

h-diplo

United States efficiency against
European nationalism in the first years
of the Cold War in NATO (1948-1950)

2007 SHAFR Conference

6/23/2007

© 2007 Victor Gavin

United States efficiency versus European nationalism in the first years of the Cold War in NATO (1948-1950). Collective balanced forces against national balanced forces.

**Victor Gavin, PhD
University of Barcelona**

**Paper presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, Marriott Westfields, Chantilly, Virginia, June 21-23 2007
Panel 43: Linking security and prosperity: Explorations into the political economy of NATO.**

[Do not cite or quote from without written permission from the author]

In 1951, the future president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, wrote the following entry in his personal diary, on the subject of Western Europe: *It is scarcely necessary to enumerate the problems that arise out of or are exaggerated by the division of Western Europe into so many sovereign nations (...) Each nation watches its neighbor to see that its neighbor's contribution to the common security is at least equal to the first nation ratio- and none is ever so convinced.! (...) I think that the real and bitter problems of today would instantly come within the limits of capabilities in solving them if we had this single government! Moreover, I believe inspired leaders could put it across. But everyone is too cautious, too lazy and too ambitious (personally). So many advantages would flow from such a union that it is a tragedy for the whole human race that it is not done at once.*¹

These words lead us to a forgotten and brief chapter in the first years of the Cold War, that is, the confrontation between the US and the European conceptions of the organization of the defense of Western Europe. The US conception involved the application of its own organizational model to the reconstruction of Europe as a whole: an offer along the lines of “*you can be like*

¹ Eisenhower Mss. Diaries, 11 June 1951. In L. Galambos (ed.): *The papers of Dwight David Eisenhower. Vol. XII: NATO and the campaign of 1952*. Baltimore, 1989, pp.340-341.

us” from the US to Europe. To quote William Tomlinson, Financial Adviser to the American Embassy and the ECA Special Mission in Paris: *For example, Belgium might take on the task of mounting one or two of the additional divisions that are now being suggested for France. The United Kingdom might provide the French with 50-ton tanks and let the French use the funds so freed to meet their requirements in uniforms, jeeps or planes. Germany might be permitted to produce immediately small weapons or some components of the weapons that France wants to produce and to assemble. (...) just as the working of the United States economy automatically brings about a contribution of real resources by New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California to the relatively poorer area of Idaho which enables the Idahoans to have an atomic energy industry, bombing grounds, tremendous training installations, and even naval installations at the head of the Columbia river and in the Coeur d’Alene.*² This military organization described by Tomlinson would be the logical consequence of a general, political and economic, reorganization of Europe according to a federal model. For General Eisenhower, its effect could only be positive for the continent: *Once united, the farms and factories of France and Belgium, the foundries of Germany, the rich farmlands of Holland and Denmark, the skilled labor of Italy, will produce miracles for the common good. In such unity is a secure future for these peoples. It would mean early independence of aid from America and other Atlantic countries. (...) The establishment of a workable European federation would go far to create confidence among people everywhere that Europe was doing its full and vital share in giving this*

² William Tomlinson: The role of United States in French Rearmament. Office of the Financial Adviser to the American Embassy and the ECA Special Mission. Paris, France. August 1951. AMI 8/10/3. Fondation Jean Monnet pour l’Europe (hereafter FJM)

*cooperation.*³ Moreover, according to Paul Hoffman, chief of the European Cooperation Administration, the agency established to manage the Marshall Plan, if the states of Europe integrated their economies, the continent's GDP would increase by 100 billion dollars: *within that \$100 billion the free people of Europe can have both bread and guns in sufficiency.*⁴

This reorganization had two very clear targets: to release the US from the obligation to provide financial and material aid to Europe via programs such as the Marshall Plan and to put an end to the seemingly permanent state of conflict in Europe, breaking down the rivalries between the states, which had twice dragged the United States into war. The second point provides further justification for the US position on Europe: American participation in the First and the Second World War entitled it to demand that the Europeans find a definitive solution to their structural problems, the source of their eternal conflicts. Here the future secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, gives us the key: *It would be wrong to use our resources to rebuild separate sovereignties in Europe, if without our help they might be forced to come together through necessity. But it would be proper to use our resources if they will help to induce them toward unity.*⁵ Eisenhower, Tomlinson, Foster Dulles, Hoffman coincided then on the need for a political, economic and military reorganization of Europe replacing the nation-state framework with a structure based on integration. Their opinions illustrate the resolve of US government on this matter and it should come as no surprise that, focusing on the military question, the Mutual Defense

³ Unity of Western Europe essential for World security by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 3 July 1951 in R. Ducci: *L'Europa Incompiuta*. Padova, 1970, pp.201-206.

⁴ M. Hogan: *The Marshall Plan*, Cambridge, 1987, pp.348-349.

⁵ Marshall Plan group (2 February 1948) John Foster Dulles Papers collection in Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

Assistance Act of 1949 included integration as one of its targets. Section 102 of the Act laid down that of the 500 million dollars assigned, 400 million might be used only *when the President of the United States approves recommendations for an integrated defense of the North Atlantic area which may be made by the Council and the Defense Committee to be established under the North Atlantic Treaty.*⁶

We should point out here that Washington was making a distinction between the desirability of a federal Europe following the US model, and the desirability of a federal NATO including the United States - something that never entered the US plans. The basic concepts underlying the Alliance were the rational use of the available resources and cooperation, and though the most rational thing for Western Europe was to federate, the possibility that the United States might enter into a federation with Western Europe was never entertained. So, in accordance with the strategic concept of the Alliance, which was prepared by the US Department of Defense, sanctioned by the US Department of State and then presented to the rest of the Allies for consideration and approval (though they had no right to modify its substance) (1-12-49), the following target was established: to achieve an *adequate military strength accompanied by economy of effort, resources and manpower* acknowledging that the economic recovery of Europe, and the stability that would result, constituted a key element of the security. These basic concepts were to be put in practice through the sharing of tasks between the member states: the US would take charge of strategic bombing, the UK, in conjunction with the US, would protect maritime routes, while the states of Continental Europe would contribute most of the troops for

⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan: *A community of interests: NATO and the Military assistance program 1948-1951*. Washington, 1980, p.215.

the Army. The financing would continue to be a national affair.⁷ The proposal was undoubtedly a rational one, but its implementation required two things. First, states would have to renounce the right to plan the defense of their national territories only and would have to embrace the concept of collective defense. Second, this collective defense required the raising of a collective force, rather than the classic concept of a coalition resulting from the sum of national self-sufficient armies created to defend a national territory. So the obvious question was this: was the creation of collective force of this kind compatible with the simultaneous creation of national self-sufficient armies in each of the states of the Alliance? If the answer was no, then the implementation of the plans challenged all the concepts that European states traditionally associated with their armed forces: national sovereignty in the military field, the time-honored relationship between the national armed forces and the prestige and the pride of the nation, and the state's own interest in possessing a military industry so as not to depend on others in defense matters, to mention only a few examples. At the Atlantic Council held in London between 15 and 18 May 1950, Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State and Robert Schuman, French Foreign Affairs Minister debated this key issue. For Acheson, the concepts of balanced collective force and balanced national force were not compatible; for Schuman, they were. Finally, a compromise was achieved: *balanced collective forces must be the objective (...) but account must be taken of national requirements for internal security, commitments outside the North Atlantic area and local defense on the outbreak of hostilities.*⁸ What these words in fact hide was the firm determination of each European state, not only

⁷ G.W. Pedlow (ed): *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, Brussels, 1997, pp.57-64.

⁸ "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 26 May 1950. Documents on British Policy Overseas, Vol. 2, Series 2, London, 1987. p.382.

France, to keep a national force able to defend its national territory. The true meaning of the concept “balanced collective forces” for a national defense was understood clearly by France’s National Defense Committee which, in its meeting of 17 May, that is to say at the same time as the Atlantic Council in London, rejected the idea, for the following reason: *it is unthinkable that we should not have a navy.*⁹ In fact, the Medium Term Defense Plan of the Alliance, as drawn up in the spring of 1950, called for an increase in armed forces without affecting national military systems and an increase in cooperation without transfer of power.¹⁰

The root of the problem lay in the fact that the Europeans were approaching the question from a completely different angle. Their aim was to reconstruct their national armies as an instrument of defense and, in the case of the United Kingdom and France, to project their power abroad. The problem facing them was how to finance it. The obvious solution for them was the material and financial aid of the United States, in exchange for which no European state was ready to concede so much as France - the key player in a forgotten but interesting chapter of the beginnings of the Cold War.

The problem facing France was the lack of resources to raise the kind of army she desired; indeed, all European states were in the same situation. As early as 1948, the French government of Paul Ramadier acknowledged that France was unable to finance her rearming but was not willing to limit her military forces to

⁹ Procès Verbal du Comité de Défense Nationale du 17 mai 1950. Papiers Auriol. 552 AP 44, 4AU4, Dr.4. Archives Nationales (hereafter AN) Paris.

¹⁰ Lawrence S. Kaplan: *A community of interests*. Op. Cit. p.89.

the resources available. Therefore only one solution was in sight: to use resources other than her own.¹¹ And here lies the big difference between the plans of the United States and France. Whereas Washington wanted the human and material element of the defense to be organized without regard for national borders, but financing to be left in national hands, Paris proposed leaving the nation-state framework intact in all aspects but the financial one, federating the economic resources of all the members of NATO. This was France's suggestion in early August 1950, in answer to the US question regarding the scope of the commitment to defense that each member state of the Atlantic Alliance was planning to make. The French Government saw a chance to propose a reorganization of the financial aspects of the Atlantic defense that would aid the attainment of its objectives. The French proposal was outlined in two memorandums written by the French representative to the Council of Deputies of NATO, Hervé Alphand.¹² France proposed the creation of a common NATO budget to which every member state would contribute according to its wealth, but would obtain resources according to the mission entrusted to it. Accordingly, France proposed to make the French army the largest in Europe, raising fifteen divisions in 3 years at a cost of 2 billion Francs, to be financed from the common NATO budget. In other words, France, seeing defense as a national issue, offered to make her army the main element of the defense of the continent, something which would entitle her to a sum from the common budget

¹¹ Ph.Vial: "De la surenchère atlantiste à l'option européenne: Monnet et les problèmes du réarmement occidental durant l'été 1950" in G. Bossuat & A. Wilkens (eds): *Jean Monnet, l'Europe et les chemins de la paix*, Paris, 1999, pp.307-342. Quotation on page 318.

¹² NATO Archives: Document n°8, D-D/8, 28 July 1950; H.Alphand: *L'Étonnement d'être*. Paris: Fayard, 1977. p.219.

that was greater than her financial contribution.¹³ This is the difference between the federalization of the human and material elements and federalization of the economic resources. Aware that the principal contributor to the common budget would be the United States, the French plan ceded control of its management to Washington. A note from the French Ministry of Foreign affairs which compiled the suggestions of the French Chiefs of Staff stated the following: *just as it is in France's interests to preserve the maximum freedom of action in the political and diplomatic fields avoiding the kominformization of the members of the Atlantic Alliance under the leadership of the United States, it is essential to engage the United States in a close collaboration and to freely accept the limitations of our sovereignty in a way useful to preserve our national independence.*¹⁴

The French proposal was prepared with the full knowledge of David Bruce, Ambassador of the United States in Paris, as is clear from the reading of his diaries. On 18 July Bruce met Jules Moch, the French Defense Minister. On the 27th and 28th he met Maurice Petsche, the French Finance Minister and René Pleven, the Prime Minister, and then sent a telegram to Washington stating that the French Government had agreed on a position on a common budget for NATO: each state would contribute according to its wealth, and that the coordination of the states' efforts should be replaced with a centralized

¹³ NATO Archives: Document n° 26, D-D/26, 22 August 1950; Document n°34, D-D/34, 22 August 1950; FJM: Mémoire du Gouvernement Français au Gouvernement des Etats Unis, 5 août 1950, AMI 4/2/4; The Ambassador in France to the Secretary of State, 17 August 1950. Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS) 1950, Vol. 3, pp.222-225; Archives Diplomatiques de France (hereafter MAE): Amérique 1944-52, Etats-Unis, Vol. 121.

¹⁴ P. Guillen : « *La France et la Question de la Défense de l'Europe Occidentale, du Pacte de Bruxelles (Mars 1948) au Plan Pleven (Octobre 1950).* » in Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, n° 144, 1986. p.91

organization, led by the United States and with broad powers upon the member states. Bruce said that nobody seemed to have a clear idea on how to put the idea into practice, but it had been suggested to him that a possible solution would be that an American or a restricted committee presided by an American would be given *practically dictatorial powers on rearmament and military production*.¹⁵

On 31 July 1950, the key meeting took place in Paris, that is to say, one week before the presentation of the mentioned memorandums. The meeting was attended by Pleven, Moch, Petsche, Alphand, Parodi, Guindey, Calvet for France and by a large and important US delegation including, as well as Bruce, John W. Snyder (Secretary of the Treasury), Milton Katz (delegate for Europe of the ECA), William C. Foster (delegate of the ECA) and Averell Harriman (special adviser to President Truman). The meeting began disappointingly for the French representatives. Milton Katz expressed his opposition to the French proposal since it violated US legislation in budgetary matters. The French reaction is worth recounting. Pleven was first to speak, pointing out that the basis of the military capacity of the Soviet Union resided in a centralized leadership, which the West could not hope to match by means of a simple coordination of the efforts of the states. Pleven went on to outline what France was ready to concede if this allowed her to obtain her objectives: *a common authority would place US in a better position to exercise the major role which it must play in the Atlantic defense effort* – a statement that coincided with Bruce's telegram message. Pleven was followed by Petsche, the Minister of Finance,

¹⁵ David Bruce diaries, 18, 27 y 28 July 1950. (Consulted at the Historical Archives of the European Communities in San Domenico de Fiesole (Firenze) Italy.)

who declared his readiness to transfer France's defense budget to the common budget, so that it could be managed *without the intervention of the French Government*. In other words, France was ready to cede management of the financial element of her defense if this enabled her to obtain the army she wished. But all the efforts of the French representatives were in vain. Washington was not ready to accept an idea which contravened its legislation, would have made the United States the biggest contributor to the common budget and ran counter to the principle according to which Europe had to make every effort to do without US aid. Incredibly, Pleven and Moch informed the US delegation that they were determined to go forward with their plans, and one week later the plans were presented to the US government as if nothing had happened.¹⁶ Paris, simply, could not relinquish the attributes of a major power. In October 1950, the idea of a common budget was included into the project for a European army, which would start the saga of the European Defense Community, the scheme launched by France to accept the West German rearmament asked by the US as a condition for its commitment with Western European defense against an eventual Soviet attack. In this case the common budget wouldn't be at the service of the national interests of the states but at the service of an integrated European army depending on European institutions, something that coincided with the US plans for Europe but not with the ambitions of the European nation states. The eventual failure of this project, reflecting the unwillingness of European states to abandon the nation-state framework in political and military matters put an end to the dream of the European states organized after the fashion of the United States. Western

¹⁶ The Ambassador in France to the Secretary of State, 1 August 1950. FRUS 1950, Vol. 3, pp.168-172.

Europe will not be like the United States. The disappointment of the US government was huge; the feeling was that Europe had missed a wonderful opportunity. The truth was that nationality had defeated rationality. In this sense, we should not forget the words of Markus Wolf, chief of the GDR's foreign intelligence service, in his autobiography *Man without a face*. A participant in the battle against the EDC, he takes no credit for its failure: in his words, the project was *finally blocked by the nationalism of the French rather than anything our intelligence service did*.¹⁷ The final outcome was a Europe politically based upon the nation-state, economically integrated through the European Economic Community, now European Union, since 1957, and militarily organized in NATO understood as a close collaboration between independent states under US leadership

¹⁷ Markus Wolf. *Man without a face. The autobiography of communism's greatest spymaster*. New York: Public Affairs, 1997, p.54.