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Britain and France Face the New European Architecture

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The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it explores the similarities and differences between the governments of Britain and France in their reactions to the New Europe that has emerged since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. It also assesses the impact of the events and trends associated with the New Europe on the place of Britain and France in East-West relations in Europe.

After reviewing traditional postwar British and French perspectives on Europe and the postwar world order, the first part will examine how Francois Mitterrand and the second part how Margaret Thatcher and John Major reacted to the developments associated with the "New Europe." The main issues to be examined in this context are the implications for Europe's future political, economic and security order of a unified Germany, "EC 1992," and the transformations of Central/Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Because of the weight of Britain's and France's traditional postwar approach to East-West affairs, both governments have reacted to all of these developments except "EC 1992" in a fairly similar manner. It is an approach which can be described as cautious optimism about the emergence of a new European order whose architecture remains to be defined. For most of the 1980s, Thatcher was the EC's most prominent critic while Mitterrand was its most ardent supporter and architect. With Thatcher's replacement by John Major, Britain's stance toward the EC has also moved closer to France's, although it is very likely that France will continue to be a stronger champion of EC integration.

The last part summarizes the impact of these issues on the place of Britain and France in East-West relations in Europe. On the one hand, the increased importance of the EC in world politics and the trend towards pluralism will increase the importance of Britain and France on the world stage. On the other hand, both nations are likely to suffer some loss of influence because of the decreasing importance of nuclear weapons and the dominant role Germany is likely to have in the "New Europe." Finally, whatever the shape of the future European architecture, Britain and France will retain significant geopolitical roles and influence in the New Europe.

Britain and France Face the New European Architecture

Introduction:

Although the New Europe has been discussed at great length in the press and media, the views of Britain and France on the emerging architecture of the New Europe have not received great attention outside of Britain and France. As two of the leading countries within the EC and NATO and in bilateral relations with Germany and the superpowers, Britain and France are among the key players in the New Europe. This fact is sometimes overlooked in discussions of the enhanced international roles of America and Germany and the declining superpower status of the Soviet Union. British EC policies have been covered in detail, especially Thatcher's opposition to European monetary union while she was in power between 1979 and 1990. However, British and French perspectives on the range of issues associated with the New Europe have been somewhat neglected. In part this reflects the frequently expressed view that Britain and France are losing geopolitical clout as Germany assumes center stage in the New Europe.

The following discussion will examine British and French governmental views on the developments and trends associated with the New Europe and its architecture. The views of the respective leaders of both countries will be examined as representative of governmental opinion. While some reference will be made to trends in public opinion, the emphasis in this paper is on official views as expressed by Margaret Thatcher and John Major for Britain and by Francois Mitterrand for France. The sources of these views include speeches, press conferences, interviews and published writings. This paper will not include a systematic analysis of the content of these sources. Instead, major arguments and concepts will be summarized.

The leadership perspectives have been chosen in part because they are easier to identify with reference to such recent events. Moreover, British and French foreign and security policy decision making processes have always been rather highly centralized in the hands of the executive. Despite constitutional differences in terms of governmental structure (Britain has a parliamentary system, while France has a presidential system), in both countries foreign policy is an area which has traditionally been dominated by the leader of the government of the day.

The foreign policies of Margaret Thatcher between 1979 and 1990, of Francois Mitterrand since 1981 and of John Major since November 1990 have reflected their beliefs and outlook to a great extent. In all three cases there was continuity with the policies of previous administrations in some areas, such as defense policy, especially over time. However, Thatcher, Major and Mitterrand came to power with and implemented foreign policy perspectives of their

own that broke with past traditions, particularly in the areas of East-West and European policies. Thatcher took a much harder line toward the Soviet Union and a more skeptical view of European integration than any of her predecessors. Major was expected to continue the Thatcher foreign policy legacy but instead has already moved to develop a more cooperative stance on the EC. He has also repaired relations with Germany that were badly damaged by Thatcher's outspoken opposition to German unity in 1989-90. Finally, Mitterrand has moved away from the Gaullist heritage by fostering closer ties with the United States and becoming one of, if not the, key architect of European integration.

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After reviewing traditional postwar British and French perspectives on European international relations, the first part will examine how Francois Mitterrand and the second part how Margaret Thatcher and John Major reacted to the developments associated with the "New Europe." The main issues to be examined in this context are the implications for Europe's future political, economic and security order of a unified Germany, "EC 1992," and the transformations of Central/Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

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The last part summarizes the impact of these issues on the place of Britain and France in East-West relations in Europe. On the one hand, the increased importance of the EC in world politics and the trend toward pluralism will increase the importance of Britain and France on the world stage. On the other hand, both nations are likely to suffer some loss of influence because of the decreasing importance of nuclear weapons and the dominant role Germany is likely to have in the "New Europe." Finally, whatever the shape of the future European architecture, Britain and France will retain significant geopolitical roles and influence in the New Europe.

Traditional Postwar Perspectives on the European Order

Despite numerous differences in particular policies and policy styles, Britain and France have played similar roles in postwar international politics. William Wallace describes this common element in British and French foreign policies as follows:

... Britain and France share a particular affinity in their underlying assumptions about the purposes and possibilities of foreign policy. Indeed, they are in a sense the only two states in Western Europe which still have pretensions to a national foreign policy as such (1).

Thus, the main similarity in postwar British and French foreign policies is their historical experiences of possessing global empires and world roles. This experience has, as Wallace and others have described (2), resulted in a Realpolitik approach to foreign policy that stresses the sovereignty of nation states in an interdependent European order and an attempt to maximize whatever degree of international influence still lingers from the past. British and French foreign policies since World War II have been marked by a vigilant concern with maintaining autonomy and freedom of maneuver in European and world politics.

Britain and France also shared a status quo approach to East-West relations in Europe for most of the postwar period (3). Although French governments since de Gaulle regularly called for a Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals" and "to overcome Yalta," meaning the division of Europe, they have in practice been quite supportive of postwar alliance and security structures. Both Britain and France have generally been the main defenders of a cautious analysis of the Soviet threat and of the view that NATO, the American nuclear and conventional presence and the division of Europe and Germany are best left in place at least in the short term. Similarly, in their reactions to Gorbachev and the revolutions in both Central Europe and the Soviet Union, the British and French governments have supported Gorbachev's efforts but remain cautious about altering the structures of alliance security.

As described below, this characterization applies more fully to Britain than to France. It may also be changing in Britain under John Major's premiership. While the French have generally been in favor of alternative conceptions of the European order, the British have always held an essentially conservative perspective that sought to maintain the "... Western world order: that is, preserving the Atlantic Alliance and the stability of East-West relations, and reasserting Britain's ties to the EC or to the United States (or in some cases, both)" (4).

The French have a different overall vision of Europe and have been with Germany the key shaper of the EC. Britain has generally taken a reluctant attitude toward European integration and has promoted Atlantic security conceptions based on having close relations with the United States. The French (along with both the Germans and the Russians) have in the postwar period supported at least the articulation of alternative thinking about European security (5), although in practice they have been, except under de Gaulle, excellent American and Atlantic allies. The main features of French views on the postwar European order are: in the short term, France must support the U.S. and NATO while promoting EC integration; in the long-term, the European security order that has existed since 1945 will be replaced by a pan-European security system which allows Europe to be a major geopolitical power. In other words, while the French wish to retain NATO as an institution that will help in managing the transition to a New European architecture, that architecture will be dominated by the EC in the French view.

French Views on the New Europe: Mitterrand

The essence of Mitterrand's reaction to the events and developments associated with the New Europe has been to promote continued and rapid integration of the EC in the political, economic and security spheres. He sees the EC as the best institution to anchor Germany to the Western community, to manage the transition to the new European security order and to promote Europe's independent role in world affairs. Mitterrand also sees "EC 1992" as the area of his principal legacy and contribution in foreign policy.

Although Mitterrand has greatly increased French cooperation with and participation in NATO, he seems to believe that the time will come when NATO and the East can be consolidated into a pan-European security structure. On January 1, 1990 Mitterrand gave a speech in which he outlined his somewhat vague notion of a "European confederation" in which the EC, Central Europe, and the other members of the CSCE (except the Soviet Union which would be brought in at a later stage) would form one large pan-European order. In most discussions of visions of Europe held by key European leaders, Mitterrand's "European confederation" is compared to Gorbachev's "common European home" since both visions bring the Eastern and Western halves of Europe together.

The New Europe has produced in France a sense of unease about whether France in the 1990s will be able to retain its traditional geopolitical role in Europe. In the period since the fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989, French fears about the Soviet Union, Germany and Europe's future order have been heightened (6). The main debate today among political and intellectual elites and in the media is about France's ability to retain its national identity and autonomy in a highly interdependent Europe. As explained by

David Yost, the French are worried that France will be overshadowed by Germany and marginalized by other developments in the New Europe:

Never has it been so clear, however, that France's policies of independence have been largely dependent on advantageous international circumstances. Now, given the prospect of a diminished U.S. military and nuclear presence in Western Europe, a less stable and predictable situation throughout east-central and south-east Europe and the U.S.S.R., and uncertainty concerning the internal political dynamics and policies of a unified Germany, a number of factors supporting France's privileged and unique security position may disappear. (7)

While polls show the French public and elites to be enthusiastic supporters of "EC 1992," there is an undercurrent of anxiety, especially within the neo-Gaullist RPR party of Jacques Chirac, about giving up French freedom of action in a federal Europe which is one possible outcome of plans for "EC 1992." However, at the moment it seems that leaders in France, Britain and Germany favor an intergovernmental rather than a federal Europe, albeit one in which national sovereignties will be pooled in most areas.

Moreover, the French debate on the New Europe has emphasized the fact, discussed above by Yost, that the postwar order gave France many geopolitical advantages which may dissipate in the future. When there was a divided Germany in a bipolar Europe, France was seen as the political leader of the EC, an intermediary between the superpowers and a powerful military power. In the New Europe, many argue, France will be overshadowed by German economic might which will probably translate into a greater world role as well, its military power will be less significant in a de-nuclearized security environment and the end of the cold war may eliminate its role as an arbiter of East-West relations.

On the issue of German unity, Mitterrand shared many of Thatcher's misgivings, for example about Kohl's timetable in the plan he presented after the wall came down without any prior consultation with his allies. However, by the time of the East German elections in March 1990, Mitterrand realized it would be counterproductive to attempt to slow down the unification process. He seems to have reached an understanding with Kohl that in return for supporting early unity, he would receive backing on Mitterrand's plans for the EC. Since then Mitterrand and Kohl have issued many joint declarations, such as in April 1990 that political union should proceed alongside economic union. As a result the Franco-German relationship, the traditional motor of EC unity, has been at least partially repaired.

In terms of the institutions that will comprise the future European architecture in the area of security, after the EC, the French see roles for NATO, as discussed above, and for the WEU, as a vehicle for promoting the security dimension of the EC, and for the CSCE, as the institution best suited to promoting a pan-European order. However, at least in Mitterrand's vision, the EC appears to be the leader of the "European confederation." For example, he sees West European assistance for the democracy movement in Central Europe as one of the EC's central missions. As Ole Waever writes, "Eastern Europe thus becomes increasingly important as the essence of the European project, but is systematically conceived of as the political action of the European Community in the name of the East Europeans" (8)

The final aspect of the New Europe and its architecture from Mitterrand's perspective concerns the revolutions in Central Europe and the Soviet Union. Mitterrand's views on the Soviet Union are rather hard to discern. Prior to Gorbachev's arrival, his hard-line views on the U.S.S.R. that derive from an ardent anti-communism were tempered in 1983 with a new diplomatic activism toward the East (as was interestingly also true of Margaret Thatcher in the same year). From this period on, Mitterrand began to emphasize European and Eastern policies as the core of his foreign policy. However, it is not clear whether and to what extent his views on the Soviet military threat and the nature of the Soviet Union have changed.

When faced with the fall of the Berlin wall and the other events associated with the New Europe, Mitterrand appeared to have reservations about many implications of the changes in the European order and saw the EC as the best institution to contain the problems that might arise in the future. He had reservations about the speed and manner with which Kohl and the Germans pursued unification and was concerned about the emergence of a possible "strategic vacuum" in Central Europe with the removal of American and other foreign troops and nuclear weapons from Germany, the disbanding of the Warsaw pact and instability and the prospect of disintegration in the Soviet Union (9).

In light of his emphasis on consolidating the integration of the EC, Mitterrand implicitly relegated the widening of Western Europe to include Central Europe to a later stage. In any event, the timetable of "EC 1992" favors integration over enlargement. Mitterrand is certainly in favor of bringing in the Central Europeans in principle as long as the conditions are appropriate, meaning that reform is successful.

French policies toward the Soviet Union since November 1989 have included promotion of reform efforts by Gorbachev, economic assistance and frequent high-level diplomatic exchanges between Mitterrand and Gorbachev and other officials. According to aides of the French president, Mitterrand intends to use his remaining

years in power to find a way to bring the U.S.S.R. and Central Europe in the "European confederation" as well as to consolidate the EC (10). However, Mitterrand believes that France and the West should retain and modernize their military forces and avoid jettisoning NATO because of problems that are likely arise in the transition to the New Europe. Although Mitterrand wants to retain privileged relations with the Soviet Union and believes Gorbachev should be supported by the West, he is aware that the course of reform is uncertain and that many French and Soviet interests may diverge in the future. Yost writes that "A number of French analysts have noted that France could become Russia's principal adversary in Europe; France has taken a leading role in resisting the denuclearization of Europe and in organizing West European defense and security cooperation" (11).

British Views on the New Europe: Thatcher and Major

In discussing how the New Europe is seen from No. 10 Downing Street, it is necessary consider the views of both Margaret Thatcher who was British Prime Minister until November 1990 and John Major, who replaced her when he won the Tory party leadership contest. The views of each of them will be discussed in turn.

Thatcher's reactions to the New Europe included the following principal features: support for "EC 1992" but harsh criticisms of Euro-federalism, especially in her views on the two EC intergovernmental conferences on economic and political union; open opposition to German unity; a preference for "widening" the EC by bringing in the nations of Central Europe over "deepening" through further integration; finally, despite the strongest support for Gorbachev's reform efforts among any Western leader, except perhaps the German foreign minister, Genscher, a belief that the West should not let down its guard militarily (12). In the transition to the new European order, according to Thatcher, NATO, nuclear weapons and Anglo-American relationship that have served so well in the past should be retained.

Thatcher is a conviction politician whose well defined beliefs and principles guide her policies. Her views on the New Europe are rooted in her overall approach to foreign policy which can be summarized as consisting of a few key ideas: anti-communism; peace requires a strong defense; Britain must always defend its national interests; and the core of Britain's foreign policy should continue to be the Anglo-American "special relationship." This foreign policy creed had its origins mostly in World War II and its aftermath which helps explain her antipathy to German unity and her nostalgia for the days of British hegemony and the Anglo-American global partnership.

Thatcher's opposition to Euro-federalism is legion. Her highly skeptical attitude toward EC economic and monetary union tended to obscure her positive contributions to "EC 1992."

Thatcher helped reform the EC's budget and agricultural policies for which she was secretly admired in Brussels. Moreover, Britain has an outstanding record in implementing EC directives. Other European leaders often "hid under her skirt," according to press reports that they did not need to voice their own reservations about EC policies because she did it for them. While Thatcher strongly supports a European common market, she is adamantly opposed to ceding authority to the EC on matters in which national governments and parliaments should remain sovereign. Many British politicians and citizens share her opposition to Euro-federalism, but they feel she should have expressed her reservations more subtly and displayed a greater spirit of cooperation.

Thatcher's vision of Europe's future is a Gaullist one in which each nation state retains sovereignty. Her anti-federalist views were most clearly expressed in her famous speech to the College of Europe in Bruges in September 1988. A frequently quoted sentence from that speech is "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels."

Thatcher's outspoken opposition to Germany is also well known. Despite their ideological affinity as European conservatives, she and German Chancellor Kohl have never gotten along well. After November 1989 when the Berlin wall came down and throughout the 1990-91, Thatcher continued to raise objections to German unity. First, when the wall came down, she said German unity was "not on the agenda." Then, when it became clear that Moscow would not object to unification, she asked for security guarantees for the West. Once the two-plus-four power talks became the forum for resolving the security issues, she raised economic objections (14).

In the spring of 1990, Thatcher organized a briefing with academic experts on Germany, known as the Chequers seminar, which was later leaked to the press in the aftermath of the "Ridley affair." Nicholas Ridley, her Minister of Trade and Industry and considered at the time to be her closest confidant in the cabinet, was forced to resign after the publication of an interview with *The Spectator*. In it, he claimed that the EC is "a German racket" intended to take over Europe and that the French are "poodles" who follow the lead of the Germans. Many observers of the European scene believed that Ridley's views were probably very close to Thatcher's.

Before considering John Major, the place of Thatcher's views on the East in her reactions to the New Europe will be briefly discussed. Thatcher's views on the Soviet Union have always been at the core of her overall belief system. In 1976 she earned the epithet "the Iron Lady" from the Soviet Press for her outspoken views on the Soviet threat and the moral bankruptcy of communism. In 1983, following her first reelection, she undertook a major

reorientation of British Eastern policies and replaced a largely reactive policy with heightened diplomatic activism. She travelled throughout Eastern Europe and met at least once a year with Gorbachev.

Between November 1989 and November 1990, Thatcher continued to support Gorbachev (whom she had introduced to the West in 1984 as a man one could "do business with") and his reform program. In early 1991, while visiting the U.S., in the aftermath of Gorbachev's shift to the right since late 1990 and the resignation of Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, Thatcher still held the same views on Gorbachev. She said he was still a "reformer at heart" and that "We should not underestimate the future reforming zeal of a man who allowed Eastern Europe to grasp its freedom" (14). She also said that Gorbachev would "'privately welcome Western pressure for reform' and use that pressure against increasingly powerful 'dark forces of reaction' in the Kremlin" (15).

Eastern Europe is central to Thatcher's views on the New Europe. Thatcher was delighted that Central/Eastern Europe was freed from the grip of the Soviet Union since she had supported this goal for decades. In a speech to the Aspen Institute just after Iraq invaded Kuwait, she said of the nations of Central Europe:

They have not thrown off central command and control in their own countries only to find them reincarnated in the European Community. With their new freedom, their feelings of patriotism and national identity are flooding out again...We must find a structure for the Community which accommodates their diversity and preserves their tradition, their institutions, their nationhood. (16)

In the aftermath of the liberation of Central Europe, Thatcher thus became the strongest Western proponent of admitting these nations to the EC. As she said in March 1991, the mission of the EC is "not to press for unity but 'to anchor new and vulnerable democracies securely to freedom and to the West,' and to that end it should offer full membership to any country of Eastern or Central Europe that opts for democracy and the free market" (17).

After resigning from power in November 1990, she became head of the "Bruges group" of British MP's in the European Parliament who oppose Euro-federalism. She is also starting her own think tank, the Thatcher Foundation, to assist the causes of democracy and human rights and which is based on the idea of "liberty under the rule of law" and writing her memoirs. After a few months of virtual silence since her resignation, in March 1991 she came to the U.S. for a speaking tour that included receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Bush.

John Major owes his meteoric rise from MP to Prime Minister both to his own abilities and to the support of Margaret Thatcher. Because he was considered her protege and a "Thatcherite true believer," many people expected Major to retain the substance of her foreign policies but to replace Thatcher's combative style with a more subtle one. In the span of half a year, Major has significantly altered the style and tone of Britain's EC policies from Thatcher's constant criticism to an attitude of cooperation and compromise. This has already earned him not only the respect of his European colleagues but also greater influence in the councils of Europe.

Although he shares much of Thatcher's opposition to Euro-federalism and will not allow a common currency to be imposed on Britain, Major seems to have a greater belief than did Thatcher in the merits of European integration. In May 1991, there were reports that Major was nearing agreement with Jacques Delors on a compromise solution to the issue of monetary union (18). Under this plan Britain would sign an EC treaty on monetary union in December 1991 but would activate an opt-out clause that would delay a final decision on merging the pound with the ECU until the late 1990s, which is after the British general election that must be held by mid-1992.

Similarly, Major has moved to repair relations with Germany that were badly damaged by Thatcher's outspoken opposition to unification. He has already developed a cordial relationship with Helmut Kohl and shares many views with him. For example both agree that greater economic convergence must precede monetary union (19).

It is too soon to know what Major's overall perspective is on the New Europe. Major has had a meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow and seems to share her belief that the West should support him. He also appears to be in favor, as is Thatcher, of allowing Central Europe to join the EC sooner rather than later. He and his Foreign Minister, Douglas Hurd, have expressed support for the idea of using the WEU as a bridge between the EC and NATO, and Major is apparently moving closer to the French view that the WEU should also become the main forum for European defense cooperation. However, to date his foreign policy initiatives have mainly concerned the EC, Germany and above all, the Gulf War and relations with the U.S.

All three of the leaders considered in this discussion took a very high profile during the Gulf War. Since the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on August 2, 1990, there has been very close cooperation between Britain and France and the United States. Moreover, the British and French military deployment was the largest among the Western powers. For some observers British and French involvement in the Gulf War has helped restore some of the international influence that both nations had been losing since the fall of the Berlin wall. At the very least, both countries'

relations with and importance to the U.S. have been boosted after having suffered some downgrading during 1990.

Understanding the Role of Britain and France in the New Europe

In this concluding section, I will attempt to pull together the strands of this discussion in order to briefly summarize the impact of the New Europe on the place of Britain and France in East-West relations in Europe. To do this I will consider the extent to which both countries have been marginalized by the New Europe and will review some of the similarities and differences in the reactions of Mitterrand, Thatcher and Major to the New Europe.

In the short-term, Britain and France have and probably will continue to suffer some loss of geopolitical clout in Europe. This is due not only to Germany's economic power but also, as discussed above, is a result of the end of the cold war and the downgrading of strictly military aspects of security, notwithstanding the Gulf War. Especially for Britain, NATO's incipient decline as a military organization will decrease the security roles of Britain and France.

The developments associated with the New Europe have thus produced much unease in Britain and France. With the traditional postwar bases and assumptions of their foreign policies shattered almost overnight, both nations have had to re-think the nature and objectives of their policies. Adjusting to the foreign policy and security requirements of the New Europe is especially difficult for two states that have benefitted so much from the postwar European and global orders.

The similarities between British and French reactions to the New Europe include all of the main factors associated with the New Europe, except "EC 1992." Even with Major's more cooperative stance toward the EC, Britain remains a state whose "...outlook will remain uniquely short-term, pragmatic, suspicious of grandiose institutional change" (20). Such a description hardly applies to France under Mitterrand. Mitterrand's main goal in his remaining four years in power is to continue what he considers his main project, the construction of a united Europe as the foundation for the emergence of a "European confederation." On German unity, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, all three leaders seem to share many views which is probably a result of the similarity in British and French postwar foreign policy roles and attitudes, especially towards East-West relations in Europe.

While the recent past has seen a decline in the influence of Britain and France in East-West relations in Europe, "the future is more open" (21). If Britain and France can succeed in reorienting their policies, they will probably be able to remain key players in the New Europe. Whatever the future shape of the New Europe, both countries will retain significant geopolitical roles. The future

leadership of Europe will probably lie not in the hands Germany or the EC alone but rather will consist of a Franco-British-German triangle as the core and motor of the EC and the New Europe. Already bilateral relations among these three countries are pointing in this direction.

Endnotes:

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21. George Robertson, "Britain in the New Europe," *International Affairs*, October 1990, 697.