

## **A Comment on the Article by Andrew Moravcsik**

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In view of the almost unanimous rejection of Andrew Moravcsik's interpretation by all scholars who have so far written about Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy, it seems almost unfair to record my reservations here. Let me say first, therefore, that in regard to the main policy case on which the article turns, the crisis of the "empty chair" at Brussels in 1965–1966, I entirely agree with Moravcsik's view. De Gaulle's government stood ready to break the supranational structure of the European Economic Community (EEC) if no final agreement on the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) were reached. Because a final agreement depended fundamentally and inescapably on a lowering of domestic grain prices in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), we may surely conclude that the geopolitical aim of binding the FRG to the West did not override considerations of France's economic welfare or of its president's chances of reelection. The Dutch government, as its records make plain, understood this to be the case and drew up contingency plans to cope with France's withdrawal from the Common Market.<sup>1</sup> The pattern of events also strongly suggests that the desire to strip the Common Market of its supranational machinery was a lesser priority. The Commission responded to the proclamation of the "empty chair" by conceding most of de Gaulle's demands almost at once. It was the West German government, riddled with internal discord, that prolonged the crisis. In the Luxembourg Compromise that ended it, de Gaulle settled for even more of a face-saving compromise than Moravcsik implies. Although we can not yet be certain, the evidence suggests that the use of qualified majority voting as a way of reaching decisions in the Council of Ministers actually increased immediately after the Compromise.

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1. Jan van der Harst, "For Once A United Front: The Netherlands and the Empty Chair Crisis of the Mid-1960s," Paper presented at the European University Institute, Florence, Italy, 2000.

Moravcsik's argument on this question is reinforced if we consider the constitution and presidential electoral procedures of the Fifth Republic, which concentrated the agricultural vote rather than leaving it dispersed across almost all political parties. It was a riskier business for de Gaulle not to court the farmers than it had been for the centrist coalition that signed the Treaty of Rome with only a promise, perhaps unfulfillable, to the same sector. Given the rapidly diminishing importance of the agricultural sector compared particularly to the rapidly increasing contribution of the much larger manufacturing sector, this strengthens Moravcsik's arguments, and my own, about what makes modern states tick. Surely no one in the United States, thinking about U.S. international commercial policy, would react in astonishment to the efforts made by France, which was then the world's fourth or fifth biggest industrial economy, to fight so hard for its grain, meat, and dairy exports. Nor would anyone be surprised that French leaders responded so smartly to so concentrated a pressure group as the farmers.

With regard to the second policy case that Moravcsik discusses, the exclusion of the United Kingdom from the European Communities, the issues were more complicated and probably not without geopolitical considerations on de Gaulle's side. The crucial question is how much weight de Gaulle placed on these considerations in relation to the economic ones. I was unable to answer this question before reading Moravcsik and am still unable to answer it after reading his article, which excessively simplifies the argument. On the basis of the British records, all of which are fully open to consultation, it is possible to hold differing views about how far the British government had accepted the full terms of the Common Agricultural Policy settlement achieved by the Six in December and January 1961–1962.

As far as domestic agriculture is concerned, the British government had accepted the CAP. It had even convinced itself that the financial costs of entry that were directly linked to the CAP through the proposed frontier levies on agricultural produce would be less than they were certain to be. To that extent, de Gaulle had no reason to fear the United Kingdom's non-compliance with the CAP; he had no reason to fear British agriculture's competition with France and good reasons to welcome access to the market of the world's biggest food importer. On the other hand, Britain put up a long-running fight during the last seven months of negotiations for an eventual worldwide framework of agreement on agricultural trade and prices. It is hard to believe, however, that this was taken at all seriously in either Paris or Washington. In reality, it could never have been more than a fig leaf to cover Britain's retreat on the agricultural front from its lone support of a worldwide trade and payments system.

The issue of New Zealand remained, and five of the Six wanted to make a special arrangement to grant New Zealand access to the EEC market for agricultural exports. Under severe pressure from the other members of the EEC, France did not oppose the declaration that access would be granted, but the French did claim, evidently on de Gaulle's decision, that their lack of assent meant that they had not actually accepted any such arrangement for the future. On this particular question the waters were further muddied by the opposition of some British cabinet ministers, on whose support Prime Minister Harold Macmillan counted, to ratifying an entry agreement without special terms for New Zealand. Was de Gaulle alarmed at the thought of preserving New Zealand's share of butter and lamb exports in the British market, or, worse, the entry of these exports into the whole EEC market? Or was Britain's attempt to preserve the standard of living of one of the world's richest countries—a country as far away on the globe as it is possible to get from the United Kingdom—redolent of de Gaulle's spoken objections to British entry with "ce grand convoi," the Commonwealth, in tow?

What makes it even harder to come to a clear judgment is that after the experience of the veto in January 1963, British governments attributed their failure partly to the effort they had made—against, as they believed, their own interests—to defend the essentially agricultural economic interests of Commonwealth countries. In effect they abandoned the defense of the Commonwealth's interests and stood ready to accept the whole CAP package without reservation. The French were left in no doubt that this was the position, but de Gaulle did not relent, despite what his ministers seem to have thought was France's own economic interest.

We may safely set aside the Polaris nuclear missile agreement between Britain and the United States as well as the failure of all attempts at Franco-British nuclear cooperation as the reason for either the veto or de Gaulle's subsequent persistence with it. The General did not expect for one moment that the United States would allow the transfer of nuclear technology from Britain to France. He simply accepted the Polaris agreement as a splendid excuse to vent all his geopolitical banalities about the United States, including the allegation that the United Kingdom was an American Trojan horse, as justifications for the veto. But this does not mean that these banalities were not the reason for the exclusion or that de Gaulle did not truly hold a banal view of the leadership and character of France which forestalled any thought of British membership in the EEC even if London accepted the CAP package lock, stock, and barrel.

There are good reasons to suggest that not only on this question, but on other aspects of de Gaulle's foreign policy, uncertainty about the precise bal-

ance of motivation will remain for some time. The notion that the Fouchet Plans were decoys is a plausible argument and is not contradicted by the facts. But to base this argument almost entirely on Alain Peyrefitte's statements is to give many hostages to fortune. Before perusing either part of Moravcsik's article, readers should look at footnote 189 of Part 2. It is an accurate statement of the extent of access to French government archives covering the period of de Gaulle's presidency. Readers should then note its consequence. Of the 308 footnotes in this two-part article, 119 refer to the two volumes of memoirs by Peyrefitte. Would we so confidently analyze the foreign policy priorities of any American presidency on the basis of two books by the president's chief public relations official and spokesperson? Furthermore, where Moravcsik's analysis rests on government records, they are published records of the West German government with a little pick-and-mix support from the British side.

Although this last comment may seem harsh, it is not intended to be offensive, but simply to underscore the stark nature of the present archival situation. Moravcsik has used almost all of the historical evidence now available, and no less critically than others. He is almost unique among political scientists in the tenacity with which he cleaves to the traditional historical source materials for the study of high-level policy. He has taken on a large international array of opponents, and although the battle may never have a decisive conclusion, his argument is very likely in the end to gain most of the territory in dispute. Having so abnormal a president did not make France an abnormal state.