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FRANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
18 October 1960

by

H.E.M. Hervé Alphand, French Ambassador
to the United States

In order to better understand France's stand in the great international issues of the hour, it is well, first of all, to survey briefly the internal situation of my country. Our attitude toward the world cannot but reflect the forces and values that we represent.

Those of you who have visited France recently have been able to see that her basic qualities have not changed. They are permanent. They derive from her soil and the character of her inhabitants and they will survive all political evolutions.

France, though her territory occupies a relatively modest surface, is the most diversified nation in the world. She offers a complete set of climates, of races and of landscapes, and all political views are represented in her. A humorist said once that France was a country divided among forty-three million inhabitants.

Being the nation of variety, she is also the country of paradoxes. I can assure you that for an ambassador it is difficult to represent a nation who has given birth to geniuses as opposite as Saint-Louis and Voltaire, Corneille and Marivaux, Taine and Bergson, and where sensitivity and a spirit of finesse are found side by side with logic and the most penetrating sense of criticism, a country who is faithful to the teachings of Christianity and yet has not repudiated her revolutionary ideal, who is called

sometimes the Elder Daughter of the Church and who has given to the world the Declaration of the Rights of Man; finally a nation who remains profoundly nationalistic and yet launches the most daring ideas about the reorganization of Europe or the emancipation of Africa.

All this you can find in today's France, together with a very keen desire to respect and to defend individual freedom whilst at the same time accepting and even soliciting the authority of the state.

However, besides these unchangeable elements of the French character the visitor to my country will surely notice a recent evolution which happily draws France away from the roads which could have led to her doom and makes of her a modern country adapted to the needs of the twentieth century.

I believe that the most remarkable factor of this rebirth is her new demographic situation. Up to the end of the Second World War the French population remained at the same level, even with tendency to decline. In spite of the losses sustained in those two last wars—more than two million men—today the number of births is each year greater by nearly 300,000 over the number of deaths thanks mostly to the subsidies given to large families. Proportionally our birth rate is greater than that of our neighbors. France, this old country, is becoming a young nation again and this fact cannot but have important consequences in the economic, social and even diplomatic field.

At the same time and for the last two years, France has realized a political stability. Her new constitution creates a balance between the notion of freedom and that of authority. One cannot any more witness the sad spectacle of governments falling every three months and of a great country incapable of maintaining some permanency of her political line of action.

Government stability has made possible the stability of our currency, the basis for economic progress. We do not find ourselves today as we did in the past dependent on foreign nations and specially the United States for the payment of our external debt. On the contrary we are able now to reimburse in advance the loans we have contracted; our industrial production increases from five to six per cent a year raising each year the average purchasing power of our people by four per cent. For fifty years Frenchmen were looking for protection in every field either to protect themselves against foreign competition through limitations of imports or against the dangers of war through the Maginot Line. We were stagnant whilst younger nations were increasing the rhythm of their expansion. These conservative and malthusian tendencies have been stopped. France today does not shy from facing foreign competition because she possesses modern plants, has vast sources of energy and especially of oil and is the fourth nuclear power in the world.

This is why she is now approaching international problems with a new spirit and renewed confidence. This metamorphosis gives her as well as to Europe and the free world a very precious advantage.

You will perhaps think that this presentation is tainted with too great an optimism, that in spite of the progress realized under the leadership of General de Gaulle many cracks appear in our national unity, that immense difficulties are still to be surmounted and finally that our future is not as assured as it looks.

I have no intention of ignoring the dangers threatening us which are in most cases those that you have to face, but I believe that recently they have been exaggerated in the press and that it is necessary to redress this situation. That is what I would

like to do for you by reviewing two great international problems: the relations of France with the Western World and our policy towards Africa.

First of all there must not be any doubt in your mind: France has chosen to be on the side of the free peoples and to be there with you.

Our alliance born nearly two centuries ago at the same time as your Republic, is inspired by ideals and interest far too deep for anyone to dream of changing or weakening its links.

On this subject I would like to repeat that France wants to remain an integral part of the Atlantic Alliance, an alliance that growing perils make more necessary than ever.

However, in the last few weeks I have heard a lot about the problems that certain decisions taken by the French Government would create for NATO. I believe this has been dramatized and that it is well to correct some misunderstandings.

It is true that the situation today is not the same as the one that existed when the Atlantic Pact was signed. That is so for two reasons: on one hand the United States no longer possesses the monopoly of the atomic weapons; on the other hand, the peril that we must face is not only military, nor is it limited to the small zone covered by the Treaty of the North Atlantic; it is becoming political and economic and it threatens practically every continent.

It is therefore reasonable that we should seek, as you do yourselves, to adapt the alliance to these changing circumstances. I do not believe, however, that this implies necessarily a modification of the text of the treaty, but rather of the noncontractual arrangements not ratified by the parliaments but made by the participating governments.

In particular, the President of the French Republic has wished that some changes should be made in the military structure of the organization, not in any way to weaken it, but, on the contrary, to increase its efficacy. The manner in which our forces should be combined will be studied at leisure in the months to come, taking into account the responsibilities of the states as well as the need, which we have never contested, to maintain the American divisions on the European continent in the present circumstances.

Moreover, we have asked that the Western countries that have world interests like the United States, Great Britain and France, establish closer links of co-operation in the fields of foreign policy and strategy notably concerning the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons in the world. For us Frenchmen it is unthinkable that we should be militarily allied in Europe and that at the same time we should face the solidly united Communist bloc in a dispersed order when we have to face problems in Asia, Africa or the Middle East. These are not unreasonable requests. I am convinced that we shall find the means for that co-operation that should strengthen the Atlantic Pact, without creating a sort of directorate inside NATO, but making possible a discussion and a search for agreement among our three countries on all subjects of common interests in the world.

It has been said also that France's decision to make atomic weapons was going to make the work of NATO more difficult. This is a strange accusation. When some years ago England created an autonomous nuclear force no one thought of criticizing her or of saying that such a force would weaken the Western alliance. Why, if France has the possibility of having one—without receiving any help from her friends—should she not seek to have an essential weapon in modern defense? In what way could her action be contrary to the principle of international co-operation?

As a matter of fact all that strengthens France in the political, economic or military planes strengthens the Free World also. My country has the strange destiny of being considered the sick man of Europe in her times of weakness and of being accused of trying to establish her hegemony when she becomes stronger. In truth it is very desirable that our friends should not fall victims to these exaggerations and rejoice with us when France plays the role that belongs to her in this world.

We must not forget that without a strong and healthy France there cannot be a united Europe and that without a united Europe the future of the Free World and of the United States is in danger. For many years it has been the policy of my country—and it is still our policy—to unite for peace and for economic progress the nations of Western Europe which for centuries were warring against each other. The existing organizations, and above all the Common Market, have had their origin in French initiatives. We believe that it is highly desirable that a great market of 175 million inhabitants should be constituted in Western Europe inside which goods, capitals and men can circulate freely. This economic entity of considerable power comes immediately after the United States and before the Soviet Union and it announces an important increase in the European living standard. It will be a framework for the peaceful co-operation between France and Germany. I do not think that there could be an enterprise more necessary for the equilibrium of the world.

During the last weeks the French Government has studied certain ways of completing the existing institutions in the political, cultural and defense fields. That we had certain conversations with our partners was enough to immediately inspire an unwarranted campaign about our intentions. On this subject I would like to give you some information.

First of all it is not in our intentions to modify the existing treaties. Not only does France not want to walk backwards, but she is the first to insist for an acceleration of the application of the clauses of the Common Market.

Secondly, there is no desire on our part to create a third force which would exclude Great Britain and the United States. Our links with England and with you should be reinforced as I have said, either within NATO or through a better co-ordination of our policies. As for England, who does not belong to the group of the six countries of the Common Market, she knows that she is still invited to join us if she can accept the rules that we have imposed upon us by the treaties uniting us. If for reasons of her own, that have mainly to do with her relations with the Commonwealth, she finds it impossible to participate in the Common Market and other European organizations, I am convinced that without discriminating against third party countries we could find means of increasing our reciprocal exchanges.

Finally, a co-operation of the Six Countries in the field of defense would not introduce a kind of particularism inside the Atlantic Pact. If the European countries decide to increase their solidarity in matters such as the manufacture of arms or the instruction of their forces, their action cannot but benefit the Alliance. Such is, in any case the objective that we have fixed for ourselves.

Now, I would like to give you an idea of what the French position is in regard to a problem which has for years attracted the interest of public opinion—that of Africa and in a more general way, that of what has been called the "decolonization."

In our mind, it is obvious that the era of colonialism is over. The emancipation of peoples has always been France's ideal and that of her great

empire builders, Gallieni and Lyautey, for instance. It is not that we have to be ashamed of our colonial realizations. They have introduced people not yet civilized to progress under all its forms, economic, political, administrative and social.

But the moment has come when each of these peoples must be able to choose its own destiny. On the invitation of France, eleven African Republics and the Malagasy Republic have decided, following a popular referendum, to proclaim independence. They have done so in a peaceful manner, the ultimate step having been preceded by a period of economic preparation and of education of the elites. Without such a period, we might have had great disturbances in states that do not possess experience and where the personal rivalries might have led to anarchy and chaos. Moreover, most of those new nations have freely accepted to continue working with France in an association establishing a co-operation in the essential fields of defense, currency, foreign policy and education. It would have been ruinous and regrettable if the links existing between France and those states had been suddenly broken. We respect their sovereignty but at the same time they can, if they desire to do so, continue to find in France the assistance and aid indispensable to promote their development. I truly believe that if they had not maintained their links with the Western World through France, they would have run the risk of jumping from colonialism to communism without ever knowing freedom.

It is quite evident that Soviet Russia is looking and will look for the divergencies that might exist between Africa and the old colonial powers in order to use them as a springboard against the Western World. What is happening in the Congo is, alas, an illustration of the dangers that maneuvers of international communism are creating for a state too rapidly emancipated. Such maneuvers must bring the Western Nations to reinforce their unity in order to make sure that

these young nations will not fall under this totalitarian threat which would bring to their peoples a kind of colonialism infinitely worse than any they have known in the past.

For many long years, it is certain that Africa will need hundreds and thousands of engineers, teachers, administrators and technicians. Where can they be found? Some say the United Nations will provide them. I believe this view represents an incomplete and inadequate picture of the situation. Only the nationals of the European countries who speak the languages used in Africa, who are ready to face its climate and who know its customs and problems, are available to meet this challenge. To do without their help would, I am afraid, create a vacuum opening a free way for the Russians, the Czechs or the Chinese to enter the field. In brief, self-determination and independence must, if they are to succeed, be followed by a policy of co-operation freely consented by the old colonial powers and by the ex-colonies.

But why, would you say, does not France apply to Algeria the formula that she has so generously used for the whole of Black Africa? I would reply that the French Government has no other objective than to give the Algerian population, as soon as calm prevails, the possibility to decide for itself the destiny of Algeria under conditions that would guarantee without a doubt—notably through the presence of observers from the whole world—the freedom and sincerity of the vote.

It is first necessary to put an end to the fighting and for that France remains ready to discuss, at any time, with the rebels the conditions of a ceasefire. When the fighting is ended she is ready to discuss with the representatives of all the shades of Algerian opinion without exception the conditions and guarantees for self-determination.

There is no other policy which could better fit the democratic ideals which have always been that of France as well as of the United States.

Why is it then that we have made no progress on that road when the leaders of the rebellion came to negotiate at Melun? Simply, because these leaders wanted to be regarded as the "government of Algeria"; it was impossible for us to decide such a thing without a popular vote. The fact of using machine guns and suppressing through terrorism the lives of innocent Moslem and European victims does not give them any right to be recognized as a government. The democratic way is to have an election and this is what we are proposing.

In this problem, which is within the competence of France, we see no reason to justify the intervention of the United Nations. We do not believe that this organization possesses the power or the means to impose its decision and to solve the problems of such a magnitude. The precedent created by the Congo in no way encourages us to follow that road and besides, why should we give the right to control self-determination in Algeria to governments which, though represented at the United Nations, have come to power and are maintained in power through force, which exercise a frightening dictatorship not only upon their own people but even upon others? Are they really qualified to give to France a country where the Rights of Man were born, lessons of justice and of freedom? Without trying to prejudge the reply that the Algerians will give to the questions that will be put to them, we know that in that country there are more than one million inhabitants of European origin and in the Moslem population there exists a great proportion of men and women who under one form or another want to continue co-operating with France. We cannot and we must not disappoint them.

The discussions about Algeria show a tendency to put the emphasis on the war, neglecting all that is new and coming to life in that land, thanks to France. There is a tendency to forget that local elites are now being formed and that schools and factories are being built every month, while an immense effort, far superior to that made at home by some of the nations accusing us today, is being made to equip the country. It was a correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* back from Algeria, who wrote a few days ago to his paper:

"Behind day-to-day reports of small-scale skirmishes between French troops and Algerian rebel units is the story of another war fought by French military and civilians—a war against poverty and ignorance among the mass of the Moslem population."

Therefore, no one more than France, wishes the fighting to end. It is the leaders of the rebellion bent on seizing power who are prolonging this trial and this suffering. I wish our American friends to understand this problem well. Its solution is indispensable for the Western World, and by your action I hope you do not contribute in any way, for instance at the United Nations, to the cause of our enemy, of those who are going to Peiping, to Moscow and Budapest to seek help and moral support for reasons that are already too obvious.

Such are, ladies and gentlemen, the positions that my country takes in regard to those great questions upon which depends, in fact, war or peace.

In a world such as it is today, we have no other means of defending our way of life and our freedom than to be strong and united. I hope that we are, in Europe, as well as in Africa and in all the parts of the globe where the same enemy holds above our heads as well as yours, the same threat.

I know well that the present solution which is a balance of terror is not ideal. We would prefer another solution like the one we had hopes for last May when the four chiefs of state were to meet in Paris for a Summit Conference. We would prefer a détente, the establishment of confidence between two opposite philosophies, a reciprocal controlled and balanced disarmament starting, first of all, with nuclear weapons and vehicles and the beginning of a co-operation between the two blocs to bring aid to the most needy peoples of the earth.

The last debates at the United Nations, the passion, the violence and even sometimes the absurdity they revealed, do not authorize us to believe that we are today closer to this objective than we were yesterday. However, we must not despair, we must not believe that because they keep their secrets better than we do, our enemies do not suffer also from certain internal divisions. In spite of the severe controls of their totalitarian system, we perceive from time to time muffled cracks in their machine. In the meantime, let us learn how to know each other better so that we can better act together for the service of an ideal which is common to us all.

As far as I am concerned, I am sure that the Franco-American alliance will help the world maintain peace and freedom and that the flame of liberty brought to you by Lafayette, Rochambeau, de Grasse and more recently by de Gaulle, together with the flame of freedom brought to us by Benjamin Franklin, Pershing and Eisenhower will, in the future, shine more brilliantly than ever.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

His Excellency Hervé Alphand

Present Position: Ambassador of France to the United States.

Schools:

Lycee Janson de Sailly
Ecole des Sciences Politiques, Law Degree

Career Highlights:

- 1937-38 - Inspector of Finances and Director, Trade Agreements Division, Ministry of Commerce.
- 1940-41 - Financial Counsellor to Embassy, Washington.
- 1941-44 - Director of Economic Affairs for French National Committee in London.
- 1945 - Director-General, Economics, Financial and Technical Affairs, French Foreign Office.
- 1948 - Ambassador and President of French delegation to O.E.E.C., Washington.
- 1950 - French Deputy to the Atlantic Council.
- 1952-54 - Ambassador and French delegate, NATO Permanent Council.
- 1954 - Ambassador to Japan.
- 1955-56 - Ambassador and French delegate to the United Nations.
- 1956 - Ambassador of the French Republic to the United States, a position which he now holds.