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It is a great pleasure to introduce the recent book by Susan McCall Perlman on American intelligence and France in the immediate post-Liberation period, which also, of course, corresponds to the start of the Cold War and the end of the European empires. This deeply researched book, whose author used a wide range of both French and American archives as well as a great number of secondary sources from both countries, is part of a growing interest on the influence of intelligence assessments on foreign policy.

The book is organized around an introduction and conclusion, with five chapters that largely follow a chronological outline. The exception is chapter 3, which focuses on the French empire, especially Indochina and North Africa. Perlman shows not only the frequent misperceptions of American intelligence but also efforts by French officials to manipulate US views, notably in order to increase aid, by playing on Washington’s fears of Communist insurgency: as she puts it “it was clear to French officials that they would get more out of the Americans by playing up the threat posed by communism than they would by convincing them of their competence and skill” (61). Throughout these analyses, Perlman shows how the information that reached President Harry Truman was often based on hearsay and rumor, and was without adequate analysis or context. In her conclusion, the author shows that many of these deficiencies in American intelligence continued afterward, and that they contributed, for example, to the belief that Iraq’s president Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Each of the contributors to this forum are recognized specialists in twentieth-century French history. Deborah Bauer has recently published the book Marianne is Watching: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and the Origins of the French Surveillance State.1 In her review, she focuses particularly on Perlman’s contribution to the growing number of analyses on emotions as factors in decisionmaking. Bauer comes to the conclusion that “The overriding emotion that galvanized the protagonists in Contesting France was fear, and particularly the fear of Communism that only grew as the Cold War deepened.” This fear, combined with, in many cases, a lack of detailed knowledge of France, closed American minds to other interpretations and opened them to manipulation.

Sean Kennedy is specialist of twentieth century French intellectual and political history and author of Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français as well as a recent book on André Siegfried, the French academic and racial theorist who died in 1959.2 Kennedy stresses the convincing way in which Perlman “shows that too many US officials allowed their views to be shaped by sources that narrowed their understanding of the situation in France and the territories it struggled to hold on to.” As such, the book offers important insights into the need for “deeply informed decisionmaking.”

The third reviewer, Michael Neiburg, has written on Franco-American relations, notably with his 2021 book, When France Fell: The Vichy Crisis and the Fate of the Anglo-American Alliance.3 He praises Perlman’s achievement in showing the flaws of American intelligence gathering on France at the time: “She has produced an enlightening case study of cognitive biases and the risks of reducing complex issues to dichotomies that almost inevitably turn out to be false.”

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1 Debra Bauer, Marianne is Watching: Intelligence, Counter-intelligence and the French Surveillance State, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021).
But while these reviewers may stress different aspects of the book, they all unite in praise of its accomplishments: its wide research, deep knowledge of a very complex period and its implications for today. Perlman has undoubtedly provided us with important insights into the relationship between intelligence and policy.

In her reply, the author focuses on two themes in the various reviews: “the many debates—among US officials and their French counterparts, among US intelligence and policymakers, and among US intelligence officials themselves—and how different images took hold,” and “the even more consequential, and perennial, question of what we can reasonably expect from American intelligence.” As she points out, the misconceptions based on suspect intelligence—and the fact that the upper levels of the American government failed to heed warnings about this—contributed to decades of tension with France. Ultimately, Perlman’s book has much bearing on the future, containing as it does a warning that world leaders need to take a more critical view of the information they are presented with and place more value on in-depth and detailed analyses.

**Contributors:**

**Susan McCall Perlman** is a historian of U.S. foreign relations and intelligence. She currently leads the Broadening Academia Initiative at the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and teaches at Georgetown University. She is a former intelligence officer, most recently serving on the faculty of the National Intelligence University (NIU) as Professor of Intelligence Studies and Provost. Her research and teaching focuses on modern France, diplomatic history, and intelligence through the lenses of transnationalism and emotion. She is the author of *Contesting France: U.S. Intelligence and Foreign Policy in the Early Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). Perlman is also a Senior Non-Resident Fellow with the Global National Security Initiative at the University of South Florida.

**Lori Maguire** is full Professor of American Studies at the University of Reims in France. Her research has focused on the political, cultural, and diplomatic history of Britain, France, and the United States. She is currently working on a book on the British and French consulates in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. She has published extensively both in French and English.

**Deborah Bauer** is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University Fort Wayne. She is the author of *Marianne is Watching: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and the Origins of the French Surveillance State* (Lincoln: NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2021), along with several articles and book chapters on the subject of French intelligence at the fin-de-siècle. Her current research involves contests for power among France, Great Britain, and the United States in Madagascar under the French Protectorate (1885–1895).

**Sean Kennedy** is a Professor of History at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. He is the author of *Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix de Feu, the Parti Social Français, and French Politics, 1927–1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007) and *France in the World: The Career of André Siegfried* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023). He is currently researching the history of policing in France.

**Michael Neilberg** is a Professor of History and Chair of War Studies at the United States Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. His latest book is *When France Fell: The Vichy Crisis and the Fate of the Anglo-American Relationship* (Harvard University Press, 2021).
When contemplating the world of intelligence and intrigue, few people think first about the emotional state of intelligence agents and their sources. Nonetheless, drawing from the pioneering work of Barbara Rosenwein, Susan McCall Perlman argues that American images of France in the years just after the conclusion of World War Two can be assessed by recognizing the existence of an “emotional community” of officials (6), people “with emotions and cultural and ideological affinities that shaded their perceptions (12-13).” Perlman’s book, *Contesting France*, is an outstanding contribution to the growing field of intelligence studies and its overlap with political culture.2 With a probing case study of American perceptions of France from approximately 1944–1947, the book demonstrates the extent to which intelligence informs policy in American foreign relations. Taking readers on a trajectory through the increased fear of Communist inroads in Western Europe and the colonized world in the early Cold War, the book reveals methods that diplomats and intelligence agents employed to develop their accounts, exposing the multiple factors that fed into intelligence collection and analysis. The book’s central lesson is that intelligence is not always a reflection of “hard truth,” but rather shaped by sources and practitioners themselves and the cultural and institutional environments in which they operate.

*Contesting France* draws upon a large collection of foreign-policy and intelligence sources from the United States and France to argue that American policy towards France and the French empire at the tail end of World War Two and the beginning of the Cold War emerged in reaction to a particular vision of France crafted through a disparate web of informants. The image that shaped Franco-American relations during this period is one that Perlman characterizes as a “narrative of France as weak and prone to revolution” (16). As the book’s title indicates, however, this narrative was contested. While ultimately the account of French vulnerability took hold, Perlman presents the coexistence of an alternative narrative that described France as resilient and eager to reclaim its sovereignty. Due to shifts in leadership and changing defense structures in the United States in the post-1945 era, as well as the rise in tensions between the US and the Soviet Union in the early years of the Cold War, the first narrative received greater exposure and support than the second; however, the book argues persuasively that this conclusion was not forgone and “that there was nothing inevitable about the course of Franco-American relations in the immediate postwar era” (7).

The book’s first substantive chapter begins in 1944 as World War Two was entering its final phase. As liberation from the Nazi occupation proceeded, American observers watched nervously to see how a divided, defeated country would put itself back together, and to what extent American intervention might be needed. The composition of French Resistance during the war had shifted over time, eventually coalescing under the leadership of Charles de Gaulle. Among the groups jockeying for power in the post-Occupation era was the French Communist Party (PCF), one of the few groups to have starkly opposed the war effort following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. As American troops made their way to the Continent, authorities

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in both France and the United States mused on the possibility of working with France’s provisional
government led by de Gaulle, a man who American leadership had often dismissed in the previous years.3

It is here that the book first tackles the disparity in visions regarding France’s position in postwar Europe. On
one hand, knowledge about France came from representatives of the US State Department, “officials and
diplomats [who] emulated the courts of prewar Europe, and [who] privileged panache, good breeding, and
the intimacy of male camaraderie.” (20) These individuals espoused conservative views, with many having
close ties to discredited former Vichy officials in France or prominent French émigrés in the United States,
leading them naturally to foster deep opposition to the Soviet Union and Communist ideas. State Department
officials who listened to anti-Resistance sources would have been among the first to absorb and embrace the
narrative of French weakness. Meanwhile, agents from William Donovan’s wartime Office of Strategic
Services (OSS) offered a contrary narrative. These officers, many of whom were “experts in French culture
and history,” who “represented a broader liberal tradition that eschewed vulgar anti-communism” (31) saw
France not as inherently weak, but as determined to rebuild and grow from a position of strength and
autonomy. While OSS agents tried to assure Washington that French Communists did not pose a threat to
stability, pointing to the very real working-class grievances and subsistence struggles facing the country,
conservative diplomats fanned the flames of unrest and Communist intrigue.

Over time, the more conservative views won out, a fact that Contesting France attributes to shifts in
government and intelligence infrastructure from 1945. With President Franklin Roosevelt’s unexpected death
in spring 1945 and the ascension to the presidency of Harry Truman, certain voices that had not previously
enjoyed prominence grew louder. Truman confidants such as Admiral William Leahy, “a staunch conservative
and anti-communist who maintained affection for Pétain” (24), and sources of intelligence like the American
ambassador in Paris, Jefferson Caffery, harbored anti-Communist views that surfaced in their assessments of
France and European reconstruction. Perlman’s focus on individual personalities, as well as institutions,
deepens the human element of the well-known story of intelligence organization under the intelligence-
skeptic Truman and the infighting between different government entities to dominate the world of
information collecting and analysis in the postwar era.4 Contesting France argues that Truman’s preference for
military intelligence and State Department information, on the heels of disbanding Donovan’s OSS, meant
the disappearance of a source of moderation and dissent, thus hardening the narrative of “communism on the
march throughout Europe, directed by Moscow and intent on subjugating the entire continent” (51). State
Department documents and military intelligence sources repeated rumors of PCF plans to seize power, with
only American intervention able to prevent a collapse. Such reports lacked nuance and complex analysis, and
were often penned by embassy analysists like Norris Chipman, whom even contemporaries identified as being
“so hepped up on the subject of communism that it affects his work,” (115) resulting in reports regularly
crossing Truman’s desk that were one-sided in their affirmation of French weakness and the Communist
threat.

Meanwhile, as significant attention focused on politics in France itself, another space of inquiry and analysis
was developing in France’s colonies. Another great strength of Contesting France is its integration of colonial
concerns with American perceptions of politics in the metropole. Perlman deftly presents intelligence
narratives that were aimed to garner US support for the maintenance of French sovereignty over its flagging
empire. Highlighting the transimperial aspect of intelligence practice, the book demonstrates that intelligence
collected from North Africa, Indochina, Spain, and the Levant solidified the narrative of impending
Communist revolution in weak political spaces. The upshot of this intelligence was a shift in US political
opinion towards maintaining French control over the empire, not coincidentally at the same time that

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3 Michael Neiberg, When France Fell: The Vichy Crisis and the Fate of the Anglo-American Alliance (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 2021); Julian Jackson, France in the Dark Years 1940–1944 (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2001), 393-94.

4 Amy Zegart, Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC (Stanford: Stanford University Press,
1999).
American leadership moved from Roosevelt’s anti-colonial stance to the mindsets preoccupied with the growing Cold War. Here, too, Perlman outlines the contested narrative, highlighting personalities such as the OSS officer in Indochina, Archimedes Patti, and others who stressed that the miseries of colonial peoples were the prime reason for their frustration rather than fealty to Communist ideology, pointing also to the fact that French Communists did not even support full independence for the colonies.

While anti-Communist American agents and policymakers typically authored the Daily Summaries and other reports that arrived on Truman’s desk, the origins of the intelligence these reports inspired is itself illuminating. *Contesting France* offers numerous examples of the conscious efforts that sources undertook to craft and affirm the narrative of French weakness and susceptibility to revolution. As the PCF gained power legally within government, conservative and opposition leaders continued to beat the drum of future insurrection that could only be prevented through American aid. These sources—who, happily for Perlman, are not anonymous in the archives as present-day intelligence sources are likely to be—were motivated by their own political agendas. They “gathered, sometimes invented, and often distorted intelligence on the role and activities of communists in metropolitan and overseas France,” as a way “to grab American attention,” and thus confirm the entrenched views of US officials (8). Knowing well the challenges faced by an undernourished and underemployed population, French sources sought American assistance to help with the recovery efforts and secure power. By 1946, tailored intelligence included rumors of weapons caches, parachute drops, international brigades, and mass training of partisans. These messages were relayed back to Washington, DC as confirmation that despite PCF claims that it intended to work within the government, it was planning a violent revolution behind the scenes. As Perlman demonstrates repeatedly, the fact that there was no tangible evidence to support these rumors did not dissuade American officials from digging into fears and repeating the desperate demands for financial assistance as the surest way to thwart Moscow’s sinister aims.

Similar efforts came into play when French officials were working to convince Americans to support efforts to maintain power in France’s colonies. French leaders made overt efforts to convince American officials that nationalist movements in the colonies were in fact spurred by Communists with direct ties to Moscow. Despite reports that Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh and other indigenous champions of independence sought favorable relations with the United States rather than the USSR, the alternative narrative took hold. Perlman stresses French agency in this direction, writing that “Quai [d’Orsay] instructions made it clear that its representatives should tie events in Vietnam to the communist threat when engaging American officials” (92). Similarly, US Intelligence Reviews regarding North Africa stressed that “communist parties in Algeria and Tunisia [were] acting on orders from Moscow.” (137). Even when reports of requisitioning and scarcity made it to American officials, they were overlooked in favor of the more inflammatory messages about the Communist threat. As a result, American observers and policy makers became increasingly dismissive of the potential of indigenous groups, and spoke of the nationalist movements in pejorative, orientalist terms (134; 138-39). Given the profundity of hunger and other crises in the colonial world, it is hard to fathom American analysts accepting the conclusion that colonial agitation was “purely political,” (105) and I would be interested to learn more about the factors that led policymakers to discount colonial misery, or whether there is more nuance here that did not fit into the book’s scope.

Perlman’s deep understanding of the backgrounds and political objectives of intelligence sources, collectors, and analysts serves as an important lesson for students of intelligence history and practice, demonstrating that reports passed along to the highest echelons of decisionmaking can themselves be based on biased or faulty assumptions. As noted above, *Contesting France* incorporates human emotion into the panoply of factors that influence agents and policymakers. Emotions history has been gaining ground in recent years, proving an

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important tool for analyzing behavior in war, politics, and intelligence practice. At several points in the book, we learn that analysts described France in “emotional terms” (21, 32, 131) and that emotions, which were “artfully deployed...to ‘grab attention,' suffused the intelligence that ultimately shaped master narratives about France” (13). The overriding emotion that galvanized the protagonists in Contesting France was fear, and particularly the fear of Communism that only grew as the Cold War deepened. The book describes fear that a weakened France would fall victim to the PCF, fear that the French Communists would serve as puppets for Moscow if elected to power, and fear that nationalist movements in the French colonies would result in Soviet-friendly Communist states in Africa, Asia, and the Levant. These were fears that French officials knowingly and willingly exploited, having recognized that US officials “understood the emotional language of danger,” (77) thus pointedly approaching the Americans in “language they understand” (91). Scholars have demonstrated the power of fear as a sentiment, driving populations to embrace ideas and marginalize groups out of fears that might or might not ever materialize, something Contesting France certainly confirms.7

In addition to fear, the book touches on other emotions, including self-preservation sentiments such as overcoming humiliation and the quest for prestige. Desire to overcome the humiliation of defeat by the Nazis inspired French politicians and others to work to restore their country to Great Nation status. Maintenance of the empire played a crucial role in bolstering emotional strength before the world community, something American observers certainly picked up on. The empire provided markets and material and was seen as central to France’s position in the world. One US State Department official observed France’s “pathological craving for prestige,” (74) while others recognized the French conviction that only a show of force in the colonies could dispel the vision of France as weak and vulnerable (93). The craving for national prestige was arguably one of the sentiments that drove France and other European nations to conquer and establish empires in the first place,8 affirming the emotional connection that the French military and other colonial authorities worked to preserve. While the book’s focus on emotion reflects observations and moods of individuals and agencies—the humiliation of Charles de Gaulle (107), Caffery’s emotional analyses (52), anxieties of French colonial leaders (118)—there is less commentary on shared public emotions. One wonders to what extent national or societal sentiment shaped intelligence culture, and whether the emotions attributed to the book’s protagonists were shared by local populations or diverged.

In conclusion, Perlman’s excellent case study is of value both to historians and to contemporary intelligence practitioners and policy makers. The case of France after World War Two confirms that continuing to adhere to entrenched views and a constructed narrative has consequences. The accepted narrative contributed to hardening positions during the Cold War. It served to deepen the divide between pro- and anti-Communist forces in France, and drove the PCF in the direction of Moscow, when arguably it could have continued working peacefully within French politics.9 The narrative contributed to the shift in American positions

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towards colonized populations, meaning that rather than supporting peoples in their calls for liberty and self-determination, the US turned its back on independence movements in favor of confronting what it perceived to be the fight for “civilization itself” against Communism.\textsuperscript{10} Further, obstinacy against stepping back from the entrenched narrative meant that American policymakers attributed the unfolding of events to American aid and specific decisions to alienate the Communists—claiming that (nonexistent) coups had been averted from 1944 through 1947—and thus doubled down on US interventionism, which culminated in the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. The confidence of US policy successes, paired with the secretive nature of intelligence, undoubtedly contributed to decisions to undertake covert action in places like Italy and Eastern Europe in subsequent years.\textsuperscript{11}

In reaching her conclusion that oversights in intelligence analysis such as the failure to critically assess anti-Communist intelligence reports likely contributed to less, not more, security between the world’s competing ideologies in the early Cold War, Perlman joins a cadre of historians who look back at intelligence failures from the vantage of hindsight. The book suggests that American intelligence officials rejected deep analysis and nuanced views regarding France’s history and potential and points to several additional mistakes, from the “circular reporting” of various military intelligence divisions (114) to the fact that American intelligence officers never made real attempts to meet with or infiltrate Communist groups (131). While these are legitimate lessons to draw, it is worth asking whether an alternative narrative could ever have taken hold in the tense political environment of the Cold War, or whether fear and competition, which have been ever-present in geopolitics across the centuries, always tend to blur the vision of intelligence analysts and policymakers. Examples of intelligence failures past, including the failure to predict the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the Iraq War starting in 2003, have produced scores of explanations for past mistakes.\textsuperscript{12} While post-mortems of many of these failures call for the increased use of red teams or recognition of dissenting opinion, others conclude that the predicting game is impossible and that only hindsight is 20/20. Among explanations for past failures include Roberta Wohlstetter’s observation regarding America’s surprise at the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 that sometimes noise outweighs relevant signals and Sherman Kent’s explanations for the challenge of understanding Soviet aims during the Cuban Missile Crisis that individuals can often be irrational, making it impossible for even the best analysts to assess and predict future moves.\textsuperscript{13} Given that one goal of intelligence is avoiding strategic disaster by making predictions, one wonders if more credit should not be given to the American experts who predicted a Communist insurrection that never materialized. Without the benefit of knowing alternate timelines, is it not reasonable for American policymakers to have congratulated themselves on averting a crisis in France in 1947? Regardless, \textit{Contesting France} is an excellent study of insights into Franco-American relations, offering much to think about and lessons to take into the future.

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Contesting France is a deeply researched, engagingly written book offering a compelling, nuanced interpretation of the formation of American policy towards France during the turbulent years between the Liberation and the onset of the Cold War. As someone who has researched aspects of French political and intellectual history during the twentieth century, this book afforded me a richer understanding of why US policy towards postwar France and its empire took the shape it did. In his 2019 study of Soviet conduct towards various states in early postwar Europe, Norman Naimark underscored the fluidity of this period, with various outcomes possible before the Cold War order solidified.1 Focusing instead on American policy, towards a country that Naimark’s book does not discuss in depth, Susan McCall Perlman raises important questions about how events in early postwar France might have turned out differently.

As the author notes, this subject has not been neglected by scholars, and Contesting France engages with a variety of secondary sources, both in English and French. But, following extensive work in both American and French archives, she elucidates in depth how the contrasting perceptions and recommendations of US officials were informed by what she terms “a vast transnational—at times transimperial—web of factions and sources in America, France, and the outposts of empire” (5). The sources ranged from French political figures to anti-Communist conspirators, émigrés, and even representatives of Francoist Spain and Nationalist China, who in aggregate helped draw the United States into anti-Communist intervention. Though information on some of these sources is hard to come by, the details of the interactions that Perlman reconstructs make for fascinating reading.

So does the discussion of clashing intelligence communities. While US military intelligence, the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), and many State Department officials largely accepted a narrative of France and its empire in perpetual crisis, necessitating measures to stem Communist influence, members of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and its postwar descendants took a less alarmist view, as did some US diplomats in France’s colonies. Even though figures such as William Koren and H. Stuart Hughes came from academic backgrounds and possessed deep understanding of France, it was the more panicked assessments, shaped by anti-Communist sources, that often won out. Though Koren moved into the diplomatic service until his death in a car crash in 1956, Hughes and others returned to academic life. Hughes went on to publish influential works in French and European intellectual history; the Society for French Historical Studies established an article prize in Koren’s memory.2

Contesting France takes the reader through a sometimes bewilderingly complex period in French politics, as General Charles de Gaulle’s provisional government eventually gave way to the Fourth Republic—but only after several elections, two constitutional referenda, plenty of tension, and the general’s resignation in January 1946. The author examines the perspectives of the major parties—above all the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), but also the Socialists (Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière, SFIO), and the recently formed Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP). She stresses the PCF’s rejection of an insurrectionist strategy and its desire to reshape France through the political process, an interpretation recently supported by John Bulaitis’s biography of the Communist leader, Maurice Thorez.3 However, the PCF’s time in government proved limited; after disputes over war in Vietnam and wage policies, it was expelled from the governing coalition by SFIO Prime Minister Paul Ramadier in May 1947. Thorez’s expectation that the party would soon return to government proved illusory; instead, the PCF became an opposition force. Meanwhile, de Gaulle—who had

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resigned primarily because he disagreed with the major parties’ plans for a new constitution—was launching his own political movement, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF), which was stridently anti-Communist and sought to restructure republican institutions. For the remainder of 1947 and again in 1948 France experienced major unrest, featuring strikes and political violence.

Overseas the situation was even more fraught. Violent opposition in French-ruled Algeria in May 1945 had been quelled at an enormous cost of life, and North Africa was seething with tension. In Lebanon and especially Syria the French faced strong pressure to leave. In Southeast Asia France went to war with Ho Chi Minh’s Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV) in December 1946. Though the event is outside the scope of Perlman’s already wide-ranging analysis, in March 1947 there was also an anti-colonial rebellion in Madagascar, which was repressed by the French with enormous loss of life.4

Amidst ongoing debates about the direction US policy should take towards France and its empire, Perlman demonstrates that the tendency of policymakers to highlight Gallic weakness and the threat of Communism was underway by the end of 1945. President Harry Truman did not share his predecessor’s visceral dislike of de Gaulle, but he was soon strongly influenced by Admiral William Leahy, Washington’s former ambassador to the Vichy regime, who thought little of the general and regarded the PCF as a major threat. The disbanding of the OSS and Truman’s receptiveness to intelligence summaries that drew upon anti-Communist sources encouraged belief in worst-case scenarios. These included uncorroborated reports that the French state was losing its grip on the southern part of the country, where Communists were reportedly forming international brigades to fight against Franco’s Spain. While American officials did not accept all claims of an imminent uprising, in 1947 Ambassador Jefferson Caffery still believed that the PCF was strong enough to attempt a seizure of power. As de Gaulle’s RPF gained momentum there were also fears of civil war. The United States had not prompted the ejection of the Communists from government, but it did provide significant financial aid to help keep French governments afloat, while initiatives such as supporting a split in the powerful Communist-dominated trade union movement, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), were soon underway.

The growing primacy of anti-Communism in shaping US policy towards France’s colonial empire was equally evident. With respect to French Indochina, the shift away from the anti-colonial views of President Franklin Roosevelt was notably abrupt. Though OSS officials, most famously Archimedes Patti, appreciated the intensity of Ho Chi Minh’s nationalism, French colonial officials—seconded by some Chinese Nationalists—stressed Ho’s Communist alignments, and within months Truman’s administration was shifting course. Though Ho personally attempted to win over Ambassador Caffery in 1946, and Interim Research and Intelligence Service (IRIS, a successor to the OSS) officials criticized French policymakers for provoking war, former French officials such as Alexis Leger, who now lived in the United States, helped to convince American policymakers of the need to deal forcefully with a Communist-inspired rebellion.

In the Levant and North Africa, French officials, who were deeply unsettled by growing opposition, suggested that Soviet influence was on the rise and that local Communists might appeal to and manipulate nationalist organizations for their own ends. While OSS analysts had pointed to prior French policies and dire material conditions as the source of much unrest, and officials on the ground recommended more thoroughgoing reform, US policy soon aligned more closely with Paris. Ambassador Caffery thus endorsed proposed reforms for North Africa in 1947, even though the American vice-consul in Tunis, Donald Dumont, characterized the current reform program as “so limited in scope as to be irreconcilable with the democratic principles for which we stand” (178).

As this quotation suggests, there were reform plans for the postwar French empire, but they eventually amounted to little. The contrasting views of Caffery and Dumont led me to wonder if the extant sources allow more to be said about how attuned American officials were to the evolution of French colonial policy. On this issue, the work of Martin Thomas provides valuable insights on the French perspective. Initially, Thomas notes, postwar French governments seemed willing to engage in meaningful reform, but these impulses soon faded. While he discusses a variety of reasons for this, one way to trace this process is through the evolving definition of the French Union. The latter initially featured significant colonial restructuring and was included in the first constitutional draft voted on in 1946. But after it was rejected, the subsequent constitutional draft, which was approved by referendum later that year, defined the Union in more restrictive ways, its “convoluted associational, electoral, and legal arrangements…a means to shut down reformist alternatives that threatened a real democratization of colonial politics.”

It would be interesting to know if American analysts noted this shift.

Turning to France itself, there are intriguing episodes described in Contesting France that raise other questions. Discussing French government claims of discovering arms caches mostly “in leftist hands,” the author notes that the minister of the Interior at the time, Édouard Depreux, stressed that the government was determined to avoid “another February 6” (152). The analogy was at best problematic and perhaps even disingenuous; while Communists did participate in the French demonstrations of 6 February 1934, the key players on that day were thousands of right-wing militants, who, after hours of violence, succeeded in forcing the resignation of the government of the day.

Depreux’s invocation of recent French history hints at how memories of earlier events, even distorted ones, potentially shaped the perceptions of US officials as well as their French interlocutors. Perlman notes the tendency of some analysts to focus narrowly on Communist programs and texts while disregarding recent political behavior; perhaps claims about the conduct and tactics of the PCF in the 1930s and early 1940s also figured in calculations about postwar developments.

Finally, while French governments of the early postwar era were certainly fractious, historians such as Philip Nord and Isser Woloch have explained how they initiated significant economic and social reforms; while civil servants and administrators were crucial in this process, politicians also had an impact. In The United States and the Making of Postwar France, Irwin Wall notes that many American officials supported a degree of social reform for postwar France, in part because it was regarded as a way of blunting Communist appeal. It might be instructive to know more about the extent to which economic and social reforms figured in debates between intelligence communities over US policy towards France.

It may well be that, beyond the events and examples already discussed in Contesting France, the sources do not shed much light on these matters. If they do, I would be fascinated to learn a bit more. That said, let me be clear that the book already offers a great deal. Perlman convincingly shows that too many US officials allowed their views to be shaped by sources that narrowed their understanding of the situation in France and the territories it struggled to hold on to. While the United States could not control everything that happened, alternate perspectives and policies might have encouraged alternatives. In France itself, a less rigid Cold War polarization might have led to the PCF being more fully integrated into political life. Supporting a more reformist approach towards the empire might have at least reduced the chances of horribly destructive,

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traumatizing wars of decolonization. *Contesting France* provides an engaging reminder of the role of contingency, the potentially disastrous consequences of alarmism, and the importance of deeply informed decisionmaking.
As Susan McCall Perlman notes in her conclusion, we can see in her history of American intelligence in France in the post-Second World War period many the seeds of what came after.¹ Her story of American officials who were maybe not quite naïve but certainly gullible, open to bias, and pressured by the policy preferences of those above them, rings true to scholars of the Cold War and of more recent history as well.² These same problems led senior American officials to relying on faulty intelligence that drove flawed decisionmaking processes for Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere.³

Part of the problem in France, as Perlman notes, was the need for American intelligence officials to develop their tradecraft. Those officials, who were themselves largely amateurs, set up networks in North Africa in 1940 and 1941 with whoever happened to available and willing to play at being a spy for a while.⁴ At the time the United States had no intelligence officers in North Africa, no intelligence officers who were qualified in Arabic, and did not even yet know which branch of the government would take the lead for intelligence operations there.⁵

One of my favorite parts of the research on my book on American relations with Vichy came from the world of America’s novice intelligence officers.⁶ Archival documents from the American side paint a picture of a cleverly crafted plan to sneak the head of the Office of Strategic Services, “Wild Bill” Donovan, into North Africa to meet with a ring of supposedly pro-American officials led by General Maxime Weygand.⁷ The Americans dreaming up the scheme were certain that the Germans and Vichy French were completely in the dark. So confident were the Americans that Donovan did not even change the initials on his luggage. Documents that I found in Paris, however, showed that Vichy intelligence, which was itself in a terrible state of disarray, nevertheless knew every detail of the plan, including the names of the hotels Donovan used in Europe on his way to North Africa. Vichy and German spies easily tracked him to Sofia, where they broke into his hotel room and rifled through his papers, apparently without him being any the wiser. The ring itself never existed and Donovan never met with Weygand.⁸ This dynamic fits perfectly well with Perlman’s narrative.

¹ Christopher Andrew, For the President’s Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995).
⁴ For a sense of the environment, see the memoirs of Robert Murphy, Diplomat among Warriors: The Unique World of a Foreign Service Agent (Garden City, NJ Doubleday and Company, 1964).
⁸ A full copy of the Donovan papers is located at the United States Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The French documents are located at the foreign ministry archives in La Courneuve, outside Paris.

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The story Perlman tells has other antecedents in the Vichy and Second World War periods. Americans fell under the spell of the aristocratic René de Chambrun, a direct descendant of the Marquis de Lafayette. Chambrun’s mother was the sister of Alice Roosevelt’s deceased husband, the former Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth. In the wake of France’s defeat in 1940, Chambrun’s father-in-law, the new French Premier Pierre Laval, rushed Chambrun to Washington where he told everyone from President Franklin Roosevelt to local civic groups exactly what they wanted to hear: although France had lost on the battlefield, Chambrun pledged that the new French government would remain a faithful ally to its longtime American friends. The Vichy government would pursue neutrality in the European war and a vigorous policy of anti-Communism at home. Chambrun’s message provided much-needed comfort to confused and terrified American policymakers; it influenced American decisions to recognize Vichy and keep General Charles de Gaulle at arm’s length even long after it became obvious that de Gaulle had emerged as the clear and unquestioned leader of the French people. The voices of French expatriates in Washington, who had their own axes to grind against de Gaulle, also proved deeply influential.

Henri Rol-Tanguy provides a complementary example, this one of an opportunity missed. Rol, the leader of the Paris uprising in August 1944, was unquestionably a Communist. But American officials misjudged him when they listened to French conservatives who assumed that because of his politics Rol was also interested in a seizure of power. Rol remained at all times laser focused on what he saw as the key problem: getting the Germans out of France. In order to achieve that goal, he was willing to work with de Gaulle, and encouraged his resistance fighters to enlist in the rebuilding French Army. He also pledged that he and his followers would work within the system rather than try to dislodge de Gaulle through a coup or other non-democratic action. American officials, however, failed to see beyond Rol’s political affiliation. They also failed to see how much prestige the French left had gained not necessarily because of its politics, but because when the hour called for it, the Communists led the fight to liberate Paris.

The amateurs fell victim to the same confirmation biases and lack of understanding of events on the ground from which the more professional American analysts suffered after the war. American decisionmakers received intelligence from multiple and competing sources. These sources tended to fall into two categories. The first, which Perlman calls les américains, tended to reinforce the hopes, anxieties, and fears of decisionmakers in Washington. Chambrun fit perfectly into this group. After the war, President Truman and his advisors wanted France to emerge as both pro-American and vehemently anti-Communist. As a result, Perlman argues, the Americans listened too uncritically to French sources that not only had their own domestic political agendas but also knew how to manipulate those same American hopes, anxieties, and fears. Linking almost any problem they faced to Communism guaranteed French conservatives a sympathetic American audience as well as money and American support against their domestic rivals. A nearly identical...
pattern repeated itself around the world during the Cold War and again after 11 September 2001, when the invocation of terrorism could open the same American floodgates of money, arms, and support.16

The second group, whom Perlman calls les nationaux, tended to be better connected to non-elite groups in France and in its empire. Where les américains tended to project a world of black and white, les nationaux tended to see a palette of many colors. They also had connections to those who were out of favor in the constantly shifting French ministries. Consequently, their intelligence was more ambiguous, more diverse, and better situated within French culture and history. They also tended to rise above the vagaries of the French political mood at any single point in time. In general, les nationaux tended to downplay Washington’s fears of a Soviet-backed coup by the French Communist Party, the PCF. These analysts recognized the PCF’s fundamental weaknesses; more importantly, they knew that after decades of political discord, the French people, inheritors of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, were unlikely to accept any political outcome that did not derive its authority from the people themselves.

One might presume that those analysts who were best grounded in French history and culture would have been in the strongest position to influence policy in Washington. But, as Perlman shows, it is easier to win friends and influence people when you tell them what they already want to hear. In this case, the heightened fears of les américains, bolstered by some genuine provocations from the PCF, helped officials in Washington justify both a tougher policy towards the Soviet Union and their increasing reduction of a complex and dynamic world into friends and enemies. De Gaulle, who only a few years earlier had been a pariah in Washington, moved from the latter camp to the former by virtue of a doctrinaire anti-Communism that had grown vastly more influential as a driver of policy in Washington.

Maybe the most impressive argument Perlman makes is her linkage of the domestic situation in France to what she calls the trans-imperial situation.17 At the end of the Second World War, American officials tended to downplay the linkages between the Soviet Union and anti-imperial movements like the Viet Minh and Algerian nationalism. But as Washington’s views on the Soviets hardened, American officials tended to draw overly simplistic connections between what was happening in the metropole and what was happening in the empire. By finding a single thread to connect them, namely the growth of Communist influence worldwide, American officials hoped that they had also found a single way to combat multiple adversaries at the same time. If the US supported French anti-Communists, they concluded, it could empower a pro-American and non-Communist France as an ally not only in Europe but in Africa and Southeast Asia as well.18

Perlman’s narrative tends at times to downplay the real risks to American interests if the PCF had taken control of France, either through legal means or through a coup. It may be easy to dismiss the possibility today, but surprises are a part of international relations, and government officials often have to deal not only with the most likely situations but also with the most dangerous. A France that had been governed even for a brief period of time by the avowedly pro-Soviet Maurice Thorez (who once said that France would not fight the Soviet Union even if it invaded France) would have been disastrous.19 However lacking in nuance and complexity American policy on France was, it did produce some successes, notably in bringing the United

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18 For background, see Fredrik Logevall, Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam (New York: Random House, 2014).
States and de Gaulle’s France closer on at least some key issues and paving the way for the implementation of the Marshall Plan and France’s charter membership in NATO.\(^2\)

Perlman has given us a complex book that should be of interest beyond those who study the history of France or the early Cold War period. She has produced an enlightening case study of cognitive biases and the risks of reducing complex issues to dichotomies that almost inevitably turn out to be false. This book forces us to weigh the consequences of these intellectual blind spots within the American intelligence and policy communities. They led not only through Paris and Berlin but to Algeria and, most tragically, to Vietnam as well. *Contesting France* is thus a clarion call for policymakers to learn from history not because they can find clear answers there, but because they should be able to see that the same risks and pitfalls confront them today.

Response by Susan McCall Perlman, Georgetown University

I am deeply grateful to Lori Maguire, Deborah Bauer, Sean Kennedy and Michael Neiberg for their time spent and thoughtful engagement with Contesting France. I would also like to thank Carleigh Cartmell for organizing this roundtable and the H-Diplo for hosting it.

Franco-American relations in the Second World War and postwar era enjoys a robust scholarly treatment, but I have been surprised that so little attention has been paid to the intelligence record and what it reveals about this key transatlantic partnership in a particularly critical period in the evolution of the global order—when hot war became cold, and Europe’s empires began to collapse. Many readers will no doubt recall the clarion calls over the past few decades to reengage that “missing dimension” of international history and to understand more about how intelligence influences policy. In the case of post-Liberation France, the intelligence is particularly revealing of a transnational web of sources, their motivations, and their bald attempts to use their access to US intelligence officials to further their own political and policy agendas. The picture that emerges complicates what we thought we knew about Franco-American relations in this period; in fact, narratives and images of France were deeply contested, and the course of the Cold War in France and its empire was anything but inevitable.

I am gratified that the reviewers all agree that I have answered that call, and that they find the book’s arguments both convincing and compelling. They each note the important contribution of the book’s approach to untangling particularly complex circumstances at the end of the Second World War by shifting the focus from elites in Washington and Paris to account for those overlooked human sources who exercised an influence on US officials that has been unaccounted for in the historiography of Franco-American relations. Bauer also notes the significance of the lens of emotion employed here, which illuminates the “emotional communities” to which these sources and their American interlocutors were bound, and the emotions—fear, betrayal, anxiety, humiliation, and the yearning for prestige—that drove their engagement. At the same time, the reviewers commend the transnational and transimperial perspective which connects developments in the metropole to an empire that was then simmering, and captures multidirectional dynamics, including the intelligence which flowed through those imperial circuits, that shaped American perceptions of France. Perhaps most importantly, the reviewers all believe that the lessons of Contesting France should, and do, resonate today with intelligence officials and policymakers who rely on intelligence to make decisions affecting rivalries and alliances, war and peace.

I would like to focus my response on two themes that emerge from reviews. First, the reviewers wonder about the many debates—among US officials and their French counterparts, among US intelligence and policymakers, and among US intelligence officials themselves—and how different images took hold. Second, the reviewers raise an even more consequential, and perennial, question of what we can reasonably expect from American intelligence.

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Bauer, for example, questions whether American analysts really accepted the conclusion—pushed by their French counterparts—that colonial agitation in North Africa in May 1945 was purely political, and wonders what other factors that may have led US intelligence officers to discount the role of misery and famine. In fact, American officials noted the severity of the famine and the importance of food aid sent to North Africa from the United States and France. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) analysts pointed to scarcity as the heart of the revolts, but there were some military intelligence officers who were swayed by the argument of Yves Chataigneau, the governor-general of Algeria, who claimed that the riots were purely political because these areas were the best fed and did not feel the same effects of the famine in other harder hit areas.

This shift in reporting did not necessarily discount colonial misery altogether, but it did reflect a willingness to accept arguments that anti-colonial activity was first and foremost political as nationalist groups took advantage of any opportunities to further their agendas. It also reflected attempts by French sources to reframe these challenges in ways that might grab American attention even if they sometimes strained credulity, as Kennedy also rightly notes with reference to French Interior Minister Edouard Depreux’s characterization of arms caches discovered in the metropole. The near-constant sub-current of dangerous Communist-nationalist alliances and covert Communist activity put forward by French officials eventually overwhelmed the doubts of Americans who were increasingly concerned with a global Soviet menace.

Noting the significant support for social and economic reforms in France and among US officials, Kennedy also asks how those reforms figured into debates between the intelligence communities over US policy for France. Indeed, the OSS clearly appreciated the widespread desire for reforms in France, but reported disagreements among factions over how to achieve them. Likewise, OSS analysts noted that the “reforms” need not follow the Soviet pattern—a fear which had been flamed by the far-right sources of some US intelligence officers—but could be, as historian-turned-OSS analyst Crane Brinton surmised, along Scandinavian lines. OSS reporting also suggested that the French left, including the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), was using the election results to energize reform efforts (40). And they noted that even President of the French Provisional Government Charles de Gaulle, in his conversations with US intelligence officers, articulated a program of reform, if only to maintain France’s hold over her empire and to make France internally strong. By contrast, OSS analysts also noted that many American military officers, and their informants in right-wing circles, were “not much for social change” (38).

Kennedy also wonders whether American intelligence analysts noted the shift in French colonial policy from willingness to reform and restructure to a more constrained and hardened view of French control. US intelligence officers were indeed attuned to the evolution of French colonial policy but, just as there were disputes between State Department officials in Washington and Paris and those on the ground in the empire, differences also emerged among US intelligence officers over time. By the time US intelligence noted France’s changing policy, the OSS was no more, and its successor organizations enjoyed little influence. Thus most of the intelligence reporting on French colonial policy came from the War Department, and, later, CIA reports, which noted a seeming French shift toward Vietnamese autonomy in the French Union in the aftermath of the March 6th Accords, while also pointing, erroneously, to the PCF’s shift from support of autonomy to independence. Once war broke out in Vietnam in December 1946, it was apparent to all that any French reform efforts had failed to prevent the bloodshed that would continue in the region for the next thirty years. While analysts in the Paris embassy, the Central Intelligence Group, and military intelligence officials flagged a French hardening of position, they also increasingly reported events through the anti-Communist prism, lamenting the growth of Communist influence and strength. Nevertheless, the Office of Intelligence Research (an OSS successor organization now buried in the State Department) dissented in the estimation that it was too late for peace by 1947 or that Communist influence would necessarily rise in Vietnam. Within American intelligence, as among other elements of the US government, the narrative remained contested.

Finally, Bauer and Neiberg both reflect on how we judge the performance of intelligence. Neiburg rightly notes the real risk to American interests if the PCF had taken power in France. By extension, it is...
understandable that intelligence analysts feared what a France in the hands of pro-Soviet party might mean for American interests and plans for Europe. And in fact this was a distinct possibility. After all, Communist ministers had entered the French government for the first time in history under de Gaulle. But if fear was not unreasonable, the degree to which it prevented consideration of alternative policy options and a realistic appraisal of the situation in France was. American officials felt compelled to resort to extreme measures to prevent a worst-case scenario. They accused de Gaulle—the only person who could have united France and staved off a Communist power play in 1944—of being a communist sympathizer and withheld support. At the same time, they failed to understand why the PCF, as a political force, would expect to participate in the French government after it served as the backbone of the resistance; and they failed to appreciate that French Communists were not yet calling for national liberation in the empire. By viewing the situation in stark, Manichean terms, an image fostered by a transnational web of sources, US officials foreclosed their options in order to blunt the appeal of Communism and diminish Soviet influence in France. There were indeed some American policy successes born of this era—especially, as Neiburg points out, the Marshall Plan and France’s membership in NATO—but we should also not forget that those successes were also the product of French actors who deftly used American anti-Communism to their advantage so as to garner critical aid and security guarantees.

Bauer reminds us that many intelligence failures are only understood with the benefit of hindsight, and she cites the “no fault” school in intelligence literature as represented in the work of Roberta Wohlstetter, Robert Jervis, and Richard Betts, which holds that failure is unavoidable and that, as Betts puts it, “…the challenge is to not to achieve ‘zero defects’…but to ‘raise the batting average of warning and forecasting.” The implication, of course, is that criticizing intelligence for not knowing what we now know is unfair to those who struggle to make sense of events as they happen. Bauer wonders instead if credit for avoiding strategic disaster should be given to analysts who predicted an insurrection that never materialized. Likewise, she asks whether it is reasonable to believe that any alternative narrative about France could have taken hold in the supercharged, emotional atmosphere of the early Cold War.

In the French case, it was not so much that policymakers could not have known what we now know. Even then, there were clear, known alternatives to the analytic lines that dominated much of the intelligence that made its way to President Harry S Truman. After all, OSS officers and their sources had offered a counternarrative to the prevailing narrative of French weakness and revolution that pervaded Paris embassy, military intelligence, and CIG reporting. They maintained that France was resilient and suggested an important French role in their Liberation and recovery. And they had warned of analytic and policy overreach (and blowback) for some time. And even then, the choice was not one view or another. There were those in the OSS, including OSS Chief William Donovan, who had already shifted their gaze to the Soviets as potential adversaries in 1945. But OSS officials, while they had been on the scene, provided a more nuanced view that explained the appeal of Communism and even PCF behavior, and this often had the effect of moderating the most hysterical assessments of Communism. For a time in 1944 and 1945, it was still possible for other appreciations of the situation in France to hold sway, even if by 1947 it appeared that that option had been largely foreclosed. It behooves us to know how and why that was the case.

The worst-case predictions that did take hold were not without consequence. Those false predictions did not avoid a strategic disaster; they reinforced a psychology of fear that pervaded US decisionmaking of the era. Even in the immediate aftermath of the failed strikes, CIA analysts warned that the intelligence upon which those warnings had been based was suspect. The fact that US officials chose not to heed these notes of caution does not make the episode unworthy of analysis, quite the opposite. And, as I note in the book, the assumption that American intervention explains why Communists failed to seize power in France in 1947.

fails to take the actions of local actors and the strategies of the PCF and the Soviet Union into account, and it reinforced dangerous intellectual blind spots fed by a growing sense of exceptionalism in US government circles. We cannot forget either that the perception of France teetering on the precipice of Communist revolution led to myriad interventions in French affairs that soured relations between two key allies for the next 50 years. As Neiburg observes, the lessons of Contesting France remain relevant for policy and intelligence communities that can be prone to ahistoricism. That is surely why the same human dynamics that were evident in the contentious postwar period are still with us today.