

Review ESSAY

Charles Cogan. *Diplomatie à la française, Préface d'Hubert Védrine, Traduit de l'anglais par Nicolas Rousselier.* Paris: Éditions Jacob-Duvernet, 2005. ISBN: 2-84724-093-4. 22.95€.
French translation of Charles Cogan. *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation.* Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2003. ISBN: 1-929223-52-8.

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In a memorandum to the State Department on November 10, 1943, Ambassador Edwin Wilson reported a conversation with General de Gaulle the night before. “I began it by saying that there seemed to be some misunderstandings between Algiers and Washington, which ought to be cleared up. General de Gaulle asked: ‘You think they are only misunderstandings?’ I replied: ‘Yes, I think they are only misunderstandings; what do you think they are?’ He said: ‘I have come to wonder whether it was not a matter of policy on the part of your Government.’”¹ This exchange illustrates a fundamental problem of distrust, accompanied by bewilderment, that has driven a Franco-American *mésentente* for much of the twentieth century, certainly since the Gaullist moment during World War II.

Dealing with France, the once *Grande Nation*, has not always been easy for Americans, either individually or as government officials charged with responsibility for negotiating this contentious relationship. Suspicion and a misreading of the other side’s motives, whether by mistake or intention, seems to occur with exceptional frequency. The much-used medical metaphor, a syndrome, can be applied. There have been highs and lows in the long historical engagement, but whether high or relatively low, the chart consistently reflects a feverish intensity. Charles Cogan cites Jean Monnet’s comment about how the French memory of the American refusal to recognize the Free French movement as a provisional government during World War II produced a “recurrent fever [that] has troubled Franco-American relations for the past thirty years.” (96/77)² Why has the relationship been so acrimonious? A partial answer to this question is that cordial relations between these two wary allies often get caught between the fires of anti-Americanism on one side and Francophobia on the other. The resulting heat, or fever, is further intensified by writings on the topic, some of them balanced and more or less detached, but many driven by biases and polemics. Charles Cogan is well aware of these sentiments and how they affect bilateral relations. In the interest of finding a way to manage this difficult alliance Cogan has offered a prescription as to how, despite cultural differences, Americans can comprehend French diplomatic practice and find a way to deal with it. The underlying question asks what is it that often makes French negotiators look

¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943, volume II* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943): 188, cited in François Kersaudy, *De Gaulle et Roosevelt: Le duel au sommet* (Paris: Perrin, 2004): 347-348.

² The citation is from Jean Monnet, *Mémoires* (Paris: Fayard, 1976): 261-262.

upon the United States as a dangerous rival to the extent that President François Mitterand claimed that France was “at war against America”? (54/40) The author is to be admired for undertaking a diagnosis of this chronic problem. What results is a book that synthesizes and interprets a number of arguments from a wide variety of writings on the topic.

Charles Cogan has brought his considerable professional and academic experience to the task. The original, English edition of this book was sixth in a series that the United States Institute of Peace has published on approaches to bilateral negotiations.³ Each book in the series is the work of experts in their respective fields, and Charles Cogan easily meets this standard for France. After a career in the Central Intelligence Agency that included a final tour as head of the CIA’s Paris Bureau, he embarked upon a second career in academia upon retirement from the service in 1991, having arrived at Harvard two years earlier as a research fellow associated with the Intelligence and Policy Project, a joint undertaking of the CIA and the Kennedy School. In 1992, the Kennedy School awarded him a doctorate in public administration. His dissertation became a book, *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends: the United States and France since 1940*, which is a thoughtful analysis of French-American relations that has been of great value to those who have tried to fathom the dynamics between France and the United States since World War II. Five other books followed, including *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with la Grande Nation* that was published in 2003 at the height of the Franco-American quarrel over the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq. Two years later a French translation, *Diplomatie à la française*, appeared. In 2006, the Association des Sciences Morales et Politiques of the Institute de France awarded its Ernest Lemonon prize to Charles Cogan for an outstanding work on contemporary foreign policy. It is the French publication that is reviewed here with page references from each edition, the French reference indicated first.

At the heart of Cogan’s analysis is the way that different cultures and different senses of history have become crucial sources of misunderstanding. (37/23) Cogan’s use of what the French call “cultural formation” to explain patterns of behavior takes the reader into a more fluid and complex realm than is encountered in a realist or rational behavior approach in which power and material interests are seen as presumably objective bases for negotiation.⁴ Cogan’s emphasis is the approach that the French themselves see as necessary to understanding their differences with the United States. Gilles Andréani endorses the French translation by observing that the book will please those who believe “that international politics is not only an abstract calculation of interests, but also the reflection of national temperaments.”⁵ Cogan assumes that an understanding of the cultural elements that have

³ Previously published in the series from the Institute’s Cross-Cultural Negotiation Project include: Jerrold L. Schecter, *Russian Negotiating Behavior: Continuity and Transition* (1998); Scott Snyder, *Negotiating on the Edge: North Korean Negotiating Behavior* (1999); Richard H. Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior: Pursuing Interests through “Old Friends”* (1991); Michael Blaker, Paul Giarra, and Ezra Vogel, *Case Studies in Japanese Negotiating Behavior* (2002); and W.R. Smyser, *How Germans Negotiate: Logical Goals, Practical Solutions* (2003).

⁴ An example of a traditional guide to negotiation would be Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (NY: Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, 1995).

⁵ Andréani’s remark is only in the French edition.

shaped the outlook of French negotiators will enable Americans to be less irritated and bewildered by French diplomatic style and explain why two nations with apparently similar values can and do differ. Cogan identifies six categories of French cultural formation: the tradition of the state; distinctive hallmarks of French political culture; anti-Americanism; the French temperament; the influence of Cartesianism; and the impact of the French educational system. In each category, the implicit comparison is with the United States and American practices and values.

The French state preceded the nation with a tradition dating back to the early modern period when royal power gradually established a French domain through wars of conquest and annexation, creating a highly centralized authority that has survived several forms of government. *Raison d'État* was coined under the monarchy, but has persisted under empires and republics. Cogan goes so far as to call French respect for the authority of the state “a deification.” (40/26) Yet the authority of the state has been challenged by revolution, rebellion and demonstration, which is no less an enshrined tradition of French political style. Still, no one, whether revolutionary or reactionary, has tried to abolish the state in France, and diplomats under all regimes have defended French interests tenaciously. To make his point about the pervasive presence of the state in French life Cogan cites evidence that fifty-four percent of the French gross domestic product is controlled by the state and twenty-five percent of French workers are paid by the state, a much higher percentage than in the U.S. (43/29)

The French acceptance of *étatisme* and centralized authority leads to a conception of “rights” that balances the rights of the individual with the collective rights of the community. For Americans the notion of liberty and freedom seem interchangeable, and freedom is freedom from state management of private lives. For the French the state has become the instrument to assure common interests, deriving from Rousseau’s conception of the general will that places equality and fraternity alongside liberty. Concern for the general welfare of society provides a more humane sense of civic responsibility than an American model of democracy and its corollary, unbridled capitalism. When both French and Americans think they each embody universal democratic values, but these values are in sharp contrast, conflict and misunderstanding become unavoidable. Given the realities of American power and a determination to spread an American version of democracy and a capitalist economic order, the French react with resentment and resistance.

French differences with Americans over the issue of religious freedom and toleration also enter the discourse over values and cultural difference. The French tradition of absolute secularism for the state and a freedom from religion contrasts, as many have noted, with the American idea of freedom of religion. French statesmen from the days of Clemenceau and Wilson have found American religiosity to be an unsettling basis for shaping foreign policy. A French conviction that religion drives its relations with other countries can be seen in a belief that Protestantism is at the heart of an American “Anglo-Saxon” culture that is hostile to Catholic values, which remain very much part of French cultural tradition despite the state’s neutral secularism and sparse religious attendance. Whether Protestant opposition to and

presumed prejudice against Catholicism is still a serious issue in American culture is less important than a French conviction that it is in shaping assumptions about the American other.

Over many decades negative images have produced a deeply ingrained anti-Americanism in France, as a number of recent studies have established. Much of this anti-Americanism arises from a fear of an American cultural impact that threatens French values, whether of the political Left or Right and represents a powerful challenge to what French intellectuals and politicians see as French identity. Cogan focuses upon a third form of anti-Americanism, identified by Stanley Hoffmann, as the anti-Americanism of the state in which France emerges as an underdog opposing the domination of the United States in world politics. Advocacy of multilateralism is seen as a way of counterbalancing the unilateralism of Hubert Védérine's *hyperpuissance*. An opposition to the United States out of a disagreement over specific policies is not necessarily anti-American, but an opposition based on a fundamental dislike of what is perceived to be American qualities or simply size—the fact of being a *hyperpuissance*—becomes an opposition on principle. Here Cogan argues that France has traditionally sought to prevent hegemony in Europe or globally in the past, and current French resistance to American domination, or more broadly what America represents, fits within this historical practice and a conviction to be found from de Gaulle to Chirac that what America has become politically, militarily and culturally represents a threat to France and France's standing in the world.

French defensiveness has resulted from a strong sense of French decline, beginning with military defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 and exacerbated by the humiliation of 1940. Alongside the role of David (or Asterix) challenging Goliath (Romans) is the memory of a time when France was *La Grande Nation* capable of imposing its will upon Europe. Since France can no longer dominate Europe, France will pursue a European policy as a way to enlist the continent in opposition to American hegemony and cultural impact. Resistance and a determination to say “no” to the superpower of the day is a way of defending French independence and sovereignty just as the negative image of the United States to be found in the extensive anti-American tropes among French intellectuals reflects a determination to preserve a uniquely French culture and identity in the face of an American-driven globalization. The history of the twentieth century has produced a historical memory of French humiliations, twice at the hands of Germany but several times at the hands of the “Anglo-Saxons” from Fashoda in 1898 to the abandonment of French guarantees at Versailles to Mers-el-Kebir in 1940 to Roosevelt's hostility to de Gaulle to the French wars of decolonization in Indochina and Algeria. The accumulation of French historical grievances against “the Anglo-Saxons” has made the French highly sensitive to matters of status or standing at a time of relative decline.

How then do the French, who have a built-in mistrust and suspicion of United States' policies, actions and social/cultural values deal with the *hyperpuissance* of today? One way is to emphasize differences rather than similarities of values and objectives. Another is to insist that France, in the words of Hubert Védérine, continues to be “one of the great powers of the world that have the means of a truly global policy.” (127/105) French negotiators insist that French views be heard, and they arrive at the table, as Cogan notes, with a carefully

constructed bargaining position and a clear idea of what their final outcome should be (143/120). Intransigence was de Gaulle's method, and his almost military approach to hard bargaining has left its mark, reinforced by a conviction that once determined, the French position is the correct one. Another Gaullist heritage comes from a resistance to compromise to the point of preferring being right to having an agreement that might "compromise" French principles or interests. Often French negotiators play for time in the conviction that the other side will come around to accept the logic of French arguments. The impression created is one of a French sense of their own superiority, reflecting the impressive preparation of the highly competitive French educational system that produces a talented and confident elite that is capable of engaging in intellectual intimidation. The result is often seen as inflexibility that is frustrating to American negotiators who are pragmatically inclined and impatient to find agreement on substantive issues rather than engage in lengthy, abstract discussions.

The author then cites three case studies—the issue of a French return to NATO's military alliance on condition that they be given the Southern Command, negotiations at the U.N. over weapons inspection in Iraq, and the Uruguay round on trade and culture. Of these the Iraq crisis was the most serious and harmful to U.S.-French relations, resulting in what Cogan considers a very serious crisis in French-American relations by providing a "heaven set opportunity" for France to show its independence and stand up to the *hyperpuissance* on principle. (246/211) In this sense the French were right, confirming their intransigence, but the benefits of their action were limited to an occupation of the high moral ground as the United States plunged ahead anyway, not only ignoring French advice, but excoriating the French for disloyalty and betrayal. The result was an outburst of Francophobia in which an ally was denounced as an "enemy."⁶ To his credit, Cogan, while at times critical of the French manner of negotiating, blames French and American negotiators for having misread each other's intentions during the Iraq crisis.

If negotiations with not just an ally, but an "enemy" have to take place, how should the Americans conduct themselves? Cogan notes that differences are bound to occur. His task is to offer ways in which "the mists of incomprehension" can be dispelled (273/237), or at least that is the problem stated in the American edition. The French edition asks diplomats on each side to read the author's suggestions, "through the cultural prism" (273). The addition of cultural difference as a key to understanding how to negotiate suggests that between France and America are fundamental differences, not just misunderstandings, confirming the Védrine view that Americans "are not like us" or the Gaullist vision of America "as another world." In the meantime, what does Cogan believe American diplomats can do to dispel the mists of incomprehension? For one thing, Americans should take the French seriously. They should understand that French memories of past glories remain and make the French sensitive to perceived or imagined slights. Show respect for *La Grande Nation* is one injunction. Listen to "the aggressive underdog" (a nice piece of *franglais* in the French edition, "*Un* underdog

⁶ The outburst of Francophobe literature at the time of the Iraq crisis was both impassioned and extensive. Two prominent denunciations of France as America's enemy would be the polemical history by John J. Miller and Mark Molesky, *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America's Disastrous Relationship with France* (New York: Doubleday, 2004) and Thomas L. Friedman, "Our War with France," *New York Times*, September 18, 2003 in which the columnist declares, "France is not just our annoying ally.... France is becoming our enemy."

aggressif). Wait them out and recognize that compromise may not occur and agreement may not be possible. Recognize the importance that the French attach to good form and elegant style. Accept and respect French logic even if it seems impractical and rigid to pragmatic Americans. Do not bully—or in Cogan’s words, “avoid combativeness unbecoming to a superpower.” (288/250) Finally, American negotiators should realize that French authority embodied in the central power of the state differs, as de Gaulle once tried to warn FDR, from American federalism and multiple, and often competing sources of authority in the American political tradition.

Is there a less contentious future in the relationship? Cogan is a guarded optimist. On the French side he sees a new generation of diplomats who are less rigid, more willing to seek compromise, less nationalistic, open to multilateral solutions, and who are comfortable using English. On the American side in the aftermath of Iraq, the hostile language has abated, the departure of Francophobes from the Bush administration has reduced some tension, and Condoleezza Rice’s charm offensive in Europe in 2005 have signaled a willingness to improve ties with France. Emphasis is less on difference than upon areas of cooperation, such as in Afghanistan, in anti-terror security matters, in Kosovo, in the first Iraq war, etc. Yet the underlying mistrust and suspicion remain on both sides of the table, and Cogan notes the way attempts to improve relations by new governments coming to office in the U.S. or France often begin with good intentions to ease tensions but end up frustrated over a lack of progress toward any improvement by the end of their respective terms in office. A softening of the rhetoric and a desire to step back from the wreckage of the Iraq confrontation has left the relationship still “unstable,” according to Hubert Védrine, an interpretation that Cogan shares. Differences and competition in values remain sources of ongoing disagreement, again according to Védrine, making the relationship difficult to manage (300/261-2). Accumulation of suspicion, particularly French opposition to perceived American domineering behavior, remains a permanent obstacle to a more trusting relationship. The rancor from the past cannot be swept aside easily or with a few kind words in the hope of clearing up misunderstandings. In the final analysis the ghost of General de Gaulle has not been exorcised. What Cogan’s book accomplishes is to make some “useful” (the description is that of Védrine) proposals as to how negotiating with the French can be somewhat less fraught with emotional heat, while accepting that issues of cultural difference and preferences will persist. Amelioration is possible, but the French-American connection seems destined to remain that of “an infernal couple.”⁷

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Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

⁷ Eric Dior, *Un Couple infernal: 2 00 ans de francophobie et d'antiaméricanisme* (Paris: Perrin, 2005).