be counter-productive. Whatever their unquestioned francophilic credentials, board members were American citizens who were determined to retain the institute's 'purely American character'. To have a publicly accessible collection of French pamphlets, books and brochures was one thing, but to engage any more actively in a dissemination process—particularly through the kind of publishing programme tentatively raised by Laboulaye—would be to compromise the institute and thus any influence it might reasonably have on America's eastern social and political élite.⁵²

With that door closed, and private firms apparently judged insufficient for the task, the Quai d'Orsay finally bowed to the pressure—and the initiative—of its critics.⁵³ The breakthrough came in December 1934, under the inspiration of René de Chambrun, a lawyer practising in New York. It was he who assembled the *Association pour la Constitution aux Etats-Unis d'un Office Français de Renseignements*. In a manner entirely consistent with the appraisals of the foreign ministry, this ostensibly private association proposed to create a New York based bureau which would have neither official connection to the French government nor *nuance politique*. That said, there was no mistaking the blue-ribbon cast which Chambrun had assembled on both sides of the Atlantic, including his father, General de Chambrun, who agreed to serve as treasurer, Marshal Pétain, who was to assume the presidency, and senior officials from state-connected bodies such as the *Banque de France*, 'The French Line', National Railways and the University of

Paris. Prominent, too, were the names of parliamentarians such as Paul Reynaud and Raymond Patenôtre, bankers such as Masson and Rothschild, the automobile manufacturer, Louis Renault, the publisher Bunau-Varilla, and the writers Paul Claudel and André Maurois. The American side was no less star-studded, from the names of Morgan, Rockefeller and Vanderbilt to that of a former Under Secretary of State, Frank L. Polk, and from that of newspaper publisher Eugene Meyer to those of journalists like Ogden Reid of the *New York Herald Tribune* and Louis Wiley of the *New York Times*.⁵⁴

The association was registered in Paris in January 1935, and quickly acquired office space on the Place de la Concorde. From there, and later from an office on the rue de l'Elysée, a small administrative council assumed day-to-day responsibility for the plan to open the New York office in space made available by the Rockefeller Center—with the sole American, Frank Polk, representing the council in America. The targeted opening date was to be a year hence, the beginning of February 1936; and the man designated to be the director was Robert Valeur, a long-time resident of New York and a seasoned promoter of Franco-American relations. Throughout the year-long preparation, there were frequent reminders of the character of the new body. As Secretary-General Alexis Léger reminded the Washington embassy, the French Information Center was a strictly private agency, funded by donations from companies and individuals, and free from 'toute apparence de propagande gouvernementale française'.⁵⁵ Perhaps for that reason, or so the association and government chose to believe, during their first year of operation the centre's nine employees received over 6,000 requests for information about France—including inquiries from magazines such as *Fortune*, the *New Yorker* and *Time*, from newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Courrier des Etats-Unis*, from film societies such as the March of Time, and from organisations such as the Foreign Policy Association and the Council on Foreign Relations.⁵⁶

So ends this extended if incomplete survey of efforts to redress the problem of France's faded image in the United States. What remains is the need to bring to the surface an underlying argument—namely that the choices made by the Quai d'Orsay were not only sensible, but that they had some role to play in the post-1933 recovery.

That there was a recovery seems clear enough. In January 1933 feeling against France was at a postwar high; a year later, while still feeling a 'latent state of special sympathy' on the part of Americans, Ambassador Laboulaye acknowledged that France had 'fallen from the high pedestal on which she had been placed for generations'.⁵⁷ But by the autumn of 1936, despite many American misgivings about the 'socialist' complexion of Léon Blum's Popular Front government, press opinion was judged much more sympathetic to French efforts to defuse the threat posed by Nazi Germany. New York's *Times* and *Herald Tribune* were especially supportive, including one column by Lippmann which struck a particularly useful note. With the sole exception of France, he asserted, where news was not government-censured, all other European news was corrupted at the source.⁵⁸

The year 1937 saw the trend continue. By February, there was growing public support for French rearmament, and before the summer was out it seemed clear that the resolutely francophobic Hearst press was losing readers, partly owing to its vilification of President Roosevelt and partly to its pro-German sentiments. As Georges Bonnet, Laboulaye's successor, saw it, Americans were repelled by dictatorships, and appalled by Nazi treatment of Jews and Christians. Even newspapers like the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *Washington Post*—prominent critics of the Roosevelt administration—were voicing open support for France's point of view.⁵⁹ By late 1938 there was support for French efforts to reach a new accommodation with Germany, as well as for the government's firm response to Italian territorial claims in North Africa. And on the eve of war, late in August 1939, Ambassador Saint-Quentin, reported that the vast majority of press opinion in America had turned against Germany and the Nazi regime's terror tactics.⁶⁰

There is no question, of course, that France owed much to Hitler when it came to the competition for American affection. Having arrived when Franco-American relations were in a state of acute disrepair, his regime was not long in squandering the credit amassed in America by the Weimar Republic—much of it at France's expense.⁶¹ Increasingly menacing territorial demands, together with a well-trumpeted rearmament programme, had revived American concerns about another European war, and with those concerns the attendant nightmare of renewed American involvement. Increasingly repressive domestic policies, against suspected political opponents and Jews, had progressively outraged men and women, who, despite their unshaken isolationism, still identified with democratic practice and the laws of civilised behaviour. Such fundamental abrasions, together with the publicised evidence of Nazi attempts at subversion and propaganda in the United States, slowly helped turn the tide of public sentiment away from Germany and towards the beleaguered French Republic.⁶²

No doubt there were other factors in this reversal in fortunes, including the re-emergence of the old Anglo-French entente, and the patient manoeuvring of a president sympathetic to France and mindful of the risks which isolationism held for the United States.⁶³ But among them, amid the range of forces which worked in France's favour, was that of French propaganda.

It is as impossible to quantify its effectiveness as it is to quantify the negative role of Hitler, the positive role played by Roosevelt or by the recovering American economy. But it is not impossible to demonstrate a sustained French effort, and so to defend the government of the Third Republic against suspicions of indifference or accusations of lassitude. That there was a French propaganda effort in the United States is certainly beyond question, as is the premise upon which virtually all of it was based: namely, that it had to rely on information rather than misinformation. That was the first, and the most fundamental, of the 'choices' made by the foreign ministry. Next was that of continuing the emphasis for which the *Service des Oeuvres* had been mandated, namely to promote good relations by means of cultural esteem. If Americans 'admired' France, to use Claudel's word, it was because they had been exposed to French history, French

ideas, French art, French music, in a word French ‘civilisation’—a word that came into public play more and more often in the summer of 1939 as a way of contrasting France with the barbarism of Hitler and his acolytes.⁶⁴ The emphasis both preceded and outlived the crisis in relations in 1932–3, but it came to be supplemented by some newer approaches—themselves the products of yet another choice.

This, a third, was to broaden the base of the campaign—to extend it beyond the opera-loving élite and the converted francophiles of the *Alliance Française*, beyond the traditional power wielders of the eastern seaboard, and those who could read French. That is what is reflected, from the mid-1930s on, in the growing appreciation that the French point of view had to be expressed in English. This in turn reflected a belief that opinion in an area like the mid-west could gradually be turned from its pro-German orbit. To do so, one had to reach the people on Main Street, in Newark, Chicago and Seattle—in English, with information appropriate to users’ needs and interests, and by means of a responsive delivery system. Such was the theory behind the New York based French Information Center. Finally, the information and the imagery had to be accessible through the two newest media, namely radio and cinema. Such was behind French efforts to catch up to German radio broadcasting by adapting communications technology for American public programming in the late 1930s. Such was the sister motive behind the sustained efforts to erase negative images in the production studios of Hollywood, as well as to vitiate some of the earlier emphasis on ‘art films’ by means of more popular productions.

Like so much of the story of the Third Republic, its experience in propaganda will feed many appetites. What is one to make of a country that produced no one remotely close to Josef Goebbels, Hitler’s master propagandist? By contrast, the men of the French embassy and consulates, the men and women of the *Service des Oeuvres* look cautious and uncertain, not bumbling but also not very dynamic. There is among them more than a hint of the old world, and with it a slow response time to the challenges posed by a sprawling popular democracy and by the latest developments in the mass media. But for all that, for all of the hesitation and the caution, it was the French way in propaganda that ultimately offended Americans the least. It may not be a claim to greatness, but as a case for gentle and dextrous persuasion it is worth consideration.

NOTES

- 1 Claudel to MAE, 25 June 1928, série B, Etats-Unis, vol. 69, pp. 23–9 (hereafter B, E-U, 69, pp. 23–9, etc.).
- 2 Jules Henry to MAE, 17 September 1930, B, E-U, 359, p. 174.
- 3 De Fontnouvelle (Chicago) to MAE, 7 May 1931, B, E-U, 359, pp. 124–5; Claudel to MAE, 20 August, B, E-U, 359, pp. 194–6.
- 4 The American visitor was William D. Guthrie, President of the *Comité France-Amérique*. See the text of his speech in Paris, 21 April 1932, B, E-U, 340, pp. 89–

94. For Lippmann's analysis, see Henry to MAE, 19 September 1932, B, E-U, 349, pp. 111–14.
- 5 Pierre Comert's 'Note sur l'état de l'opinion américain', January 1933, B, E-U, 348, pp. 211–13.
- 6 See for example J.-B. Duroselle, *La France et les Etats-Unis des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Seuil, 1977; M.P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest. America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919–1933*, Chapel Hill NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1979; D. Strauss, *Menace in the West. The Rise of French Anti-Americanism in Modern Times*, Hartford, Greenwood, 1978, pp. 123–35.
- 7 It also monitored and translated key articles from the foreign press and circulated such materials—in the form of weekly *bulletins*—to appropriate departments of the foreign ministry. In this way, by reporting on what was being said abroad, the *Service* at least had the added potential of influencing Paris-made policy—the more so as it was attached administratively to the powerful *Cabinet du Ministre*. See P. Allard, *Le Quai d'Orsay*, Paris, Editions de France, 1938, pp. 57–63, 179–92; M.T. Chabord, 'Les services français de l'information de 1936 à 1947', *Revue d'Histoire de la, 2e Guerre Mondiale*, 1966, 16, pp. 81–7; P.G. Lauren, *Diplomats and Bureaucrats*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1976, pp. 194–205.
- 8 Religious matters, for example, usually fell under the rubric of *Diverses*. See C. Daniélou, *Les Affaires étrangères*, Paris, Figuière, 1927, pp. 62–71; A. Marès, 'Puissance et présence culturelle de la France. L'exemple du Service des oeuvres françaises à l'étranger dans les années trente', *Relations internationales*, 1983, 33, pp. 65–80.
- 9 I have tried to cover as many facets of French propaganda as space would allow. Although none is explored in depth, some have suffered inordinately. Little is offered here about the role of the French theatre in America, of music—either composers or artists—or of the prominence of French art in American galleries and exhibitions. By the same token, nothing is said of those two highly publicised occasions: the Paris Exhibition of 1937 and France's contribution to the New York World Fair of 1939. Finally, while sports did fall under the *Service des Oeuvres* and fashion did not, I have eliminated both for the purposes of this study.
- 10 J.M. Domenach, *La Propagande politique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1969; A.P. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*, London, Methuen, 1983; G.S. Jowett and V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, London, Sage, 1986.
- 11 For two recent works on French wartime efforts, see M. Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1996; and C. Prochasson and A. Rasmussen, *Au nom de la patrie: Les intellectuels et la première guerre mondiale, 1910–1919*, Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1996.
- 12 M. Schudson, *Discovering the News. A Social History of American Newspapers*, New York, Basic Books, 1978, pp. 125–44.
- 13 Saint-Quentin to MAE, 10 March 1939, B, E-U, 347, p. 145.
- 14 Claudel to MAE, 3 February 1932, B, E-U, 348, 12–15; also 26 March, vol. 340, p. 120.
- 15 Laboulaye, 26 November 1933, B, E-U, 342, p. 35; and 26 December 1934, vol. 348, p. 228.
- 16 See the note from the sous-direction d'Amérique, 31 July 1932, B, E-U, 348, p. 152.

- 17 Fontnouvelle to MAE, 21 March 1932, B, E-U, 348, pp. 80–6.
- 18 Meric de Bellefon, 17 January 1933, B, E-U, 341, pp. 16–33.
- 19 Of a lesser but still coveted order were the academic decorations, known as the ‘*palmes académiques*’, of the sort recommended in 1936 for E.C.Mills for his work in the New York based American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. See the *Oeuvres* recommendation to the Société Universelle du Théâtre, 23 June 1936, Service des Oeuvres (SO), 490. Of a more particular character were the awards—from grand prix to bronze—conferred on American architects, painters and sculptors for their contributions to the Paris Exhibition of 1937. See *New York Times*, 16 September 1938, p. 19.
- 20 Claiming that the number of Légion ribbons distributed among American journalists was ‘notorious’, Hearst refused to allow anyone within his press empire to accept such recognition—except in connection with wartime service. See, for example, the telegram from Jules Henry to MAE, 17 September 1930, B, E-U, 358, pp. 259–61, and *San Francisco Examiner*, 8 February 1928, p. 26.
- 21 See Bellefon to MAE, 22 April 1932, B, E-U, 340, p. 99; Weiller (Chicago) to MAE, 26 September 1933, B, E-U, 341, pp. 274–6; Protocole to SO, 29 June 1935, SO, 569; Laboulaye to MAE, 29 June 1933, SO, 478; ‘Note sur M.Walter Lippmann’, apparently February–March 1940, B, E-U, 351, pp. 310–12; Office Français de Renseignements to MAE, 17 January 1938, B, E-U, 348, pp. 300–1.
- 22 For example, see *New York Times* report of 13 January 1937, p. 26, treating the conferral of a commander’s rank in the Légion of Honour upon President Conant of Harvard University, and a promotion from *chevalier* to *officier* of Professors Birkhoff, Coolidge, Munn and Greene. And similarly of 22 August, a report from Philadelphia of awards to the president of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, the president of the *Alliance Française* and the Philadelphia manager of the ‘The French Line’, ii, p. 6.
- 23 See, for example, the letter from the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d’Amérique to the consul general (New York), 2 May 1934, B, E-U, 343, pp. 1–13.
- 24 One slight quantitative measure of French medal-awarding activity is found in Saint-Quentin’s request to MAE of 10 March 1938, SO, 570. In all, he needed that spring 160 medals and 160 certificates for school prize winners in the areas of Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles. For an article and photos covering an award ceremony sponsored by the Washington Association of Teachers of French, see *Washington Post*, 29 April 1938, p. 13.
- 25 See, for example, Henry to MAE, 13 September 1937, B, E-U, 346, pp. 124–9. In a subsequent note Henry suggested an indirect way for the Quai d’Orsay to provide its annual subvention to the *Lycée*, namely via the University of Paris and then through its affiliate, the American Lycée Society. See note of 1 October 1937, B, E-U, 346, p. 142. This was implemented a year later. See Marx (*Oeuvres*) to Saint-Quentin, 8 November 1938, *ibid.*, p. 167.
- 26 Bellefon to MAE, 3 August 1932, B, E-U, 340, pp. 157–9; Pila (*Oeuvres, Section des écoles*) to Ministry of Education, 11 May 1933, B, E-U, 341, p. 155; Bargeton (MAE) to Laboulaye, 25 April 1934, B, E-U, 342, p. 307; Bellefon to MAE, 6 August 1936 [Nantes, p. 53], SO, 570; note from sous-direction d’Amérique, 19 February 1936, SO, 570. For the pre-war origins of these exchanges see H. Blumenthal, *American and French Culture, 1800–1900*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1975, pp. 77–9, and J.Portes, *Une Fascination réticente. Les Etats-*

- Unis dans l'opinion française, 1870–1914*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990, pp. 215–18; S. Skard, *The American Myth and the European Mind*, New York, Perpetua, 1964, pp. 64–6.
- 27 One report of January 1932 compared unfavourably the thirty-two French scholarship holders in America with the well-trained, well-financed sixty-five students from Germany. See report by M. Declos MAE, 20 January 1932, B, E-U, 340, p. 64; Fontnouvelle (New York) to MAE, 20 March 1932, B, E-U, 340, pp. 70–1; Institut des Etudes Américaines (Paris) to MAE, 6 May 1932, B, E-U, 340, p. 113–14.
- 28 Pila (*Oeuvres*) to Claudel, 1 February 1930, B, E-U, 358, p. 13.
- 29 Claudel said that the company had been almost single-handedly responsible for the new wave of interior design and furnishing in the United States. See his despatch to MAE, 19 March 1930, B, E-U, 358, pp. 39–41. See also Fontnouvelle (New York) to MAE, 30 November 1935, SO, 569.
- 30 In June 1935 the travel costs of ten American college students were assumed by 'The French Line' and by *Oeuvres*. But the funds were channelled through an organisation called the 'Société des Amis de l'Université de Paris.' See Bargeton (*Oeuvres*) to Senator André Honnorat, 23 March 1935, B, E-U, 344, p. 127. The annual subventions to the French chamber of commerce are referred to by Claudel, 21 November 1930, B, E-U, 340, pp. 21–4; and the ambassador's honorary status by Henry to MAE, 2 September 1937, B, E-U, 346, p. 108.
- 31 Between 1932 and 1934, for example, the New York weekly received through the Quai d'Orsay's *Service d'Information et de Presse* a monthly subvention of 25,000FF, or approximately \$1,000. By the third quarter of 1935 that assistance had been reduced to 9,000FF, all of it, it seems, destined to support the Paris office of the paper. See Report of 19 November 1935, B, E-U, 350, pp. 247–52. In June 1937 Ambassador Bonnet referred to the \$24,000 annual subvention for the paper. See his report to MAE, B, E-U, 351, pp. 134–6. Owing to enduring financial difficulties, the paper folded early in 1938.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 250. The *Courrier du Pacifique* offered coverage of news from California, Washington and Nevada, and was judged the 'principal' tie between France and francophones in the west, a tie whose disappearance threatened a 'real catastrophe'. See Bellefon to MAE, 2 December 1932, B, E-U, 340, p. 260.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 252.
- 34 See 'Note pour le Cabinet du Ministre', 9 February 1933, B, E-U, 349, p. 198; Marx (*Oeuvres*) to Saint-Quentin, 4 November 1938, SO, 570. The first consisted of articles translated from the French press. *La Semaine* was a news sheet covering French-related activity in New York: concerts, lectures, films, radio programmes. See Henry to MAE, 8 December 1937, B, E-U, 346, pp. 168–73; and Saint-Quentin to MAE, 25 November 1938, B, E-U, 347, pp. 25–8. For information on the pamphlet of 1936, see Jacques Kayser's report, 11 February 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 98–9.
- 35 Claudel to MAE, 11 October 1927, B, E-U, 28, p. 9. The French response to a new version of the film released by Paramount in 1939 was no better, finding in it—despite efforts to warn the producers in advance—a determined attempt to depict the Légion in the worst light. See Saint-Quentin to MAE, 2 August 1939, B, E-U, 351, pp. 268–70.

- 36 Premier's office to Claudel, 8 July 1932, B, E-U, 340, p. 152; Laboulaye to MAE, 3 October 1933, B, E-U, 342, p. 29; Saint-Quentin to MAE, 10 August 1939, B, E-U, 351, p. 273.
- 37 See, for example, Bellefon (San Francisco) to Laboulaye, 19 October 1933, B, E-U, 342, pp. 22–4. As an example of the positive impressions left by some French films, see the enthusiastic review of *Carnet de Bal* at New York's Belmont theater—a film which was voted at the Vienna Film Exposition, the 'finest motion picture produced throughout the world in 1937'. *New York Times*, 27 March 1938, x, p. 5. Reflecting the success of the movie was a special showing in Washington attended by Ambassador Saint-Quentin. See *Washington Post*, 14 October 1938, p. 21.
- 38 See Fontnouvelle's report to MAE, 7 May 1936, B, E-U, 345, pp. 138–40.
- 39 Most expressly tourist films were handled by the French Railroad Office in the Rockefeller Center. For this and further information on the Cinema Center, see Jacques Kayser's report on propaganda, 11 February 1939, B, E-U, 347, pp. 93–5. See also the very positive assessment of the French film industry in the *Washington Post*, 15 January 1939, vi, p. 4.
- 40 Claudel to MAE, 6 March 1930, B, E-U, 358, pp. 27–32; and 26 April 1932, vol. 340, p. 108. One might note that Claudel, by approaching the managing director of the *New York Times*, was successful in seeing that the full text of Jusserand's speech was reproduced in that paper at the beginning of May.
- 41 Laboulaye to MAE, 29 January 1935, B, E-U, 343, pp. 317–22; and 5 March 1935, B, E-U, 344, pp. 146–9; Jacques Kayser's report on propaganda, 11 February 1939, B, E-U, 347, p. 90; also Brière (consul, Boston) to MAE, 11 September 1939, B, E-U, 347, p. 215. For coverage by *La Semaine*, see Saint-Quentin to MAE, 25 November 1938, B, E-U, 347, pp. 25–8. Lest the impression be left, again, that the French were so backward in communications technology, one should see the report on their role in the vanguard of television technology in the *New York Times*, 21 March 1937, xi, p. 10; also of 27 February 1938, x, p. 10, where French short-wave programmes are ranked 'among the best.'
- 42 See Claudel to MAE, 7 May 1928, B, E-U, 28, p. 108; Laboulaye to MAE, 2 August 1933, B, E-U, 341, pp. 230–7. A summary history of the *Fédération* is contained in a press extract from the *Courrier du Pacifique*, located in a file of 4 February 1934, B, E-U, 343, pp. 165–9. See also 'Le Radio' in Daniélou, *Les Affaires étrangères*, pp. 27–34.
- 43 For its part, the *Alliance Française* was very mindful of the need to avoid appearing to be 'une organisation de *propagande*. Il faut éviter...de parler de subvention, d'appui politique, etc.' See remarks of Pierre Bédard in a report by Jacques de Lacretelle, 4 October 1939, SO, 571.
- 44 See the 'Arrête' of 4 October 1935, SO, 569; and 1 February 1938, SO, 570; 12 October 1938, SO, 571.
- 45 See Marx (*Oeuvres, Section oeuvres diverses*), 15 March 1934, B, E-U, 342, p. 245.
- 46 With reference to the preceding discussion of cinematic and radio activity, it is worth noting that the executive committee of the association comprised a number of subcommittees, including ones for the promotion of French cinematography and radiodiffusion, as well as music, plastic arts and one entitled 'Books, Lectures and Criticism'. See Dossier 'Comité D'Action Artistique', SO, 485.
- 47 See undated (apparently 1936) 'Notice sur l'Association Française...', SO, 485. One suspects that not only did such an arrangement provide some degree of 'arm's-

- length' protection against the suspicions of foreign governments, it also insulated the government against the protests of rejected applicants—of whom there were many. Indeed, the association's role was similar to that of many modern granting agencies.
- 48 See Association Française..., Conseil d'Administration, 23 December 1932, 13 November 1936, 8 December 1938, SO, 571; 28 December 1938, SO, 485; 31 October 1933, SO, 576; 20 December 1937, SO, 577.
 - 49 See William R. Keylor, "'How they advertised France'": the French propaganda campaign in the United States during the breakup of the Franco-American entente, 1918–1923', *Diplomatic History*, 1993, 17, pp. 351–73.
 - 50 See 'Note pour le Cabinet', of 25 October 1930, B, E-U, 348, pp. 1–6; and correspondence of November 1930, within a bordereau dated December 1938, B, E-U, 347, pp. 30–41. For evidence of approaches made to the French government by other public relations firms, see the letter of Austin C. Lescarboursa to Premier André Tardieu, 2 March 1932, B, E-U, 348, pp. 27–28.
 - 51 See Comert to consul general (New York), 10 May 1933, B, E-U, 341, p. 153; and M. Pila's note to the *Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques*, 13 July 1933, SO, 569; Bonney to 'The French Line', 18 May 1935, SO, 569; and her letters of 3, 12, February, 11 May, 1936, 17 October 1938, SO, 573.
 - 52 Laboulaye to MAE, 30 June 1933, B, E-U, 341, pp. 200–10.
 - 53 As early as January 1933 Pierre Comert, head of the Quai's *Service d'Information et de Presse*, expressed doubts about the cost effectiveness of relying on private publicity agents. His preference was to strengthen the press service within the embassy and each consulate, partly by personnel increases and partly by increasing the co-operative ties between the diplomats and the New York office of the government-connected Agence Havas. See his note 'sur l'état de l'opinion américain', B, E-U, 348, pp. 208–20.
 - 54 See Comert to Laboulaye, 24 December 1934, B, E-U, 348, p. 225; Laboulaye to MAE, 26 December, *ibid.*, pp. 226–7; 'Note pour M. Rochat', 28 December, *ibid.*, pp. 230–2; André Maurois, *Memoirs, 1885-1967*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, p. 195.
 - 55 Léger to Washington, 9 January 1936, B, E-U, 348, pp. 262. See also *New York Times*, 9 March 1938, p. 14. Indicative of the inter-connectedness of French agencies in America is the fact that the *Compagnie général transatlantique* assumed the publishing costs of two pamphlets prepared by the French Information Center: *Enjoy Your Studies—Summer Courses in France*, and *Schools in France*. See report by Jacques Kayser, 11 February 1939, B, E-U, 347, p. 100.
 - 56 In the first four months of operation the centre received more than 1,200 inquiries, and by February 1937, over 6,000. See Center to MAE, 26 June 1936, B, E-U, 348, pp. 279–82; and Center to MAE, 27 January 1937, B, E-U, 348, p. 296. See also the articles on the centre by the *New York Times*, 19 January 1937, xi, p. 10; 24 February 1939, vi, 7.
 - 57 Comert's 'note', January 1933, B, E-U, 341, p. 208; Laboulaye to MAE, 12 February 1934, B, E-U, 342, p. 176.
 - 58 Laboulaye to MAE, 15 September 1936, B, E-U, 351, p. 82. See also Henry's report of 18 August, and Laboulaye's of 18 and 19 September *ibid.*, pp 72–3 85–8, 89–91.
 - 59 Laboulaye to MAE, 5 February 1937, B, E-U, 351, pp. 106–8; Bonnet to MAE, 15 June 1937, B, E-U, 346, p. 45; Henry to MAE, 24 June 1937, and also 9

- August 1938, B, E-U, 351, pp. 140–2, 224. See also G.J.White, *FDR and the Press*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- 60 Saint-Quentin, 6 December 1938, B, E-U, 351, pp. 236–8; and 31 August 1939, *ibid.*, pp. 274–5. In August 1937, 30 per cent of the Americans polled believed Germany was the country most likely to start another war; by January 1939, 62 per cent believed Germany would be solely responsible for starting a new war; and in September, 82 per cent held Germany responsible for the war. See G.H.Gallup, *The Gallup Poll. Public Opinion, 1935–1971*, vol. 1 (1935–48), New York, Random House, 1972 pp. 65, 137, 179.
- 61 For praise of the subtlety and effectiveness of Weimar propaganda, with its emphasis on cultural propaganda, see Comité France-Amérique to MAE, 11 August 1932, B, E-U, 348, pp. 156–60.
- 62 For example, in November 1933 the *Chicago Tribune*, a paper that had been generally more sympathetic to the Weimar Republic than to the French Republic, ran two sensational articles on Nazi propaganda strategy in the United States, articles which discussed the tactics of bribery and disguised provenance. Simultaneously, the paper reported German disappointment in being unable to find evidence of French propaganda centres in America. See clippings in bordereau of 5 December 1933, MAE, B, E-U, 339, pp. 8–9. See also S.A.Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States, 1924–1941*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974; Anonymous, *The German Reich and Americans of German Origin*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1938; D.E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief. The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, New York, Free Press, 1986, ch. 6; D.A.Saunders, ‘The Dies Committee: first phase’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1939, 3, pp. 223–38.
- 63 See, for instance, the closing ‘confidentiel’ of Ambassador’s Laboulaye’s report on the president’s re-election in November 1936. ‘We can only rejoice at this success, given the President’s private sympathies for France’, 4 November 1936, DDF, 2e série, iii, no. 437, p. 674. Also H.Blumenthal, *Illusion and Reality in Franco-American Diplomacy, 1914–1945*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1986, pp. 179–80; M.Rossi, *Roosevelt und the French*, Westport, Praeger, 1993, pp. xix, 14–15; R.Dallek, *Franklin D.Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp.174–80; A.Krock, *Memoirs. Sixty Years on the Firing Line*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1968, p. 191. For a more qualified view of Roosevelt’s feelings for France, see F.W.Marks, *Wind Over Sand. The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1988, pp. 124–6.
- 64 See my ‘In the eye of the beholder: the cultural representation of France and Germany by *The New York Times*, 1939–1940’, *Historical Reflections*, 1996, 22, 1, winter, pp. 189–210.

DALADIER, BONNET AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS DURING THE MUNICH CRISIS, 1938

Yvon Lacaze

The *Anschluss* of March 1938, when Austria was absorbed into the German Reich, marked the beginning of a long, anguished crisis, which neared its culmination on the afternoon of 28 September when Hitler invited Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier and Benito Mussolini to Munich to resolve his dispute with Czechoslovakia over the German minority that had been integrated in 1918 into the new Czech state. France was directly interested in the dispute on account of its treaties with Czechoslovakia: the Treaty of Friendship of 25 January 1924 and the Treaty of Alliance signed on 16 October 1925 within the framework of Locarno. Although the events of this period are well known, it is only recently that serious study has been made of the decision-making process that led French leaders to sign the Munich agreements¹—a lacuna the author has sought to remedy, using in particular the contributions of Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and Marlis Steinart to the analysis of international relations.

FROM THE IRRUPTION OF THE CZECH PROBLEM TO THE MAY CRISIS

The Czech problem was raised by Hitler on 5 November 1937, during a secret conference of senior military and political officials when he signalled his intention to set aside the conquest of eastern Europe for the longer term, and in the meantime to seize Austria and Czechoslovakia. Germany's threats to the region posed a challenge to Anglo-French solidarity. At the very hour of *Anschluss*, on 12 March 1938, the Quai d'Orsay called on London to accept its responsibilities and, underlining the difference between the Austrian situation and that of its ally Czechoslovakia, to issue a joint warning to Berlin. Britain was not prepared to tie itself closely to the new government of Léon Blum, which was formed on 13 March and which seemed unlikely to survive long or to be able to provide Prague with effective assistance. France was reminded that it could count on Britain's support only in the case of unprovoked German aggression, although, as acknowledged in a note from the British embassy on 23 March and by Chamberlain in a speech of 24 March, Britain did not exclude the possibility of a situation where 'the inexorable pressure of facts' became 'more powerful than formal engagements'. The pessimistic conclusions of the French Permanent

Committee of National Defence, convened on 15 March to examine means of assisting Czechoslovakia following the oral assurance given by Blum and his foreign minister, Joseph Paul-Boncour, to the Czech minister in Paris, Stefan Osusky, that France would respect its treaty obligations, perhaps justify British hesitations. After Blum's resignation and his replacement by Edouard Daladier on 10 April, the British government discouraged the reappointment of Paul-Boncour to the Quai d'Orsay, and Georges Bonnet was appointed instead.

With the situation rapidly deteriorating in Czechoslovakia, British and French leaders gathered in London on 28 to 29 April. Daladier insisted upon a policy of firmness whereas Chamberlain remained unconvinced of Hitler's aggressive intentions.² But behind their apparent confidence, Daladier and Bonnet were deeply uneasy, as they revealed in conversations with the American ambassador in Paris, William Bullitt.³ During the May crisis, when British statesmen took the leading role in restraining Germany, they did not hesitate to warn France, on the night of 22 to 23 May, against taking any initiative without prior consultation that might expose Britain to German attack. Bonnet hastened to assure the British ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, that France could signal to the Czechs that their decision to mobilise in April without warning Paris or London released France from its obligations. While the May crisis—which lasted only a few days—brought Britain and France closer together, albeit in subordinating France to London's desiderata, it also introduced an element of suspicion between the French and the Czechs, owing to the fact that the intelligence on German troop concentrations, which triggered the Czech mobilisation, proved inaccurate or grossly exaggerated. Some observers, including the Havas representative in Prague, suspected that the whole crisis had been engineered by Benes for domestic political purposes. Meanwhile, it provoked the Führer into announcing on 30 May his 'irrevocable decision to crush Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future'.

The dangerous summer—French warnings to the Czech leaders

In the aftermath of the May crisis, abundant evidence appeared of a hardening of the Reich's stance towards Czechoslovakia: in the language of Hess's speech at Stettin on 12 June; in the sharp exchanges between André François-Poncet, the French ambassador in Berlin, and Ribbentrop on 23 June, and between Goering's aide-de-camp and the French assistant air attaché in Berlin, Captain Stehlin; and in the massive preparations for war as reported by François-Poncet and the military and air attaches in Berlin. Nevertheless, speaking publicly on 12 July, Daladier attempted to lower the temperature by paying homage to the Reich's 'peaceful intentions'. Britain meanwhile pressured France to 'reason' with its Czech allies, and sought to persuade the Quai d'Orsay to accept certain proposals formulated by the Sudeten leader, Conrad Henlein, who, during a recent voyage to London, had cleverly avoided raising the 'eight points' of his inflammatory

Carlsbad speech of 24 April and instead appealed for democratic methods to modify Prague's policy.

France yielded. On 9 June Osusky was warned of the danger Prague ran in 'discouraging' Franco-British solidarity and of the need for 'effective and practical action' in favour of Czechoslovakia's German-speaking minority. French officials displayed increasing irritation towards the Czechs, who were now considered 'disloyal'. Emissaries were sent to Prague to spell out the facts to Benes; the journalist Jules Sauerwein, for example, warned Benes that 'victory is not a state that endures forever'. French impatience was expressed in two brutal warnings: on 17 July in a note submitted by Victor de Lacroix, French minister at Prague, and on 20 July during a meeting between Bonnet and Osusky. France, the Czechs were told, could not come to their aid unless Britain was prepared to do so as well, and certainly not now 'while...our diplomatic isolation is almost complete'.

This was unquestionably a turning point, and it coincided with the presence of Chamberlain and his foreign secretary, Lord Halifax, in Paris on the occasion of the official visit of George V to France. British leaders informed their French colleagues of their intention to send the Runciman mission to Prague. Benes, having rejected both a plebiscite and arbitration, faced a painful dilemma and was left to wonder if France would now regard Czechoslovakia as a 'burden'. What would it do if no understanding was reached between Czechs and Sudetens? On 23 July, Osusky confronted Bonnet, firing questions at him on France's attitude in the event that Prague rejected Runciman's proposals as incompatible with Czech independence. Despite Bonnet's efforts to reassure him, Osusky bitterly complained that France had placed the direction of its foreign policy in British hands.

From the aftermath of the Runciman mission to Hitler's speech on 12 September

Although the Reich stepped up its preparations for war in August, France and Britain came no closer to co-ordinating their reactions. After General Vuillemin's disturbing report of German air strength following his visit to Germany on 16 to 21 August, and a detailed report from François-Poncet on 18 August which particularly impressed Bonnet,⁴ the Quai d'Orsay again urged the Foreign Office to issue a warning to Berlin. Sir John Simon, the chancellor of the exchequer, in a speech on 27 August, however merely referred to Chamberlain's speech of 24 March. At the end of August Britain dismissed a plan prepared by Benes as 'vague and woolly', and invoked this 'setback' as grounds for refusing a show of firmness. This led Bonnet once more to play the British card by supporting British arbitration and requesting Lacroix to speak firmly to leaders in Prague.

In the first days of September Bonnet put on a show of firmness along with a desire for conciliation in an interview with Count Welczeck, the German ambassador.⁵ French leaders were nevertheless disconcerted by Britain's attitude.

Halifax, speaking to the French ambassador, Charles Corbin, on 5 September, expressed doubts about Benes' good faith and volunteered that an eventual approach should be made to Berlin 'in private' in order to forestall 'a needless fit of temper' by Hitler. Despite the Moravska-Ostrava incident that day, Halifax on 7 September remained ambiguous about Britain's commitment to France, while the same morning *The Times* recommended that Czechoslovakia should be made 'a homogeneous state, by accepting the secession of the [German-speaking] population which deserves to be regarded as foreign'. On 8 September, as the annual Nazi party rally began at Nuremberg, Daladier maintained a firm stance in talks with Phipps, asserting that in the event of war France would march as a single man; although in a separate meeting with Bullitt he seemed somewhat less assured. Britain too hardened its position. On 11 September Britain issued a warning to the *Reich* against the illusion that it could 'embark upon a brief and victorious campaign against Czechoslovakia, without running the risk of France intervening, then Britain'.

The stiffening of Britain's position contrasted with the despondency, indeed panic, reigning at the Quai d'Orsay, a situation brought on by various developments including Roosevelt's refusal to authorise a firm speech by Bullitt on 4 September, Bonnet's unproductive contacts in Geneva with his Soviet counter-part, Litvinov, and the picture drawn by Colonel Lindbergh, on his way through France, of the superiority of the German air force.⁶ Bonnet, acting on his own, submitted a questionnaire to Phipps on Britain's intentions in the event that France mobilised. Bonnet was somewhat reassured by Hitler's closing speech at the Nuremberg rally on the evening of 12 September, in which he frenziedly denounced 'the oppression' of the Sudetens but did refer to a plebiscite and recalled the Reich's sacrifices for peace, in particular its renunciation of Alsace-Lorraine. However, he was disquieted by the British warning of 11 September and attempted to minimise its importance to the press. On 13 September he expressed his surprise to Phipps that 'Britain willingly accepted the idea of a war over Czechoslovakia', and reiterated the proposal for a four-power conference formulated by Alexis Léger, the Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay. Phipps, taken aback, met Daladier who reaffirmed France's commitments though without enthusiasm; the British ambassador feared that 'the French were only bluffing'. Events rushed on. Instead of the French proposal for a Franco-British-German-Czech meeting, Chamberlain preferred a bilateral meeting with the Führer, which soon took place at Berchtesgaden. The British had discerned a 'wavering' in the French position, and this 'wavering', this panic, could only reinforce Chamberlain in his intention to deal man-to-man with Hitler, while ignoring France which appeared to him less and less reliable.

THE FRANCO-BRITISH ULTIMATUM TO PRAGUE, 19 SEPTEMBER

Benes, keen to forestall proposals for a plebiscite which could play into French and British hands⁷ and whose application could mortally damage his country, declared a state of siege following the troubles provoked in the Sudetenland by Hitler's speech of 12 September, and envisaged a voluntary cession of territories. Some allusions to Benes' solution reached the British minister in Prague, Basil Newton, and Lacroix, in advance of a secret mission by the Czech minister Necas to Léon Blum and leaders of the British Labour party. Necas' proposals were discussed in London between British and French statesmen.

At a further meeting in London, on 18 September, differences again arose between Chamberlain, who since his return from Berchtesgaden favoured recognising the right of German-speaking Czechs to self-determination, and Daladier, who opposed a plebiscite and reaffirmed his readiness to fulfil his 'clear and inevitable' obligations to Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless it was Daladier who suggested that Prague should be persuaded to yield up a part of Sudetenland in return for a guarantee of Czech independence and the possibility for Czechoslovakia to reconstruct its system of fortified defences. The French delegation thus sought to trade off the neutralisation of Czechoslovakia in return for a British guarantee. From the early hours of 19 September a virtual ultimatum was addressed to Prague to accept a voluntary transfer of all territories containing over 50 per cent German speakers, under the direction of an international commission (with the possibility of the adjustment of frontiers); with a general guarantee of Czechoslovakia to replace the treaties currently in force. At a Cabinet meeting that day in Paris a confrontation took place between those such as Bonnet, who looked forward to France regaining its freedom if Czechoslovakia rejected the ultimatum, and Campinchi, Reynaud and above all Mandel, who believed themselves to be committed irrevocably to Prague and threatened to resign. They were left to await Czech acceptance.

On 20 September at 9:45 pm Lacroix transmitted word from Hodza, who had Benes' agreement that if Lacroix were to announce that 'France, because of its commitments to Britain, would not march', he would take note and the Cabinet would give way. It was a curious request for 'cover' and was followed by indignant denials, but there is no doubt that it occurred or that it enabled Bonnet to outflank ministers opposed to his policy. On the pretext that time was too short, no meeting of the Cabinet was convened, and after deliberations by a more restricted group comprising Daladier, Léger, Bonnet and his chef de cabinet, Jules Henry, a new warning was sent to Benes. On 21 September at 5 pm, when further attempts to evade French pressure proved unavailing, Benes yielded.

Benes' procrastination was largely due to hopes nourished in Prague that the Daladier government might give way to one better disposed towards Czechoslovakia. Mandel had telephoned to Benes advising him to remain firm. Churchill visited Paris, where he spoke with Reynaud, Mandel, Campinchi,

Champetier de Ribes, all advocates of firmness. Herriot and Jeanneney, presidents of the Chamber and the Senate respectively, were urged to offer a new lead. A meeting of left-wing deputies on 21 September was encouraged to believe that Bonnet would be required to resign, but its resolutions were not followed up.⁸

The crisis accelerated, with the formation in Prague on 22 September of a new Cabinet headed by General Sirovy; the submission and subsequent withdrawal of resignations from Campinchi, Mandel and Reynaud; Daladier's reassurance to a Radical-Socialist delegation the following day of his intention to stand fast; and orders for a general mobilisation by Prague and a partial mobilisation by Paris. French opinion stiffened when it learned of the contents of Hitler's memorandum of 23 September to Chamberlain. The *Deuxième Bureau*, which obtained the text, set out the position in stark terms. Whereas the Anglo-French plan of the 19th had anticipated a transfer of territories on lines drawn up by an international commission, avoiding a plebiscite but guaranteeing the new frontiers, the German document envisaged the immediate transfer of a 'red' zone, as set out on an appended map, and plebiscites in an adjacent 'green' zone, but made no mention of an international guarantee. The Cabinet on the afternoon of 25 September rejected the German memorandum. Although Daladier was prepared to make some concessions, he was not prepared to see the 'green' zone abandoned.

When Daladier and Bonnet again went to London on 25 September, the classic scenario recurred. Chamberlain reaffirmed his conviction of Hitler's moderation, while Daladier declared Hitler's claims to be unacceptable and called for agreement to hold to the plan of the 19th and for each one to 'do his duty', at the same time presenting the correlation of forces in a favourable light to his sceptical hosts. He suggested, however, an immediate occupation of the Czech districts whose majority population was clearly German. After a private meeting, Daladier and Chamberlain agreed that Sir Horace Wilson should be sent to Berlin to warn of Britain's possible involvement in the event of war. Gamelin, called to London on the 26th, also presented an optimistic picture of the military situation, albeit stressing that British forces should be sent to France within a limited period of time. Within the French delegation Daladier had exercised the dominant role, whereas in contrast to earlier times Bonnet remained virtually silent from start to finish. Their differences in outlook became evident after their return to Paris, in conversations between Daladier and Bullitt, and Bonnet and Phipps, when Bonnet again questioned the British ambassador carefully about British military and economic policy in the event of conflict.

THE ROAD TO MUNICH

On the evening of 26 September, Hitler's speech at the *Sportpalast* comprised the usual formula: threats combined with protestations of peaceful intentions towards France. He 'excelled at acting the innocent', pretending that his memorandum on the Sudetenland scarcely differed from the Franco-British plan. At the same hour, the Foreign Office solemnly announced that if, in spite of Chamberlain's efforts,

the Reich attacked Prague, France would intervene and 'Britain and Russia would certainly be at its side'. This declaration—dragged out of Halifax by Churchill but disavowed by Chamberlain, deeply dismayed Bonnet who did everything he could to halt its distribution and minimise its effect.⁹

The rift between Daladier and Bonnet, already evident at the time of the London meeting, increased when the Cabinet met on the morning of 27 September. Daladier, supported by Campinchi and Reynaud, challenged the pessimistic view painted by Bonnet and envisaged the call for a general mobilisation. For a moment, Bonnet's resignation appeared inevitable. However, he soon re-established his influence, insofar as the visit to the Quai d'Orsay of a delegation of the parliamentary opposition in support of the Godesberg memorandum and the Foreign Office communication appear to have been his doing or were at least encouraged by him.¹⁰

On both sides of the Channel plans were drawn up on the assumption that Czech territories would be occupied from 1 October. Britain now regained the initiative. While refusing to make the least recommendation either to Benes or to Bonnet—Hitler had threatened to begin action on 28 September at 14:00 hours—it once again requested France not to rush into supporting Prague without prior consultation (22:10 hours). This was a godsend for Bonnet who, judging the British timetable for a solution to be inadequate, had telephoned François-Poncet in the early hours of the 28th to propose the occupation of a larger territory from 1 October, 'thus assuring the German government that it could claim to have won a victory'. In the meantime Roosevelt issued an appeal for an international conference. Bonnet—advised by an Italophile group including Frossard, Monzie and Piétri¹¹—urged Corbin to persuade Halifax to solicit Mussolini's support for his scheme or a more modest one designed to keep the peace: a four-power conference. This soon became a proposal for an Anglo-German conference with Franco-Italian participation, which Chamberlain proposed to Hitler and the latter accepted.

The events of 28 September, including the conversation between François-Poncet and Hitler and the invitation to come to Munich, are too well known to require retelling here. As for Benes, he was harassed by Lacroix to accept the British programme, but held doggedly to the Franco-British plan of 19 September and demanded guarantees.

THE MUNICH CONFERENCE

With the invitation issued to Munich, it was Bonnet's approach which apparently prevailed over the firmer one of the premier. Although Daladier affirmed on the evening of the 27th that nothing was lost, and did not rule out the eventuality of war in a speech drafted the same night, in the end he did not deliver it.¹² On the morning of the 28th, he rejected the proposal made by a new delegation of the parliamentary opposition led by Louis Marin, who insisted upon parliament being consulted before any mobilisation order was issued. Now, however, the

responsibility again fell on Daladier to lead the negotiations at Munich, for Bonnet, who preferred to be able to say that his ideas were betrayed if things turned out badly, kept out of the way and only supplied his instructions to Léger, who was to accompany Daladier, virtually at the moment of their departure.¹³

How did Daladier act once inside the walls of the *Führerhaus*? At the start of the meeting, he lost his temper and declared that if the Führer wished to destroy Czechoslovakia as an independent state, he would have nothing to do with this 'crime'. Nonetheless he accepted as a basis of discussion the 'Mussolini proposal', which in fact had been concocted by the Germans. He did not insist that Czechs should be evacuated from transferred lands only after new Czech fortifications were erected, and he agreed that Czechs should not be represented at the conference if their presence would create difficulties. He recalled that he had already approved the transfer of territory without consulting Prague and despite the existence of the Franco-Czech alliance. Nor did he agree that the granting of a guarantee should automatically follow the Czechs' approval of the settlement. The only points on which the French delegation remained faithful were the maintenance of the linguistic pockets, to be occupied by international forces, and the principle that the new frontiers should take account of geography, economics and politics. The delegation also advocated an exchange of territories in order to preserve the Czech Maginot Line and maintain the coherence of the country. According to Ciano, Daladier defended the Czechs 'without great conviction'. He condemned Benes' 'egotism' and spoke of his opponents in France as 'warmongers'. His numerous maladroit proposals attest to the anguish he suffered from what he felt obliged to do. It was left to Léger to undertake the actual defence of Czech interests.

The Munich negotiations demanded that Britain and France co-ordinate their efforts in the face of Hitler's demands. Daladier later complained that just before setting off for Munich he tried to establish liaison with Chamberlain, but fell into a 'trap'. He claimed, again afterwards, that he 'defended the Czechs as best he could', but lacked Chamberlain's support, who was interested only in the financial aspect of the settlement. Chamberlain presents a completely different picture in letters to his sisters, in which he refers to the 'very passive attitude' of the French delegation; he suggests he gave up collaborating with Daladier because he was 'so timorous, so unsure of himself'.¹⁴ While contradictory, this evidence has the merit nonetheless of revealing the gulf of incomprehension which, at the height of the crisis, separated the French and the British.

The Munich agreement called for a staged evacuation between 1 and 10 October, followed by a staged occupation of 'predominantly German' territories, with an international commission responsible for applying the evacuation conditions. The commission would determine the regions submitted to plebiscite, which would then be occupied by international forces. It would proceed to the fixing of definitive frontiers and a collective guarantee was then envisaged, although the Germans and Italians subordinated this to the settlement of the Polish and Hungarian minorities' disputes. French statesmen could console

themselves that the agreement was less draconian than the German memorandum of 23 September: the Reich conceded the appointment of an international authority for the fixing of frontiers; the occupation would not be a lightning 'Foch-style' operation, but rather carried out in stages; and Czechoslovakia would receive a guarantee from the powers. Above all, beyond the Czech affair, 'there was still the chance for a European concert', as François-Poncet put it. Daladier and Goering chose to describe Munich as 'the starting point of a broader, more ambitious policy between our two countries'.

THE DECISION-MAKERS

Was the Cabinet the key element in French decision-making during the crisis?¹⁵ Daladier's Cabinet was distinctly heterogeneous. Centre-left and predominantly Radical on account of the refusal of the Socialists to participate, it marked a definite shift to the right. It contained a solid core of advocates of firmness towards the Reich, including Mandel, Paul Reynaud, Champetier de Ribes, Campinchi, Jean Zay, Albert Sarraut; but also the 'appeasement' clan, Bonnet, Pomaret, Anatole de Monzie, Chautemps and Guy La Chambre among others. The tensions between them were sometimes extreme, as on 19 September when they contemplated what to do in the event that the Czechs rejected the Anglo-French ultimatum issued that day. At the heart of a Cabinet so divided as this, the only authentic decision-makers capable of carrying with them one way or another the majority of their colleagues, and the only ones to represent France in the Franco-British conferences, were Daladier, the premier and minister of national defence, and Bonnet, the foreign minister. They did not hesitate, when they felt it necessary, to make contact with the Reich through parallel diplomacy without the knowledge of their colleagues.¹⁶

This is not the place for a psychological analysis of Daladier, who is by now the subject of innumerable, often contradictory, accounts.¹⁷ Suffice it to note that the man, while clearly blessed with intellectual ability honed by long experience in ministerial office, failed to display a will equal to his perceptiveness, and that his readiness to seek advice and be informed was not complemented by a firm resolution to act. His principal collaborators, Marcel Clappier, Roger G n brier, Roger Leonard, and for the examination of diplomatic correspondence, Jacques Kayser and Andr  Chamson, had, if one accepts the evidence of G n brier, so yielded to the premier's ascendancy that they did not give him their advice or attempt to influence his policy. They were essentially civil servants rather than counsellors. Aside from his mistress, the Marquise de Crussol, whose influence, while discreet, was perhaps greater than it appeared, the friends most able to influence him were Guy La Chambre and the American ambassador, William Bullitt.

Daladier lacked experience in foreign policy. He excelled in matters of principle and was good at choosing the right words and images to define a situation. His personal values led him to pass severe judgement on the dictators

and to defend principles of justice and right. Yet he felt out of his depth when he had to go beyond principles to negotiations, and he allowed himself to be outmanoeuvred by the British, who hid their prevarications behind a phlegmatic exterior. Nothing was more instructive in this respect than the three Anglo-French encounters between April and September 1938. Daladier started from a position of firmness and ended supporting a radical compromise. As a war veteran, he looked forward to a Franco-German rapprochement, although he did not share Chamberlain's blind faith in Hitler's word. In his eyes, Czechoslovakia represented a prize of great strategic importance, a point of view that reflected his simultaneous role as minister of national defence.¹⁸ He was not unaware of the tensions that the Führer's policy provoked in Germany, particularly in the *Wehrmacht*. He knew the Soviet Union was nearby with substantial resources, particularly its air force. One cannot criticise him for being less than clear-sighted or ill-informed.

As for Georges Bonnet, he too has aroused a good deal of controversy which shall not be dwelt upon here. It would however be unjust to see him only as the highly intelligent, ambitious intriguer who appears in most accounts. Bonnet was also a war veteran whose experience of the trenches of 1914–18 left him with a visceral horror of war. He openly denounced the 'warmongers' of the Quai d'Orsay. Yet he also displayed an interest in military facts and readiness to integrate them into his assessment of the international situation. He concentrated in his own hands the formulation of foreign policy, keeping his senior officials at a distance. Hence it became a personal policy, accompanied by recourse to methods that scarcely found favour at the Quai d'Orsay, for example modification or suppression of despatches, and telephoned instructions to ambassadors without records kept. Perhaps, if we can believe Léon Noël, he also altered certain documents in order to justify his own acts, and manipulated press reports, as when he attempted by means of the press to cast doubt on Britain's rare displays of firmness.

Daladier and Bonnet were linked by an implicitly understood interest. Bonnet was not recruited solely, as Daladier claimed, for his qualities as a former minister of finance and ambassador in Washington. He was also appointed because of his role as leader of the conservative faction of the Radical-Socialist party and his excellent relations with the financial community and the Senate. Daladier included him in the Cabinet in order to watch over him. For Bonnet, who dreamed ardently of becoming premier, the breakup of the Popular Front, which Daladier pursued, offered him the chance to realise his ambitions. It is worth considering the common elements shared by the premier, who had acquired a reputation for firmness and determination to bring a recalcitrant Britain around to his views, and the foreign minister, who was ready to hide behind Britain's weakness to avoid having to act. If both of them passionately sought peace, each nevertheless cultivated a different philosophy to attain it. The foreign minister and former minister of finance judged that the country's financial and economic position did not allow it to negotiate from a position of strength and sacrificed Czechoslovakia

without regret, justifying it on the grounds of France's lack of military preparation and its diplomatic isolation. He assumed the game was lost in advance. The premier, who as minister of national defence did not consider the military situation so disquieting, in contrast hoped until the last minute that with British support the Reich could be made to retreat.

Their personal relations were also by no means easy. Bonnet, speaking to the journalist Lazareff, openly acknowledged his fear that Daladier's belligerent posturing would land the country in trouble. The first signs of discernible differences go back to the time of the Runciman mission in August.¹⁹ On 24 September Bonnet sought to cool Daladier's ardour by a personal letter stressing France's 'thoroughgoing isolation', but differences only fully emerged after Godesberg and notably when they confronted one another in Cabinet on 27 September.²⁰ Bonnet may be reproached for using a double language: one in private suggesting France's disengagement from central Europe, the other proposing the contrary in official declarations.²¹ Jacques Debû-Bridel accuses him of destroying in a sentence the substance of the Premier's declarations.²² In reality, from the Franco-British meeting at the end of April, Daladier, conscious of France's deficiencies and disturbed by the meagreness of the results so far obtained, left diplomatic relations in Bonnet's hands in order to devote himself to rearmament.²³ Bonnet thus had a great deal of autonomy, which he was occasionally tempted to abuse, as for instance on 20 July when he sought to burden the Cabinet with responsibility for a decision taken personally.²⁴

Bonnet's consistency contrasted with Daladier's vagueness and vacillation. Bonnet took the initiative on the night of 27 to 28 September and imposed his personality upon the decision-making process. In contrast, Daladier hovered between contradictory feelings and allowed himself to be carried along by the course of events. It is too much to speak of a diarchy, in which Bonnet, following ministerial discipline, advanced Daladier's views before Chamberlain. More accurately, Bonnet's subtlety allowed him to alter the course Daladier had set and to take advantage of the premier's hesitations.

Bonnet had another strength: the backing of a lobby which included parliamentarians, ministers and former ministers, such as Piétri, Lamoureux, Monzie, Mistler, Bérenger, Montigny, journalists, including Jacques Sauerwein and Emmanuel Berl, and the industrialist Marcel Boussac.²⁵ This lobby mistrusted Daladier and suspected him of leading the country into war, as Geneviève Tabouis has shown.²⁶ Bonnet called on the Radical deputy and former minister, Lucien Lamoureux, to 'reason with' the deputies present in Paris on 27 September.²⁷ The former minister of marine, François Piétri, along with Anatole de Monzie, was one of the small group who pressed Bonnet to solicit Italian mediation.²⁸ Jean Mistler and Henry Bérenger, who presided over the Foreign Affairs Commissions of the Chamber and Senate respectively, opened the way for Bonnet by opposing Paul-Boncour's reappointment to the post.²⁹ Jean Montigny, another Radical-Socialist parliamentarian, issued a brochure claiming that the

Franco-Czech Treaty of Alliance was no longer valid on account of circumstances.³⁰

Two other personalities deserve mention: Joseph Caillaux, the former premier and minister of finance, who presided over the Senate Finance Commission in 1938³¹ and whose collaborator, Emile Roche, edited *La République*, a pro-government journal favourable to appeasement; and above all, Pierre-Etienne Flandin, president of the Democratic Alliance. An advocate of direct talks with the Reich and Italy, particularly after his visit to Berlin in December 1937, supporter of the defensive Maginot Line strategy and a policy 'more imperial than European',³² Flandin redoubled his activities in September. Speaking to Daladier on the 13th, he claimed the premier could not constitutionally decree general mobilisation in existing circumstances.³³ On the 14th, he wrote to Chamberlain repeating this view, while supporting the right of the Sudetenlanders to self-determination and proposing the enlargement of negotiations with the Reich. He reiterated his argument in *Le Journal* on the 15th ('Watch out for war'). He wrote to Daladier on 24 September to demand that the British Empire accept specific commitments in case of conflict. On the 28th he signed a petition denouncing the 'manipulation of occult forces' allegedly pushing France into war, as well as the Communists' 'swindling of patriotism'. Flandin, who caused a scandal by sending a telegram of congratulations to Hitler after Munich, justified the agreement of 30 September by denying that the government had abandoned its commitments, and called again for an imperial policy.³⁴

At the heart of the lobby were a number of editors and journalists close to Bonnet, among them the political director of the Havas news agency, Léon Bassée, who was a personal friend.

THE ADVISERS: THE 'CHOSEN' AND THE 'AVAILABLE' EXPERTS

Among the first group (the 'chosen'), who were not necessarily listened to, were the diplomats. The Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Léger, a figure who has provoked widely differing judgements,³⁵ had rather better relations with Bonnet than is commonly assumed. However, jealous of his authority, it seems he set up a screen between the ambassadors in their posts, the central administration of the Quai and the minister. A man of an earlier epoch, that of Briand and the triumph of collective security, Léger could not be indifferent to the deterioration of the international situation in the immediate pre-war period; E.de Crouÿ-Chanel has described his rage on 7 March 1936 and his battle for the creation of a ministry of armaments. Léger—suspected of a fixed hostility towards Rome—regarded it essential to maintain the appearance of good Franco-British relations in face of the Reich, but London's hesitations towards Czechoslovakia led him to keep a low profile at the time of Munich. He was not opposed to concessions: standing with Bonnet, he called on the Czechs to accept the Runciman mission; and Bonnet associated him with his policy by calling on him to draft a threatening

note to Prague on the night of 20 to 21 September. It must also be noted that he appears to have ignored warnings from a German source of the danger posed by Hitler and the necessity to oppose it.³⁶ Nor is there evidence for thinking that he supported Massigli and Comert in their efforts to influence ministerial policy. That said, there is no doubt that at Munich he felt obliged to encourage Daladier—whom he respected in contrast to Bonnet³⁷—to resist German demands.

Relations between Bonnet and Massigli, political director of the Quai, were distinctly cool.³⁸ Throughout September, Massigli did no more than present suggestions that were swiftly overtaken by events: to appeal to the League Council in case of direct aggression against Prague; to favour changes in the Czech frontier without a plebiscite; on 27 September to accept the occupation of a zone on the northern and western sides of the Bohemian quadrilateral only in exchange for various guarantees to Prague. Bonnet's animosity was directed equally towards Pierre Comert, chief of the Quai's press service, who resigned from the Quai d'Orsay immediately after Munich.

Among the ambassadors, François-Poncet sent judicious analyses from Berlin. He did not hide the conflicts within the Nazi party or Hitler's dominant role in the political system, nor did he rule out the eventuality of economic difficulties in the Reich or the possibility that the 'bluff' of military manoeuvres could result in war. In September he assessed all the latent dangers in the apparent moderation of Hitler's speeches. But the solutions he proposed, beginning with a proposal to guarantee the neutrality of Czechoslovakia, were closely similar to those recommended by the British. In London, Charles Corbin, a skilled diplomat, sought to discern an evolution in British opinion towards firmness. Hostile to Bonnet's policy but without going to extremes, he had also got wind of revelations about the German resistance to Hitler.³⁹ Nevertheless he abstained from giving advice. Robert Coulondre, who attempted to promote conversations between the French and Soviet high commands, displayed a similarly realistic outlook, as did Léon Noël in Warsaw, who coldly observed Poland's double game. Finally from Prague, Victor de Lacroix, albeit poorly prepared for the 'subtleties' of central Europe,⁴⁰ strove constantly to open the government's eyes and encourage it not to yield to pressure.

On the whole, the diplomats cannot be accused of serious human failings or gross errors. The 'chosen' experts, whether Jules Henry, Léger or Massigli, do not appear to have influenced the government's decision, except in the case of Léger when he acted as Daladier's deputy at Munich. Of the ambassadors, François-Poncet played the most important role with his warnings, in contrast to Lacroix.

Among the military leaders, the 'preferred' expert, namely the Chief of Staff of national defence, Maurice Gamelin,⁴¹ sought, according to Colonel Le Goyet, to 'pass as an intellectual' who did not trouble himself with details, but felt at ease with conditions of uncertainty. Typically he proceeded by a mental process of zigzags, as when in March 1938 he predicted long and hard battles against the Siegfried Line, but in the summer criticised reports which underlined the importance of the German fortifications and speaking to the British minimised

their strength. Similarly while reproving the Czechs for the military measures they took following the Nuremberg rally, he also expressed deep concern for Prague in face of French inaction. The man fled responsibilities. He was careful not to propose a meeting of the Permanent Committee of National Defence before Munich to inform the government of the consequences of a transfer of Czech territories. He displayed open optimism in September, which rested upon paradoxical considerations. Did he not tell the British on 26 September that France's morale would make up for inferiority in the air? This optimism undoubtedly affected Daladier.

In contrast, General Vuillemin, the air force Chief of Staff, never ceased to warn that the French fighter force would be wiped out within a fortnight. Having been thoroughly impressed by his visit to Germany, he had an opposite effect upon Daladier, albeit indirectly through the air minister, Guy La Chambre.⁴² This explains why Daladier, speaking to Bullitt a few days after Munich, rejected responsibility for the 'colossal diplomatic defeat they had suffered', and blamed it on the inferiority of the French air force.⁴³

At the level of 'available' experts, France had a corps of military and air attachés worthy of comparison with those of any country. Their intelligence was sometimes better than that of the diplomats; in certain cases, they played a role in policy-making. This was the case for the Berlin team, led by Renondeau, Geffrier and Stehlin, although they were occasionally victims of Nazi deception.⁴⁴ For the most part, the military attachés in central Europe offered pessimistic assessments of their host countries,⁴⁵ while General Lelong in London reported every aspect of Britain's lack of preparation, all of which provided grist to the mill for Bonnet. The chief of the military mission in Prague, General Faucher, while unceasingly viewing the Czech army in a favourable light, received practically no support in Paris where his Protestant integrity and his role as Benes' mouthpiece only raised suspicions.⁴⁶

The last 'chosen'—and heeded—expert was Jacques Rueff, director of the *Mouvement général des fonds*, whose appeals for an increase in production by abandoning the forty-hour week and blocking all spending other than military were adopted totally by Daladier in his speech of 21 August.⁴⁷ With Rueff as spokesman, the ministry of finance intervened like a powerful pressure group in its pursuit of balanced public accounts and free markets in capital and goods. Its voice was heeded by decision-makers, not least because Bonnet had hitherto been chief at the rue de Rivoli.

'UNDERLYING' FORCES AND 'ORGANISED' FORCES

In 1938, the 'underlying' force emanating spontaneously from the masses was pacifism, which transcended the boundaries of the left and right and was expressed in a number of 'organised' forces representing peasants, war veterans, school teachers and various economic interests. In France, where 48 per cent of

the population was rural and the peasants had paid the heaviest price in the last war, the largest agricultural union, UNSA, appealed to Daladier on 28 September 'against war, which is so lethal to peasants'. France's peasants were prepared to fight in defence of their country, but not in defence of an ideology. Along with the message, a journal article defined the stakes of a war 'for a just cause' as the lives of millions of men, and described peasants as 'good judges of the honour and interest of France'. After Munich, emphatic homages were sent to Daladier, 'countryman, son of the soil'.⁴⁸

In September, war veterans—and it should be recalled that the generation who had fought in the war now occupied most positions of responsibility—generally refused to regard war as inevitable; at the hour of Munich, the *Confédération nationale*, the veterans' peak organisation, sent Daladier a message expressing their confidence in him. Henri Pichot, president of the *Union fédérale*, a leading veterans' organisation, actually took their endorsement to Daladier in Munich.⁴⁹ The National Union of Teachers, which refused to choose 'between slavery and war', issued a petition on 26 September under the signature of its Secretary-General, André Delmas, and that of Giroux, leader of the PTT union, which affirmed, 'We do not want war', and called for further talks in order to avoid 'the most appalling of wars'.⁵⁰

The illusion of peace was also encouraged in commercial circles, the industrial world, reflection groups such as *X-crise*, and the journal *Nouveaux Cahiers*, to which Auguste Detoef, president of Alsthom, contributed with calls for 'the introduction of international arms control, and organisation of economic collaboration in both Europe and the colonies'. A whole group including Louis Renault, Henri de Peyerimhoff and the heads of *Banque Lazard* and *Banque d'Indochine*, feared the effects on the economy of intensive rearmament and supported Bonnet.⁵¹ Finally, *Le Temps*, which prided itself on its 'realism' in supporting the Chamberlain's policy and affirming its confidence in Hitler's pacifism, reinforced Bonnet's cause with the weight of its social respectability.⁵²

In the international environment of the Munich crisis, we have underlined the importance of 'the British nanny', to borrow the phrase of François Bédarida, and its lack of consideration for its French ally, as illustrated by the multiplication of its warnings to Paris (22 May, 27 September) and its initiatives taken without prior consultation with the French government, such as the Runciman mission and Chamberlain's trips to Berchtesgaden and Godesberg. Because of Chamberlain's and Bonnet's convergence of interests, however, French diplomacy chose not to encourage the pro-French lobby in the Foreign Office or British political circles, as indicated by reactions to the official declaration of 26 September.⁵³ French relations with Germany were paradoxically less conflictual from the moment that the Führer showed tact towards France in his speeches by insisting that he made no claim to Alsace-Lorraine. French relations with Czechoslovakia meanwhile were strained by French press campaigns denouncing the artificial character of the Czech state, and by the absence of personal warmth among decision-makers such as prevailed in the time of Briand and Berthelot—to

say nothing of the fact that in Paris the Czech minister was the Slovak, Osusky, who was not on good terms with Benes.⁵⁴ Hodza, the Czech president, who had long affirmed, whether sincerely or for tactical reasons, his confidence in France,⁵⁵ found little support among the pro-Czech members of the French Cabinet, who were not prepared take the logical final step and resign. As for Lacroix and Faucher in Prague, they did not have the weight needed to influence events at home.

The domestic environment at the time of Munich was troubled by strikes which followed Daladier's speech of 21 August, and by the relative weakness of parliament in relation to the government. Parliament was in recess during the conference and no debate on foreign policy took place for the whole period from 25 and 26 February to 4 October. However, activity in the corridors, the actions of leaders such as Flandin and Caillaux and parliamentary groups demonstrated that the deputies on hand were anxious not to be left out of a decision affecting the future of the country. The closer the crisis came, the more the majority of political groups, aside from the Communist party, rallied to Daladier's strategy of a firm approach, although the vague terms of their communiques left the premier wide latitude for action. Daladier's own Radical-Socialist party, after some wavering, allowed itself to be won over to a policy of appeasement disguised as Briandism. But more than the parties, it was individuals on the right of the Radical party and from elsewhere who pressed for the decision. As described above, the Bonnet lobby contained numerous groups, in face of which Daladier found himself remarkably alone.⁵⁶

The Munich agreements did not result from bargaining among administrative units, each one advancing its own interests.⁵⁷ During the crisis, the decision-making process was simple: the decision-making unit was reduced to two persons, but the differences between them opened the way for intervention by party leaders and individuals close to the foreign minister who weighted the balance in favour of the latter's preferred outcome.

NOTES

- 1 Y.Lacaze, *La France et Munich. Etude d'un processus décisionnel en matière de relations internationales*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1992. Among the pioneering work on this subject are, R.Girault, 'La décision gouvernementale en politique extérieure', in R. Rémond and J.Bourdin (eds), *Edouard Daladier chef de gouvernement avril 1938-septembre 1939*, Paris, Presses FNSP, 1977, pp. 207-27; R.Girault, 'Les décideurs français et la puissance française en 1938-1939', in R.Girault and R.Frank (eds), *La Puissance en Europe 1938-1940*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1984, pp. 23-43. The present study has also benefited from the remarkable biography by E.du Réau of *Edouard Daladier 1884-1970*, Paris, Fayard, 1993. On the British decision-making process, see N.Black, 'Munich 1938: l'examen des propositions relatives au processus décisionnel de crise', *Etudes internationales*, 1978, 9, 2, June, pp. 162-3.

- 2 Daladier urged a joint démarche to Berlin in order to demonstrate their support for Prague and to make clear that the means existed to do so (the substantial Czech army, the Franco-Czech alliance, the resources and air force of the USSR).
- 3 Daladier's anxiety was due to the disproportion between French and German aircraft production, Hitler's visit to Rome on 3–10 May, which was followed on 14 May by a particularly hostile speech by Mussolini, and Bonnet's disappointing exchanges with his Soviet and Romanian counterparts at Geneva on or around 10 May. Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 293–4, 337–9.
- 4 G. Bonnet, *Défense de la paix*, I, *De Washington au Quai d'Orsay*, Geneva, Editions du Cheval Ailé, 1946, pp. 175–8; Bonnet, *Défense de la paix*, II, *Fin d'un Europe (de Munich à la guerre)*, 1948, pp. 88–91.
- 5 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 173.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 379–80, 300, 380 n10.
- 7 On 15 September Benes issued a 'supreme appeal' to the French government warning it against any threat to the territorial integrity of his country. Paris replied by expressing its 'profound sympathy', but also referring to 'the recommendations made in fulfilment of the Minister's instructions of 17 July'.
- 8 Y. Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française et la crise de Munich*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1991, pp. 372, 519; Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 216–18.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–8.
- 10 Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française*, pp. 281, 520.
- 11 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 245–6.
- 12 Du Réau, *Edouard Daladier*, pp. 271–3.
- 13 J. Daridan, *Le Chemin de la, défaite (1938–1940)*, Paris, Plon, 1980, p. 84; Daridan, *Munich, mythes et réalités*, p. 230; E. de Crouÿ-Chanel, *Alexis Léger, l'autre visage de Saint-John Perse*, Paris, J. Picollec, 1989, p. 231.
- 14 Du Réau, *Edouard Daladier*, pp. 277, 279.
- 15 On the Cabinet, see Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 443–7.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 444, n5.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 427–32.
- 18 Thus in September 1938, unbeknownst to Gamelin, he sought information about Czech defences: see testimony of Colonel Rocolle in Du Réau, *Edouard Daladier*, p. 249.
- 19 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 157.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- 21 As Osusky noted, in *ibid.*, p. 164.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 437, n 9.
- 23 Du Réau, *Edouard Daladier*, p. 239.
- 24 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 156.
- 25 Pierre Charpentier, in his private notes, denounced the 'mediocrity' and 'agitation' of this lobby; J. Daridan, *Le Chemin de la défaite*, p. 75, speaks of a 'faction'.
- 26 G. Tabouis, *Vingt ans de 'suspens' diplomatique*, Paris, A. Michel, 1958, p. 353.
- 27 Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française*, p. 291.
- 28 Piétri was similarly requested by Bonnet at the end of September to inform Brussels of France's unpreparedness, in order that this information would be passed on to London. See Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 392.

- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 121. Bérenger, since March, had not disguised from Osusky his view that the Franco-Czech alliance was dead and that France could not assist his country military: Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française*, p. 513.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 566–7. In a letter to President Lebrun, Montigny demanded a high court trial for French leaders if war were allowed to break out: *ibid.*, p. 273, n 5.
- 31 On Caillaux, see *ibid.*, pp. 373–4.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 325–6. On the interview given by Flandin at the end of July, and where he declared his preference to see Germany expand economically towards central Europe rather than challenge France in its colonial empire, see *ibid.*, pp. 214–15.
- 33 On the same day, Caillaux was active in the corridors of the Palais Bourbon, and Bonnet described the situation in sombre colours to the president of the senate, Jeanneney.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 254–5, 270–1, 280, 303–1, 567.
- 35 See, for instance, the severe judgement in J.-B. Duroselle, *La Décadence 1932–1939*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1979, pp. 23–4 and various, and the far more generous portrait by Ambassador Etienne de Crouÿ-Chanel, who worked closely with Bonnet, *Alexis Léger*.
- 36 On the warnings from Carl Goerdeler, mayor of Leipzig, and the German ambassador in Moscow, see Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 503–4.
- 37 On the affinity between the two men, both ardent patriots, devoted republicans, imbued with the Jacobin spirit, see de Crouÿ-Chanel, *Alexis Léger*, p. 148.
- 38 Bonnet was responsible for rustivating Massigli to Ankara after Munich.
- 39 By proposals which reached his chargé d'affaires, Roger Cambon: Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 504.
- 40 Daridan, *Le Chemin de la défaite*, pp. 25–6.
- 41 On Gamelin, see Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 466–71, Colonel le Goyet's biography, *Le Mystère Gamelin*, Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1975, which passes a severe judgement on him, and the much more favourable account by M.S. Alexander, *Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the Politics of French Defence, 1933–1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- 42 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, pp. 167–8, 233, 491, 493. On La Chambre's letter to Daladier expressing deep disquiet, see *ibid.*, p. 385.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 489.
- 44 Le Goyet, *Munich, 'un traquenard'?*, Paris, Editions France-Empire, 1988, p. 403. On the over-estimation of German power, see also R. Rothschild, *Les Chemins de Munich. Une nuit de sept ans 1932–1939*, Paris, Perrin, 1988, p. 338 and various; Y. Lacaze, 'Réflexions sur la supériorité militaire allemande à l'heure de Munich', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 1992, 105, pp. 77–83.
- 45 A. Marès, 'Les attachés militaires en Europe centrale et la notion de puissance en 1938', *Revue historique des armées*, 1983, 1, pp. 60–72.
- 46 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 481.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 483–4.
- 48 On the peasants and Munich, see Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française*, pp. 497–501.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 501–6. On Pichot, see A. Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914–1939*, trans. H. McPhail, Oxford, Berg, 1992, pp. 36, 70–72 and various.
- 50 Lacaze, *L'Opinion publique française*, pp. 452–4.

- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 488–9, 494. Other industrialists such as Ernest Mercier, François de Wendel and Eugene Schneider called for resistance.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 338–40.
- 53 Lacaze, *La France et Munich*, p. 238.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 410–12.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pp. 408–9.
- 56 *Ibid.*, pp. 509–10.
- 57 The roles played in the Munich policy by what Paul Reynaud called ‘the three citadels of the established order’, the ministry of finances, the foreign ministry and the high command (see his *Mémoires III, Envers et contre tous, 7 mars 1936–16 juin 1940*, Paris, Flammarion, 1963, p. 23) were indirect, insofar as they influenced from an early date the tendency of the decision-makers to accept the compromise solution agreed on 30 September 1938. However, there was no debate or competition among them on the eve of the decision.

INTELLIGENCE AND THE END OF APPEASEMENT

Peter Jackson

France began preparing for war against Germany in the aftermath of the Munich agreement of September 1938. This decisive stage in French inter-war history has been largely overlooked in existing studies of French strategy and diplomacy. The prevailing view is that it was the German occupation of the Czech principalities of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March 1939 which provided the catalyst for a revolution in French policy. In the weeks that followed, Franco-British guarantees were issued to Poland, Romania and Greece, which set European diplomacy on a course that culminated in war over Danzig in September. One school of interpretation has argued that appeasement remained the guiding force in French policy throughout, with the government of Edouard Daladier prepared to acquiesce in German domination of eastern Europe as the price for a lasting understanding.¹ Another school has represented the period between Munich and the Prague coup as one of uncertainty in which French policy was devoid of any clear direction.²

An examination of the relationship between intelligence and decision-making during this crucial period provides a new perspective on the course of French policy. Military leaders and statesmen began planning for the construction of an eastern barrier to German aggression in late 1938—much earlier than has hitherto been assumed. Intelligence played an important role in this process. In the autumn of 1938 France's intelligence services provided decision-makers with overwhelming evidence that German preparations for war had intensified since Munich. They warned that the Axis powers were set on a policy of military expansion in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. These reports reinforced a growing realisation among France's leadership that the hegemonic ambitions of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy posed a mortal threat to France's survival as a European power. Similarly, intelligence on German and Italian war potential, when combined with the emergence of a long-awaited military commitment from Britain, and a simultaneous resurgence in French national confidence, wrought a fundamental change in perceptions of the European strategic balance. The result was France's decision to forsake the policy of appeasement and challenge Germany's second bid for European dominance in the twentieth century.

I

During the inter-war period the official organisations in France charged with collecting foreign intelligence were the *Deuxième Bureaux* (second sections) of the army, navy and air force general staffs. The Foreign ministry did not possess its own secret service nor did its representatives normally engage in the gathering of 'secret' information. By far the largest, best funded and most influential of the service intelligence departments was the army *Deuxième Bureau*. The most prolific source of information possessed by the service intelligence departments was the reports of service attaches assigned to French diplomatic missions abroad. Attaches were responsible for gathering information on the political, economic and military situation inside the state to which they were posted. Each week the army, naval and air *Deuxième Bureaux* received hundreds of reports from this network of attachés.³

Another major source of information was the French secret intelligence service, the *Service de Renseignements* (SR). The SR gathered intelligence by clandestine means for the army and air force *Deuxième Bureaux*.⁴ It was responsible for espionage, cryptanalysis, aerial photography and wire-tapping. The SR conducted these operations primarily through a network of stations in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. The most important such stations were the three big *postes* situated on the Franco-German frontier at Lille, Metz and Belfort, and the fourth near the Franco-Italian frontier at Marseilles. There were also key stations in Copenhagen, The Hague, Rome, Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Belgrade and Budapest which were run by SR officers in the guise of assistant military attachés. There were secondary posts (*antennes*) established inside Germany at the French consulates in Dresden, Leipzig, Munich and Saarbrücken. In addition, an SR agent, Captain Maurice Dejean, was attached to the French embassy in Berlin. A lone *correspondant isolée* was responsible for collecting 'secret' information from London.⁵

The chief functions of the SR stations were to run agent networks and to monitor the volume of electronic transmissions in Germany, Italy and Spain (traffic analysis). The information gleaned by these means was forwarded to the offices of the SR in Paris, where it was collated, then forwarded to the *Deuxième Bureaux*. Individual reports from the SR always provided an evaluation of the source. The most important sources, such as prized agents Hans-Thilo Schmidt (who worked in the cipher section of the German air ministry) or Colonel Lahousen Elder von Vivremont (a senior officer in the German *Abwehr* and former head of Austrian military intelligence) had their own instantly recognisable code names.⁶ The SR also housed an industrious code-breaking unit (*Section D*) which worked in intermittent co-operation with the *Cabinet Noir* at the foreign ministry. The performance of French signals intelligence during this period remains something of a mystery. From the archives it is clear that French cryptanalysis succeeded in breaking the 'low-grade' (less secret) codes of Austria, Britain and its Dominions, Republican Spain, Italy and the United States. But,

among the European states, the only 'high-grade' (most secret) ciphers the French were able to read were those of Austria and Italy. German military and diplomatic communications remained unbreakable throughout this period.⁷

The mass of information supplied daily by the SR and by service attachés was supplemented by daily information exchanges with the director of political and economic affairs (DAPC) at the foreign ministry and the inter-ministerial organ charged with mobilisation planning and with gathering economic data on foreign states, the *Secrétariat Général du Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale* (SGDN).⁸ All incoming information was synthesised by analytical sub-sections: the *Section des Armées Etrangères* (SAE) of the army *Deuxième Bureau*; the *Section d'Etudes Générales* of the navy general staff; and the *Section des Aéronautiques Etrangères* of the air force *Deuxième Bureau*. These subsections were responsible for preparing daily, weekly and monthly intelligence bulletins for distribution throughout the French defence establishment.⁹

The central focus of this intelligence machinery was Nazi Germany. In 1938–9 more analysts were attached to the *Section Allemande* of the army *Deuxième Bureau* than to all other geographic sections combined. And intelligence assessments at this time reached the upper echelons of France's policy-making establishment. Daladier, a former intelligence officer who paid careful attention to the studies prepared by the *Deuxième Bureaux*, combined the portfolios of minister of national defence and premier during the final months of peace. Daladier's private papers are replete with military and air intelligence reports. On security issues, he was without question the best informed French premier of the inter-war period.¹⁰

II

Since Hitler's accession to power in 1933 French intelligence had predicted that Germany would mount another bid for European domination. Appreciations of German intentions warned consistently that the preliminary phase in this policy would be a drive to secure control over the natural resources of eastern Europe and the Balkans. This would provide the Reich with the raw materials it lacked to sustain a prolonged war of attrition with the western powers. Colonel Maurice Gauché, chief of French military intelligence, warned Daladier that allowing Germany a free hand in eastern Europe would 'only delay an eventual Franco-German conflict.... One would have to know nothing of the German mentality to believe otherwise'.¹¹

By 1938, however, the intelligence services had concluded that Germany had achieved clear military superiority over France. A tendency to exaggerate German military strength, which had characterised *Deuxième Bureaux* assessments since 1919, culminated during the Czech crisis that summer. With Europe hovering on the brink of war, army and air intelligence badly exaggerated the power of the *Wehrmacht*. The army *Deuxième Bureau* estimated that the Germans would mobilise 116 divisions when the true size of the German field army was only seventy-two divisions.¹² Air intelligence estimates were even more overblown.

The air force *Deuxième Bureau* reckoned the first-line strength of the *Luftwaffe* at 2,760 aircraft and concluded that 85 per cent of these of modern design. In reality the German air force comprised only 1,669 first-line planes, and less than half of these were modern.¹³

The worst mistakes occurred in evaluating the performance of the German aircraft industry. In August 1938 the air force *Deuxième Bureau* (along with British and American intelligence) reckoned that German factories were turning out more than 1,000 military aircraft per month. Actual German production was less than 450 aircraft per month.¹⁴ Nevertheless this intelligence played a key role in decision-making during the Munich crisis. German military superiority, Czechoslovakia's isolated position in east-central Europe and, most importantly, France's economic and psychological unpreparedness for war, all affected the Daladier government's decision to abandon Czechoslovakia in September of 1938.¹⁵

In the months following the Munich agreement there was widespread hope that the foundations for a lasting peace had been established. But at the same time a veritable flood of intelligence indicated that the threat to French security was actually increasing. Both the SR and the French military attaché in Berlin, General Gaston Renondeau, reported that Hitler considered Munich a defeat and even a humiliation.¹⁶ Although the *Deuxième Bureau* was unable to turn up precise intelligence on Hitler's next move, evidence abounded that Germany was increasing its preparations for war. Renondeau prepared a perceptive analysis of the intense propaganda campaign launched by the Nazi regime in early November, designed to combat the 'profound lassitude which the German people demonstrated when faced with the prospect of another war'.¹⁷ Shortly afterwards he informed Daladier and the general staff that the German army had 'entered an important new phase in its reorganisation and development' with as many as six new divisions under construction.¹⁸ In late November the SAE concluded that work was under way on two new armoured divisions, two light mechanised divisions, one regular infantry division and three alpine divisions. 'The arming of the *Wehrmacht*,' an overview of late November warned, 'continues without respite and at a hitherto unprecedented pace.'¹⁹

Air intelligence similarly confirmed that the Nazi regime had opened the throttle on rearmament. A survey of German air power prepared by the air attaché in Berlin and forwarded by Air Minister Guy La Chambre to Daladier, Bonnet and Minister of the Marine César Campinchi, concluded that 'A major augmentation of the German air force is under way.' Seven new airframe and motor factories had begun production over the previous six months and the size of the workforce employed by the German aero-industry had grown to more than 258,000.²⁰ The navy *Deuxième Bureau* was unable to obtain precise intelligence on the 'Z-Plan', which did not gain official approval until January 1939. Nevertheless, during the autumn of 1938 monthly intelligence bulletins reported that two new 26,000-ton battle cruisers, the *Gneisau* and the *Scharnhorst* (the actual displacement of these vessels was 32,000 tons), would enter into service in the coming months and that

a third, along with two medium cruisers and ten submarines, would be ready by the end of 1939. In mid-December the navy *Deuxième Bureau* judged that, 'The end of 1938 and the first months of 1939 will mark a crucial period in the renaissance of German sea power' and that 'all indications point to a further acceleration of naval construction'.²¹

This intelligence only reinforced the defence establishment's conviction that the true objective of Nazi policy was a war of conquest and the domination of Europe, starting with eastern Europe. At the end of November Colonel Gauché informed Daladier and General Maurice Gamelin, Chief of Staff for national defence and commander-in-chief designate of the French armed forces, that 'information from an excellent source' indicated that the *Wehrmacht* was 'working intensely' to revise its mobilisation schemes for the following spring. He judged that the most likely scenario was a German drive to secure control of the raw materials in eastern Europe and the Balkans as a prelude to an attack on France. In making this case, Gauché noted that the majority of the *Wehrmacht's* armoured and mechanised formations were stationed in eastern Germany and that military activity in western Germany remained defensive.²² Both naval and air intelligence formulated similar appreciations. An air intelligence assessment prepared in November asserted that Germany had embarked on the *Weltpolitik* phase of the foreign policy programme outlined by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, and that a German drive to secure the natural resources of eastern Europe 'is beginning to develop before our eyes'.²³

There was disagreement, however, over whether the Nazi regime would risk a general European war in 1939. In Berlin, Renondeau's replacement, General Henri Didelet, agreed that Romanian oil and Balkan foodstuffs were the chief targets of German *Ostpolitik*. Yet he based his calculations on the assumption that 'Hitler is not mad' and therefore would not commit the *Wehrmacht* to a general war before it was ready. 'All indications,' he reported in December of 1938, 'place this date between 1940 and 1942.'²⁴ In formulating this assessment, Didelet assumed that Hitler would interpret the military balance in the same light as French (and for that matter many German) military leaders. This was a mistake. Hitler viewed the strategic situation from his own unique perspective and attributed decisive importance to the vitality of the German race. Didelet's views were rejected by the *Deuxième Bureau*. In a note to Gamelin, Gauché stressed the intensification of German military preparations in late 1938 and above all Hitler's unpredictability, in advising that 'under no circumstances can the possibility of war this coming year be discounted'.²⁵ Gamelin agreed. He advised Daladier in late December that 'Germany has a number of compelling reasons to push the pace of events'. The foremost of these was 'the need to strike before French and British rearmament closes the gap' with Germany.²⁶

The other major threat to French security was Italy. French intelligence took Mussolini and his grandiose ambitions to make the Mediterranean an 'Italian lake' very seriously. Since the mid-1930s the French security establishment increasingly accepted that Fascist Italy would collaborate with Nazi Germany in pursuit of this

aim. Indeed, Italy was considered incapable of realising the Duce's objectives without German support. The navy, more sensitive to the Italian threat to France's position in the Mediterranean, was first among the services to conclude that Italo-German collusion was inevitable. The army general staff, on the other hand, was reluctant to accept the division of Europe into ideological blocs and resisted the slow death of the Franco-Italian military alliance after 1935. But by early 1938 overwhelming evidence of co-operation between Rome and Berlin, over the civil war in Spain as well as the German seizure of Austria, led army intelligence to assume that Italy would line up alongside Germany in the event of war.²⁷ The Czech crisis provided further indication that Italy and Germany were co-ordinating their policies. The *Deuxième Bureaux* judged that Italy's partial mobilisation in late September had been intended to support Germany. Military and naval intelligence reports predicted that Germany would probably support Italian claims on Tunisia in return. The celebrated anti-French tirade of Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, before the *Gran Consiglio di Fascismo* on 30 November—which concluded with demands for the cession of Djibouti (the capital of French Somaliland), Tunisia, Corsica and even Nice—was correctly interpreted as the opening salvo in an Italian campaign for Mediterranean dominance. The SAE understood, moreover, that this campaign was predicated on German support.²⁸

The most valuable intelligence on Italian intentions came from French code-breakers. In early January Daladier received a decrypted telegram from the Italian foreign ministry to its Paris embassy which outlined Italy's 'plan for the Mare Nostrum'. From this document it was clear that France would have to relinquish its status as a Mediterranean power in order to placate Italy. Italian demands included the cession of Djibouti and much of Tunisia as well as the liquidation of French interests in the Suez Canal.²⁹ The following March Daladier received another decrypt that provided an even clearer picture of Italian ambitions: a communication to the Paris embassy affirming that the Fascist government had 'no illusions' concerning the prospects for a peaceful settlement of its differences with France. Italy required a 'radical and definitive solution' to its Mediterranean and African demands, which now included not only the concessions demanded in January but also German colonial demands. A negotiated solution was out of the question, although talks with Britain and France would be undertaken 'as the necessary prelude to real action'. It was nevertheless clear from this decrypt that Mussolini's government wished to avoid a general conflict. 'Our foreign policy', the document concluded,

must at all costs avoid the constitution of an anti-totalitarian bloc, which would unleash a general conflict; the line of conduct of Axis diplomacy, recently re-confirmed in the Göring-Ciano meeting, is the continuation of attempts to isolate France completely.³⁰

These decrypts, combined with complementary information obtained from sources inside Italy, created an atmosphere of anticipation in Paris in early 1939. The weekly reports of the *Deuxième Bureaux* advised that there was a real danger of war with Italy in the Mediterranean and that such a development could easily escalate into a general European conflict.³¹

In sum, the prevailing assumption within the defence establishment was that Germany and Italy were conspiring to overthrow the peace. Significantly, the Franco-German declaration, signed by Georges Bonnet and his German counterpart, Joachim von Ribbentrop, on 6 December 1938, had no impact whatsoever on intelligence appreciations of the international situation. Intelligence services continued to anticipate German aggression in eastern Europe. In mid-December the SR obtained intelligence from 'a high ranking German military personality' (possibly Hitler's adjutant Captain Fritz Wiedemann) which indicated that Germany would seek to extend its hegemony over eastern Europe and the Balkans. This region would serve as an 'excellent base of departure for expansion toward the inexhaustible riches of the Caucasus'. This information was taken very seriously. Gamelin forwarded a copy of the report to Daladier with the observation, 'France must thus anticipate the hypothesis that the Rome-Berlin Axis will pose in the near future (in the spring or summer of 1939) yet another "trial of strength"'.³² Gauché reinforced this thesis on 28 December in a strategic overview circulated throughout the general staff and ministry of defence, which advised that 'the vast majority of intelligence indicates that Germany will move to liberate itself from any threat from the east in 1939'. Germany aimed to control the natural resources of the Balkans and to 'dismantle Poland'.³³ In late December Gamelin informed Daladier that intelligence provided by the *Deuxième Bureau* 'confirms the Führer's determination to pursue his program of hegemony', and that his next move would come in the east.³⁴

A clearer picture of Hitler's intentions only emerged in early 1939. In January anticipation of an Axis challenge to the peace was heightened by intelligence emanating from the SR network in Germany, which indicated preparations for a *Probe Mobilmachung* (trial mobilisation).³⁵ Further information obtained from a member of 'the political milieu' in Berlin suggested that the Führer had ordered the *Wehrmacht* to be ready from the end of February to 'support a diplomatic action which might cause an armed conflict'.³⁶ In mid-January Didelet predicted that the army would be ready from the beginning of March 'either for a surprise action or for another show of force which will make such an action unnecessary'. The target of this operation remained obscure, but Didelet considered that the probable objective was Romanian oil.³⁷

The signals the *Deuxième Bureau* received were a combination of disinformation spread by *Abwehr* chief, Admiral Canaris, the intensification of reservist training in the German army, and preparations for the occupation of the remnants of Czechoslovakia. Hitler had issued a directive for 'the liquidation of the remainder of the Czechoslovak state' the previous October. The historian Anthony

Adamthwaite has written that the *Deuxième Bureau* failed to alert decision-makers to this threat.³⁸ This conclusion must be qualified. The intelligence services focused attention on a possible move against the Czechs from early March, and both Daladier and Gamelin were warned of an imminent move fully seven days before Prague was occupied. The first substantial rumour of German designs on the principalities of Bohemia and Moravia had arrived from the French embassy in Berlin the previous December. Ambassador Robert Coulondre passed on intelligence from a 'most reliable source' (which remains obscure) that Hitler had decided to liquidate the remainder of the Czech state.³⁹ But no further evidence turned up to corroborate this intelligence until mid-February. On 14 February the *Deuxième Bureau* warned that 'the situation will likely deteriorate during the first two weeks of March'.⁴⁰ On 5 March Colonel von Vivremont advised the SR that a military operation had been planned against the Czechs for Wednesday 15 March. This intelligence was complemented by similar information obtained from the British Secret Service.⁴¹ Daladier and the Quai d'Orsay were first alerted to the possibility of an imminent German strike on 8 March.⁴² On 11 March Czech intelligence informed the *Deuxième Bureau* that, 'Our German friends will arrive on Wednesday.' The same day the SR post in Prague forwarded a detailed report on Hitler's intention to occupy the Czech rump state on 15 March.⁴³ Two days later Gamelin informed members of the *Conseil Supérieur de Guerre* that 15 March would be the *date fatidique* for the Czechs, who would not resist.⁴⁴ Although it did not evoke a bellicose response from France, the German occupation of Prague came as no surprise. The truth is that the Czechs had long since been written off by French policy-makers.

III

Intelligence appreciations of Axis military capability played an important role in shaping perceptions in Paris. In late 1938 and early 1939 army and air intelligence estimates continued to indicate that, in terms of land and air forces, Germany and Italy possessed clear superiority over a Franco-British coalition. At the same time, however, assessments placed much greater emphasis on the vulnerability of the Axis economies and the limitations this imposed on German and Italian war potential.

In late November army intelligence predicted that by the following spring Germany would be capable of mobilising a field army of 126 divisions, including five armoured and four light mechanised divisions. In the event of a long war it was expected that the size of the German army would eventually increase to as many as 240 divisions.⁴⁵ The total strength of the Italian army after mobilisation was estimated at seventy-seven divisions, including six motorised and two armoured divisions. This was considered to be the absolute maximum number of divisions that Italy could maintain in the field no matter how long hostilities lasted.⁴⁶ At the same time, the combined strength of the French and British armies after mobilisation was estimated at only 106 divisions. In terms of armoured and

motorised units, the prospective allies lagged far behind the Axis. In late 1938, for example, only one of the French army's three light mechanised divisions was operational, while a planned heavy-armoured division was nowhere near ready. The British army was in even worse shape. *Deuxième Bureau* assessments projected that Britain could mobilise a maximum of only six divisions during the first six months of war with a maximum of two mechanised brigades. Moreover, French long-war calculations were reliant on British willingness to mobilise a field army on the same scale as the British Expeditionary Force during World War I because it was expected that France would hit the 'manpower wall' at 120 divisions. But the British government remained very reluctant to make this commitment. The Axis, therefore, would possess a decided numerical advantage in land forces for the foreseeable future.⁴⁷

Assessments of the air balance painted an equally unfavourable picture. In early January French air intelligence estimated that German first-line air strength would increase to nearly 3,600 modern combat aircraft by the summer of 1939.⁴⁸ Intelligence reports projected that the Italian air force would comprise 1,440 first-line warplanes including 860 modern fighters and bombers.⁴⁹ The air staff projected that the first-line strength of the French air force would increase to 1,500 combat aircraft by mid-1939, but stressed that a maximum of only 530 of these would be comparable to the latest German and Italian machines.⁵⁰ Here Britain was in a much better position. The air *Deuxième Bureau* estimated that the first-line strength of the Royal Air Force would increase to nearly 1,550 military aircraft by the following spring. But the increase in British air power was not a direct benefit to France's strategic position because the Chamberlain government refused to commit the majority of its aircraft to fight on the Continent.⁵¹ Thus in numerical terms, the balance of forces favoured the Axis both on the ground and in the air.

But there were crucial weaknesses in Axis war potential. Both Germany and Italy lacked domestic supplies of vital strategic raw materials, notably oil and iron ore. Since 1936 French intelligence had been operating on the assumption that Germany had subordinated all economic policy to the demands of unrestricted rearmament. This was thought to have placed severe strains on German society. Reports abounded of widespread shortages of key raw materials and foodstuffs. Nor did Germany possess the currency reserves with which to purchase these resources from abroad.⁵² Significantly, these factors were largely omitted from net assessments of the strategic situation in the months leading up to the Munich crisis. Only in the aftermath of Munich were they given a central place in French calculations of the European balance of power. In the spring of 1939 the *Deuxième Bureau* judged that Hitler's Four-Year Plan for economic self-sufficiency had failed utterly. The Reich was still importing 65 per cent of its iron ore and 78 per cent of its petrol. The SGDN reported, correctly, that German reserves of gold and foreign currency were exhausted. In April, military intelligence produced two lengthy studies on the possibilities of economic warfare. The central conclusion of both documents was that Germany could be defeated if

denied access to oil from Romania and iron ore from Scandinavia.⁵³ This was reinforced by an increased flow of intelligence indicating widespread popular discontent with the Nazi regime. A *Bulletin de Renseignements* in February concluded that 'National Socialist Germany carries the germs of a weakness which could, if the situation deteriorates, pose a grave menace to its cohesion and stability'.⁵⁴

Italy was considered to be even more vulnerable. Assessments stressed repeatedly that the Abyssinian campaign and intervention in Spain had placed a terrible strain on the Italian economy. During the Munich crisis, for example, the *Deuxième Bureau* judged that Mussolini's desire to support Germany was undermined first by Italy's clear military and economic unpreparedness and second by growing opposition to the Fascist regime among the Italian people.⁵⁵ An assessment prepared for Gamelin estimated that, in the event of war, Italy would constitute 'a deadweight for Germany', and that if Italy became involved in a long war the Duce would be faced with a 'crise de regime'.⁵⁶ In the ensuing six months incoming intelligence only reinforced this impression. The summary of political intelligence prepared weekly for the high command and defence ministry pointed consistently to extensive popular discontent and opposition to war in Italy.⁵⁷ Nor had the military or economic situations improved. Military intelligence emphasised that the Italian army was in the throes of a complete reorganisation in early 1939; the Italian economy was 'strained to the breaking point' by Fascist policies of rearmament and foreign intervention. Italy was considered to be 'critically vulnerable' to economic warfare and incapable of sustaining a war of attrition.⁵⁸

In the months following the Munich agreement French policy makers received relatively accurate intelligence on German and Italian intentions. Appreciations warned consistently of an imminent challenge to the peace, and correctly identified the importance of eastern Europe to German policy. In keeping with a postwar trend, intelligence appreciations continued to over-estimate German military power. These exaggerations were counterbalanced, however, by a more systematic appreciation of Axis strategic vulnerability. In fact, a lack of raw materials was viewed as a decisive consideration in both German and Italian foreign policy.

IV

Intelligence on Axis intentions and capabilities was pivotal to the outcome of a wide-ranging reassessment of the strategic situation that took place in the aftermath of Munich. Up for reconsideration was the future of France's long-standing search for an eastern counter-weight to German military power. Colonel Jean Delmas, the military attaché in Romania, captured the essence of the dilemma facing French policy-makers when he urged Daladier that 'France must either recognize German predominance in the east and accept the consequences or, if the stakes are considered high enough, begin construction of a real eastern barrier to

German expansion'.⁵⁹ To 'accept the consequences', however, would be to renounce France's status as a great power.

There were influential advocates of a fundamental change in French policy. From Berlin, André François-Poncet, the ambassador, asserted that the way was open for Germany to establish political and economic predominance in eastern and central Europe, and stressed the need to re-examine French security policy in light of the new strategic realities presented by the Munich agreement.⁶⁰ In Paris, an influential political group including former foreign ministers, Pierre-Etienne Flandin and Pierre Laval, former premier and president of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, Joseph Caillaux, and, most notably, foreign minister Bonnet called for a policy of withdrawal from eastern Europe. Withdrawal, they hoped, would facilitate a durable rapprochement between France and Germany.⁶¹ Before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber in October, Bonnet stressed the need to 'restructure' France's obligations to eastern Europe and 'renegotiate' agreements which might draw France into war 'when French security is not directly threatened'.⁶² The underlying assumption, that a lasting understanding was possible between France and Germany, was completely at variance with the *Deuxième Bureau's* thesis that Germany would turn westward once it had secured control of eastern Europe and the natural resources it required to wage a long war. The climax of Bonnet's policy was the Franco-German declaration in early December, which was followed by a series of studies within the Quai d'Orsay and ministry of finance on ways to bolster economic ties with Germany.⁶³

Opposition to this policy of retreat within the foreign ministry owed much to the quality of its intelligence. In the autumn of 1938 intelligence assessments began to appear regularly in the personal papers of important Quai d'Orsay officials. It was at this juncture, too, that the view of Germany determined on a policy of conquest prevailed within the foreign ministry in general and the DAPC in particular.⁶⁴ Alexis Léger, the senior permanent official at the foreign ministry, considered the Munich agreement a necessary evil but opposed further concessions in eastern Europe.⁶⁵ Emile Charveriat, the new director of political and commercial affairs, was also deeply sceptical of Bonnet's policy, and advised the foreign minister that 'Hitler appears more concerned with hegemony in Europe than with improving commercial relations with France'.⁶⁶ This scepticism was expressed in stronger terms by Roger Hoppenot, the deputy director in charge of European affairs. Hoppenot argued that, by pursuing a policy of appeasement, France would sacrifice its entire position in the east in exchange for more promises from Hitler. 'We have already received enough of these assurances,' he drily observed, 'to establish their value.'⁶⁷

The same debate played out within the military. In early October General Gamelin advised Daladier that the strategic situation in central Europe was 'completely transformed'. Germany had secured de facto dominance in the Danube basin and cleared the way for expansion to the Black Sea. He concluded that France must adjust her policies accordingly, although characteristically he did not explicitly recommend that France should renounce its ties to eastern Europe.

Instead he advocated a 'new military policy' devoted to defending French territory and strengthening the lines of communication with the Empire, and close co-operation with Britain.⁶⁸

Responding to this note, Daladier requested the service chiefs to prepare their own assessments of the strategic situation. The most important of these, because it proposed a policy diametrically opposed to Gamelin's, came from army Chief of Staff, General Louis Colson. Colson rejected the idea that France could 'withdraw inward upon itself and its colonial empire'. He argued that to allow German domination of eastern and central Europe would be to concede to the Reich the resources it lacked to withstand an economic blockade and to sustain a long war. Thus the search for an eastern counter-weight 'must remain an axiom of our foreign policy'.⁶⁹ This view, which derived from the importance accorded to the natural resources of eastern Europe in *Deuxième Bureau* assessments, was supported by Gauché in an important overview prepared for Daladier and circulated throughout the high command in late December. Gauché argued that Germany's successes in 1938 had been achieved because France had failed to present Hitler with 'the nightmare of a two-front war'. He believed that German domination in the east would not only provide the Reich access to the natural resources in this region, but would also deprive France of an important reservoir of manpower which could offset Germany's marked demographic superiority. A bloc of eastern states united in opposition to German aggression could provide a potential 110 divisions to an anti-German coalition.⁷⁰ Air intelligence chief, Lieutenant-Colonel Arnaud de Vitrolles, was similarly opposed to allowing Germany a free hand in eastern Europe. He judged that if Britain and France did not make a stand in the east, the Reich would 'crush Poland, overrun Romania, seize the Ukraine and become the unchallengeable mistress of Europe and the world'.⁷¹

Opposition to a *dégagement à l'est* ultimately prevailed within the military. By the year-end Gamelin had recovered his nerve and changed his attitude towards eastern Europe. In early December he informed Daladier that it was in France's interest to unite Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Turkey in an eastern bloc that could receive material support from the Soviet Union.⁷² In an emotional note to the premier written a few weeks later, Gamelin urged that 'the fate of human civilisation, that of all democratic powers', depended on France's resolve to resist the *Drang nach Osten*.⁷³ During the last week of December the army general staff produced the first of a series of studies on the construction of an anti-German front in eastern Europe. It was at this point that the Soviet Union began to play a central role in French strategic planning for the first time in the inter-war period. In his overview of the situation in the east Gauché advised Daladier and Gamelin that:

one fact remains certain: Poland and Romania could hope to resist a German military threat only if they decide to accept, and are assured of receiving, the only source of immediate and effective assistance available in the region: Soviet aid—even if it is limited to aerial and material support.⁷⁴

This conviction would grow over the course of the coming spring and underpin the urgency with which French military and diplomatic officials sought to obtain Soviet military support for the projected *barrière de l'est* during the spring and summer of 1939.⁷⁵

From a military point of view, therefore, the strategic underpinning for a policy of resistance to further German aggression was in place by the first quarter of 1939. But the key to the future course of French policy lay with neither Bonnet nor the general staff, but with Daladier. In 1938–9 the French Cabinet was badly divided over foreign policy. During the Czech crisis a small but voluble *anti-munichois* faction, comprised of George Mandel, Paul Reynaud and Jean Zay, had opposed the appeasers led by Bonnet and including Anatole de Monzie, Charles Pomaret and Paul Marchandeau. A key third grouping had supported the policy of concessions with deep reservations and included, among others, Vice-premier Camille Chautemps, Guy La Chambre and César Campinchi.⁷⁶ Significantly, the members of this latter group were all moderate Radical politicians closely allied to Daladier. The configuration of the Cabinet thus permitted the premier to exercise decisive control over external policy in 1938–9. Although Bonnet had considerable freedom in the day-to-day management of French diplomacy, he could not challenge Daladier over differences in overall policy. Bonnet remained at the Quai d'Orsay, however, because his power base within the conservative wing of the Radical party prevented the premier from replacing him.⁷⁷ But all of the key foreign policy decisions of 1939 were made by Daladier. These were often made despite, rather than in agreement with, the views of the foreign minister.

Daladier was predisposed to accept the interpretation of Axis intentions put forward by the *Deuxième Bureau*. The previous April he had warned the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, that if Germany was permitted to dominate eastern Europe it would 'be assured the resources necessary to turn against the west, which, out of weakness, will have provided her with the means to wage the long war which she is at present incapable of sustaining'.⁷⁸ Daladier had gone to Munich out of necessity rather than choice. He confided to Jacques Kayser, vice-president of the Radical party and a trusted collaborator, that: 'The Munich agreement is really only a short respite. Hitler will find a pretext for an armed conflict before he loses his military superiority.'⁷⁹ This view was further reinforced by a sweeping *tour d'horizon* of the international situation prepared in November for Daladier by Louis Aubert, an academic historian, former member of the French delegation to Geneva and confidant of the premier. Aubert, echoing the views of the intelligence services, warned that 'the idea that Germany will be permanently satisfied if given a free hand in the east is an illusion.... For Germany the east is only means to acquire the resources which will permit her to turn against France.' Although he acknowledged that France could not act without British support, he argued against renouncing existing accords. Hitler's 'hegemonic ambition' would eventually prompt Britain to intervene, which in turn would rally the states of eastern Europe to an anti-German front. 'We must

wait,' he advised the premier, 'but we must also prepare to act when the opportunity arises.'⁸⁰

Ultimately Aubert's memorandum constituted something of a blueprint for French policy in Europe. From October 1938 to the British commitment to defend Poland the following March, French policy was caught between an awareness of the grave threat that German domination of eastern Europe posed to France's security and the conviction that any challenge to Germany required full British support. The result was a *politique d'attente*. Commitments in the east were neither reinforced nor renounced. Bonnet was refused a mandate to bargain away French interests east of the Rhine, and strict limitations were imposed on projects for appeasing Germany economically.⁸¹

At the same time preparations for war were intensified. The most significant of the measures was a massive increase in the scope and pace of rearmament after Munich. In addition to the sixteen billion francs allotted to the refurbishment of the services in the budget for 1938, another twenty-five billion was earmarked for rearmament for 1939. Funding granted to the air ministry for rearmament nearly quadrupled from 6.64 billion francs in 1938 to 23.9 billion in 1939.⁸² Armed with intelligence on the intensification of German air rearmament, Daladier brushed aside the protests of the finance minister, Paul Reynaud, and pushed a proposal to purchase 1,000 aircraft from the United States through the *Comité Permanent de la Défense Nationale* (CPDN) in December.⁸³ The phenomenal increase in defence spending in early 1939 reveals the extent to which the Daladier government had already forsaken appeasement.

It is within this context that France's hard-line response to Italian territorial demands should be interpreted. Early in the new year Daladier made an ostentatious tour of France's North African possessions, proclaiming that 'not one inch' of French imperial territory would be ceded to any foreign power.⁸⁴ There can be little doubt that the abundance of intelligence concerning Italo-German collusion received in November and December, along with the dismissive assessments of Italian military potential, lay behind this defiance. A tough stance towards Italy was only the first step in a more vigorous policy towards the dictators. But France was unable to go beyond this without a full-blown military alliance with Britain. As we have seen, French calculations of the military situation were based on the assumption of a Franco-British coalition. Daladier had endured the humiliation of Munich in the hope that a strengthened Franco-British military relationship would emerge out of the wreckage of the alliance with Czechoslovakia. But the bitter truth was that, in late 1938, the two states were no closer to a full military alliance than they had been before the crisis.⁸⁵

V

The intelligence services played a key role in the evolution of a British military commitment to France in the weeks that followed. The chief tactic employed by

French soldiers and statesmen in pursuing this objective was to emphasise the danger of a possible German offensive in western Europe in late 1938 and early 1939. Accordingly, the emphasis on eastern Europe as the probable direction of German aggression was distinctly absent in the information forwarded to the British government through its ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, and his military attaché, Colonel William Fraser. Instead, these British representatives were provided with information pointing to a German attack in the west through either Belgium and Holland or through Switzerland. Both Gauché and Gamelin stressed the difficulties France faced in preventing Germany from overrunning Belgium, and of the danger which German submarine and air bases in the low countries would pose to a Franco-British coalition.⁸⁶ Daladier, too, expressed great concern to Phipps over the possibilities of a German move against the low countries.⁸⁷ This bogus intelligence about imminent German ground and air offensives in the west corresponded with a simultaneous campaign of disinformation mounted by opponents of Hitler within the German *Abwehr*.⁸⁸ After receiving an alarmed note from the British Foreign Office in late January, the Quai d'Orsay responded that:

The French government has received analogous information to that of His Majesty's Government. Although it has yet to be confirmed, this information suggests that a German action, even if oriented initially towards eastern Europe, could be directed either suddenly or in conjunction with Italian ambitions, toward the west, that is to say Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.⁸⁹

Significantly, however, there is no evidence that rumours of a German attack in the west were taken seriously in any of the weekly intelligence reports in December or January.⁹⁰ The fixation with eastern Europe in intelligence assessments lasted right through to the outbreak of war the following September. There can be no doubt that the communications to London were, as Robert Young has speculated, 'a carefully orchestrated scare tactic' intended to open British eyes to the need for closer military relations between Britain and France.⁹¹ Surprisingly, the impetus for this disinformation campaign appears to have come from London. In October British army Chief of Staff Sir Henry Pownall, frustrated by the Chamberlain government's refusal to recognise the need for a large Continental army, instructed Fraser to 'have a nice chat' with Gamelin's Chief of Staff and to suggest that France intensify its pressure on London for a truly substantial British Expeditionary Force.⁹² The French responded with exaggerated warnings of a German threat to the west.

This tactic succeeded brilliantly.⁹³ Lord Halifax, the British foreign minister, became convinced that war with Germany was imminent. He advised the foreign policy sub-committee of the Cabinet that Britain must revise its Continental policy to prevent Germany from overrunning Holland and Belgium and establishing air bases within easy striking distance of England. The only way this

could be accomplished was to enter into a close military relationship with France. The Cabinet approved this recommendation, and on 29 January Britain proposed detailed staff conversations and joint military planning based on the hypothesis of war between an Anglo-French coalition and the Axis.⁹⁴ France thus obtained the Continental military commitment it had sought since 1919.

VI

The British Continental commitment paved the way for a final end to appeasement. It is no coincidence that one detects a renewed confidence and determination in French policy from mid-February onward. The *volte-face* in British policy provided the French defence establishment with the opportunity to press forward with its plans for an eastern front. On 9 February, Daladier advised the Senate Defence Commission that if Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia could be induced to make common cause against Germany, and if these states could receive material support from the Soviet Union, 'we would have no need to fear the shadow of war in Europe'. He added that 'Rallying these states to a common policy', was the 'primordial objective' of French diplomacy.⁹⁵ France did not hesitate to join Britain in guaranteeing Polish independence in late March. At the same time, Gamelin's staff produced a strategic overview which set out the future course for French policy. The two fundamental issues it addressed were the importance of raw materials to German and Italian military potential and the significant contribution that the populations of eastern Europe could make to an Allied coalition.⁹⁶

The Daladier government's reaction to the war scare of early April provides clear evidence that it had abandoned appeasement. In the aftermath of the Prague coup, the *Deuxième Bureau* received a flood of rumours of imminent German attacks on Poland and Romania. These culminated two days after the Italian seizure of Albania, when Colonel von Vivremont sent word that Italy and Germany were co-ordinating plans for an attack on Poland and a move against Tunisia. Hostilities would commence on 20 April with simultaneous bombing attacks on London and Paris. According to the *Deuxième Bureau's* summary of this report, 'war is now all but inevitable'.⁹⁷ Von Vivremont's information was unreliable. The *Wehrmacht* high command only received Hitler's directive ordering the preparation of an operation against Poland on 3 April and spent the ensuing two months planning 'Case White'. There were no plans whatsoever to bomb either Paris or London.⁹⁸ All the same, the *Deuxième Bureau* took his warning very seriously. Between 9 and 12 April the atmosphere in Paris was dominated by anticipation. Bonnet was convinced that 'there might be war at any moment' and that 'the only question is where the blow will fall'.⁹⁹

Significantly, the French government responded to the prospect of imminent war with a resolution that had been wholly absent the previous September. Measures of *alerte* along the Franco-German and Franco-Italian frontiers were taken immediately and the first class of reservists, the *disposables*, were called to the

colours. The CPDN met on 9 April and resolved that France would strike hard at Italy from the outset of a war with the Axis. It also decided to undertake military conversations with the Soviets aimed at forging an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance.¹⁰⁰ In the weeks that followed France seized the diplomatic initiative in eastern Europe. Daladier personally applied unprecedented pressure on the Chamberlain government and successfully obtained a Franco-British guarantee for Romania on 13 April. It was also French diplomacy that assumed the leading role in negotiations for a Grand Alliance that were to end in failure and frustration in Moscow the following August.¹⁰¹ Despite Bonnet's continued presence at the Quai d'Orsay, the policy of concessions was replaced by a policy of firmness.

There was another dimension to the dramatic shift in French policy. The political and economic situation in France had improved significantly. Daladier's government had achieved startling success in its efforts to restore French economic vigour and to bolster a rearmament effort that, by the following September, was outproducing Germany in tanks and fighter aircraft.¹⁰² Production in other sectors also recovered. During the first quarter of 1939, for example, the output of such key industries as coal-mining, chemicals, steel and textiles rose by 20 per cent. The financial situation was much brighter. The capital which had fled France during the era of the Popular Front returned in late 1938 and early 1939. The government's use of unprecedented powers of decree to revise the forty-hour week and its harsh response to resulting labour unrest in November had impressed French capitalists. Between November and the following August twenty-six billion francs worth of investment returned to swell the coffers of the Bank of France. In addition to providing an obvious stimulus to the whole economy, the return of French gold provided the government with a vital source of capital with which to finance its ever-expanding rearmament programmes. It also boded well for the long war that French planners anticipated. When war finally broke out the following September, gold and currency reserves were more than double what they had been in July 1914.

To these economic and financial improvements must be added a palpable resurgence in French national confidence during the first six months of 1939. Daladier's use of the decree powers granted him by parliament the previous April and renewed without difficulty in October, had given credibility to his programme to 'restore the authority of the state'.¹⁰³ The successful cultivation of a 'strong man' image for the premier had helped Daladier's popularity to increase dramatically during this period. At the same time, the government launched a propaganda campaign to boost unity and confidence. The power of the French empire and similar themes were trumpeted to the French people through the mass media.¹⁰⁴ The success of these efforts, and the corresponding emergence of support for a policy of firmness, were reflected in a series of public opinion polls conducted during the final 11 months of peace. Polls conducted by the *Institut Français d'Opinion Publique*, and followed carefully by Daladier's civilian staff, testify to an increase in public support for resistance to future aggression. In October 1938, 57 per cent of French people polled approved of the Munich

agreement. In February 1939, over 70 per cent supported a policy of firmness to future German or Italian demands. In the aftermath of the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, this figure rose to 77 per cent. The same poll revealed that over 47 per cent of French people believed that war was inevitable in 1939.¹⁰⁵

These transformations in the public mood created new pressures on the Daladier government. The propaganda effort to restore confidence and build national unity, the rhetoric of a strong and determined France, the tremendous sacrifices which the government demanded in the name of national defence and the resulting profound shifts in public opinion all combined to create a powerful psychological imperative for decision-makers which made further capitulations to dictators unacceptable. Daladier sensed this and warned his Cabinet colleagues that, 'Public opinion will sweep aside a weak and hesitant government.' What was required was a 'politique de virilité'.¹⁰⁶

Three factors were crucial to the end of appeasement and the emergence of a policy of resistance. The first was the *redressement nationale* that began in late 1938. The second was the military commitment from Britain of early 1939. The third factor, the focus of this essay, was the portrait of the strategic situation provided to decision-makers by the intelligence services. The shift from appeasement to firmness was dependent on the emergence of a psychological willingness among the policy-making élite to accept the risk of war. The experience of Munich was a watershed in this process. It was the pivot upon which the French response to Hitler turned. In September 1938 France had been carried to the very brink of a war for which it was neither materially nor psychologically prepared. This had the effect of a dash of cold water to the face and produced the realisation that war might come whether France was ready or not. Intelligence on Axis intentions and capabilities became crucial at this stage. The steady stream of reports indicating that the Germans were intensifying military preparations and that the Italians were planning further adventures in the Mediterranean provided ammunition for opponents of further appeasement. Just as importantly, assessments that stressed Axis economic vulnerability provided hope that a Franco-British led coalition could defeat Germany in a long war of attrition. This is why planning for economic warfare and for the construction of an eastern front that would include the Soviet Union came to dominate French strategy and diplomacy in the months before the outbreak of war.

There was an unmistakable element of forced optimism in all this. The *redressement national* of 1939 was late in developing and proved fragile when put to the test. The profound anxiety and the abhorrence of war that had characterised the French reaction to the Nazi threat since 1933 had not disappeared. Against this, however, was now the recognition among key decision-makers that France must act or lose forever its status as an important power. In December of 1938 Gamelin had warned Daladier that: 'The question which must be addressed is whether France wishes to renounce its status as a European Great Power and abandon to Germany hegemony of not only central but all of eastern Europe.'¹⁰⁷ Daladier agreed. He advised the Army Commission of the Chamber:

If we want to ensure that France retains its position among the great states and if we want the ideas for which she stands to endure...we must be resolved to make the necessary sacrifices and to accept the necessary risks.¹⁰⁸

After much soul-searching, and only once assured of British military support, the Daladier government chose the path of resistance. By early 1939 appeasement had been abandoned and France was girding itself for war.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, A.Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, London, Cass, 1977, pp. 264–99; A.Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914–1940*, London, Arnold, 1995, pp. 216–19; N. Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1918–1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993; R.Girault, 'La politique extérieure française de l'après-Munich', in K.Werner and K.Hildebrand (eds), *Deutschland und Frankreich 1936–1939*, Munich, Artemis, 1981, pp. 507–22; and R.Poidevin, 'La tentative de rapprochement économique entre la France et l'Allemagne, 1938–1939', in J.Bariéty, J.M.Valentin and A.Guth (eds), *La France et l'Allemagne entre les deux guerres mondiales*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1987, pp. 59–68.
- 2 J.-B.Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France: La décadence*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1979; R.J.Young, 'The aftermath of Munich: the course of French diplomacy, October 1938 to March 1939', *French Historical Studies*, 1973, 8, 2, pp. 305–22; R.J.Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933–1940*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 214–33. See also W.Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power 1938–1939: The Path to Ruin*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 264–309; and D.C.Watt, *How War Came, 1938–1939: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War*, London, Heinemann, 1989, pp. 76–187.
- 3 The attaché reports received by the intelligence departments were copies of originals which were addressed directly to the relevant service minister, usually reaching Paris via the foreign ministry. On the role of France's service attaches see A. Beauvais, *Attachés militaires, attachés navals et attachés de l'air*, Paris, A.Pedone, 1937; M.Vaïsse, 'L'évolution de la fonction de l'attaché militaire en France au 20ème siècle', *Relations internationales*, 1982, 32, pp. 507–24; and J.-B. Duroselle, *Tout Empire périra*, Paris, A.Colin, 1984. There is also the very useful unpublished study, Captain C.Carré, 'Les attachés militaires français, 1920–1940: Rôle et influence', Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Paris I, 1976.
- 4 During this period the navy operated a small and underfunded secret service of its own whose activities remain obscure. There was also a Section Aéronautique within the SR staffed by two air force officers. See J.Bézy, *Le SR Air*, Paris, Editions France-Empire, 1979, and H.Navarre, *Service de Renseignements 1871–1944*, Paris, Plon, 1978, pp. 39–40.
- 5 SHAT, 7N 2485–3, 'Organisation et fonctionnement des Services Spéciaux', October 1933; 7N 2501–1, 'Les renseignements', 26 October 1935. For reference

- to the 'correspondant isolée' in London, see also the collection of SR *comptesrendus* for 1939 in 7N 2570–1.
- 6 Schmidt was referred to as 'Asché', 'HE' or sometimes 'Source Z', while von Vivremont was typically designated 'MAD' or 'M'. P.Paillole's *Notre espion chez Hitler*, Paris, R.Laffont, 1985, is a somewhat unreliable account of Schmidt's activities.
 - 7 The existing documentary record of French code-breaking during the 1930s is concentrated in the collection of intercepted telegrams, comprising fifteen cartons, in the archives of the foreign ministry: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, (cited hereafter as MAE), *Télégrammes Interceptés*, volumes 1–15. See also the memoirs of the head of Section D, G.Bertrand, *Enigma, ou la plus grande énigme de la guerre 1939–1945*, Paris, Plon, 1972, pp. 54–5.
 - 8 Most of the summaries of the daily meetings between the Quai d'Orsay and the *Deuxième Bureau* have been lost. In 1938–9 more formal weekly meetings took place between the head of the DAPC and the chiefs of army, air and naval intelligence. See SHAT, 7N 2525.
 - 9 For the organisation of the army *Deuxième Bureau* see SHAT, 7N 2484–1, 'Contrôles nominatifs du 2e Bureau', 9 May 1939; for air intelligence, SHAA, 1B 4, 'Instruction fixant l'organisation et fonctionnement en temps de paix de l'Etatmajor de l'Armée de l'Air', 8 July 1936; for the naval *Deuxième Bureau*, SHM, Carton 1BB2 1, 'Attributions des Bureaux, Sections et Services de l'Etat-Major Général', 20 March 1937.
 - 10 On Daladier's wartime service see E.du Réau, *Edouard Daladier 1884–1970*, Paris, Fayard, 1993, pp. 30–3. For a breakdown of the various sections of the Section des Armées Etrangères, see SHAT, 7N 2484–1, 'Contrôles nominatifs du 2e Bureau', 9 May 1939. See also 7N 2484–2, 'Repartition du travail dans la Section Allemande', June 1935.
 - 11 See, for example, SHAT, 7N 2521–6, 'Note sur les consequences à tirer au point de vue militaire de la renonciation par l'Allemagne du traité de Locarno', 8 June 1936; 7N 2522–1, 'Note au sujet de la possibilité d'un conflit en Europe', January 1937; 7N 2522–1, 'Reflexions sur un conflit éventuel en Europe', 9 March 1937 and 7N 2522–1, 'La situation politique et militaire de l'Europe', 4 June 1937.
 - 12 SHAT, 7N 2522–2, 'Considérations sur la forme que pourrait prendre une attaque contre la Tchécoslovaquie', 23 July 1938; 7N 2676, 'Note sur les moyens et les possibilités de manoeuvre de l'armée allemande dans l'hypothèse d'une action offensive principale contre la Tchécoslovaquie menée avec les gros de ses forces', summer 1938 and Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), Archives Daladier, 496 AP 35, dr 5, sdr a, 'Allemagne: forces terrestres', 27 April 1938. For the true size of the German army and air force, see Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power*, pp. 219–22.
 - 13 For assessments of German air power see P.Jackson, 'La perception de la puissance aérienne allemande et son influence sur la politique extérieure française pendant les crises internationales de 1938 et 1939', *Revue Historique des Armées*, 1994, 39, 4, pp. 76–87. The estimations presented in P.Buffotot, 'La réarmement aérienne allemande et l'approche de guerre vu par le 2e Bureau français, 1936–1939', pp. 250–91 are inaccurate. For German air power, see R.Overy, 'German Air Strength 1933–1939: A Note', *Historical Journal*, 1984, 27, p. 465–71.

- 14 Jackson, 'La perception de la puissance aérienne allemande', p. 80, and E.Homze, *Arming the Luftwaffe: The Reich Air Ministry and the German Aircraft Industry, 1919–1939*, Lincoln NE, University of Nebraska Press, 1976, pp. 144–5, 159, 231.
- 15 Among the many analyses of French policy during the Munich crisis, see especially Y.Lacaze, *La France et Munich: étude d'un processus décisionnel en matière des relations internationales*, Berne, Peter Lang, 1992; M.Vaisse and J.Doise, *Diplomatie et outil militaire, 1871–1991*, 2nd edn, Paris, Seuil, 1992, pp. 398–411; and Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, pp. 340–64.
- 16 SHAT, 7N 2515, 'Rapport hebdomadaire', 10–16 October 1938 and 7N 2605, Renondeau to Daladier, 11 October 1938.
- 17 SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Propagande militaire', 9 November 1938.
- 18 SHAT, 7N 2602–1, Renondeau to Daladier, 15 November 1938.
- 19 SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Notre sur le développement des forces allemandes', 25 November 1938 and 'Note sur le développement des forces terrestres allemandes', 30 November 1938.
- 20 MAE, série Eu 18–40, Carton 663, 'Accroissement du matériel de l'Armée de l'Air en Allemagne', 10 November 1938. This report is summarised in the 'Rapport hebdomadaire' of 16–20 November 1938 in SHAT, 7N 2515. See also de Geffrier's post-Munich summary, 'Le facteur aérien dans le conflit germano-tchécoslovaque', in SHAT, 5N 579–6, and the lengthy study prepared on the Munich crisis by air intelligence in SHAA, 2B 60, 'Tension Septembre', March 1939.
- 21 SHM, 1BB2 92, Bulletins des renseignements, 15 November and 15 December 1938.
- 22 SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Recherche du renseignement', 29 October 1938 and 7N 2676, 'Note sur le développement des forces terrestres allemandes', 30 November 1938.
- 23 PRO, Air Ministry, (hereafter AIR), 9/93, translation of a French air intelligence assessment entitled 'Germanic Expansion', 12 November 1938 which is also in SHAA, 2B 60 as 'L'expansion germanique', same date. See also the analysis of the Section d'Etudes of the naval general staff in SHM, 1BB2, 208, 'Note sur les conditions de la guerre dans la situation internationale présente', 12 November 1938.
- 24 SHAT, 7N 2602–1, 'Tour d'horizon', 12 December. For Didelet's assessment of Hitler's mental state see 7N 2602–2, 'Rapport sur la situation générale', 11 April 1939.
- 25 SHAT, 1N 43–7, Gauché to Gamelin, 22 December 1938.
- 26 SHAT, 7N 2522–2, Gamelin to Daladier, 27 December 1938. Didelet, nonetheless, stuck by his interpretation of Hitler's thinking through to the end of April 1939. On the differences between Didelet and the *Deuxième Bureau*, see also M.Gauché, *Le Deuxième bureau au travail*, Paris, Amiot-Domont, 1954, pp. 96–7; Carré, 'Les attaches militaires', pp. 288–9; and Young, 'French military intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938–1939', in E.R.May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 293–5.
- 27 SHAT, 7N 2928–2, 'Note sur l'attitude d'Italie en cas de conflit', 12 February 1938. See also 7N 2918–2, 'Compte-rendu des renseignements', 3 February 1938 and 'Note de renseignements: visées allemandes sur le Togo et Cameroun', 3 May 1938. For the navy's attitude see the excellent study of Reynolds Salerno, 'The

- French navy and the appeasement of Italy, 1937–1939', *English Historical Review*, 1997, cxii, 445, February, pp. 66–104. For the perspective of the army general staff see R.J.Young, 'French military intelligence and the Franco-Italian alliance, 1933–1939', *Historical Journal*, 1985, 28, 1, pp. 143–68.
- 28 SHAT, 7N 2927–1, 'Note sur les mesures militaires arrêtées par l'Italie pendant la période de tension dans la métropole', 28 October 1938; 7N 2917–4, 'Note sur le discours du Comte Ciano prononcé le 30–11–38 à la Chambre des Députés', 1 December 1938; SHM, 1BB2, 92, Bulletin de renseignements, 15 December 1938. For studies of Italian policy, see M.Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939–1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 37–49. See also M.Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1964, pp. 85–108 and Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 51–7. On Franco-Italian relations, see W.Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy: the Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy, 1920–1940*, Ohio, Kent State University Press, 1988, pp. 239–44.
- 29 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 12, dr 2, sdr a, decrypt of a telegram from the director of European and Mediterranean affairs at the Italian foreign ministry to General Visconti Plasca, Italian military attaché in Paris, 13 January 1939.
- 30 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 12, dr 3, sdr a, Decrypt of a telegram to Baron Capranica del Grillo, counsellor at the Italian embassy in Paris, 27 March 1939.
- 31 See especially the summaries of political intelligence for 18, 24, 30 January, 23 February and 4 April in SHAT, 7N 2571–1 and the weekly reports for December 1938 and January–May 1939 in 7N 2515. See also 7N 2672, 'Note sur une attaque germano-italienne exécutée par surprise contre la Suisse', 31 March 1939. On the naval side, see SHM, 1BB2, 208, 'Note des conditions de la guerre dans la situation internationale présente', 12 November 1938 and 'L'Angleterre et la France: peuvent-elles soutenir un conflit contre l'Allemagne et l'Italie?', 24 January 1939.
- 32 SHAT, 7N 2522–2. Gamelin to Daladier, 19 and 27 December 1939. The original SR reports remain lost, destroyed or unavailable. Wiedemann, a member of the 'moderate' group within the Reich chancellery, was opposed to risking war with Britain and France and had provided reliable information on the timing of the planned operation against Czechoslovakia the previous summer. See MAE, Papiers 1940, Cabinet Bonnet, 'Note remise au Directeur politique', 8 September 1938. On Wiedemann see also G.Ritter, *The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1958, pp. 474–5.
- 33 SHAT, 7N 3056–2, 'Considérations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 December 1938.
- 34 SHAT, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224–9, dr 1, Gamelin to Daladier, 27 December 1938.
- 35 SHAT, 7N 2571–1, Review of political intelligence, 4 and 11 January 1939 and 7N 2515, Weekly report for the period 19 December 1938 to 9 January 1939.
- 36 SHAT, 7N 2515, Weekly report, 9–15 January 1939.
- 37 SHAT, 7N 2602–2, 'Prévisions', 10 January 1939 and 'Information', 17 January 1939. Didelet insisted, however, that Hitler had no intention of attacking France and that the Führer would recoil at the threat of a European war.
- 38 Adamthwaite, 'French Intelligence and the Coming of War, 1935–1939', in C.M. Andrew and J.Noakes (eds), *Intelligence and International Relations*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 1987, pp. 194–6.
- 39 Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, pp. 402–3.

- 40 SHAT, 7N 2516-1, Bulletin de renseignements, 14 February 1939. Paillole, *Notre espion chez Hitler*, p. 143, alleges that in late January Thilo-Schmidt advised the SR of Hitler's intention to move into the Czech rump state in mid-March. This is unlikely because intelligence from Schmidt would have surfaced in the weekly bulletins.
- 41 SHAT, 7N 2642-4, SR Report from BREM (Metz SR station), 5 March 1939 for the information from von Vivremont. For the intelligence from London, see 7N 2642-5, 'Rapports et compte-rendus de Londres: 11-20 Mars 1939'. See also C. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, London, Heinemann, 1985, pp. 585-6.
- 42 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr 4., sdr a, 'Les visées de l'Allemagne sur la Tchécoslovaquie', 8 March 1939 and SHAT, 7N 2525, 'Compte-rendu de liaison hebdomadaire', 8 March 1939 (also in DDF, 2ème série, XIV, 286).
- 43 SHAT, 7N 2642-4, *Comptes-rendus*, 11, 12 March 1939. See also F. Moravec, *Master of Spies: The Memoirs of Frantisek Moravec*, London, Bodley Head, 1975, pp. 154-5.
- 44 SHAT, 1N 38-3, 'Procès-verbal de la séance d'études du 13 mars 1939'. The lone document upon which Adamthwaite bases his conclusion is an SAE assessment: SHAT, 7N 2524-1, 'Note pour le commandement sur la situation en Europe Centrale', dated 9 March 1939. This document was clearly dated erroneously by an archivist after 1945.
- 45 SHAT, 7N 2676, 'Les forces allemandes disponibles pour une opération contre la France au printemps 1939', Autumn 1938; 'Note sur le développement des forces allemandes', 25 November 1938; 7N 3434-3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée', 29 December 1938 and 7N 2513, 'Note au sujet de la natalité et du potentiel de guerre du Reich', 24 July 1936.
- 46 SHAT, 7N 2927-1, 'Note pour le commandement sur la reorganisation de l'armée italienne', 8 December 1938; 'Note pour le commandement sur la situation de l'armée italienne', 28 June 1939; and 7N 3434-3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée', 29 December 1938.
- 47 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, Dr. 2, sdr a, 'Information du Président: conversations franco-britanniques', 22 November 1938; SHAT, 7N 3434-3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée', 29 December 1938.
- 48 SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12941, dr 1, 'Conférence sur l'armée allemande', (January 1939); SHAA, 2B 61, 'Caractéristiques des appareils de l'aviation allemande', January 1939.
- 49 SHAA, Fonds Guy La Chambre, Z 12964, dr 2, 'Note pour M.le Ministre de l'Air', 19 December 1938.
- 50 SHAA, 2B 163, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat-Major de l'armée de l'air', 18 November 1938; 2B 1, 'Renseignements sur la situation de l'armée de l'air', 7 January 1939.
- 51 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr 2, sdr a, 'Information du Président: conversations franco-britanniques', 22 November 1938.
- 52 A sampling of this reporting includes SHAT, 7N 2644-1, 'L'approvisionnement de l'Allemagne en matières premières', 29 November 1937; 7N 2600, 'Economie et réarmement', 22 September 1937; 1N 152-6, 'Le Plan de Quatre Ans et l'agriculture', 25 March 1937; 7N 2629-3, 'Allemagne: ravitaillement en minerai de fer', 25 January 1937; and 7N 2629-3, 'Situation économique et financière en Allemagne', 18 July 1938.

- 53 SHAT, 7N 2524–1, 'Note sur les moyens que pourraient être employés pour mener contre l'Allemagne une guerre économique', 14 April 1939 and 7N 2602–2, 'Etude sur l'économie des pays de l'Europe du Sud-est et du Nord considérée dans ses rapports avec le potentiel militaire allemande', 28 April 1939. For assessments of German hard-currency holdings, see 2N 152–2, 'Les difficultés allemandes et les dangers de guerre', 19 February 1939. On the eve of war Germany's currency reserves amounted to only 500 million Reichsmarks 'a sum just about sufficient to finance one-tenth of Germany's peacetime imports'. H.-E. Volkmann, 'The National Socialist Economy in Preparation for War', in W. Deist, M. Messerschmidt, *et al.* (eds), *Germany and the Second World War*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 365.
- 54 SHAT, 7N 2680–2, Bulletin de renseignements, January–February 1939. For incoming further intelligence on popular disaffection with the Nazi regime and its policies, see the 'Comptes-rendus des renseignements politiques' for 11 and 16 January, 4 and 19 February and 7 March 1939, in 7N 2571–1. See also the attaché reports for this period in 7N 2602–2.
- 55 SHAT, 7N 2919–1, 'Note sur l'attitude italienne en face de la question tcheque', 12 September 1939; 'Italie: position prise en face d'un conflit éventuel', 20 September 1938. See also 'Renseignements relatifs à la situation actuelle en Italie', 22 September 1938 and 7N 2917–4, 'Etat d'esprit de la population', 30 September 1938.
- 56 SHAT, 7N 2919–1, 'Situation politique et perspectives d'avenir', 9 September, initialled by Gamelin. This note corresponded with a host of *Deuxième Bureau* assessments identifying Italy as the weak link of the Axis. See R.J. Young, 'French military intelligence and the Franco-Italian alliance', and 'Reason and madness: France, the Axis powers and the politics of economic disorder, 1938–1939', *Canadian Journal of History*, 1985, 20, pp. 65–83. See also Salerno, 'The French navy and the appeasement of Italy.'
- 57 See, in particular, the *Comptes-rendus* for 12, 31 January, 19 February, 10, 15 March 1939 in 7N 2571–1. See also 7N 2917–4, 'Compte-rendu des renseignements', 6 October 1938; 7N 2919–1, 'Renseignements sur l'Italie', 12 December 1938; and 'Situation en Italie', 19 December 1938.
- 58 SHAT, 2N 158–1, 'Situation économique et financière de l'Italie', 22 February 1939. See also 2N 238–1, 'Etat d'esprit des populations: attaque possible de leur moral en cas de guerre', 2 June 1938; 7N 2914–1, 'Stocks de matières premières à la fin de 1938', 18 March 1939. For assessments of the state of the Italian army see 7N 2927–1, 'Note pour le commandement sur la réorganisation de l'armée italienne', 8 December 1938 and 'Note pour le commandement sur la situation de l'armée italienne', 28 June 1939.
- 59 SHAT, 7N 3058, Delmas to Paris, 3 October 1938.
- 60 DDF, 2ème série, XII, 209.
- 61 Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 369.
- 62 France, Archives de l'Assemblée Nationale (cited hereafter as AAN), Commission des Affaires Etrangères, 16ème séance, Carton 76, Bonnet audition, 17 October 1938.
- 63 On French schemes to appease Germany with economic concessions, see Poidevin, 'La tentative de rapprochement économique'; Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, pp. 371–3; and Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, ch. 15.

- 64 See the military intelligence reports in the papers of Political Director Emile Charveriat and Roger Hoppenot in MAE, *Papiers 1940*, Charveriat, Volume 2 and Hoppenot, Volume 1.
- 65 E.de Crouÿ-Chanel, *Alexis Léger. L'autre visage de Saint-John Perse*, Paris, Picollec, 1989, pp. 236–99. See also Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 369, F. Bédarida, 'La "gouvernante anglaise"', in R.Rémond and J.Bourdin (eds), *Edouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement*, Paris, FNSP, 1977, pp. 229, 231.
- 66 MAE, Papiers 1940, Charveriat, Volume 2, 'Éléments d'une politique d'apaisement à l'égard de l'Allemagne: questions politiques', 17 December 1938.
- 67 MAE, Papiers 1940, Hoppenot, Volume 1, 'Note pour le Ministre: relations franco-allemandes', 5 December 1938.
- 68 SHAT, 5N 579–1, Gamelin to Daladier, 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 12 October 1938.
- 69 SHAT, 5N 579–1, Colson to Daladier, 'Note sur la situation actuelle', 26 October 1938.
- 70 SHAT, 7N 3056–2, 'Considérations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 December 1938 and 7N 3434–3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat-Major de l'Armée', 29 December 1938.
- 71 PRO, AIR 9/93, British air attaché Douglas Colyer, reporting a conversation with De Vitrolles of 13 January 1939.
- 72 SHAT, 5N 579–1, Gamelin to Daladier, 3 December 1938.
- 73 SHAT, 5N 579–1, Gamelin to Daladier, 19 December 1938.
- 74 SHAT, 7N 3056–2, 'Considérations sur la constitution d'un bloc oriental', 28 December 1938. For early planning of an eastern front, see SHAT, 3434–3, 'Note pour le Général Chef de l'Etat Major de l'Armée', 29 December 1938.
- 75 French planners were never anxious to see the Red Army in eastern Europe, desiring instead to see the USSR function as the arsenal of an eastern front, supplying the Poles and the Romanians with the war material that France was unable to provide. On this question see P.Jackson, 'France and the guarantee to Romania', *Intelligence and National Security*, 1995, 10, 2, esp. p. 257.
- 76 Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, p. 381.
- 77 For the best account of the balance of power within the Radical Party, see S.Berstein, *Histoire du Parti Radical: Crise du Radicalisme, 1926–1939*, vol. II, Paris, FNSP, 1982, pp. 545–78.
- 78 Cited in Jackson, 'France and the guarantee to Romania', p. 249.
- 79 Cited in Du Réau, *Daladier*, p. 294. For Daladier's political manoeuvring in the autumn of 1938, see Berstein, *Histoire du Parti Radical*, vol. II, pp. 550–7.
- 80 MAE, Papiers 1940, Fonds Daladier, Volume 2, 'La politique extérieure de la France', 16 November 1938. Other Aubert assessments appear in this collection of Daladier's personal papers in Volume 1, 26 August 1938 and Volume 3, 27 March 1939.
- 81 Poidevin, 'La tentative de rapprochement économique', pp. 66–7.
- 82 AN, Archives Daladier, 496 AP 11, dr 1, sdr b, Daladier before the Senate Finance Commission, 17 July 1939 and 496 AP 32, dr 5, sdr d, 'Les armements français'. Robert Frank[enstein] has demonstrated that France spent roughly the same portion of its national income on rearmament as Nazi Germany in 1939, *La Hantise du déclin: La France, 1920–1960: finances, défense et identité nationale*, Paris, Belin, 1994, p. 51

- and *Le Prix du réarmement français*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982, pp. 295–6 and 306.
- 83 SHAT, 2N 24, Procès-verbal of the CPDN, 5 December 1938. See also J.M. Haight Jr., *American Aid to France, 1938–1940*, New York, Atheneum, 1970.
- 84 Daladier finally consented to sending an unofficial emissary, Paul Badouin, to Rome the following spring, but his government remained utterly opposed to any significant territorial concessions to the Italians: Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*; Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy*, pp. 242–52; Du Réau, *Daladier*, pp. 309–10, 329–34; and Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 230–1.
- 85 See the lengthy report on British military preparedness despatched by the French military attaché in London in AN, Archives Daladiers, 496 AP 11, dr 2, sdr a, Léger to Daladier, 17 November and ‘Information du Président: conversations franco-britanniques’, 22 November 1938. For an analysis of the summit in London, see Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 214–20.
- 86 For a sampling of these warnings, see PRO, FO 371, 21785, C12144/1169/18, Phipps to London, 12 October 1938; PRO, FO 371, 22922, C345/281/17, Phipps to London, 9 January 1939; PRO, FO 371, 22922, C800/281/17, Foreign Office memo, 16 January 1939; and a series of translated comptes-rendus in AIR 9/93.
- 87 *DBFP*, 1954, third series, iv, London, HMSO, 94, Phipps to London, 29 January 1939.
- 88 On the activities of the *Abwehr* at this juncture, see Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 100–7.
- 89 MAE, Papiers 1940: RoCHAT, Volume 18, Draft communication to the British Embassy, 30 January 1939.
- 90 The weekly intelligence briefs for this period are in 7N 2515.
- 91 Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 222–3. See also M.Alexander, ‘Les réactions à la menace stratégique allemande en Europe occidentale: La Grande Bretagne, la Belgique et le “cas Holland”’, décembre 1938–février 1939’, *Cahiers d’Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Brussels, 1982, pp. 5–38; and Du Réau, *Daladier*, pp. 340–1.
- 92 T.Imlay, ‘How to win a war: Franco-British planning for war against Germany, 1938–1940’, PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1997, pp. 150–1.
- 93 The following paragraph is drawn from Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 100–7; Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 580–5; and N.Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, i, *Rearmament Policy*, London, HMSO, 1976, pp. 654–6.
- 94 DDF, 2ème série, Volume XIII, no. 454, ‘Aide-mémoire du gouvernement britannique’, 29 January 1939. For the analysis of the political directorate of the Quai see *ibid.*, no. 460, 30 January 1938.
- 95 AS, Commission de l’Air, Carton no. S18, Daladier before the three Commissions of National Defence, 9 February 1939.
- 96 SHAT, 7N 3434–3, ‘Etude des données du problème stratégique d’ensemble’, 31 March 1939.
- 97 SHAT, 7N 3439–1, Gauché to Lelong, 9 April 1939. Marked ‘pour le Ministre’ by Colson. See also the procès-verbal of the meeting of the service chiefs on 11 April 1939 in SHAT, 2N 225–2.
- 98 Messerschmidt, ‘Foreign Policy and Preparation for War’, pp. 688–96; G. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany: Starting World War II, 1937–1939*,

- Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 558–61; and Watt, *How War Came*, pp. 30–45 and 188–98.
- 99 Cited in Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 309.
- 100 SHAT, 2N 25, Procès-verbal of the CPDN meeting of 9 April 1939.
- 101 On Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations, see Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France*, pp. 403–39. For the opposing argument that the French were never serious about a Soviet alliance, see M.Carley, 'End of the "low dishonest decade": failure of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance in 1939', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1993, 45, 2; and G.Roberts, 'The alliance that failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance negotiations, 1939', *European History Quarterly*, 1996, 26, 3, pp. 383–414.
- 102 On France's industrial recovery, see A.Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres*, vol. II, Paris, Fayard, 1967, pp. 338–9. On the financial recovery, see Frank, *La Hantise du déclin*, pp. 179–88; and P.Reynaud, *La France a sauvé l'Europe*, vol. I, Paris, Flammarion, 1947, pp. 529–35. On progress in rearmament, see Frankenstein, *Le Prix du réarmement français*, pp. 281–91; Du Réau, *Daladier*, pp. 312–17; and R.Jacomet, *L'Armement de la France*, Paris, Les Editions Lajeunesse, 1945, pp. 133–53.
- 103 On Daladier and the *redressement nationale*, see R.Rémond and J.Bourdin (eds), *La France et les français en 1938–1939*, Paris, FNSP, 1978; R.Rémond and J. Bourdin (eds), *Edouard Daladier, chef de gouvernement*; Paris, FNSP, 1977, J.-L. Crémieux Brillhac, *Les français de l'an 40*, vol. II, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, pp. 135–47; Du Réau, *Daladier*, pp. 312–22; Berstein, *Histoire du Parti Radical*, vol. II, pp. 542–65; and R.J.Young, *France and the Origins of the Second World War*, London, Longmans, 1996, pp. 126–9.
- 104 C.-R.Ageron, 'La perception de la puissance française en 1938–1939: Le mythe imperial', in R.Frank and R.Girault (eds), *La Puissance en Europe 1938–1940*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1984, pp. 227–44. See also R.Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962*, Paris, 1972, pp. 186–9.
- 105 C.Peyrefitte, 'Les premiers sondages d'opinion', in Raymond and Bourdin (eds), *Edouard Daladier, chef du gouvernement*, pp. 265–78.
- 106 J.Zay and P.Henriot, *Carnets Secret de Jean Zay, de Munich à la guerre*, Paris, Les Editions de France, 1942. p. 56. Zay was minister of education in Daladier's cabinet.
- 107 SHAT, 5N 579–1, Gamelin to Daladier, 19 December 1938.
- 108 AAN, Commission de l'Armée, 16ème Legislature, Daladier audition, 31 August 1938.

FRANCE AND THE PHONEY WAR,
1939–1940*Talbot Imlay*

French strategic planning in the late 1930s centred on a long war, *une guerre de longue durée*. The broad outlines of this strategy are well known. With the Great War of 1914–18 in mind, French planners expected the next war to be a total war in which victory would go to the side best able to mobilise its resources—military, economic, demographic and political. Two principles followed from this basic assumption. First, France needed allies to redress the imbalance of power caused by Germany's far greater industrial and demographic strength. Here France looked mainly to Britain and its vast empire for help. Indeed, French foreign policy from 1933, if not before, has often been described in terms of the pursuit of a British alliance. Second, France needed to gain time. By allowing France (and Britain) to mobilise its latent strength and to win additional allies, time would gradually overturn the short-term advantage which Germany had gained by its head start in rearmament.¹

The pieces of this strategy appeared to fall into place after Munich when the French experienced a *redressement*. Political uncertainty was largely removed when the failure of the general strike of 30 November 1938 brought the demise of the Popular Front and Edouard Daladier took the Radical party into a centre-right coalition with himself at its head. Led by the 'bull of Vaucluse', France now seemed to have regained stable government, and Paul Reynaud, the minister of finance, lost no time in issuing a series of decree laws which revived a still sluggish economy. Industrial production, as Alfred Sauvy's statistics show, leapt dramatically in the following months. Abroad, the British finally came to their senses in early 1939 and embraced the Continental commitment they had spurned for so long. The French now had reason to be guardedly confident, which was all the more necessary as it soon became apparent that the Sudetenland had not sated Hitler's expansionist appetite. French and British planners therefore sat down together to prepare for a war which appeared increasingly to be inevitable. Happily, the French found the British to be largely in agreement with them. A British paper presented to the French during staff talks in the spring of 1939 provides the best summary of Allied strategy:

To sum up, we should be faced with an enemy who would be more fully prepared than ourselves for war on a national scale, would have superiority

in air and land forces, but would be inferior at sea and in general economic strength. In these circumstances, we must be prepared to face a major offensive directed against ourselves or France. To defeat such an offensive we should have to concentrate all our initial efforts and during this time our major strategy would be defensive.²

To be sure, the proposed strategy was not entirely defensive. From the beginning the Allies intended to wage economic warfare against Germany, principally by blockade, and might even take offensive action against Italy and its African empire. But generally speaking, the French and British appeared content to wait, confident in final victory. 'Once we had been able to develop the full fighting strength of the British and French Empires,' the staff paper concluded, 'we should regard the outcome of the war with confidence.' Or as French wartime propaganda would have it: *Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts.*

It was with this strategy that the French (and British) went to war in September 1939. Of course, things did not work out as planned. In May 1940 German panzer divisions broke through the French lines at Sedan and six weeks later Pétain's new government requested an armistice. We have been cautioned not to read too much into this debacle. Rejecting the familiar picture of a defeatist, divided and decadent France as simplistic, a growing band of scholars offer a more favourable interpretation of the Third Republic on the eve of its extinction.³ For them, a defensive, long-war strategy was not the product of intellectual blindness and laziness but a reasoned response to the realities of geography, military capabilities and historical experience. They argue that aside from a few marginal figures, the war against Germany enjoyed widespread support within parliament and among the public. By 1940 the financial and industrial effort begun in 1936 had started to pay off as French war production—particularly of aircraft—rapidly increased. The fall of France was thus essentially a military defeat stemming from a mix of French miscalculation and German audacity, not the result of a failure of leadership, and still less the product of profound social, political and economic problems. Put simply, in 1940 France ran out of time.

There is much to be said for this general picture of French strategy and the events of 1938–40: of growing French strength and confidence tragically cut short by Germany's stunning military triumph. Yet some pieces do not quite fit. A useful starting point is not the debacle of June 1940, as so often chosen, but the eve of the German offensive in May 1940 and the formation of Paul Reynaud's government in March of that year. In some ways this was just another of the many Cabinet crises which litter the Third Republic's political landscape. Yet it was also much more, as General Gamelin unhappily recognised. 'We are possibly throwing ourselves into a terrible adventure', he intimated in April.⁴ Gamelin feared that Reynaud's arrival in office heralded fundamental changes to French (and Allied) strategy. And it appears he was right. 'To believe that time is at present working for us,' the French government now warned Britain, 'is, today, an error.' Calling for an 'energetic and audacious' conduct of the war, it outlined

a number of proposed military operations in Norway, the Black Sea and the Caucasus. The next month Reynaud presented a typically dramatic assessment of the general situation to Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London: 'We have to act quickly or lose the war.'⁵ Reynaud's frantic proposals for military action were not an isolated episode but the culmination of a multi-faceted crisis in France. This chapter will discuss three aspects of the crisis: the strategic, the domestic political and the political-economic.

THE STRATEGIC ASPECT OF THE CRISIS

Here the essential issue had to do with confidence in a long-war strategy. Even before 1939 French planners had begun to doubt whether France alone or with Britain could defeat Germany. Britain's projected contribution was always deemed essential but not sufficient. More to the point, it could not substitute for a second front in eastern Europe. Since before 1914 the French had judged an eastern front to be indispensable in a war against Germany—hence the patchwork of alliances and pacts signed with the successor states after Versailles. An eastern front would not only provide France with a military counter-weight to Germany but prevent the Germans from gaining control of foodstuffs and raw materials—such as oil, chrome and tungsten—needed to wage a long war. But if an eastern front had long been a principle of French strategy, it was the brush with war during the Czech crisis in September 1938 that transformed it into a burning necessity. The following month General Colson, chief of the army staff, recommended a diplomatic, economic and military effort to construct an 'eastern bloc' from the Baltic to the Balkans capable of 'barring the path to the *drang nach Osten*'. Gamelin fully agreed. France, he wrote to Daladier, 'must seek to reconstitute forces in eastern Europe to resist Germanism'.⁶

It soon became clear that a militarily viable eastern front required Soviet participation. Before and during the Czech crisis the consensus within the high command and the foreign ministry had been that the Soviets could—and would—offer little if any help in a war against Germany. Afterwards these assessments quickly changed, a point General Gauché, chief of the army's *Deuxième Bureau*, underlined in December 1938. 'In the face of German military pressure,' he argued, 'Poland and Romania will only be able to resist if *they are willing to accept and are assured of the only effective and immediate help available*—Soviet help.'⁷ Early in the new year air force staff officers lent support to the possibility of Soviet planes operating against Germany from Polish airfields. With Soviet help, remarked one officer in early February 1939, 'I believe that the...future of France presents itself in a very favourable light.'⁸

After the Prague coup in March the French pursued a Soviet alliance with single-minded determination and growing desperation. For Georges Bonnet, the foreign minister, the destruction of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent Anglo-French guarantees to Poland and Romania marked the defeat of his policy of preserving peace through a Franco-German accommodation based on a free hand

to German political and economic expansion in eastern Europe. Recognising this, he seized on deterrence as the only means to avoid war. This meant constructing an eastern front whose centrepiece would be a Soviet alliance. As he explained to Corbin in July:

We are arriving at a decisive moment and it seems to us that we should neglect nothing to reach our end. We should not ignore the disastrous effect which a failure of the negotiations would have not only for our two countries, but for the maintenance of peace. I fear that it would serve as a signal to Germany to take action against Danzig.

To ensure success, Bonnet was prepared to go behind the backs of the Poles and offer the Soviets the old Curzon line.⁹

The general staff readily agreed on the importance of a Soviet alliance. 'Everything that our diplomacy can do to convince the USSR to collaborate with Poland by sending raw materials, foodstuffs, munitions and, meanwhile, to get the Poles to collaborate,' Gamelin wrote in April 1939, 'can only advance the interests of an eventual coalition of powers against the Berlin-Rome axis.' Increasingly, staff officers viewed the Soviets not simply as a potential arsenal but also as the military backbone of an eastern front. In June, General Billotte, vice chief of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, reported to Gamelin, on his return from a mission to eastern Europe, that only direct intervention by Soviet land and air forces could prevent the rapid conquest of Poland (or Romania). Next month, Gamelin instructed the chief of the military mission to Moscow to arrange for the passage of Soviet land and air forces across Poland.¹⁰

News of the Nazi-Soviet pact came as a grievous blow. France, Daladier explained to the American Ambassador on 22 August, had been placed 'in a most tragic and terrible situation'.

The entire diplomatic structure which he had attempted to build up has been destroyed by this act of the Russians...and could not be supplied with arms and ammunition except by way of Russia and the agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany would mean that the Poles would have to fight their battle against the Germans alone except for the support the French could give by engaging a number of German divisions on the French-German frontier.¹¹

Less than two weeks later France found itself at war with Germany without a coherent second front in eastern Europe. Over time three additional factors worked to exacerbate this initial strategic defeat, fuelling doubts as to whether France (and the Allies) could win the war. The first was French perceptions of the present and future military balance of power. In December 1939 the army's *Deuxième Bureau* estimated that Germany would be able to field 175 divisions by the spring of 1940; the next month the air force warned that the *Luftwaffe* would

soon possess 14,000 modern planes.¹² Although these figures proved to be exaggerated, especially those for the *Luftwaffe*, they were widely accepted at the time. More important still, they sharply contrasted with current and projected French strength. For demographic reasons alone, the French army could not expand beyond the 84 divisions (plus 23 fortress divisions) that it had reached in September 1939. ‘France,’ Daladier informed Colson in February 1940, ‘is in effect reaching the limit of its effort in...personnel. There can be no question in present circumstances of intensifying it.’¹³ At the same time, French war production expanded more slowly than anticipated, so that by early 1940 almost every type of army material—anti-tank guns, shells, tanks, etc.—was well below target.¹⁴ Aircraft production was in even worse shape. Not only were too few planes produced, but as Vuillemin repeatedly complained, many were unusable. Thus of 358 planes produced in January 1940 (up from 298 in September 1939), the air force accepted only 198. In any case, both figures paled beside estimates of German production put by the *Deuxième Bureau* at 800 per month in September 1939 and soon rising to over 2,000. Having gone to war with fewer than 400 modern planes, France was at a definite and growing disadvantage to Germany in the air.¹⁵

Quantitative assessments can conceal more important qualitative considerations, and French intelligence certainly did not ignore the weaknesses of the German army and air force, especially those thought to be caused by too rapid expansion. But, influenced by World War I, they emphasised quantitative over qualitative factors, engaging in what Clausewitz derisively termed ‘war by algebra’. If proof were needed of the *Wehrmacht’s* quality, it was provided by the crushing victory over Poland in September. The French expected Britain’s strength to help offset that of Germany. In 1914–18 Britain’s contribution to the Allied effort had been immense, eventually amounting to some ninety divisions. Yet France doubted whether Britain would or could make a similar effort this time. From London Corbin warned of British complacency, while General Lelong, the military attaché, expressed scepticism about British plans for a thirty-two-division army. As early as September Lelong pointed to the shortage of material and trained troops and warned that ‘it would be better [for us] to face realities and draw the necessary conclusions as to our action’.¹⁶ Even in the air, where the RAF was in a position to offer immediate and substantial help, the French could count on little help from their ally. Indeed, the question of the RAF’s contribution to the defence of France became a source of mounting tension as the British made it clear that their priority was on the air defence of Britain.¹⁷

Britain’s potential economic contribution appeared equally problematic. In April 1940 Emmanuel Monick, the financial attaché in London, could describe the recent British budget as unimpressive and inadequate. Anglo-French economic and financial co-operation was quickly arranged through joint committees for supply, armaments, oil, aviation, economic warfare, maritime transport and foreign purchases. But if this ensured the more efficient use of existing resources it did not address the issue of the magnitude of Britain’s total effort. And here the

French harboured dark suspicions of their ally. Britain's aim, Reynaud told the American ambassador in November 1939, 'was to see French resources exhausted before there was a serious weakening on the part of Great Britain, so that at the end of this war, Great Britain could control the situation absolutely'.¹⁸

Britain, then, offered no solution to the unfavourable balance of military power. Nor, it increasingly appeared, did economic warfare, the second factor in the undermining of French confidence. Already by the outbreak of war French planners had begun to revise their assumptions about German economic weakness. Having failed to construct an eastern front which would deny Germany valuable strategic raw materials, Daladier became pessimistic. 'It would be puerile,' he explained to the Cabinet in November 1939, 'to hope for an impending collapse of Germany under the weight of its economic difficulties.'¹⁹ Information now also suggested that the blockade was not working. In January 1940 the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense nationale*, the body charged with planning France's own economic war effort, reported that Germany 'is not presently suffering from a penury of [primary] products which are essential to her'. Germany, it asserted the next month, 'is trying by every means to defeat the Anglo-French blockade and, moreover, [is doing so] with some success'.²⁰ Fully concurring with this assessment, the ministries of blockade and the navy pressed for a tightening of the blockade and in particular the rationing of commerce with neutral states that, despite the French policy of preventive purchasing, appeared to be important suppliers to Germany.²¹

Here, Romania offers a case in point. Although since 1938 the French had attempted to increase their purchases of Romanian oil and so limit German imports, their efforts were unavailing. The monthly average of French imports, which from April to August 1939 stood at a paltry 36,000 tons, fell to 31,000 tons between September 1939 and March 1940. To be sure, German imports of Romanian oil during the latter period fell even more, to one-half the average monthly figure of 139,350 tons for the last five months of peace, but this was due almost solely to British purchases.²² More importantly, French planners believed this success to be temporary. Typically viewing matters more in a French than an Allied context, they focused on France's failure to increase imports, and ascribed it to various factors, among them the inability to supply the Romanians with military material, and financial constraints. The clash of public and private interests also played a role as the government placed the execution of policy in the hands of private French oil companies in Romania—'hardly an appropriate channel', noted a British blockade official in October 1939. By early 1940 French businessmen and officials in Bucharest were accusing each other of corruption and even treason.²³ Meanwhile, the fear of mounting German influence in Romania overtook officials in Paris. Already in December a Romanian-German accord, which a French official termed the 'Romanian Munich', had assigned the Reich a monthly quota of 130,000 tons. Unable to succeed by economic and diplomatic means, French planners turned increasingly to more direct action. Indeed, plans to sabotage Romanian oil wells and storage tanks or to interfere with traffic on the

Danube and Black Sea testified less to the foresight and ingenuity of the French, and more to the perceived failure of economic warfare and, more generally, of France's long-war strategy.²⁴

The third and related factor involved changing assessments of Soviet intentions. Despite bitterness over the Soviet Union's 'betrayal' in August 1939, the French government initially chose not to break with Moscow. Prompted by his military and diplomatic advisers and under British pressure, Daladier accepted the argument that Soviet and German interests would inevitably clash. Similarly, French planners, while aware of the possibility of enduring Soviet-German political and economic co-operation, downplayed its likelihood. Things quickly changed, however, after the Soviet attack on Finland. Emile Naggjar, the French ambassador, who before had emphasised the Allies' room for manoeuvre between Moscow and Berlin, now lumped the two regimes together as implacable enemies. He reported in January 1940:

United before by camouflaged aggression, these two Empires are now also united by open aggression. It is a profound abyss on the level of general policy and even of the most elementary principles of human life which today separates France and England on the one hand and Russia and Germany on the other.²⁵

Equally significant, French planners grew far less confident about the future course of German-Soviet economic relations. Reports on German military and technical missions to the Soviet Union and on planned improvements to the transport system in eastern Europe, as well as news of a German-Soviet economic accord signed in February 1940, suggested that Berlin and Moscow were drawing closer together. By early 1940, the French planners' worst nightmare—a German-Soviet bloc which would constitute an unbeatable economic and military colossus—thus appeared to be a real possibility. As Maurice Dejean, one of Daladier's closest diplomatic advisers, warned in early 1940:

if by itself Russia does not represent a very important source of military and economic support for Germany, this could completely change if, in order to defeat its present and future enemies, [Russia] was induced to accept German organisation and leadership. The day when German engineers take control of Russian factories...when Russian troops welcome German officers, the shape of the war will change. No doubt it will take some time for Germany to benefit from Russia's potential. But nothing says that Hitler, while waiting for this, will not continue his policy of delay and prolong the war.

Germany's 'methodical exploitation of the USSR', the *Deuxième Bureau* predicted two months later, had become simply a question of time.²⁶

These three factors, the unfavourable military balance of power, the apparent failure of economic warfare, and the growing belief in the inevitability of German-Soviet collusion, together sapped French confidence in the long-war strategy. If the Allies could not win a long war they would have to try to win a short one, and this required military action. Ruling out an offensive in the west as too costly, French planners looked elsewhere—a choice also dictated by the need for a second front to replace the one lost in eastern Europe. Early in the war General Weygand, commander of a small army in Syria, insistently advocated opening a Balkan front by sending an Allied expeditionary force, which received a sympathetic hearing from Daladier, Quai d'Orsay officials and some army officers.²⁷ By the new year, however, attention had shifted to Scandinavia and plans to help the Finns, cut German supplies of Swedish iron ore and relieve Germany military pressure in the west; and in April 1940 the Allies landed forces in Norway, though with less success than anticipated. There was assuredly a good deal of wishful thinking in these plans, a point the British frequently stressed. French planners generally underestimated both the myriad technical difficulties of military operations in distant theatres and the *Wehrmacht's* ability to respond effectively, as well as exaggerating the impact on the German war economy of the partial loss of one or two raw materials.

But the key point was that the French increasingly needed a fast and easy way to win the war—in short, a panacea. Nowhere was this need more evident than in plans to attack the Soviet Union and, in particular, to strike at its oil industry in the Caucasus (the Baku project). In January 1940 Daladier instructed Gamelin and Darlan, the naval chief, to prepare plans for military operations against the Soviets. The next month Vuillemin forwarded to Gamelin a draft plan for air attacks on Baku. Meanwhile, with Daladier and Gamelin's active encouragement, the preparation of aircraft and air bases in Syria steadily advanced, and in April Weygand informed Paris that everything would be ready by the end of May or early June.²⁸ But even more remarkable than the support which the Baku project enjoyed from France's top political and military leaders was the wishful thinking behind it. As a Quai d'Orsay paper asserted in March 1940, by destroying the oil fields in the Caucasus, the Allies could deal a crushing blow to the Soviets *and* Germans:

the immediate result will be to upset the industrial and agricultural economy of Russia and, progressively, to paralyse it. It will reduce to nothing all the hopes of the Germans in the rational organisation of Russian production to their benefit and will, therefore, have a significant effect on the outcome of the war.²⁹

Increasingly mesmerised by this hope, French planners brushed aside the disadvantages of war with the Soviet Union at a time when the Allies had their hands full with Germany. Thus the very country France had sought so desperately as an ally in the summer of 1939 was now, only a few months later, the prime

target for attack. Nothing better illustrates the mounting crisis in Paris caused by the loss of confidence in the long-war strategy.

THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE CRISIS

As contemporaries recognised, in France especially foreign policy-making and strategy could not be divorced from their domestic political context. Before and during the phoney war both were subjects of intense debate inside and outside parliament. The decisive event came in 1938–9 with the shift from a centre-left to a centre-right governing coalition, a process which both affected and was affected by reactions to the prospect of war. On the left, the question of whether to resist or acquiesce in German expansion tore apart the Popular Front. While the Communist party (PCF), adhering to Comintern instructions, called for a policy of resistance to Fascism in alliance with the Soviet Union, the Socialist party (SFIO) after Munich split down the middle. On one side stood the *durs* around Léon Blum, the SFIO's parliamentary leader, who advocated a policy of collective security; on the other, the supporters of Paul Faure, the party's secretary-general, whose pacifism and anti-Communism fed calls for further appeasement of the dictators. 'If in the past,' wrote Faure in June 1939, 'we had signed treaties and contracted alliances only with those diplomats and governments in whose word we had faith, I would like to know how we would have managed.'³⁰ The SFIO, the largest party within the Popular Front, was thus too divided to prevent a slide to the right within Parliament.

This rightward shift was evident within Daladier's own Radical party, the lynchpin of the Popular Front coalition. Powerful Radicals such as Emile Roche and Georges Bonnet, who had never reconciled themselves to the Popular Front, seized upon Communist denunciations of Munich to convince their party to break with the PCF and, by extension, the coalition itself. These Radicals, moreover, had pronounced views on foreign policy. France, they agreed, should reduce its commitments in Europe, especially eastern Europe, and instead turn its attention southwards, to the Mediterranean and the empire. As Aimé Berthod, rapporteur on foreign policy at the party's annual congress in October 1938, asked:

Will we be accused of being little Frenchmen and being resigned to the 'abdication of France' if we recognise that, as a western, maritime, African and colonial nation, the cultivation of our magnificent empire contributes far more to our destiny than does the ungrateful role of policeman or even of banker which, in the intoxication of victory, we believed ourselves called upon to play everywhere where the prestige of our armies had carried us?³¹

Further to the right of the Radicals, others said much the same thing. Pierre-Etienne Flandin, leader of the Alliance Démocratique, warned against ideological

wars and maintained that France should approach foreign policy 'realistically, without passion'. No longer able to maintain the European balance of power, France should avoid risks, retreating into itself and its empire. True, a few figures on the right, such as Henri de Kérillis and Paul Reynaud, protested against a retreat from Europe, insisting that it would foster rather than prevent war. Yet beside their increasing isolation these men were also haunted by a belief, common among the centre-right and right, of France's profound internal and external weakness, a situation for which they held the Popular Front principally responsible. One result was a mounting campaign for the internal 'regeneration' of France which, in its darker aspects, assumed a xenophobic and racist slant. As internal and external politics fused, moreover, the risks of a European war increasingly appeared too great for many on the right—military defeat and social upheaval, perhaps revolution, whose only beneficiary would be the Soviet Union.³² A free hand to Germany in eastern Europe seemed the wiser course.

Daladier's great success after Munich was to take the Radicals into a centre-right coalition without adopting the centre-right's foreign policy. The destruction of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, along with Italy's campaign of colonial demands which opened in November 1938 with, many believed, Germany's secret support, offered further evidence that Hitler could not be trusted to abide by any deal, tacit or explicit. As a result, Daladier could rally most of the centre-right and right as well as the left to a 'policy of firmness'. Thus after Prague Berthod renounced his support for a French retreat from Europe while Jean Mistler, the Radical and Munichois chairman of the Chamber's Foreign Affairs Commission, referred to the Soviet Union as 'the key to the arch' of any alliance system. More typical perhaps was the attitude of Pierre Bernus, the influential editor of the conservative *Journal des Débats*, who reluctantly accepted Bonnet's efforts to ally with the Soviets, warning only that any agreement should contain 'no dangerous clauses'.³³

If external events favoured a Soviet alliance, so too did domestic politics: with the Popular Front's demise conservatives had less reason to fear such an alliance for its effects inside France. Still, the centre-right and right's support for Daladier's foreign policy was far from unconditional. Events had muffled, not eliminated, their dislike and distrust of the Soviet Union. More important, their conviction of French weakness and conversely of German strength also persisted. Such perceptions were too deep-rooted in political, moral and ideological assumptions to be much altered by France's economic upswing, its change of government or Britain's new-found enthusiasm for the entente. It appears instead that, like Bonnet, the centre-right and right placed their hopes in deterrence—a hope Daladier was careful to cultivate. A firm front towards Germany and Italy, the construction of an eastern front, even a Soviet alliance, might give Hitler and Mussolini reason to pause.

The outbreak of war and Bonnet's departure from the Quai d'Orsay shortly afterwards marked the failure of deterrence. On 2 September Daladier confidently invoked the *union sacrée* of 1914–18, the union of all Frenchmen against external

danger. Cracks, however, soon appeared in the facade. Resentful at Daladier for landing them in a war they had hoped to avoid, the centre-right and right soon found their convictions of French weakness amply confirmed by the disappointing results of war production. In December 1939 the Senate Air Commission directly challenged the statistics provided by Guy La Chambre, the air minister and close political ally of Daladier. Two months later growing concern over output resulted in a general indictment of the government's economic and industrial policies during a secret session of the Chamber of Deputies. Fernand Robbe, a member of the Chamber's Air Commission, opened the session with the claim that France had only 800 modern first-line planes to Germany's 5,000.³⁴ Worse still, many doubted whether Germany was growing weaker. As early as September Lucien Lamoureux, a right-wing Radical, voiced doubts about the efficacy of the blockade, referring to it as 'a problematical, long-term operation against which Germany had prepared for a long time'. In December Paul Bastid, a conservative and former finance minister, argued that conquest and coercion would ensure Germany the raw and manufactured goods it needed for a sustained war.

One result was a growing call from the right for military action to end the war quickly. 'One thing is certain,' an editorial in the *Journal des Débats* declared in February 1940, 'in war no less than anything else, victory does not go to the one who indolently waits for it without doing anything.'³⁵ Dependent on these circles for political support, Daladier could hardly ignore this campaign. In 1940, he assured the Chamber's Foreign Affairs Commission, would be the year in which the Allies sought the 'extension of the [military] front... to force the Germans to come out from behind the Siegfried Line'. 'There are risks to this policy but also considerable advantages,' he added, 'and...we are in a position when we must know how to take risks.'³⁶

Meanwhile, a political struggle got underway to shape the nature of France's war. Broadly speaking, the centre-right and right objected to the view of the war as an ideological conflict between liberal democracy against fascism. This view, popular among the centre-left and left, envisaged total war and the need for total victory. As Blum explained in January 1940, this had profound and probably long-term social and economic implications:

To resist and to defeat [Germany], it will be necessary for France to be inspired more and more by a collective organisation, that she regulate the economy more and more strictly around the collective needs by removing it from the [working] of the so-called laws of 'liberty', that is from personal caprice, competition and profit, [and] that she ensures the predominance of the notion of collective good over that of private interest.³⁷

In addition to denouncing the 'revolutionary' goals of the left, the centre-right and right presented an alternative vision of the war. Indirectly they did so by attacking the government's handling of Italy and to a lesser extent Spain. Both the

Chamber and Senate's Foreign Affairs Commissions strongly pressed Daladier to negotiate with the Italians in order to win them over to the Allies' side. The premier's claim, backed by the French ambassador in Rome, that Mussolini did not want negotiations did nothing to dampen their campaign. By holding up Fascist Italy as a possible ally, they could present the war as an old-fashioned *Kabinettskrieg*, a war in which political and territorial rather than social aims were paramount. Moreover, a *Kabinettskrieg*, with its limited and presumably negotiable aims, implied the possibility of a compromise with Nazi Germany.³⁸ Here Mussolini might be useful as an intermediary with Hitler.

Pierre Laval, who used his growing influence within the Senate Commission to keep Italy at the forefront of discussion, favoured a compromise peace with Germany to avoid the dangers of a total war. 'If the war lasts,' he remarked in January, 'the social consequences for capitalist regimes will be frightful.'³⁹ While many on the right probably agreed, the idea of a compromise peace with Germany violated their patriotic instincts. But if the goal remained victory, the centre-right and right raised doubts about the enemy by increasingly vilifying the Soviet Union—which became another means of shaping France's war. Partly in an effort to appease conservatives, the government cracked down on the PCF after the Nazi-Soviet pact, seizing its newspapers, outlawing the party and stripping its members of their parliamentary immunity before imprisoning them. Although Daladier initially sought to isolate domestic anti-Communist measures from external policy, this broke down after the Soviet attack on Finland provoked violent anti-Communist and anti-Soviet hostility. The Soviet Union was now lumped with Germany as the common enemy. 'The truth is that we now have two enemies instead of one,' Bastid wrote, 'tied together by a solidarity as profound as it is possible to establish. It behoves us to treat them as such, without illusions and without complacency.' Germany, argued Louis Germain Martin, another former finance minister, was moving towards 'Asiatic Communism', the real enemy of 'western civilisation'. The suggestion that the Soviet Union was actually the greater enemy found a ready echo. To the applause of his colleagues, Senator Henry Lémery in March denounced the Soviet Union as 'the veritable author of the war', having laboured 'with a premeditation which dates back far further [than Germany's]'.⁴⁰

Pressure quickly mounted on the government not only to break relations with Moscow but to intervene in the Russo-Finnish war. Helping the Finns would appease two demands of the centre-right and right: to strike at the Soviets and more generally to end the Allies' defensive strategy. Thus Maxence Bibié, a conservative deputy, argued that a Soviet reversal in Finland 'would be our first victory against Germany'. To be sure, the potential benefits of cutting off Germany's access to Sweden's iron ore fields were also mentioned, but the goal of inflicting a defeat on the Soviet Union increasingly took precedence. 'If Finland is victorious against Bolshevik aggression,' Flandin insisted, 'it will be the first great success for our thesis, for our doctrine, for our reason for waging war.'⁴¹ Politically Daladier was in no position to ignore these demands, and in February

1940 he informed the Chamber of plans for an imminent Allied expedition to Finland. Interestingly, the centre-left and left scarcely resisted this pressure. While Faure's anti-Communism cancelled out his pacifism, leaving him silent, Blum, moved by the Finns' plight, denounced the Soviet Union's naked aggression. Although worried that the 'Russian peril' would eclipse the 'Hitlerian peril', Blum urged that 'nothing practically and humanly possible should be spared for [Finland's] salvation'.⁴² Even had it been less divided and weak, the left was in no position to prevent the war being transformed, under the right's mounting anti-Soviet hostility, from an anti-Fascist into an anti-Communist struggle.

The failure to intervene in Scandinavia before Finland's surrender led to Daladier's fall. To no one's surprise Reynaud replaced him: the success of his financial policies before the war and his leading role since then in calling for greater sacrifices had identified him as the heir apparent. Reynaud's parliamentary majority, however, was extremely precarious—his government won its first vote of confidence in the Chamber by only one vote. His strongest support came from the left, especially the SFIO. Despite their deep divisions, the Socialists had cobbled together a truce based on the call for a greater mobilisation of France's resources which Blum believed indispensable in order to defeat Germany, and which Faure accepted as an alternative to costly offensives on the western front. Both, moreover, made participation in the government a condition of SFIO support, Blum because he hoped to strengthen the forces favouring military victory, Faure because he hoped to encourage those who favoured a compromise peace.⁴³ But Reynaud's appointment of two Socialist ministers alienated large sections of the right who accused him of playing politics at a time of national peril. A small war cabinet made up of able and decisive men was needed, successive spokesmen insisted, not 'ministerial combinations'.

Calls for an end to politics, however, also reflected conservative fears of Socialist influence on France's internal and external policies. Speaking for the conservative *Fédération Républicaine*, René Dommage warned the Chamber that Socialists 'had never stopped being in the service of nationally destructive forces which we must defeat if we are to win the war'. During the same debate Fernand Laurent, a right-wing Radical, questioned Reynaud's anti-Soviet credentials. 'Do you consider [the Soviet Union],' he demanded, 'to be, like Germany, the declared enemy of the French nation which is fighting for its existence?' 'Simple good sense,' he added, 'indicates that we cannot take the [military] initiative unless we are determined, when [the opportunity] presents itself, to attack Soviet Russia.'⁴⁴

Caught between the left and right, Reynaud responded with the ambitious if not reckless military programme outlined earlier. Only military operations on secondary fronts offered the possibility of reconciling the centre-right and right to his government while satisfying the left's demand for a more intensive war effort. Successful military action, moreover, might end the war quickly, thereby avoiding the further fracturing of France's body politic. 'We want to make war,' the new premier declared in March, 'because we know that it is only our will to

war which will allow us to obtain as fast as possible the only peace we want, a durable peace.⁴⁵ The highly fractious state of French politics, itself partly a reaction to the prospect of war, underscores another important point. With the left divided and isolated and the right increasingly prey to pacifism and anti-Communism, there appeared to be no stable parliamentary majority in support of continuing the war against Germany. On the eve of Germany's great offensive in the west, the *union sacrée*, a prerequisite for a long-war strategy, had become little more than a hollow fiction.

THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ASPECT OF THE CRISIS

The decisive factor in the political-economic sphere was the decline in relations between organised labour, business groups and the government. In 1936 the wave of strikes following the Popular Front's electoral victory had ended with the Matignon agreements, in effect a national collective bargaining agreement signed by representatives of the main employers' organisation, the *Confédération Générale de la Production Française* (CGPF), and the largest trade union group, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT). Thereafter, however, relations steadily deteriorated. Employers, smarting from their defeat, regrouped in a revamped CGPF (now called the *Confédération Générale du Patronat Français*) and sought to reaffirm their authority, while trade union leaders strove to defend and extend their advantages.⁴⁶

Nowhere was this struggle fiercer than in the metallurgical industry, on which arms production depended. In the spring of 1938 talks broke down between the militant Communist-dominated *Fédération des Métaux* and the *Groupement des Industries Métallurgiques, Mécaniques et Connexes* (GIMM), the Paris affiliate of the national employers' organisation (UIMM), resulting in a series of strikes.⁴⁷ Since the intervention of the Popular Front in industrial relations, however, the confrontation had acquired a deeper significance. With the CGT and politicians on the left advocating state economic planning, employers and their right-wing political associates united solidly against state intervention in the economy, regarding it in the words of Jean-Claude Gignoux, the *patronat* president, as 'Marxism in action', which would end in 'red or brown dictatorship'.⁴⁸ The conflict that arose over the forty-hour law, one of the principal legacies of Popular Front intervention, thus took on the character of a struggle over the political economy of the country as a whole.

Initially, it appears, the government sought a compromise along lines proposed by the trade unions, which would avoid a general suspension or revocation of the law while allowing individual firms to prolong the work week when necessary. Members of the *Comité de Production*, the influential interministerial body presided over by Daladier and charged with overseeing war production, were prepared to accept that other reasons existed for the shortage of skilled labour.⁴⁹ The government, however, could not remain neutral in this now highly politicised

conflict. Already in August Daladier had announced his intention to 'put [France] back to work', a remark widely interpreted as an attack on the forty-hour law. On 2 November 1938 he replaced finance minister Marchandeu, who favoured greater state control over the economy including exchange controls, with Reynaud. Almost immediately, Reynaud introduced decree laws which eliminated most financial regulations, cut government spending (except for defence), increased indirect taxes and allowed employers to impose overtime at little additional cost. Reynaud did not conceal his identification with the *patronat*. 'We live in a capitalist system', he declared. 'For it to function we must obey its laws. These laws are those of profits, individual risk, free markets and growth by competition.'⁵⁰ The decree laws widened the confrontation, with militant workers and employers confusing their conflict with foreign threats. As Ambroise Croizat, Secretary-General of the *Fédération des Métaux*, wrote:

It is a matter now of defending against the Fascist danger at home and abroad. It is a question of our existence and the maintenance of our freedoms. Equally, we should with all our forces resist all efforts aimed at undermining our social laws—the forty-hour law and all the advantages we have won.⁵¹

Under pressure, Léon Jouhaux, the moderate CGT leader, agreed to a one-day general strike on 30 November. The *patronat*, uncertain of the government's reaction, waited for a lead. It soon came in the form of threats of severe sanctions against public sector workers. Firm action defeated the general strike. But the government's decision to align itself with employers had tremendous consequences. Broadly speaking, it meant that rearmament and, more generally, economic mobilisation for war would be pursued along laissez-faire lines.⁵² Largely because of employers' resistance to a planned and managed economy, little was done to prepare for the long war which French planners envisaged waging. '[O]ur real economic mobilisation', another report concluded in April 1939, 'has [still] to be done'.⁵³

As a result, in September the French faced the massive and complex task of shifting from a peacetime to a wartime economy. 'To pass from a capitalist regime to a completely managed economy is not an easy thing', Raoul Dautry, the armaments minister, noted in January 1940. 'To do so during a war is hopeless.'⁵⁴ Continued adherence to 'business as usual' principles only increased the difficulties. In the area of manpower, the near absence of population growth in the previous fifty years meant inevitable shortages. Poor management, however, aggravated the problem. At the outbreak of war fully 40 per cent of France's 1.1 million metallurgy workers were called up, crippling the industry. While such errors might be considered unavoidable, French planners had warned of this danger after the partial mobilisation in September 1938.⁵⁵ The absence of any higher authority resulted in a free-for-all.

Similar problems were evident elsewhere. Before the war the ministry of commerce had organised producers into industrial and regional groups which in wartime would oversee the import and distribution of raw materials and semi-finished goods among their members. Even these plans, which represented more an attempt at industrial self-regulation than state direction, fell victim to reigning liberal economic doctrine. Early in the war businessmen were told they should ignore the groups and address themselves to 'their habitual suppliers'. Once again the result was a free-for-all as firms competed fiercely for scarce materials, driving up prices and demand, and producing a generally chaotic situation.⁵⁶ Without a central directing and co-ordinating force able to draw up a balance of sheet of resources and demands, set goals, establish priorities, distribute scarce resources, control prices and wages, and spread the economic burden fairly, France's war economy suffered from unnecessary inefficiency and incoherence.

All this contributed to the disappointing production figures during the phoney war. To be sure, much of the current scholarship on France's wartime economy stresses the jump in production in early 1940. Robert Frank notes that, despite substantial losses, the French air force had more planes after the Battle of France than before. More generally, Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac writes that 'the industrial front was, in the final analysis, the one which best fulfilled its mission'.⁵⁷ While there is some truth to this conclusion, two important reservations are necessary. First, the rise in production can be exaggerated—hence, for example, Vuillemin's complaints about the unreliability of aircraft figures. Second, production increases came very late in the day, by which time the belief had gained hold that France's war economy was simply not working. Dautry, no appeaser, was greatly discouraged. Impressed by Germany's economic success and convinced that France's industrial mobilisation had been 'completely botched', he appealed unsuccessfully to Daladier to assume far-reaching powers over the economy. Dautry wrote in January:

[Y]ou need to create in your hands under the Ministry of National Defence a powerful organ of effective, simple, concentrated and vigorous command in which in each area one man will have the authority—all the authority—and the responsibility—all the responsibility—and whose decisions everyone has only to obey.⁵⁸

Reynaud was, if anything, more discouraged. Disturbed by the staggering cost of rearmament, which threatened to exhaust France's financial reserves by 1941, he seized upon proposals for large-scale orders of US planes in an attempt to gain overall direction of the war economy.⁵⁹

Daladier, however, refused to concede any new powers, explaining to Reynaud that 'financial problems...are vital, but they are not the only ones'. Convinced of the need for a 'quick fix' for the air force, he also insisted upon placing the orders for US planes. His promise to reduce foreign purchasing programmes in 1941 after the long-anticipated 'take-off' of French production

offered no solution to France's immediate economic and financial problems. But Reynaud had little else to offer. Although a *dur* by instinct, he had always doubted whether France possessed the resources to resist Germany. Moreover, having opposed the domestic economic and industrial measures needed to prepare for a long war, by 1940 he found himself in a financial crisis partly of his own making—a crisis which only reinforced his belief that the war economy was failing. Unable to find a solution to France's economic and financial ills, he (and Dautry) turned to military action. By striking a decisive blow at Germany, the war might be ended quickly enough to avoid the impending disaster. And Germany's most vulnerable point, as Reynaud's closest military advisers insisted, appeared to be its supply routes—for Scandinavian iron ore and Soviet oil from the Caucasus.⁶⁰

The real and perceived failure of France's war economy and the widespread discouragement this had fostered by the spring of 1940 brings us back to the subject of industrial relations. After the failed general strike of November 1938 organised labour stood isolated and alienated from the larger *redressement* in 1939. Successive decree laws, seeking to create a pro-business climate, limited overtime rates while increasing the work week. In May 1939 the head of the Marseilles metallurgical union complained that his members worked seventy and even eighty hours a week.⁶¹ It is true that industrial strife virtually disappeared, a situation caused in part by the weakness of organised labour whose membership fell sharply in 1939, and in part by the unwillingness of trade union leaders to stir domestic unrest at a time of mounting foreign danger. But despite conciliatory gestures,⁶² trade unions remained effectively shut out from all decisions affecting economic and social policy, their views neither solicited nor welcomed even during the phoney war. To be sure, some gestures were made. In October 1939, at Dautry's prompting, trade union and employer delegates, among them members of the UIMM and the *metallos*, met and signed the 'Majestic Accords' whose declared aim was to promote 'confident collaboration'. In November, worker and employer representatives of the Paris metallurgical industry began a series of regular talks under the aegis of the director-general of the ministry of labour, which lasted throughout the phoney war. However, given the marked lack of enthusiasm within the GIMM for the 'Majestic Accords', these talks predictably produced no concrete results.⁶³

The isolation of organised labour fed the growing belief in the failure of France's economic effort. During the phoney war the dominant image of industrial workers among employers and government officials was one of sullenness and intractability. Thus a report sent to Dautry in December 1939 remarked on the general absence of enthusiasm among workers. Over the next few months factory inspectors repeatedly noted the 'very bad' morale among workers. 'The workers do not overtly manifest their Communist sympathies but perform their tasks without any "national spirit"', read one report while another warned of '[n]umerous secret meetings' among workers.⁶⁴ The poor state of working-class morale could also be invoked to help explain disappointing production results.

Thus while almost all inspectors discounted rumours of the sabotage of machine tools and material, several claimed that workers were deliberately engaged in under-production, often under Communist orders.⁶⁵ Fear of Communist influence among workers, in fact, rapidly mounted, mirroring the growth of anti-Communism in political circles.

The immediate results were an extensive surveillance and security system inside factories and increasing crackdowns on suspected agitators. But this effort appears only to have stoked further fears. Referring to the 'insufficiency of repressive measures', a police report in January 1940 warned that a 'revolutionary cell' was being formed in every factory 'in conformity with a plan prepared in advance' whose aim was to undermine war production.⁶⁶ Without more evidence the accuracy of these reports is extremely difficult to establish. The perception of a discontented working class vulnerable to Communist agitation was, however, enough to strengthen doubts about France's ability to wage a long war. Did French workers possess the stamina? Even if they did, might not the result of a prolonged war be the complete adherence of the working class to revolutionary Communism? Thus in their own mind at least, French employers and officials got the working class that their economic and social policies deserved.

To conclude, this chapter has outlined three sources of the crisis which progressively overtook the French during the phoney war and led to the overthrow of the long-war strategy. Much more could be said, especially on Britain's role, but given space constraints it is best to end with a few observations. The first is the multi-faceted nature of the crisis. The strategic, domestic political and political-economic realms each contributed to undermining confidence in a long-war strategy and, equally important, each influenced the others. To focus on one or even two aspects is to miss a good deal of the story. As in the present account, a narrative approach which focuses on political and military events should be combined with a more structural one which looks at social and economic developments. Only by so doing can a proper balance be struck between contingency and determinism. Second, the pre-war and wartime periods constitute more a continuum than a break. It is useful, moreover, to argue back from the situation on the eve of Germany's offensive as this places France's wartime *union sacrée* and its industrial achievements as well as its pre-war *redressement* and Daladier's *politique de fermeté* in a somewhat different light from that of recent scholarship. Finally, the study of pre-war and wartime France must go beyond debates about the decadence and defeatism or the determination and far-sightedness of the French. Besides asking what French leaders wanted to do, we must ask why they did what they did and what prevented them from doing something else.

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- 3 For the revisionist view, see n. 1. For the more familiar picture, see A.Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, London, Cass, 1977, J.-B. Duroselle, *Politique étrangère de la France: La décadence*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1979; and N.Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1919–1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
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- 5 MAE, Papiers 1940, Fonds Dejean, vol. 1, ‘Note’, undated but handed to the British ambassador on 25 March 1940. MAE, Papiers 1940, Reynaud, vol. 2, Reynaud to Corbin, 26 April 1940.
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- 7 SHAT 7N 2522–3, ‘Considerations sur la constitution d’un bloc oriental’, EMA/2, 28 December 1938, emphasis in original.
- 8 SHAA, Z 12941, Papiers La Chambre, ‘Conférence sur l’U.R.S.S. et les puissances secondaires de l’Europe Centrale’, EMAA/2, February 1939. This file includes additional favourable assessments of Soviet air power.
- 9 CADN, Londres, vol. 134, Bonnet to Corbin, box 1517, 19 July 1939. For the Curzon line, see AN 496/AP/13 2DA6 Dr3, ‘Extraits des notes personnelles du Ministre des Affaires Etrangères’, 26 May 1939.
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- 11 Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter FDRL) PSF, Box 19, Despatches, Bullitt to Secretary of State, no. 1543, 22 August 1939.
- 12 SHAT 27N 53, ‘Note sur les possibilités allemandes au printemps 1940’, EMA/2, undated but December 1939. SHAA, Papiers La Chambre, Z 12964–2, ‘Situation de l’armée de l’air le 1er septembre 1939’ attached to Vuillemin to La Chambre, no. 813/5RS, 9 January 1940.
- 13 SHAT 5N 584–2/15, Daladier to Colson, 27 February 1940.
- 14 For figures, see the various tables in AN, Papiers Raoul Dautry, 307/AP/106 and 109.
- 15 For Vuillemin’s complaints, see SHAA Z 12964–2, ‘Note verbale du Général Commandant en Chef’, no. 899bis, 26 January 1940; and Vuillemin to Ministre de l’Air, no. 1066, 17 February 1940. French aircraft figures are in Z 12931–2, ‘Prévisions semestrielles de fabrication franco-anglaise...’, undated but late 1939; and

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 - 20 SHAT 2N 55-1/4, 'Question 8...', January 1940; 2N 53-4, 'Note sur la lutte de l'Allemagne contre le blocus', 8 February 1940,
 - 21 For blockade officials, see AN 72/AJ/566-3/1, 'Note pour Monsieur Dayras', 7 March 1940. For the navy, see SHM, 1BB2207-2/2, untitled note, 22 December 1939; TTA 92, 'Blocus des importations allemandes', FMF/3, 24 March 1940.
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 - 28 Plans and preparations for Baku are in SHAA 1D 33-d1; and SHAT 27N 9; 27N 4-2. Weygand is in 7N 3131-4, Weygand to Gamelin and Vuillemin, 17 April 1940.
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- 38 See, for instance, Albert Bachelet in AS, Commission des affaires étrangères, vol. II, 23 February 1940.
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INDEX

- Acéries Réunies de Burbach, Eich et Dudelange* (ARBED) 41, 42
Action française 14
Adamthwaite, A. 182
Addis Ababa 149
Adenauer, K. 63
Adriatic 15, 148
Africa 12, 13, 15
Aix-la-Chapelle 77
Albania 152
Albert Canal 183
Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft 37
Alliance démocratique 48, 268
Alliance Française 201, 202, 206
Alphand, H. 158
Alsace-Lorraine x, 9–11, 16, 17, 18, 30, 71, 75, 78, 136, 167, 181, 216, 228;
see also Lorraine
Alsthom, 227
America *see* United States of America
American Society of Teachers of France 197
Anglo-American guarantee to France 17, 22, 23, 32
Anglo-American loans 64
Anglo-Belgian-French solidarity 136
Anglo-French entente 206
Anglo-French guarantees to Poland and Romania 262
Anschluss 11, 113, 139, 213;
attempted (1934) 154
Antwerp 72, 74, 77
Arlon-Bastogne-Liège line 82
Armistice (1918) x, 1, 9, 13, 23, 71, 133
Association française d'expansion et d'échanges artistiques 202
Association pour la Constitution aux Etats-Unis d'un Office Français de Renseignements 204
Aubert, L. 245
Austria 11, 16, 98, 131, 132, 154;
appeals for French financial support 117;
gains French financial support 120;
National Bank 117;
reparations 97;
see also *Anschluss*
Austria-Hungary 15, 149
Austro-German customs union scheme 84 110, 113, 116–20, 139
Avenol, J. 107
Baden-Wurtemberg 186
Bainville, J. 9, 21, 22, 24
Baker, R.S. 9
balance of power 5, 14, 51, 266, 268
Balbo, I. 150
Balfour note (1 August 1922) 56, 93, 94
Balkans 148, 234, 236, 261
Baltic-Silesian railway 116
Bank for International Settlements (BIS) 117, 118
Bank of England 79, 97, 106–10, 113, 119
Banque d'Algérie 106
Banque d'Indochine 157, 227
Banque de France 79, 101, 106, 114, 115, 117, 119, 170, 204;
technically bankrupt (1931) 120;
extends credits to French allies (1931–3) 120
Banque de l'Union Parisienne 108
Banque de Paris et des Pays Bas 107

- Banque Franco-Serbe* 107
Banque Lazard 227
Banque Nationale de Belgique 79
 Bardoux, J. 56
 Bargeton, P. 142
 Barret, M. 202
 Barthou, L. 22, 48, 141, 144
 Bassée, L. 224
 Bastid, P. 269, 270
 Battle of the Bulge 185
 Baudouin, P. 157
 Beaumarchais, H. de 151
 Bédarida, F. 228
 Belgium 2, 11, 13, 31–3, 113, 163, 169,
 179, 182, 183, 185, 246, 247;
 abandons gold bloc 85;
 Brussels agreement 62;
 commercial agreement with Germany
 (1924) 78;
 commercial policy 81;
 currency stabilisation 78, 79;
 customs union with Luxembourg 41;
 demands compensation from
 Netherlands 16;
 industrialists 72;
 initiates tariff truce proposal 111;
 interest in European movement 108;
 neutrality 16, 70;
 refuses to ratify 1923 commercial
 agreement with France 78;
 relations with Britain 71–3;
 relations with France 70–86;
 relations with Luxembourg 32, 33;
 Ruhr occupation 39;
 signs Ouchy convention 122;
 steelmaking 30, 40, 41, 43, 80;
 supports plurilateral conventions (1928)
 109;
 tariff 76;
 troops occupy Ruhr 59;
 war debts 90
 Bellefon, M. de 198
 Benes, E. 124, 214–30
 Bérard, A. 143
 Berchtesgaden meeting 216, 217, 228
 Bérenger, H. 223–6
 Bergmann, C. 58, 95
 Berl, E. 224
 Bernhard, G. 132
 Bernus, P. 268
 Berthelot, P. 50, 72, 131, 134, 135, 136,
 228
 Berthod, A. 268
 Billotte, General G. 262
 Black Sea 15, 261, 265
Bloc national 48, 55, 64, 98, 99
 Bloch, M. 4
 blockade 14
 Blum, L. 144, 155, 175, 205, 217, 267,
 270, 271;
 government (1938) 213
 Bolshevism 13, 15, 17, 20
 Bonar Law, A. 56, 57, 58, 60, 75, 95;
 reparations plan (1923) 95, 97, 101
 Bonnet, G. 122, 172, 196, 205, 214, 215,
 216, 219–30, 235, 238, 244, 248, 262,
 267, 269;
 advocates withdrawing from eastern
 Europe (1938) 242;
 appeaser 143, 221;
 contacts Litvinov (1938) 216;
 favours rapprochement with Italy 156,
 157;
 leaves Quai d'Orsay 269;
 personal qualities 222, 223;
 seeks alliance with Soviet Union 268;
 seeks to abandon Czechoslovakia 217,
 223;
 sets French plan for Munich 220;
 supporters 228;
 supports deterrence strategy (1939) 262
 Bonney, T. 203
 Bouchet, H. 84
 Boulanger, N. 202
 Bourgeois, L. 12, 17
 Boussac, M. 224
 Bradbury, Sir J. 56
 Briand, A. 13, 15, 37, 42, 44, 119, 136,
 144, 151, 152, 175, 193, 228;
 cabinet (1922) 48;
 favours détente with Germany 133,
 135;
 resigns (1922) 38;
 plan for European federation 81, 82,
 111, 112, 115, 124, 138;

- supports European movement (1927) 108;
- Thoiry meeting 40, 165;
- urges financial cooperation with Britain 115–18;
- visits London (1922) 92;
- Briandism 50, 135, 144
- Briand-Kellogg Pact 194
- Briey-Longwy basin 30
- Britain x, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 88;
 - Abyssinian crisis 155;
 - adopts imperial protectionism (1931) 83;
 - air force 240, 264;
 - appeasement policy 156, 215;
 - blocks Ouchy convention (1932) 84, 123;
 - coal exports 35–7;
 - commercial policy 80–2;
 - driven off gold standard (1931) 81, 119–2;
 - Expeditionary Force (BEF) 2, 247;
 - foreign lending 107, 152;
 - Foreign Office 116, 117, 124, 219;
 - Franco-German rapprochement 38;
 - free trade 109, 111;
 - frightened into Continental commitment 247;
 - general election (1929) 114;
 - guarantee to Belgium 16, and France 142;
 - House of Commons 2;
 - intelligence service 56;
 - Labour party 217;
 - loans to Germany 102;
 - naval agreement with the United States (1922) 91;
 - offers France consultation on war debt strategy 121;
 - policy towards Germany 54, 65 132, 216;
 - relations with Italy 152, 155, 156, 157, 159;
 - relations with the United States 90;
 - Ruhr occupation 39, 63, 65;
 - Safeguarding of Industries Act (1921) 75;
 - sponsors tariff truce proposal 111;
 - steelmaking 29;
 - Treasury 20, 116, 117, 124;
 - Treasury conversations with France 115;
 - war debt policy 89–2
- Brockdorff-Rantzau, U. von 14
- Brüning, H. 118, 119, 121
- Brussels 43, 75;
 - conference (1920) 52;
 - conference (1934) 85;
 - University 108
- Bulgaria reparations 97
- Bullitt, W. 214, 218, 222, 226
- Bush, G. 163

- Caillaux, J. 224, 228
- Cairns, J.C. 162
- California 199
- Cambon, J. 133
- Cambon, P. 56, 72
- Cameroons 7, 16
- Campinchi C. 217, 218, 219, 235, 244;
 - advocate of firmness 221
- Canaris, Admiral 239
- Cannes conference (1922) 38, 130, 134
- Cartel des Gauches* 99, 150, 173
- cartels 83
- Célier, A. 89
- Chad 159
- Challener, R.D. 167
- Chamberlain, A. 133
- Chamberlain, N. 156, 158, 214, 215, 218, 220, 223, 224, 228, 240;
 - at Munich 220–3;
 - blind faith in Hitler's word 222;
 - government 247;
 - invited to Munich 213;
 - receives French warning 244–7;
 - seeks direct meeting with Hitler 217;
 - visits Berchtesgaden and Godesberg 227
- Chambrun, General de 204
- Chambrun, R.de 204
- Chamson, A. 222
- Chanak crisis 56
- Charveriat, E. 242
- Chautemps, C. 172, 244;

- appeaser 221
 Chequers 92
 Chéron, H. 114, 176
 Cheysson, P. 52
 Chicago 200, 206;
 Museum of Fine Arts 198
 Churchill, W.S. 2–3, 115, 219
 Churchill-Caillaux agreement on war debts
 100
 Ciano, G. 157, 158, 159, 220, 237
 Clappier, M. 221
 Claudel, P. 50, 85, 193, 196, 204, 206
 Clemenceau, G. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 49, 165,
 172;
 resigns 36
 Clémentel, E. 11, 12, 20, 21, 31, 37, 71
 coal and steel 11, 16, 18, 21, 23, 29–44, 60
 Coblenz 19
 Cologne 19;
 occupation zone 41
 Colrat, M. 64
 Colson, General L. 243, 261, 263
 Comert, P. 225
Comité des Forges 74
Comité d'entente franco-belge 84
Comité de Production 273
Comité des Forges 31
Comité France-Amérique 203
Comité Protestant des Amitiés Françaises 197,
 202
Commission d'Organisation des Régions
 Fortifiées (CORF) 169, 174–7, 179
Commission de Défense des Frontières 169,
 170, 184
Commission de Défense du Territoire 168
Commission des traités de paix 9, 15, 22
 Committee of Enquiry for European Unity
 82–4, 112–15, 116,
 conference (February 1931) 112
 Communists (PCF) 58, 155, 224, 267, 270,
 276
Comoedia 203
Compagnie générale transatlantique 199, 202
Confédération Générale de la Production
 Française (CGPF) 272
Confédération Générale du Patronat Français
 272
Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)
 181, 272
 Conference of Ambassadors 130, 131, 132,
 133, 134, 137, 138
 Conference on Concerted Economic
 Action, *see* tariff truce
 Coolidge, C. 98
 Corbin, C. 136, 216, 219, 261, 262, 263;
 hostile to Bonnet 225
 Corfu crisis (1923) 149
 Corsica 157
 Coulondre, R. encourages Franco-Soviet
 cooperation (1938) 225
Courier des Etats-Unis 198, 200, 204
Courier du Pacifique 198, 200
 Credit Anstalt 117
 Crémieux-Brilhac, J.-L. 274
 Croizat, A. 273
 Crouÿ-Chanel, E.de 225
 Crussol, Marquise de 222
 Cuno, W. 39, 53, 59, 60
 Curzon Lord 56, 58
 Czechoslovakia 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 143,
 232, 239;
 crisis, 235, 261;
 French financial support 116, 120;
 mobilises (1938) 214;
 on Munich agenda 213;
 Daladier 175
 Daladier, E. 4, 172, 215, 216, 234, 235,
 236, 239, 242, 250, 259, 263, 269;
 abandons appeasement (1939) 247;
 accepts appeasement 232;
 approaches Italy 159;
 at Munich 220–30;
 Briandism 228;
 cabinet divided 221;
 directs rearmament 273;
 dominates foreign policy making 244;
 firm on Czechoslovakia 217, 218;
 frightens Britain into Continental
 commitment 247;
 government 218;
 invited to Munich 213;
 personal qualities 222, 223;
 resigns 271;

- secures Franco-British guarantee of Romania 248;
 'strong man' image 249;
 suspicious of Italy 157-60
 Danube region 110, 112-15, 116, 117, 148, 152
 Danzig 6, 17, 232
 Darmstadt 75
 Dautry, R. 274-7, 276
 Dawes Committee 62, 64, 98;
 plan 39, 40, 64, 77, 99, 100
 Debeney, M.-E. 170
 Debû-Bridel, J. 223
 Dejean, M. 233, 265
 Delacroix, M. 92
 Delbos, Y. 172
 Delmas, A. 227
 Delmas, Col.J. 242
 Denmark 16, 113
 Detoef, A. 227
Deutsche Volkspartei 53
 Didelet, General H. 236, 239
 disarmament 12, 17, 18, 21, 24, 84, 138;
 conference 139, 140, 141, 144, 176;
 conference fails 144;
 see also France, Germany
 Djibouti 149, 157, 159, 237
 Dommage, R. 272
 Douhet, General G. 153
 Doumergue, G. 141
 Dreyfus affair 171
 Drummond, Sir E. 113
 Duroselle, J.-B. 141, 143, 213

 eastern Europe 234-49;
 see also France, interest in eastern Europe
Economist 114, 123
 Eden, Anthony 142
Entente républicaine et sociale 49
 Ethiopian crisis 155, 156
 Eupen-Malmédy 16
 Europe, protectionism 108-11, 124
 European Coal and Steel Community 86
 European Commission for Economic Union (CEUE) 82-4
 European customs union 83

 European Economic Community 86
 European movement 108-12
 European unity 111, 135, 138

 Fabry, J. 175
 Faucher, General 226, 228
 Faure, P. 172, 267, 271
 Federal Reserve Bank of New York 97, 100, 119
Fédération d'Alliance Française aux Etats-Unis et au Canada 201-4
Fédération de l'Alliance Française 197
Fédération des Métaux 272, 273, 276
Fédération Républicaine 272
 Finland 271
 Fiume 148
 Flanders 72, 83, 84
 Flandin, P.-E. 111, 112, 119, 142, 143, 228, 268;
 advocates withdrawing from eastern Europe (1938) 242;
 promotes appeasement 224
 Fleuriau, A.de 136
 Foch, Marshal F. 10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 23, 32, 63, 166, 170;
 critical of Versailles treaty 171-4;
 favours dismemberment of Germany 165;
 proposes seizure of Ruhr (1921) 37
 Fontnouvelle, C.de 197
Fortune 203, 204
 Fouques-Duparq, J. 112, 138
 Four-Power Pact (1933) 154
 Fourteen points 13, 18
 France abandons appeasement 250;
 air force 174, 178, 180, 182, 226, 274;
 air ministry 245;
 alliance with Russia (1891-1917) 15;
 appeasement 232-5;
 archives 10;
 army 164;
 Black Sea fleet 15;
 capitalist system 124;
 cartels, *see* industrial ententes;
 Chamber of Deputies 49, 58, 59, 64, 173, 174, 175, 176, 178, 184, 218, 224, 228, 242, 250, 268, 269, 270,

- see also* parliament;
 colonial demands 10, 13;
 commercial agreement with Germany (1927) 109;
 commercial expansion 13;
 concedes *Gleichberechtigung* 122;
Confédération nationale 227;
 conscription 175, 177;
Conseil supérieur de la Défense nationale 141, 234;
Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (CSG) 169;
 currency devaluation (1936) 85;
 currency instability (1924–6) 78, 88, 93, 98, 99, 105–8, 152;
 currency overvalued, 85, 120, 121, 173;
 currency stabilisation (1926–8) 80, 105;
 customs union with Belgium, Luxembourg, Saar and Rhineland 31–3, 108;
 customs union with Saar 41;
 ‘decadence’ 6, 7;
 decline 24, 43;
 defence strategy 162–88;
Défense Aérienne du Territoire (DAT) 179;
 defends most-favoured-nation principle 110, 124;
Deuxième Bureaux, *see* intelligence services;
 economic crisis (1932–4) 173;
 economic diplomacy 105–26;
 disarmament 139;
 economic pressure groups 123;
 economic recovery (1939) 259, 260;
 economic war aims 31;
 employers’ organisations 272–6, 276;
 finances 49, 62–4, 170, 178;
 films 200–3;
 financial markets 82;
 financial situation improves (1939) 248;
 financial support for Austria 120;
 foreign lending 89, 116;
 foreign ministry, *see* Quai d’Orsay;
 guarantee to Czechoslovakia 136;
 general strike (1938) 273, 275;
 guarantee to Poland 136, 232, 247;
 increases protectionism (1932) 81;
 high command 141, 153, 155, 169, 182;
 industrialists 17, 36; 38, 40, 43, 72, 74, 80, 148;
 industrial ententes 42, 80, 108, 113, 121;
 industry 49, 166;
 intelligence services 14, 52, 167, 184, 218, 232–52, 263;
 interest in East Africa 152;
 interest in eastern Europe 136, 170, 234, 261–4, 267–71;
 investments in Russia 15, 107;
 joins gold bloc (1933) 84;
 journalists 224;
 League of Nations 16;
Légion d’Honneur 198;
 legislative election (1924) 79, (1932) 172;
 Luxembourg railways 16;
 militarism 1, 56, 102;
 military power 14;
 ministry of air 159;
 ministry of armaments 159;
 ministry of commerce 50, 110;
 ministry of finance 11, 50, 87, 100, 227, 242;
 ministry of navy 159;
Mouvement général des Fonds 89, 226;
 National Congress (1919) 13;
 nationalists 175, 181;
 navy 182;
 North African possessions 245;
 parliament 12, 15, 37, 38, 50, 58, 88, 99, 129, 116, 120, 121, 181, 194, 219, 220, 228, 267, 271–4;
 parliamentary committee of inquiry 22;
 Permanent Committee of National Defence 214;
 ‘phoney war’ 158;
plan constructif français 113, 121 123;
 population 14, 24, 35, 151, 164, 165–8, 227;
 preferential agreements 113, 122;
 propaganda 193–207;
 protectionism 70, 108;
 public opinion (1938–9) 249;
 purchases aircraft in United States 245;

- radio broadcasting 201;
 rearmament 178, 245, 248, 263, 269;
 reconstruction 20, 38, 89, 106;
 reduced to debtor status 87–89;
 relations with Belgium 69–86, 108,
 136, 141, 169, 174, 179;
 relations with Britain 49, 51, 54–7, 57,
 64, 136 140, 141, 142, 143, 225, 227–
 30, 243;
 relations with Czechoslovakia 213–16,
 220–3, 239;
 relations with Germany 17, 36, 38, 52,
 65, 70, 75, 108, 130–46;
 relations with Italy 143, 147–62, 237–
 40, 246, 270;
 relations with Luxembourg 72, 108,
 169, 179;
 relations with Poland 151;
 relations with the Soviet Union 51,
 262, 265, 266–9, 270–3;
 relations with the United States 49, 51,
 110, 193–207;
 relations with Yugoslavia 148, 149,
 150, 151, 152;
 restoration as a Great Power 3–4;
revanchisme 49;
 Rhine frontier 32;
 secret service, *see* intelligence services;
 seeks revision of war debt obligations
 90–3;
 Senate 13, 64, 218, 223, 224;
 Senate Foreign Affairs Committee 55,
 94;
Service de Renseignements (SR), *see*
 intelligence services;
 sponsors tariff truce proposal 111;
 staff talks with Britain (1939) 260;
 steelmakers 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 41, 58,
 59, 72, 73, 74, 80;
 ‘The French Line’ 204;
 Third Republic 4, 48, 50, 112, 206,
 207;
 trade unions 175, 227, 272–6, 275;
union sacrée 272, 277;
 Vichy regime 4;
 war debts 193;
 war veterans 227
- France–America Society 197
- Franco-Belgian commercial agreement
 (May 1923) 76;
 (1934) 84
- Franco-Belgian economic conference
 (1917) 72
- Franco-British coalition 246, 249;
 economic cooperation 264;
 treaty 136
- Franco-British–Turkish alliance 144
- Franco-German commercial treaty (1925)
 41;
 agreement (17 August 1927) 78–79;
 (1932) 84;
 economic and financial entente 60, 61,
 62, 115
- Franco-German declaration (1938) 238,
 242
- Franco-German entente 134, 135;
 rapprochement 139
- Franco-Prussian War x, 11, 13, 14, 18, 88,
 173
- François-Poncet, A. 113, 117, 121, 131,
 159, 214, 215, 219, 221;
 advocates withdrawing from eastern
 Europe (1938) 242;
 ambassador to Rome 156–9;
 favours bilateral negotiations with
 Germany 140;
 issues warnings (1938) 225, 226
- Francqui, E. 79–1
- Frank, R. 274
- Frankfurt 19, 75;
 Treaty of 30
- Fraser, Col. W. 246
- French Institutes 197
- Fromageot, H. 136, 137
- Frossard, A. 219
- Gamelin, General M. 176, 177, 178, 182,
 183, 218, 236, 238, 239, 246, 250, 261;
 alters policy towards eastern Europe
 243–6;
 conversations with Badoglio 154;
 discourages support for Czechoslovakia
 226;
 warns Daladier (1938) 237
- Gauché, Col. M. 234, 236, 238, 246, 261;

- opposes appeasement 243
 Gaulle, General C.de 3–4, 130
 Geffrier, Col. 226
 Génébrier, R. 221, 222
 Geneva protocol 136
 Genoa conference (1922) 57, 91, 92, 130, 134
 George V, King 215
 Germain Martin, L. 270
 Germany x, 1, 4, 5, 49, 51, 108, 130–46, 147–50;
 Abwehr 233, 239;
 air force 240;
 Alsace-Lorraine 17;
 armed forces 17;
 army 12, 142, 166;
 at Paris peace conference 9–24;
 attacks France (1940) 159;
 bankruptcy 62;
 coal production 30;
 coal exports 97;
 Communists 115;
 delegation to Peace conference 22;
 disarmament 12, 21, 37, 122, 132, 134, 137, 138;
 economic vulnerability 240–3, 264;
 ‘economic Locarno’ (1927) 109;
 finances, 52, 114;
 financial crisis (1931) 118–1;
 foreign trade 110;
 gold bloc 84;
 Führerhaus 220;
 hyperinflation 93, 97;
 industrialists 36, 53, 63, 133, 135;
 influence in eastern Europe 122;
 interest in Romania 264–7;
 Luftwaffe 235, 263;
 Kapp putsch (1920) 133;
 League of Nations 17, 136, 137–40, 139, 144;
 militarism 102;
 national debt 88;
 navy 236;
 Nazi regime 167, 173, 185, 196, 232, 235;
 Nazis 135, 225;
 Nuremberg rally 216;
 occupation of Lorraine 30–2;
 offensive (1940) 1–3, 260;
 Ostpolitik 236;
 pan-German support 108;
 parliament 133;
 passive resistance 62;
 ‘peace plan’ 142;
 population 243;
 propaganda 52, 54, 198, 206;
 rearmament 140;
 Reichstag 52, 54;
 Reichswehr 133, 134, 135, 138;
 relations with France 143;
 relations with Italy 140, 148;
 relations with Soviet Union 265–9;
 requests reparations moratorium (1921) 56–8,
 (1922) 93;
 restrictions on foreign trade 72,
 end (1925) 78;
 revolution of 22, 198–199;
 Siegfried Line 269;
 Socialists 14;
 stabilisation of the mark 42;
 steel trusts 36;
 steelmakers 34, 38, 40, 41, 42, 74, 76, 80;
 steelmaking 24, 30–2, 35, 41;
 support for Italian territorial demands 237;
 threatens Britain 143;
 Upper Silesia 17, 18;
 Weimar Republic 10, 14, 21, 35, 135, 137, 139, 171, 193, 205;
 Wehrmacht 1–2, 185, 222, 235, 236, 238–1, 240, 248, 263, 266;
 Zollverein 32, 72
 Giannini 158
 Gide, C. 51
 Gignoux, J.-C. 273
 Godesberg meeting 223, 228;
 memorandum 219
 Goebbels, J. 185, 207
 Goering, H. 221
 Gold Bloc 84
 gold standard 82, 119, 120
 Gorce, P.-M.de la 178
 Grandmaison, General F.de 166
 Griffiths, R. 175

- Groupement des Industries Métallurgiques, Mécaniques et Connexes* (GIMM) 272, 276
- Guillaumat, General A. 169, 184
- Guariglia, General R. 158
- Gulf War 163–6
- Guthrie, W. 203
- Gwynne, H.A. 58
- Hagondage 30
- Hague conference (1929) 102, 111, 114–17, 130, 135
- Haguénin, E. 21, 132, 133, 134
- Halder, General F. 1, 2
- Halifax, Lord 2, 142, 215, 216, 219, 247
- Hamburg 53;
Hamburgischer Korrespondant 53
- Harding, W.G. 98
- Havas News agency 214
- Hearst, W.R. 198, 205
- Heideking, J. 133
- Henderson, A. 113, 119
- Henlein, C. 215
- Henry, J. 193, 194, 217, 226
- Herrick, M. 97
- Herriot, E. 40, 99, 139, 140;
agrees to abandon inter-government debts 121;
concedes *Gleichberechtigung* 140;
cool towards Ouchy convention 123;
government 78, 173;
changes policy towards Italy (1932) 153
- Hesnard, O. 132, 133, 134
- Hess, R. 214
- Hitler, A. 1–2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 122, 130, 141, 143, 164, 167, 173, 174, 178, 205–8, 207, 216–19, 234, 235, 268, 270;
after Munich 224;
ambitions in eastern Europe 238;
at Munich 213, 220–3;
attempted putsch (1923) 62;
eliminates Czechoslovakia 239;
Four-Year Plan 241;
meets Mussolini (1939) 160;
Mein Kampf 236;
memorandum (1938) 218;
orders ‘Case White’ 248;
pacifist 227;
‘peace plan’ (1936) 142;
plans to seize Austria and Czechoslovakia 213;
relations with Italy 156–60;
takes power 123, 139, 140, 153, 194
- Hoare–Laval plan (1935) 155
- Hodza, M. 217, 228
- Hoesch, L.von. 115
- Holland, *see* Netherlands 185
- Hoover, H. francophobia 121;
moratorium 111, 118, 121
- Hoppenot, R. opposes appeasement 243
- Horne, A. 163
- Hughes C.E. 98, 99
- Hughes J.M. 165, 182, 183
- Hungary 132, 143, 152;
reparations 97
- Huntziger, General C. 3
- Hussain, Saddam 163
- Hymans, P. 72, 83
- Institut Français* 203
- Institut Français d’Opinion Publique* 249
- Inter–Allied Military Control Commission in Germany (IMCC) 40, 41, 137
- Inter–Allied Rhineland High Commission (IARHC) 21, 23, 34
- International agricultural mortgage corporation 116
- International Chamber of Commerce, Congress 1929, 110
- International Court, the Hague, 113
- International Iron and Steel Entente 29–44, 80, 152
- International Rail Makers Association (IRMA) 38
- Iraq 163
- iron ore, *see* steel
- Italy 15, 16, 84, 167;
abandons Triple Alliance 147, 148;
army 240;
Chamber of Fasces and Corporations 157;
colonial ambitions 149, 152, 157, 159;
dependence upon foreign resources 241;

- economy 241;
 Fascist regime 5, 149–2, 232;
 francophobia 149;
fuorusciti 150, 153;
 industry 33;
 interest in eastern Europe 122;
 propaganda 198;
 relations with France 147–62, 237–40;
 relations with Germany 148, 156, 237;
 relations with Yugoslavia 148–1, 151, 152;
 seizes Albania 247;
 supplies military equipment to France (1940) 159;
 supports Ruhr occupation 59, 149, 150;
 territorial claims 205, 237, 268;
 war debts 90
- Japan 16
 Jaspar, H. 75;
 cabinet 79
 Joffre, Marshal J. 166, 169
 Jones, M. 203
 Jouhaux, L. 273
Journal des Débats 268, 269
 Jouvenel, H.de 153–6
 Jusserand, J. 196, 201
- Kayser, J. 222, 245
 Kellogg, F.B. 193
 Kérillis, H. de 268
 Kerr, P. 18
 Keynes, J.M. 1, 6, 53, 55, 90, 96, 100, 102;
 Economic Consequences of the Peace 9
 Khrushchev, N. 3
 Kiel Canal 16
 Klotz, L-L. 11, 12, 20, 22, 89
 Knipping, F. 139
 Kovacs, A.V. 164
 Kuwait 163
- La Chambre, G. 226, 235, 244, 269;
 appeaser 221, 222
La France militaire 168, 171, 177
La République 224
 Laboulaye, A. 196, 201, 203, 204, 205
- Lacroix, V.de 215, 216, 217, 225, 228
 Lamont, T. 99
 Lamoureux, L. 223–6, 269
 Landau 9, 18, 22
 Laroche, J. 133, 134, 135, 136
 Laurent, C. 36, 43
 Laurent, F. 272
 Laval, P. 116, 119, 139, 270;
 advocates withdrawing from eastern Europe (1938) 242;
 Ethiopian crisis 154;
 second government (1935–6) 175;
 Stresa front 155;
 visits United States 121
 Lazarus, D. 202
 Le Goyet, Col. P. 226
Le Journal 224
Le Temps 227
 Le Trocquer, Y. 53, 84
 League of Nations 12, 18, 37, 40, 80, 108, 130–3, 134, 135, 140, 141, 142, 155, 172;
 Assembly (1929) 111, 138,
 (1930) 112,
 (1931) 113;
 commercial relations 83;
 Commission 17;
 Council 138, 225;
 Covenant 16, 17;
 Economic Committee 81, 109;
 Economic Section 85;
 Financial Committee 107;
 Germany joins 136, 137–40, 171,
 withdraws 139, 144;
 plurilateral conventions, 124;
 Saar 32;
 see also disarmament conference
 Lebrun, A. 159
 Lee, B.A. 167, 178
 Léger, A. 42, 50, 112, 130, 138, 142, 158, 204, 216, 217, 220, 242;
 attends Munich 226;
 relations with Bonnet 224–7;
 supports appeasement 143
 Leith Ross, F. 115, 116
 Lelong, General 261
 Lémery, H. 269
 Lentin, A. 22

- Léonard, R. 221
L'Ere Nouvelle 133
 Levant 13, 22, 149
 Libya 159, 168
 Lindbergh, C. 216
 Lippmann, W. 194, 198
 Little Entente 152, 154, 170,
 see also Czechoslovakia, Romania,
 Yugoslavia
 Litvinov, M. 216
 Lloyd George, D. 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19,
 20, 21, 22, 23, 32, 37, 56, 57, 75;
 seeks cancellation of war debts 92, 93
 Locarno agreements 41, 44, 65, 130, 133,
 134, 135, 136–40, 142, 144, 150, 155,
 171, 172, 213;
 conference 40;
 ‘spirit of Locarno’ 135, 137, 138
 Logan, Colonel J. 56
 London conference (August 1922) 55, 94;
 conference (December 1922) 57, 95;
 conference (July 1924) 40, 41, 77, 99–2,
 119, 130, 134;
 four-power conference (1932) 122;
 naval conference (1930) 153;
 Pact of (1914) 15, 16;
 ultimatum (1921) 37;
 Treaty of (1915) 15
 London, City 107, 114, 119;
 over-exposed in Central Europe 117
 Lorraine 32, 34, 38, 39, 166, 176, 179;
 iron ore 36, 41, 63;
 Poincaré 49;
 steel 75
 Loucheur, L. 14, 19, 20, 37, 52, 75, 83,
 108;
 meets Lloyd George 92;
 plan (1921) 101;
 proposes international economic
 conference 80
 Loucheur–Rathenau agreements (1921) 75
 Louis XIV 24
 Luther, H. 119
 Luxembourg 11, 13, 16, 30, 31, 32, 33, 39,
 43, 71, 72, 73, 74, 83, 108, 181, 182;
 customs union with Belgium 41, 42,
 74;
 customs union with France 74;
 industrialists 74, 79;
 Guillaume–Luxembourg railway 75;
 iron ore 34;
 relations with Belgium 32, 33;
 signs Ouchy convention 123;
 steelmakers 41, 42, 80;
 steelmaking 40, 41, 42;
 Treaty of Frankfurt 30
 MacDonald, J.R. 6, 40, 64, 111, 119;
 refuses discussion of war debts with
 France 100;
 Stresa front 155
 MacDougall, W. 10
 Macedonian separatism 152
 Maginot Line 162–88, 224
 Maginot, A. 48, 58, 116, 162
 Maier, C. 63
Maison de la presse 131
Manchester Guardian 123
 Malmédy *see* Eupen–Malmédy
 Mandel, G. 64, 217, 218;
 advocate of firmness 221;
 anti-Munichois faction 244
 Mantoux, P. 10
 Marchandeu, P. 244, 273
 Margerie, P. de 60, 74, 136
 Marienwerder 17
 Marin, L. 220
 Marne, first and second battle of, x
 Massigli, R. 21, 110, 112, 130–46, 225,
 226;
 as Cassandra 144;
 discourages appeasement of Mussolini
 158;
 opposes appeasement 143;
 sent to Ankara (1938) 143;
 supports Briandism 135
 Maurin, L. 174, 177
 Maurois, A. 204
 May crisis 214
 Mayrisch, E. 41, 42, 79;
 committee 43, 108
 McCormick, C. 198
 McKenna committee 98
 Mediterranean 15

- Mellon-Bérenger agreement on war debts 100, 101
- Memel 132
- Meyer, E. 204
- Mezes, S. 18
- Middle East 12, 56;
see also Levant
- Millerand, A. 36, 57, 58, 63
- Mission Interalliée de Contrôle des Usines et des Mines* (MICUM) 39, 40, 59, 62, 99
- Mistler, J. 223–6, 268
- Monick, E. 264
- Monod, V. 202
- Montigny, J. 223
- Montmédy 181, 182, 185
- Monzie, A.de 219, 223–6;
anti-Munichois 244;
 appeaser 221
- Morand, P. 50
- Mordacq, J. 10, 18
- Moreau, E. 79, 106–9, 114
- Moresnet 16
- Moret, C. 115;
 assists Britain 119
- Morgan, J.P. 92, 98, 204;
 organises loan to France 99
- Morning Post* 60
- most-favoured-nation principle 80, 83,
 108–12, 124
- Munich 267
- Munich agreement (1938) 232, 245, 246,
 249;
 conference 62, 156, 213–30, 219–3,
 259;
 crisis 241, 268
- Mussolini, B. 241, 270;
 Ethiopian conflict 155–8;
 invited to Munich 213;
 Mediterranean ambitions 150–4;
 obsessed by Hitler 160;
 opposes *Anschluss* (1934) 154;
 proposes pact of friendship (1933) 153;
 seeks rapprochement with Germany
 (1935) 156;
 seeks to avoid conflict (1938) 238;
 seizes power 148;
 subverts Franco-British relations 156;
 suspicious of Germany 150
- Napoleon I 24, 167
- Napoleon III x
- Napoleonic wars 13
- National Association for Economic
 Expansion 123
- NATO 4, 185, 186
- Nazi party 115;
 regime 205
- Nazi-Soviet pact 262, 265, 270
- Necas, M. 217
- Needham, H. 175, 177
- Néré, J. 183
- Netherlands 11, 16, 83, 84, 98, 113, 246,
 247;
 signs Ouchy convention 122
- New York 197–198, 200, 202–6;
 Foreign Policy Association 205;
 French Chamber of Commerce 200,
 201;
 Council on Foreign Relations 205;
 French Information Center 202, 206;
Lycée 199;
Herald Tribune 198, 204, 205;
Maison de France Rockefeller Center 198,
 199;
New Yorker 204;
Times 198, 203, 204, 205
- Newton, B. 217
- Nicholas II, Tsar 15
- Nicolson, H. 9
- Noël, L. 222, 225
- Norman, M. 79, 106–9, 113, 117;
 requests French assistance 119
- North Africa 168
- Norway 266
- Nouveaux Cahiers* 227
- Nuremberg rally 226
- Odessa 15
- Orlando 16
- Office Nationale des Universités et Ecoles* 199
- Orlando, Premier 16
- Oslo convention (1930) 83, 113
- Osusky, S. 214, 215, 228
- Ottoman Empire x, 10, 149
- Ouchy convention (1932) 83, 84, 122–5

- Pact of London 15–16
 Painlevé, P. 168, 175
 Pan-Europa 108
 Paris 2, 204;
 Allied economic conference (1916) 71;
 Bourse 107;
 Peace conference (1919) x, 1, 9–24,
 148, 165;
 British delegation 10;
 Council of Four 10, 16, 21;
 Council of Ten 16;
 Fontainebleau memorandum 17, 22;
 Polish Affairs Commission 17;
 conference (January 1923) 75
 Patenôte, R. 204
 Patton, General G.S. 185
 Paul-Boncour, J. 140, 142, 175, 214, 224
 Pearton, M. 166, 167, 174
 Pétain, Marshal H.-P. 4, 170, 176, 178,
 179, 183, 204, 260;
 biography 175
 Peyrimhoff, H.de 227
 Phipps, Sir E. 214, 216, 218, 246
 Pichon, S. 19
 Pichot, H. 227
 Piétri, F. 219, 223
 Poidevin, R. 135
 Poincaré, R. 10, 12, 15, 22, 41, 48–65, 72,
 76, 87, 93, 133, 135, 144, 150, 152, 170,
 172, 175;
 Corridor 11, 17;
 decision to occupy the Ruhr 93–8;
 franc Poincaré 170, 179;
 government 78;
 halts decline in franc 106;
 maintains inter-Allied solidarity 97;
 Poincaré-la-guerre 49–1;
 ratifies Mellon-Bérenger agreement
 101;
 restores monetary stability 101;
 Ruhr crisis 38, 39, 60;
 seeks new partnership with Britain 107;
 stabilises franc 79–1;
 suspicious of Fascist Italy 149
 Poland 11, 13, 15, 17, 37, 84, 110, 113,
 137, 143, 157, 170, 243, 244, 248, 261–
 4;
 French financial support 116, 120;
 industry 33;
 plays double game (1938) 26;
 stabilisation loan 107
 Polk, F.L. 198, 204
 Pomaret, C. 244;
 appeaser 221
 Popular Front 155, 156, 175, 205, 223,
 248, 259, 273;
 collapses 267–71
 Potsdam conference 3
 Pownall, General Sir H. 247
 Prague coup 262
 Prinkipo Island 15
 Quai d'Orsay 50, 52, 72, 74, 75, 88, 107,
 108, 130, 131, 134, 135, 136, 138, 140,
 141, 143, 148, 149, 151–4, 153, 194,
 219, 222, 224–8, 239, 242, 244, 248,
 266, 269;
 appeals for Franco-British solidarity
 (1938) 213;
 Briandism 50;
 League of Nations section 110, 130,
 131, 135, 138–1;
 opposes Ouchy convention 123;
 panics 216;
 prepares Briand plan 112;
 propaganda 193–207;
 role in Ethiopian crisis 154;
 Service d'action artistique 202;
 Service d'Information et de Presse 194,
 200, 203;
 Service des Oeuvres Françaises à l'Étranger
 194–8, 202, 206, 207;
 supports appeasement 143;
 unable to coordinate policy 124
 Quesnay, P. 115
 Radical party 49, 62, 64, 116, 155, 153,
 164, 172–5, 218, 222, 228, 244, 259,
 267–70, 272
 Radisse, Mlle 202
 railways 16, 19
 Rapallo, Treaty of, 39, 91
 Rathenau, W. 37, 38
Région Fortifiée de la Lauter (RF Lauter) 169,
 170, 179, 185

- Region Fortifiée de Metz* (RF Metz) 169, 170, 179, 185
- Reibel, C. 63
- Reichsbahn* 115
- Reichsbank* 118, 120
- Reid, O. 204
- Relations internationales* 135
- Renault, L. 204, 227
- Renondeau, General G. 226, 235
- Reparations 12–13, 17, 19–4, 37, 53, 54, 55, 59, 74, 75–7, 77, 87–102, 121, 124, 148, 193;
 deliveries in kind 36, 37, 39, 52, 53;
 Reparation Commission 21, 38, 50, 54, 55, 56, 59, 63, 92, 98, 99, 100;
see also Dawes plan and Young plan
- Réquin, General E.J. 116
- Reynaud, P. 2, 3, 183, 204, 217, 218, 219, 259, 264, 268;
 advocate of firmness 221;
anti-Munichois faction 244;
 anti-Soviet view 272;
 financial reforms (1939) 273–6;
 government (1940) 260–3, 271;
 requests meeting with Mussolini (1940) 159
- Rhineland 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18–19, 20, 31, 38, 61;
 demilitarisation 32;
 frontier, 22, 63, 74, 169, 170;
 independent state 32;
 occupation 23–5, 32, 111, 137, 138, 165, 172, 173, 176;
 proposed central bank 77;
 Rhineland pact, *see* Locarno treaties;
 remilitarisation (1936) 9, 141–4, 144, 153;
 separatist movement 23, 37, 51, 62, 63, 64, 96, 98, 133
- Ribbentrop, J. von 238
- Ribes, C.de 218;
 advocates firmness 221
- Ricard, General E. 182
- Robbe, F. 269
- Roche, E. 224, 267
- Rockefeller, J.D. 198
- Rohstahlgemeinschaft* 42, 43
- Romains, J. 199
- Romania 15, 113, 143, 152, 243, 244, 261–4;
 French financial support 116, 120;
 oil 236, 239, 264–7;
 stabilisation loan 107
- Rome agreements 154, 157
- Roosevelt, F.D. 2, 3, 205, 216
- Rueff, J. 226–9
- Ruhr 6, 18, 19, 31, 32, 36;
 coal and coke 34, 75;
 crisis (1923) 9, 38, 40, 48–65, 108, 134;
 Dortmund 59;
 Duisberg 37;
 Düsseldorf 37;
 industrialists 42, 62;
 occupation (1921) 37;
 occupation (1923) 39, 40, 41, 70, 76, 79, 87, 96, 99, 101, 130, 149, 150;
 passive resistance, 77, 97;
 Ruhrort 37
- Runciman mission (1938) 215, 223, 225, 228
- Russia x, 54;
 alliance with France 15;
 Bolsheviks 13, 15;
 Civil War 15;
 Whites 15;
see also Soviet Union
- Russo-Finnish War 271
- Saar 9, 11, 13, 17, 18, 22, 31–4, 38, 71, 138, 169, 170;
 plebiscite (1935) 32;
 basin 30;
 customs union with France 33, 41;
 steelmaking 40, 43
- Saarbrücken 9
- Saint-Aulaire, Comte de 60, 94
- Saint-Quentin, R.de 196
- San Remo agreements 158
- Sarraut, A. 142;
 advocate of firmness 221
- Saturday Evening Post* 203
- Sauerwein, J. 215, 223
- Sauvy, A. 35, 259
- Savoy 157
- Schacht, H. 114

- Schleswig 16
 Schmidt, H.-T. 233
 Schneider, E. 72
Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), *see* Socialists
 Sedan 1
 Serruys, D. 74, 110
 Seydoux, J. 36, 38, 41, 65, 107, 135, 136, 137;
 plan 75
 Shirer, W. 162, 182
 Siegfried Line 226
 Siegfried, A. 199
 Simon, Sir J. 215
 Smoot, R. 193
 Socialists (SFIO) 49, 58, 116, 155, 172–5, 175, 181, 267, 271
Société des Gens de Lettres 197
Société Générale de Belgique 79
 Soutou, G.-H. 71, 135, 141
 Soviet Union 3, 24, 35, 39, 49, 50, 51, 91, 122, 138, 143, 216, 222, 243–6, 248, 262, 268, 270;
 attacks Finland 270;
 oil 275;
 see also Stalin, J.
 Spa conference (1920) 36, 75;
 percentages 95, 101
 Spain 167, 270;
 civil war 156, 237, 241
 Stalin, J. 3
 steel 11, 14, 16, 29–44;
 see also coal
 Stehlin, Capt. P. 214, 226
 Steinart, M. 213
 Sterling, M. 202
 Stimson, H. 119
 Stinnes, H. 36, 39, 40, 133
 Stoppani, P. 85
 Strasbourg 142
 Stresa conference (1932) 122;
 front (1935) 155
 Stresemann, G. 61;
 Thoiry meeting 40, 165
 Strong, B. 100
 Sudeten crisis 156, 213–19
 Sudetenland, 9, 11, 16, 130, 215, 224, 259
 Suez Canal 237;
 Company 157
 Supreme Inter-Allied Council (1939) 132, 158
 Sweden iron ore 39, 266, 271
 Switzerland 84;
 supports plurilateral conventions (1928) 109
 Syria, *see* Levant
 Tabouis, G. 224
 Tangiers 150
 Tardieu, A. 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 52, 64, 112, 172, 175, 183;
 plan (1930) 180;
 (1932) 123;
 urges Franco-German economic cooperation 115
 Tariff truce conference (1930) 111, 122
 Theunis, G. 79, 85, 99;
 government 76
 Thoiry meeting 165, 171, 172
 Thyssen, F. 30, 38, 41, 43,
 proposes international steel cartel 43
Time 204
Times (London) 216
 Tirard, P. 13, 34
 Togo 7, 16
 Tournoux, P.-E. 169
 Trachtenberg, M. 20
 Treaty of London (1915) 15, 149
 Triple Alliance 147, 148
 Tripolitania 151
 Tunisia 149, 151, 152, 154, 157, 159, 168, 237, 247
 Turkey 243
 Tyrol 15,
 see also Italy
 Tyrrell, Sir William (Lord) 58

Union douanière européenne 84, 108
 United States of America x, 2, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 35, 51, 88, 151;
 bankers 40;
 Congress 3, 12, 22, 111;
 disappointment in France 3–4;
 financial imperialism 101;
 foreign loans 100, 102, 152;

- francophilia 197;
 francophobia 194, 197;
 Hollywood 206;
 isolationism 110, 205;
 protectionism 109–12;
 Senate 22, 49;
 Smoot–Hawley tariff 111;
 steelmaking 29;
 supplies aircraft to France 275;
 Treasury 90;
 universities 198–1;
 war debts 56, 100, 89, 90, 92–5;
 World War Foreign Debt Commission 91,
see also Wall Street
Union fédéral 227
 Upper Silesia 11, 17, 18, 37, 38, 132;
 plebiscite 21
- Valeur, R. 204
 Van Zeeland, P. 85, 86
 Vanlangenhove, F. 78
 Versailles, Treaty of, 9–10, 15, 21, 22–35,
 36, 37, 38, 39, 49, 52, 65, 77–9, 101,
 105, 118, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 138,
 139, 142, 147, 165, 171–4;
 commercial restrictions on Germany
 33–5, 41;
 Covenant 21;
 disarmament clauses 140;
 iron and steel scheme 33–5, 39, 43, 87;
 war guilt clause 21, 49
 Victor Emmanuel III, 159
 Vilna 132
 Vistula 11
 Vitrolles, Lieut.-Col. A.de 243
 Vivremont, Col. L.E.von 233, 247–50
 Vuillemin, General J. 215, 226, 263, 274
- Wall Street 114–17, 117;
 boom 115;
 crash 108, 173, 194
 Wallony 83, 84;
 industrialists 78
 war debts 20, 56, 64, 87–102, 121, 124,
 193
 War, Cold 163, 186;
 Gulf 163;
 Phoney 158, 259–77
Washington Post 205
 Welzcek, Count J.von 216
 Wendel, H.de 43
 Weygand 266
 Weygand, M. 4, 165, 173, 176, 177, 178,
 182;
 critical of Versailles treaty 172;
 suspicious of Third Republic leaders
 171;
 urges appeasement of Italy 159
 Wiedemann, F. 238
 Wiesbaden agreements 37, 38
 Wiley, L. 204
 Wilson, W. 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19,
 22, 32, 102
 Wolff, O. 133
 World Economic Conference (1927) 80–2,
 108;
 (1933) 82, 84, 124
 World War, First 130, 147, 164–8, 172,
 263;
 casualties 165;
 Second 9, 43, 86, 147
- Yalta conference 3
 Young plan 100, 101, 102, 110, 111, 114–
 17, 118, 165, 176
 Young, R.J. 246–9
 Yugoslavia 15, 113, 148–1, 151, 243,
 French financial support 120, 116
- Zay, J. advocate of firmness 221,
anti-Munichois 244