

From Decrepit Empire to Third World Champion:

France's Incredible Transition, 1958-1963

Jean-Robert Lalancette
McGill University

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*La France n'est réellement elle-même qu'au premier rang...
la France ne peut être la France sans la grandeur.¹*

- Charles de Gaulle

Abstract

This essay argues that from 1958 to 1963 Charles de Gaulle achieved many unlikely victories for France in international affairs. Five years after the start of his presidency, de Gaulle could boast of many achievements like the start of French Africa's decolonization, the termination of the Algerian War, France's new friendships with Third World states, and the end of the dominating influence of the United States and Britain on France's foreign policy. In retrospect, these diplomatic victories were quite surprising because de Gaulle, an advocate of empire, implemented imperialist policies at the start of his presidency. By trying to reconcile this paradox, the essay demonstrates that the diplomacy of African leaders like Gamal Abdul Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, and Sékou Touré had much more agency than previously thought because it both forced France to begin its decolonization and forced de Gaulle's to alter his foreign policy. Thus, the Fifth Republic's relationship with Africa is a story of how serious resistance from African states forced de Gaulle to reconsider his designs for the continent. In the face of determined African resistance – both in Africa and in international forums like the United Nations – de Gaulle surprisingly altered France's colonial image in December 1959 and began a policy of decolonization and reconciliation. De Gaulle's failed imperial policies and his subsequent change of heart therefore permitted the pro-Third World foreign policy that brought France victories on the international stage.

Introduction

Charles de Gaulle was undoubtedly France's most important political figure in the Twentieth Century. *Le Général* exhibited the rare qualities required to join the ranks of great French statesmen such as Cardinal de Richelieu and Napoleon 1^{er}. Within five years of the creation the Fifth Republic in the winter of 1958, de Gaulle had successfully implemented a policy of decolonization and steered France on its own independent path in international affairs

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¹This passage can be translated as: "France is really itself when it is at the forefront of the leading nations... France cannot be itself without her greatness." Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel, 1940-1942* (Paris: Plon, 1954), 1.

for the first time since 1940. His successes, however, were narrowly achieved because his first five years at the helm were very difficult for a man who truly belonged to France's past. A proud advocate of colonialism and a dreamer of France's past glory, de Gaulle had been ill-equipped to redress the damages incurred by France during its dreadful Fourth Republic – namely a protracted colonial war in Algeria and the loss of great-power status to the Anglo-Saxon powers, the United Kingdom and the United States.

This essay argues that France recaptured its great-power status and its independent role in world affairs – its *grandeur* – through de Gaulle's African policy.² In his successful attempt to regain France's former grandeur, de Gaulle simultaneously achieved the unlikely outcome of a successful decolonization process after a series of failures both within and outside of his control. After being stopped by the Anglo-Saxon powers from capturing France's grandeur through an imperialistic intervention in Lebanon, de Gaulle began to consolidate what was left of the French Empire by building a sphere of influence in Africa, out of the reach of the Anglo-Saxons. De Gaulle's attempt, however, to salvage the remnants of France's empire by maintaining control of the African territories through a reformed federated system of member states – 'la Communauté' – failed at the end of 1959. The combined resistance of Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Sékou Touré to de Gaulle's neo-colonial venture forced the French leader to alter his deep-seated belief in colonialism, effectively shedding France's image as a colonial power in the eyes of the Third World. De Gaulle adjusted France's behavior toward its former colonies and adopted a policy of development in the region in 1960. This effectively brought to its side many new friends, both within and outside of Africa, giving France more influence abroad and increasing adulation from the Third World. Thus, by 1963, de Gaulle's African policy helped

² This essay agrees with Maurice Vaïsse's assessment that de Gaulle was the main force behind France's foreign policy making. See, Maurice Vaïsse, *La Grandeur: Politique Étrangère du Général de Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Paris : Fayard, 1998), 284.

him fulfill his promise to right the French ship and regain its *grandeur* lost by an inept Fourth Republic.

Because of the wealth of published French primary historical documents ranging from memoirs to diplomatic papers, this essay focuses on France's role in Africa from 1958 to 1963. Given the fact that Guinean, Ghanaian, and Egyptian diplomatic documents were either unavailable or out of reach, the arguments on the behavior of the African radicals on their continent are based on political pamphlets, speech collections and published Algerian diplomatic documents. The essay is structured in three parts: part I traces the impact of de Gaulle's belief in colonialism on his foreign policy decisions in Africa during his first year in office. Part II demonstrates how the resistance of African leaders collapsed the Communauté, de Gaulle's neo-colonial creation, and forced the French leader to re-evaluate his African policy in December 1959. Finally, part III explains how de Gaulle's decision to adopt a policy of cooperation and development in Africa in 1960 regained France's *grandeur* in the following three years.

Part I: Charles de Gaulle, the French Empire's Last Advocate

Although de Gaulle would later be known for steering France toward the decolonization of the French Empire, before December 1959, he had been a staunch supporter of the France's empire because he associated it with France's greatness.³ During the Second World War, de Gaulle valued the French Empire tremendously. Since he believed it to be an integral part of France, he did not see his government's capitulation to Germany in June 1940 as the loss of France. Instead, he argued that France remained defiant in the war against Germany because its empire had not been conquered.⁴ Thus, de Gaulle's strategy as the leader of the Free French was

³ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel*, 2.

⁴ Charles de Gaulle, "Appel du général de Gaulle aux Français, le 18 juin 1940," speech reprinted in *ibid*, 267.

to recapture France through its empire by bringing the colonies together behind the Free French forces.⁵ For de Gaulle, France's strength and survival depended on its empire.

The Second World War was also an important period that determined de Gaulle's conceptualization of the French Empire and the future of Africa until 1959. The Brazzaville Speech of January 1944 was important because it set the tone for France's administration of African affairs and it demonstrated de Gaulle's plans for Africa's future. In this speech, de Gaulle explained that the future of both France and its African territories were determined by their bonds. In de Gaulle's mind, the relationship between the two had produced mutual benefits. After all, argued de Gaulle, it had been France's civilizing mission that had shed light into the darkness of Africa, brought it progress, and opened it to the world. The colonies, however, had not only been profiting, since they had helped France by forming the base of France's continued fight against the Axis Powers.⁶ For *le Général*, the two parts of the empire mutually supported each other and worked toward progress. As a result, he spoke of France's duty in the post-war period to continue to develop and further open its colonies to the world while allowing its inhabitants "to slowly elevate themselves to a point where they would become capable of participating in their governing their own affairs."⁷ Even if de Gaulle advocated for slowly allowing Africans to partake in their own governance, he neither envisaged any form of secession from the empire, nor a loss of French control of its colonies. Most importantly, de Gaulle had not clearly stated the rate at which the transition of domestic power would take place.

⁵ Charles de Gaulle, "Instructions remises par le général de Gaulle à ses délégués dans les colonies françaises d'Afrique, Londres, 5 août 1940," telegram reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *ibid*, 286-287.

⁶ Charles de Gaulle, "Discours prononcé par le général de Gaulle à l'ouverture de la Conférence de Brazzaville, le 30 janvier 1944," speech reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Unité, 1942-1944* (Paris: Plon, 1956), 555-557.

⁷ Translated from "[de] s'élever peu à peu jusqu'au niveau où ils seront capables de participer chez eux à la gestion de leurs propres affaires." *Ibid*, 556.

Thus, the Free French leader believed that a key element of French strength was its empire, and that the empire still needed Paris' enlightenment to progress.

Although de Gaulle stopped using formal imperial terminology, his ultimate belief in France's need for a colonial policy did not change during his years outside of government.⁸ In many speeches before he retook power in 1958, de Gaulle strongly suggested that Paris maintain its control over its territories. In a speech given in Bordeaux in May 1947, de Gaulle elaborated on the issue of autonomous governance in the French territories. De Gaulle indicated that France's overseas territories would govern themselves under the guise of a federal system administered from Paris, and France would exert authority "in the domains of public order, national defense, foreign policy, and the common economy."⁹ In a speech given in Bamako in March 1953, de Gaulle remarked that the tasks facing France and its overseas territories for the next one-hundred years were to create prosperity, bring health and education for the benefit of all under a federal system controlled by Paris.¹⁰ When asked during a press conference two years later on which policy France should follow in Africa, De Gaulle reiterated his opinion that in order to prevent nationalist fervor from destabilizing the continent, France's African territories needed to enter a federal structure under French guidance since they could not govern themselves effectively.¹¹ Throughout the period when he was out of office (1946 to 1958), Charles de Gaulle

⁸ The terminology which de Gaulle ceased to refer to were words like 'colony' and 'empire'; instead, de Gaulle used the words 'territory' and 'l'Union Française' as redefined in the Fourth Republic's constitution of 1946. See, "Constitution de 1946, IVe République, 27 octobre 1946, Titre VIII, Section 1, Article 60," Conseil Constitutionnel de France, accessed February 12, 2012, <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/les-constitutions-de-la-france/constitution-de-1946-ive-republique.5109.html>.

⁹ Translated from "dans les domaines de l'ordre public, de la Défense Nationale, de la politique Étrangère et de l'économie commune." Charles de Gaulle, "Discours prononcé à Bordeaux, 15 mai 1947," speech reprinted in *Discours et Messages: Dans l'Attente, février 1946 – avril 1958* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 79-80.

¹⁰ Charles de Gaulle, "Discours prononcé à Bamako, 8 mars 1953," speech reprinted in *ibid*, 579.

¹¹ Charles de Gaulle, "Conférence de Presse Tenue à l'Hotel Continental, 30 juin 1955," press conference reprinted in *ibid*, 637-639.

further expanded and elaborated on an ideal French policy in Africa, but he did not change his opinion that France's territories needed to remain under direct French control.

While de Gaulle's conception of colonialism did not change in form, it radically changed in content during the postwar years. During his years on France's political fringe, he observed that the overseas territories had become a burden for France since the rise of decolonization movements had brought France into costly wars in Indochina and Algeria.¹² The emerging Third World also became a growing concern for de Gaulle because it exerted pressure on the colonial territories to seek immediate emancipation.¹³ A rapid and creative response to the growing pressures heaped onto France by its territories was necessary if France was to maintain its influence in Africa. Severing France's ties with its territories was unacceptable for de Gaulle, who thought that they were not yet ready to rule themselves. France, in short, needed to take account of the new realities in the world and guide its territories toward eventual statehood.¹⁴

So how did de Gaulle believe that France should achieve this new goal? As he asked rhetorically in his memoirs, "could it be possible to transform the old relations of dependence into preferential ones of political, economic and cultural cooperation?"¹⁵ In other words, France needed to institute reforms to the links with its territories. De Gaulle's answer was that France needed to dismantle its formal structure of empire which was built to administer territorial affairs by a colonial 'divide and rule' policy. France must then replace this structure with new centralized systems of self-governance under French tutelage, which could evolve into a future

¹² Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir: Le Renouveau, 1958-1962* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 17-18.

¹³ Ibid, 42.

¹⁴ Ibid, 42-43.

¹⁵ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, 16.

state.¹⁶ De Gaulle's view of the relationship between France and its territories had changed in content but not in form because change was still to be driven and controlled by a paternalistic France.

Despite occupying a prominent position on de Gaulle's agenda, the project to build a new form of association between France and its African territories became subsumed in his overall goal to restore France's status as a great power. Thus, his immediate concern for the start of his presidency was his foreign policy and he embarked on a crusade to restore a critical element of France's identity lost because of the Fourth Republic's terrible management of France's foreign affairs – France's *grandeur*. The concept of *grandeur* (greatness) was an important characteristic of de Gaulle's idea of France and he considered it intrinsically linked to its existence and *raison-d'être*: “France is really itself when it is at the forefront of the leading nations [...] France cannot be itself without her greatness.”¹⁷ By *la grandeur*, de Gaulle meant an acquired place among the world's great powers and a nation's independence in world affairs, two characteristics which he believed constituted the bedrock of France's identity throughout its history.¹⁸ With this conception of France in mind, de Gaulle was chagrined to watch from the sidelines as successive governments undermined the very *grandeur* that he had recaptured for France during the Second World War.¹⁹ Under the leadership of the Fourth Republic, not only had France uselessly suffered mounting casualties, defeats, and a dwindling economy because of protracted wars in its

¹⁶ Quote translated from “serait-il possible de transformer les anciennes relations de dépendance en liens préférentiels de coopération politique, économique et culturelle?” Ibid, 42-43.

¹⁷ Translated from “La France n'est réellement elle-même qu'au premier rang [...] la France ne peut être la France sans la grandeur.” Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel, 1940-1942* (Paris: Plon, 1954), 1.

¹⁸ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: Le Salut, 1944-1946* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 651-652. De Gaulle's belief of France's greatness came from his youth when he was inspired by the sight of the Napoleon's tomb, as well as feeling a profound sense of pride when he admired l'Arc de Triomphe and the war trophies displayed in les Invalides. See Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel, 2* and Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: Le Rebelle, 1890-1944* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984), 24.

¹⁹ De Gaulle states his case very strongly in his memoirs by claiming that France had been an equal to the United States and Britain for having been present during the acceptance of Germany's and Japan's capitulation as well as being one of the founding members of the United Nations. See Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir: Le Renouveau*, 8, 11, 15.

territories, but France had also tarnished its image because it had lost its independence in international affairs. But De Gaulle also believed that the many governments of the Fourth Republic were to blame for France's loss of *grandeur*. According to him, they had allowed France to renounce its great power status by becoming a subordinate power to the United States and Britain by entering the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and it had allowed its former rival, Great Britain, to command French troops during the Suez campaign.²⁰ For de Gaulle, the lack of judgment displayed by the Fourth Republic was criminal because it deprived France of its historic *grandeur* and by extension, it had also jeopardized France's existence and *raison d'être*. Redressing this important characteristic of French identity thus became de Gaulle's priority after regaining power in the spring of 1958.

De Gaulle's Implementation of the Policy of *Grandeur* in the Middle East and Africa

After reassuming power in the summer of 1958, de Gaulle was tempted by an unforeseen opportunity to restore France's lost *grandeur* by regaining a sphere of influence in the Middle East during the escalation of the Lebanese crisis in July 1958. As mounting internal pressures threatened to throw Lebanon into a civil war, on the 14th of July, Camille Chamoun, the Lebanese president, sent messages of distress to the French, American, and British governments pleading for their intervention.²¹ Since de Gaulle believed that the Fourth Republic had squandered French influence in the region as a result of the botched invasion of Egypt in 1956,²² de Gaulle decided to tell the Americans that he wished to intervene. Hervé Alphand, the French ambassador in Washington, was instructed to tell the American allies that France had been invited by the Lebanese leadership to intervene and that it was considering doing so. Alphand

²⁰ Ibid, 14-15.

²¹ "M. Roché, Ambassadeur de France à Beyrouth, À M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 14 juillet 1958," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français : 1958, Tome II (1^{er} juillet – 31 décembre)* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1993), 66-67.

²² Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir: Le Renouveau*, 15.

met Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that afternoon, but the French message was met with relative indifference. Although Dulles did mention that the United States was preoccupied with the events in Lebanon, he stated the United States did not intend to intervene. Despite the lie told by Dulles, the Secretary of State did not respond to the idea of French intervention.²³ The next day, French diplomatic officials realized that their idea had been disregarded (and possibly even ignored) by the Americans since had sent a landing force of U.S. Marines to Beirut's beaches without consulting the French.²⁴ The French were further dismayed on the 17th when they learned that the British had also decided to send troops to the region without conferring with them. The French response was swift. That same day, Couve de Murville sent the Anglo-American powers a note in protest expressing that the Anglo-American interventions had surprised the French for the blatant disrespect shown to their interests. Not only was it apparent that France felt hurt because they had not been considered as an equal power by their British and American allies, but the note also explicitly stated that repercussions could result in the NATO alliance because the Anglo-American behaviour did not conform to the tripartite relations expected in the NATO alliance.²⁵ Unfortunately for the French president, his plans to restore France's *grandeur* through the Middle East had been nixed by the Anglo-Saxon powers and he was left with the only short term option of sending pitiful threats. Out of this failure, however, grew a new determination to look to Africa as the engine to restore France's great power status.

France's failure to be included in the interventions in the Middle East angered de Gaulle and forced him to draw two important lessons from the conduct of his British and American

²³ "M. Alphan, Ambassadeur de France à Washington, au Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 14 juillet 1958," telegram reprinted in *DDF 1958, Tome II*, 70-71.

²⁴ "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, à M. Roché, Ambassadeur de France à Beyrouth, 15 juillet 1958," telegram reprinted in *DDF 1958, Tome II*, 76-77.

²⁵ Interestingly, Couve de Murville wrote to his ambassadors with considerable disbelief that "pourtant, la France est l'une des trois puissances occidentales," before threatening that the NATO alliance could suffer consequences. See, "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à Londres, Washington, 17 juillet 1958," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français : 1958, Tome II*, 89-91.

allies that would shape his foreign policy.²⁶ Since he had been left out of the loop and prevented from taking part in the intervention in the Middle East, de Gaulle understood that France's presence in the Middle East was not welcome by the two strongest members of the NATO alliance. The second lesson that the French president learned after the Lebanese crisis was that the NATO alliance was destined to remain skewed towards the Anglo-Saxon powers. On September 17th, de Gaulle addressed his grievances in a note to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He stated that he understood and appreciated the importance of the Middle East to the British and the Americans and criticized the NATO framework, affirming it was too favorable to British and American interests. He therefore proposed that the three nations work together more efficiently and coherently for the sake of their alliance in the future and to hold tripartite talks to discuss the range of action of NATO's actions in many parts of the world, including Africa.²⁷ On October 31st, Hervé Alphand reiterated the French President's wish to hold talks between the three greatest NATO powers and on December 17th, Dulles agreed to hold the talks in Washington in mid-April the following year.²⁸ The ensuing meeting between British, American and French officials became a watershed moment for France's foreign policy because the Americans and the British both stated their positions on Africa which led France to believe it now held freedom of action on the African continent.

²⁶ It was with an angry tone that de Gaulle wrote his letter asking the British Premier to explain why France had not been consulted during the Lebanese and Jordanian Crises, see Charles de Gaulle, "Lettre à Harold Macmillan, Premier Ministre de Grande-Bretagne, 8 août 1958," letter reprinted in Charles De Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets: juin 1958 – décembre 1960* (Paris: Plon, 1985), 69-70.

²⁷ Charles de Gaulle, "Lettre et Mémoire au Général Eisenhower, Président des États-Unis d'Amérique, 17 septembre 1958," letter and memorandum reprinted in De Gaulle, Charles. *Lettres, Notes et Carnets: juin 1958 – décembre 1960*, 82-84.

²⁸ "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, à M. Alphand, Ambassadeur de France à Washington, 3 novembre 1958," and "Note du Département, 17 décembre 1958," both telegrams reprinted in *DDF 1958, Tome II*, 620n, 893-894 and Glenn La Fantasia, "Editorial Note," in Glenn La Fantasia, Harriet Dashiell Schwar and Stanley Shaloff, ed, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960 : Volume XIV, Africa* (Washington : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 44. (Henceforth FRUS)

On April 16th 1959, a French delegation comprised of Hervé Alphand and Louis Joxe, the Secretary General at the Quai d'Orsay, met with U.S. State Department officials and the British ambassador in Washington for talks on African affairs. The American statement about its position on Africa was clear: Africa was strategically important for the West because of its resources and geopolitical position. The Americans noted that North Africa was much more important strategically than the Sub-Saharan region, despite the fact that the erratic behavior of the new states in West Africa had attracted the Soviet Union's attention. The Americans also stated that this region would inevitably be affected by the pressures of self-determination and that "it was essential that [change] should take place in an orderly manner and in the closest cooperation with the Western powers." While the Americans deemed the region important for the West, they judged that "the U.S. regards the European Powers as best equipped for the leading role" and that it supported any attempts at evolutionary self-determination.²⁹ Since the United States did not consider Africa to be an area of immediate interest, the French found an opening through which it could manifest an independent policy from the Anglo-Saxon powers.

The exclusion of France from the interventions in the Middle East marked the first shift in French foreign policy. Since de Gaulle abandoned a direct approach to reclaiming great power status, he worked to conserve what was left of France's empire and turned his attention to the need for urgent reforms in Africa. In de Gaulle's mind, there was only one way to avert further disasters in the remnants of the empire. France could only solve its colonial problems and maintain its influence in colonial territories by dismantling its formal structure of empire and to replace it with a new centralized system of self-governance under French tutelage prefiguring a future independent state.³⁰ A new form of association could also prevent further insurgencies

²⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation, April 16, 1959," Memorandum reprinted in *FRUS Volume XIV, Africa*, 45-47.

³⁰ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, 42-43.

from starting and prevent the African territories from leaving the French orbit altogether, thus consolidating permanent ties in the region. De Gaulle's first public announcement of France's new direction and its scope came on July 13th, 1958 during a speech in Paris when he invited all French citizens – from the *métropole* and the overseas territories – to join a project he called 'la Communauté'. "We are striving towards a vast and free Communauté" de Gaulle proclaimed, "in 1958, we must build new institutions, solidify the links of your union within a federal system, organize a great political, economic, and cultural ensemble that reflects the modern conditions of life and progress." Most importantly, this new project also included Algeria, the most tumultuous territory, and assured that it would hold a prominent place within the Communauté.³¹ By including Algeria in France's new direction, de Gaulle intended to solve the Algerian conflict as well as prevent new African conflicts.

De Gaulle's next step was crucial because his plan to dismantle the formal structures of empire for a new set of institutions had to be approved by the people the new institutions would govern, or else these reforms might incite new resistance. In order to prevent resistance, de Gaulle envisaged placing the project of the Communauté inside a new French constitution (its fifth) and then allow every citizen in France and its territories to vote on it in a referendum. Two weeks after his Paris speech, de Gaulle invited African political leaders to participate in debates on the form the community would take in the new constitution.³² During the talks about the Communauté, de Gaulle revealed his plan for reform. De Gaulle proposed to create a federal structure composed of states from the old African colonies. This would provide autonomy in domestic affairs while these nations would remain under overall French sovereignty. The African

³¹ Translated from "Nous allons vers une vaste et libre Communauté," "en 1958, nous devons bâtir de nouvelles institutions, établir sur le mode fédéral les liens de notre union, organiser un grand ensemble politique, économique et culturel qui réponde aux conditions modernes de la vie et du progrès." Allocution radiodiffusée prononcée à Matignon, 13 juillet 1958," speech reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Avec le Renouveau, mai 1958 – juillet 1962* (Paris: Plon, 1970), 26-27.

³² The African leaders who participated included Léopold Senghor and Félix Houphouët-Boigny. See, Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur*, 92.

leaders, however, rejected de Gaulle's proposal because they remained unconvinced that they would ever become independent under such a scheme. This prompted de Gaulle to revise his offer by giving the Africans two options: either vote against the constitution and claim complete independence and secession from France, or vote for the constitution and enter the federated community with its promise of Paris' cooperation and guidance toward eventual independence.³³ It was with their consent that de Gaulle set off for a tour of thirteen African colonies in late August to promote and explain the constitution in a referendum called for the following month. With the exception of Guinea, de Gaulle's promises to the Africans that a vote for the constitution would put their state on track for future independence were met with cheers.³⁴ De Gaulle's hopes that the Africans would choose to remain attached to France were confirmed with the results of the referendum held on the 29th of September; despite a significant level of internal opposition in Senegal, only one out of the thirteen states – Guinea – chose not to enter the Communauté.³⁵ With the African territories' adoption of the constitution and the subsequent founding of the Fifth Republic, had France finally gotten rid of its empire?

Even if it seemed that France's new constitution had dismantled the old empire by granting statehood and promised independence for Africans in the future, a close look at this constitution reveals that the colonial spirit of domination remained. Despite stating that the territories had become states, article 77 also limited their sphere of autonomy to their own internal affairs in a clear attempt to placate independence movements.³⁶ While article 78 stated

³³ Ibid, 93.

³⁴ De Gaulle's speeches to African peoples in the former colonies were met with considerable applause and cheers. See, Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, 58-59 and Maurice Vaïsse, *La Grandeur*, 94.

³⁵ The twelve states that entered the community were: Senegal, the Ivory Coast, French Sudan, Dahomey, Niger, Upper-Volta, Mauritania, Congo (Brazzaville), Chad, Gabon and Oubangui-Chari. See, *ibid*, 97. Mamadou Dia, Senegal's head of government in the Communauté, noted in his memoirs that many people in Senegal were against de Gaulle's constitution since they favoured immediate independence. See, Mamadou Dia, *Mémoires d'un militant du tiers monde* (Cahors: Publisud, 1985), 90-93.

³⁶ Frédéric Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l'Afrique (1958-1974): Décoloniser et Coopérer* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2010), 39 and Article 77, in the "Constitution de la République et de la Communauté Titre XII: De la

that the community member-states were to manage common policies on foreign, economic, cultural, and defense matters, and article 82 stipulated that members were included in an executive body to handle their tasks, France conserved its pre-eminence in these domains because this body was chaired by the president of the French Republic who dominated it.³⁷ Although the constitution did include a clause for an eventual status change from member-state to independence, the change had to be approved by the French government and no time limit was suggested as to when the states could ask for independence. The member states, however, were free to claim a premature independence, but article 86 stated that this option came at a high cost. Any member-state claiming its independence without the consent of the French Government would lose all of their links to France and the Communauté, therefore terminating any of benefits they had been receiving from these bodies.³⁸ In theory, the Fifth Republic's constitution treated the member states as equals, but in reality, it allowed the French president, under article 82, to wield the community's executive power in all domains except for the member states' domestic affairs. With the establishment of the Fifth Republic under the consent of all citizens of France and the member states of the Communauté, De Gaulle retained a tight grip over France's ex-colonies without even hinting when these states would be allowed to claim their independence. De Gaulle had effectively ended France's traditional colonial practice by installing a strict multilateral system of French control over the member states of the Communauté. De Gaulle, in short, changed the empire's name and form, but hardly altered its substance. So what had the member states gained from their vote to enter the Communauté?

Communauté,” Digithèque de matériaux juridiques et politiques, accessed November 17, 2011, <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/france/co1958-0.htm>.

³⁷ Article 78 and 82, *ibid.* In his study of de Gaulle and the community, Frédéric Turpin has persuasively argued that by seating at the head of the executive body, De Gaulle was able to dominate the community in all domains apart from their internal affairs. See, Frédéric Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l'Afrique*, 42.

³⁸ Article 86, *ibid.*

Although it would seem that the price of entry to the Communauté had been very high for the member states, they did gain something in their bargain with the French leader. Even though de Gaulle had not given a date for the independence of the member states, the Communauté was nevertheless designed to develop the African territories in preparation for their independence. To his credit, de Gaulle arranged funding to be channeled to the Communauté from the European Economic Community's (EEC) European Development Fund. From this source, France diverted 581 million dollars to the development projects of the member states between 1958 and 1962.³⁹ Despite the fact that all aid going to Africa was centralized and trade and monetary control remained under French administration, Africans began to assume a shared role with French administrators in reformed monetary institutions.⁴⁰ As a result of the increased funding and African participation in its distribution, de Gaulle's development scheme became immensely popular with the member states. Senegal's leader, Léopold Senghor, later told *Foreign Affairs* that "the French Community, created by General de Gaulle [...] is one of the greatest achievements of our time" because it had enabled "the former mother country and its erstwhile colonies to form a friendly cultural and economic union."⁴¹ By diverting the EEC's funds to Africa, de Gaulle achieved important goals; it permitted him to keep his promise to develop the African states in a successful bid to keep them in France's sphere of influence, and it kept its costs low for France, which was burdened by a history of colonial wars.

Despite his failed attempt to regain France's *grandeur* in July, de Gaulle could nevertheless argue that his foreign policy achieved some success during his first months in office because he consolidated France's sphere of influence in Africa. After all, his great project for

³⁹ Guia Migani, "De Gaulle and Sub-Saharan Africa: From Decolonization to French Development Policy, 1958-1963," in Christian Nuenlist, Anna Locher and Garret Martin, ed., *Globalizing De Gaulle: International Perspectives on French Foreign Policies, 1958-1969* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010), 262.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 264.

⁴¹ Léopold Senghor, "West Africa in Evolution," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (January 1961): 240.

reforms in Africa had been a great achievement since twelve of the thirteen former French colonies voting to keep its ties to its former mother country and become member states of the Communauté. Interestingly, this success had been permitted by de Gaulle's continued belief in the spirit of colonialism. But his success was short-lived as trouble soon appeared in Africa owing to several factors and circumstances both within and outside France's control.

Part II: African Resistance and the Demise of the Communauté

France and African Radicals: A Clash of Ideologies Sows the Seeds of the Communauté's Destruction

The biggest contributing factor to the growth and consolidation of the opposition to France's project of the Communauté in Africa came not from geopolitical considerations of the two strongest states of Africa – Ghana and Egypt – but instead from their sense of identity and corresponding anti-imperialist ideologies. The creation of a community of African states under French supervision took place in a continent with pre-existing and antagonistic ideologies. The different ideologies and sense of national identities of Nasser, Nkrumah and de Gaulle therefore created a chasm between the Africans and the French which made any chance of reaching an understanding between them too difficult and cooperation impossible during the late 1950s. Despite coming from two different regions of Africa and their adherence to different radical ideological beliefs, both Nasser and Nkrumah considered that their shared experience of their recent independence and their common goal to loosen the grip of the colonial powers on Africa provided enough common ground to forge an alliance against France. This alliance proved to be a formidable threat to France and its African territories because of the popularity of Nkrumah's and Nasser's crusade against imperialism.

Nasser and his Struggle against Imperialism

In order to understand Nasser's adoption of an African policy from 1954 to 1962, attention must be given to his ideology because the two were closely intertwined. The origins of Nasser's ideology are located in his only theoretical work, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, written shortly after he became the leader of Egypt in 1954, which contains the many personal beliefs that would form Nasser's ideology. One of the most striking themes in his philosophy is the high value he placed on independence. Since 1942, he had opposed Britain's imperialist policies in Egypt and in 1952, he acted in concert with other military officers to fulfill Egypt's dream of self-rule.⁴² Although Nasser attributed the highest importance to Arab affairs, he nonetheless argued that he would also devote much attention to Africa because of the fact that Egypt could not be impartial to the "sanguinary and dreadful struggle now raging in the heart of Africa." The Egyptian leader also feared a protracted struggle in Africa, and believed it to have been the fault of a renewed form of European imperialism: "the white man, who represents several European countries, is trying to again repartition Africa."⁴³ Motivated by these fears, Nasser sprang to action in 1955.

Nasser's opposition to French policies in Africa went even further back than the Suez Crisis. During the Bandung Conference in April 1955, Nasser managed to squeeze the issue of France's violent conduct in Algeria onto the conference agenda. This engendered a combined protest from the conference's delegations.⁴⁴ Nasser also rallied African nationalist movements in his call for a struggle against imperialism. The Egyptian leader established African Bureaus in Cairo to represent the nationalist movements from colonized areas like Guinea, Nigeria and

⁴² Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Economica Books, 1959), 28-30.

⁴³ Ibid, 74, 76.

⁴⁴ Tareq Ismael, *The U.A.R. in Africa: Egypt's Policy under Nasser* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 29.

Kenya.⁴⁵ To demonstrate his anti-imperialist image built during the Bandung Conference and the Suez crisis even further, as well as to promote Egypt as the center of the anti-imperialist struggle, Nasser hosted the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference and created a media frenzy to promote the event to boost its popularity.⁴⁶ This Conference, hosted from December 1957 to January 1958, brought delegations from 45 Afro-Asian countries to Cairo for talks on topics which were similarly addressed at Bandung. Various speakers were invited to speak on the themes of imperialism, colonialism, the Algerian problem and economic cooperation.⁴⁷ Due to his history of support for national liberation movements and his passionate belief in the anti-imperialist struggle, Nasser recognized the French project of the Communauté as unacceptable since the member states had not found their independence. In fact, Nasser interpreted France's policy in Africa as a neo-colonialist venture that had to be stopped.⁴⁸

Kwame Nkrumah and his Anti-Imperialist Struggle

Kwame Nkrumah became a committed supporter of the emancipation of colonial peoples as early as the Second World War and in the following fifteen years, his thoughts culminated into a coherent anti-imperialist ideology that served as his guide in international affairs.⁴⁹ Nkrumah's early thought provided the foundation of his later political thought. In his first political tract, *Towards Colonial Freedom*, Nkrumah provided an analysis of the oppressive nature of the policies of colonialism and imperialism as well as their corresponding remedies. Nkrumah considered the policies of imperialism and colonialism as distinct. Imperialism, he

⁴⁵ Ibid, 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁷ Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference, *Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference: Cairo, December 26, 1957 – January 1, 1958* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 7-8 and David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*, 129-130.

⁴⁸ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Speech Delivered by President Gamal Abdel – Nasser to Members of the United Nations General Assembly, September 27, 1960* (Cairo: Information Department, 1960), 6.

⁴⁹ Nkrumah wrote in the preface of *Towards Colonial Freedom* that he had written about his opinions on the colonial struggle in the mid-1940s and that he still held the same opinions when he wrote the preface in 1962. He did add, however, that his thought had grown to incorporate the dangers of a new spectre haunting Africa – neo-colonialism – and his ideas on African Unity as a prerequisite to Africa's survival. Kwame Nkrumah, *Towards Colonial Freedom: Africa in the Struggle against World Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1962), ix-xi.

explained, preceded colonialism since it is a state's policy "which aims at creating, organizing and maintaining an empire."⁵⁰ Colonialism, on the other hand, linked economics and politics, and was a policy through which a "mother country [...] binds her colonies to herself by political ties with the primary object of promoting her own economic advantages."⁵¹ This was a crucial distinction for Nkrumah, who saw an explicit link between politics and economics in the concept of colonialism. As for its remedy, Nkrumah argued that although "the basis of colonial territorial dependence is economic [...] the basis of the solution of the problem is political." The stress attributed to "political independence" from colonial rule was important for Nkrumah because it was the necessary precursor to a people's economic liberation. In order to obtain independence, "a fierce and constant struggle for emancipation from the yoke of colonialism and exploitation"⁵² needed to occur. For Nkrumah, there was no alternative, since colonial powers were not to be trusted because many of their humanitarian schemes – such as the seductive promise of future self-government – were "nothing but deception, hypocrisy, oppression and exploitation."⁵³ Thus, colonial states were considered oppressive by the future Ghanaian president and he believed that "the imperial powers will never give up their political and economic dominance over their colonies until they are compelled to do so."⁵⁴ For Nkrumah, the only way for Africans to fight back and eventually win their independence was by uniting in a mass liberation movement, which he began calling for in his 1945 *Declaration to the Colonial Peoples of the World*.⁵⁵ Nkrumah's early writings exhibit the beliefs which he would continue to develop after Ghana's independence in 1957: unity, anti-imperialism and the relentless struggle against colonial states

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid, 2.

⁵² Ibid, xv.

⁵³ Ibid, xvi.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 38, 39-42.

⁵⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, "Declaration to the Colonial Peoples of the World, Approved and Adopted by the Pan-African Congress held in Manchester, England, 15-21st October, 1945," reprinted in Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path* (London: PANAF Books, 1973), 43-44.

to give Africans their right to seek complete independence. Given his conviction to build a struggle against colonialism and imperialism based on the very model France had offered to the Communauté, Nkrumah would not allow it to exist unopposed.

The Communauté Besieged: the Algerian Problem and de Gaulle's Ill-Timed Spite

The first signs of resistance to France's African policy emerged in the weeks leading to de Gaulle's September referendum for France's new constitution. The French were especially surprised that growing opposition grew out of Cairo because Nasser and previous French governments had been working towards restoring relations between the two states since June 1957. Although the two agreed to restore cultural and economic relations on August 22nd 1958, the French complained that the Egyptians did little to honor their commitment in the following weeks.⁵⁶ Part of the reason for Nasser's sudden disinterest in befriending the French is due to its timing because it coincided with de Gaulle's tour of Africa to promote the referendum for the establishment of the Communauté. In fact, Nasser, a sympathizer for Algerian independence, began to target France's new African policy specifically because it aimed to solve the Algerian conflict by including the Algerians in the Communauté instead of allowing their immediate independence. Unfortunately for the French, the Algerians were bitterly opposed to de Gaulle's idea. France's new policy in Africa had a negative effect – the growing collusion between Nasser and the Algerian resistance movement.

As the Fifth Republic's President of the French National Assembly, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, noted in his memoirs, de Gaulle had partly devised the idea of the Communauté as a measure to end the war in Algeria: "it is for Algeria" de Gaulle said, "that I am creating the

⁵⁶ Couve de Murville, "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à Tunris, Rabat, Paris, 15 octobre 1958," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 522.

Communauté.”⁵⁷ De Gaulle hoped that the bitter fighting between the Algerian majority and the *pieds-noirs* minority could be stopped by allowing Algeria to become a member-state of the Communauté with the promise of future independence. According to de Gaulle, not only could the Algerian majority be swayed to accept the new constitution because France appeared willing to accept its former colonies on an egalitarian footing, but the inclusion of Algeria in the French-supervised Communauté would simultaneously alleviate the fears of the *pieds-noir* community that France was abandoning them.⁵⁸ Unfortunately for the French leader, his hopes were too optimistic. In an internal report of the Algerian national independence movement, the Front de Libération National (FLN), the movement stated that it opposed “the policy of integration of a patronizing de Gaulle” because it was not compatible with the aspirations of the entire Algerian people who sought complete independence from France.⁵⁹ As for the *pieds-noirs*, they were opposed to de Gaulle’s idea because they believed Algeria was a genuine part of France and did not want to become independent.⁶⁰ Despite his best efforts to bring the fighting in Algeria to a close by bringing it into the Communauté, de Gaulle was jarred to change his tactics by dealing with the problem on its own. Undeterred by French policy in Africa, the FLN began to expand its struggle against France and found an ally willing to help – Nasser’s United Arab Republic (UAR).

Looking to become known as a world leader of anti-colonial resistance, Nasser enlarged his support to the FLN’s struggle against the French in the late summer of 1958 because the FLN needed help to bring their struggle for independence to the international stage. With France’s

⁵⁷ Translated from “c’est pour l’Algérie que je fais la Communauté.” Charles de Gaulle, as quoted in Jacques Chaban-Delmas, *Mémoires pour demain* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 311.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁵⁹ Translated from “la politique d’intégration patronnée par de Gaulle.” ‘Rapport de la commission gouvernementale sur la formation d’un gouvernement provisoire de l’Algérie libre, 6 septembre 1958’, report reprinted in Mohammed Harbi, ed, *Les archives de la révolution algérienne* (Paris: Les éditions Jeune Afrique, 1981), 210.

⁶⁰ Jacques Chaban-Delmas, *Mémoires pour demain*, 312.

attention now focused on Africa, the FLN's hopes to meet the increasing French pressure by increasing the strength of its struggle relied on creating a provisional government located outside of Algeria. In an internal FLN report circulated on 2 September 1958, the Chief of the General Liaison and Communications, Abdelhafid Boussouf, advised his superiors that the FLN was expected by its own members to provide not only a military reaction, but also a significant psychological and political act in response to the new French integration plan for its African territories. For Boussouf, the most damaging action against the French plan was for the FLN to create a provisional government.⁶¹ Boussouf's idea was then further elaborated during a meeting in Cairo four days later by an FLN commission appointed to study the question of forming a provisional government. The commission concluded that adopting the proposed move was potentially damaging for the French for many reasons. Not only would it reinvigorate the Algerian push for independence, but they hoped that its timing (shortly before De Gaulle's referendum) would convince the Algerian masses to oppose de Gaulle's plan for Algeria's integration in the Communauté. The FLN could then also enter the international arena and claim a better position at the United Nations.⁶² Although there is no published evidence of the UAR's complete approval of the FLN's plan, the fact that an Algerian provisional government led by FLN members, the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (GPRA), was proclaimed and assembled in Cairo on the 19th of September suggests that the Egyptians began to back the Algerians because they agreed that France had no right to prevent Algeria's outright independence.

⁶¹ Boussouf believed that a provisional government could draw France to cut off relations with states who would establish relations with the FLN, thus isolating France in world affairs. See, Abdelhafid Boussouf, 'Note du Chef du département des liaisons générales et communication sur les avantages de la formation d'un gouvernement algérien, 2 septembre 1958,' reprinted in Mohammed Harbi, ed, *Les archives de la révolution algérienne*, 219-222.

⁶² 'Rapport de la commission gouvernementale sur la formation d'un gouvernement provisoire de l'Algérie libre, 6 septembre 1958', report reprinted in Mohammed Harbi, ed, *Les archives de la révolution algérienne*, 210-213.

The declaration of the FLN's provisional government in Cairo on the 19th sent the French a clear signal. Not only had a large and militant section of Algerian society refused France's plan for integration in the Communauté, but the fact that the GPRA was operating from Cairo showed that the UAR was behind the scheme. The French quickly expressed disappointment over the UAR's behavior because the Egyptians had chosen not to build good relations with France and instead opted for a policy intrusive to France's internal affairs.⁶³ The French response to the creation of the GPRA was swift; in the three days following the announcement, Couve de Murville instructed all French diplomatic officials abroad to discredit the illegitimate "pseudo-government" and lodge a formal protest with governments which had both hosted French and FLN diplomatic missions in their country.⁶⁴ There were also other signs of coming tension in the following weeks between the Egyptians and the French. On October 12th, the French determined that despite their cultural and economic agreement signed a few months before, Nasser had neither authorized the return of the French in Egypt nor had given back the French schools he had seized during the Suez campaign.⁶⁵ What infuriated the French even more was Nasser's growing influence on the FLN. During a press conference on October 23rd at Matignon, de Gaulle invited the leaders of the GPRA for talks in Paris to find an end to the hostilities.⁶⁶ Although the GPRA initially showed interest in the French invitation, they refused because Nasser forbade them to meet with de Gaulle and to attempt a rapprochement.⁶⁷

⁶³ Maurice Couve de Murville, "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à l'Étranger, Paris, 20 septembre 1958," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 397.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 396-397. Couve de Murville, "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à Téhéran, New Delhi, Djakarta, Beyrouth, Khartoum, Manille, Bonn, Bruxelles, Ottawa, Washington, Madrid, Stockholm, Helsinki, Oslo, Berne, Tokyo, Londres. Paris, 22 septembre 1958," telegram reprinted in *ibid*, 407-408.

⁶⁵ "M. Roché, Ambassadeur de France à Beyrouth, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Beyrouth, 12 octobre 1958," telegram reprinted in *ibid*, 501.

⁶⁶ Charles de Gaulle, "Conférence de presse tenue à l'Hotel Matignon, 23 octobre 1958," press conference reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Avec le Renouveau*, 56.

⁶⁷ "M. Roché, Ambassadeur de France à Beyrouth, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Beyrouth, 29 octobre 1958," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 597.

The opposition to France's new African policy was not limited to North Africa, since French officials began reporting Ghanaian misgivings about France's referendum and its policy towards Algeria. In late August and early September 1958, an African mission headed by one of Ghana's ambassadors toured the Scandinavian countries. During the trip, Ghanaian officials met prominent politicians and gave press conferences deriding the upcoming French referendum and boasted that Ghana would not hesitate to recognize a provisional Algerian government.⁶⁸ Although one Ghanaian official threatened that his state would recognize the GPRA, Nkrumah did not announce Ghana's recognition of the GPRA in the fall of 1958. In fact, eleven days after the establishment of the GPRA, Nkrumah chose to give France's ambassador a long tirade about African solidarity before stating that he did not intend to recognize the provisional government, a fact that he reiterated to the French two weeks later.⁶⁹ Regardless of Nkrumah's assurances to the French however, there were several indicators which revealed that the French doubted Nkrumah's word. After all, Ghana was a signatory of the resolution of the Conference of Independent States in April which supported "the right of the Algerian people to independence" and proclaimed that its member states would provide "all possible effort to hasten the realization of their independence."⁷⁰ In December, France's fears over possible collusion between the Algerians and the Ghanaians grew when the French ambassador remarked that Nkrumah brought an FLN delegation to Accra for the All-African People's Conference held in Accra and that its head representative received a thundering ovation from the 250 African delegates in

⁶⁸ "Note de la sous-direction des Nations Unies et des Relations Internationales: Mission de la conférence d'Accra dans les pays Nordiques et en Irlande, Paris, 18 septembre 1958," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 388.

⁶⁹ M. Guiringaud, "M. Guiringaud, Ambassadeur de France à Accra, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Accra, 13 Octobre 1958," telegram reprinted in *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 506, 506n.

⁷⁰ "Conference of Independent African States: Declaration, 1958," declaration reprinted in Colin Legum, *Bandung, Cairo and Accra: A Report on the First Conference of Independent African States* (London: The Africa Bureau, 1958), 28.

attendance.⁷¹ Nkrumah explained at the conference that the best method for African states to develop were to conform to his model of African unity, which was to obtain complete independence and then achieve unity before beginning the social and economic reconstruction of Africa.⁷² This conference was important for French officials because they began to form a generally hostile opinion of Nkrumah's direction built on ideological beliefs they felt stood against their interests in Africa. France's Communauté was thus implanted in a neighborhood ruled with an antithetical ideology.

Although Ghanaian and Egyptian interests did begin to converge on the Algerian issue, their interests did not completely mesh until Guinea's refusal to partake in de Gaulle's Communauté. In fact, due to these two issues, de Gaulle faced his major point of resistance to his policy of decolonization in Africa because of the ensuing formation of an axis of radical and independent African states between Cairo, Accra, and Conakry. The formation of this axis cannot solely be attributed to similar radical ideologies, since de Gaulle's own dislike of the Guinean leader, Sékou Touré, pushed Guinea in the arms of Nkrumah and Nasser. De Gaulle's acrimony for the Guinean leader began during his August 1958 trip to Africa to propose France's new constitution. After being previously welcomed by three enthusiastic territories, de Gaulle's hopes for a total African acceptance of France's new constitution were dashed immediately upon his arrival in Guinea. As de Gaulle later remarked with scorn, the drive to the Conakry's city center was lined with inhabitants waving placards and screaming the word 'indépendance' incessantly.⁷³ De Gaulle's visit quickly worsened as his shock turned into anger. At an organized rally at Guinea's Territorial Assembly where he was supposed to speak, de Gaulle was pre-

⁷¹ M. de Guiringaud, "Ambassadeur de France à Accra, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Accra, 9 décembre 1958," telegram reprinted in *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 826-827.

⁷² Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech by the Prime Minister of Ghana at the Opening Session of the All-African People's Conference on Monday, 8th December, 1958," speech reprinted in Kwame Nkrumah, *All-African People's Conference: Speeches by the Prime Minister of Ghana at the Opening and Closing Sessions on December 8th and 13th, 1958* (Accra: Community Centre, 1958), 4.

⁷³ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir: Le Renouveau*, 59-60.

empted by Guinean nationalists who dispensed anti-imperialist rhetoric amid frequent thunderous applause. Believing Touré to have masterminded the insulting reception, the infuriated de Gaulle responded by refusing to attend a scheduled dinner with the Guinean leader.⁷⁴ Although his reception was a disaster, de Gaulle nonetheless bit his lip and acted with tact and restraint during his talks with Touré the next day by laying out two options for Guinea. De Gaulle cautioned the Guinean leader that a step-by-step approach to independence was favorable for Guinea because France had turned the page of its colonial history. If, however, Guinea desired true independence, de Gaulle warned that he would get no help – nor any sympathy – from the French state which would not provide it with any aid.⁷⁵ But as his parting comment to the Guinean people indicated – “Adieu, la Guinée!” – de Gaulle believed that Touré would take a determined stand for independence and France would have to let it go.⁷⁶

De Gaulle's stopover in Conakry ended in failure. Not only was de Gaulle insulted by the lack of respect shown to him during his visit, he felt that he was in the midst of a forming totalitarian state which remained uninterested in France's decolonization project.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for Guinea, de Gaulle had been vexed and he demonstrated that he could hold a grudge. After Guinea voted against de Gaulle's constitution and proclaimed its independence on October 2nd, de Gaulle held his word and ordered all financial aid cut and all technical staff, teachers and government functionaries to collect all their supplies and to board ships headed for France. In a final spiteful gesture, the French leader ordered all equipment that could not be brought with them to be burnt.⁷⁸ Touré, however, was stunned because he had thought all along that de Gaulle

⁷⁴ De Gaulle's right-hand man with African affairs, Jacques Foccart, noted that de Gaulle canceled a scheduled dinner with Touré by coldly stating “Je ne dînerai pas avec cet individu.” See, Jacques Foccart, *Foccart Parle: Entretien avec Philippe Gaillard* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 137.

⁷⁵ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir: Le Renouveau*, 60.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷⁸ John H. Morrow, *First American Ambassador to Guinea* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968), 37, 126.

was bluffing on his promise to end Guinea's aid. Being underdeveloped, Touré knew that Guinea could not afford to be abandoned by the French and sent desperate notes pleading Paris not to sever all links with Guinea. These notes were ignored.⁷⁹ Given its desperate situation, Guinea was forced to turn to its only option – it went to other states for help. Guinea's independence, however, attracted the attention of other African leaders. Relishing the opportunity to bring a formal French colony to his side, Kwame Nkrumah did not even wait for Touré's official pronouncement of independence to recognize Guinea as a sovereign state. Further pursuing his anti-French policy, Gamal Abdel Nasser soon followed Nkrumah and also recognized Guinea after it declared its independence.⁸⁰ On the 23rd of November, Nkrumah helped his impoverished ally with a desperately needed 10 million pound loan, allowing Nkrumah the leverage required for Touré to sign a base treaty for their unity in a future 'United States of Africa'.⁸¹ Despite claims made by journalists and commentators that the proposed union of the Ghana and Guinea was simply a ploy to rival Nasser's bid for the leadership of Africa, Nasser quickly dispelled these claims and proclaimed his support for the union as great step towards African liberation.⁸² Guinea's defection from the French Empire became an opportunity for Egypt and Ghana in their quest to challenge French policy in Africa. This alliance frightened de Gaulle because it held the potential to entice other states to gain independence and join the growing pan-African project. However, instead of trying to patch up his relations with Touré to undermine this alliance, a spiteful de Gaulle burnt the last bridge and notified him that he would not pledge for Guinea's

⁷⁹ Mamadou Dia, *Mémoires d'un militant du tiers monde*, 94 and Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: Le Souverain, 1959-1970* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 412.

⁸⁰ Couve de Murville, "M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France à l'Étranger, Paris, 11 octobre 1958, 15h," telegram reprinted in *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1958, Tome II*, 497-498.

⁸¹ Olajide Aluko 'Ghana's Foreign Policy,' in Olajide Aluko, ed., *The Foreign Policies of African States* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 73-74.

⁸² Gamal Abdel Nasser, "President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Speech to the General Co-operative's Conference, November 27, 1958," speech reprinted in Gamal Abdel Nasser, *On Africa* (Cairo: State Information Service, 1965), 9-10.

entry into the United Nations because Guinea entered the alliance.⁸³ After being brought together by an irrational de Gaulle, the three African leaders found enough common ground to form an alliance to wage concerted action. This augured worse news for de Gaulle, as this alliance managed to bring the Communauté to its knees.

A Welcomed Dissolution? France's Response to the Death of the Communauté

The new alliance of radical states quickly made itself heard around Africa. From the 8th to the 13th of December 1958, Kwame Nkrumah held the First All-African People's Conference in the Ghanaian capital, Accra. In front of a crowd made up of official representatives of trade unions and political leaders from all over Africa (including the member states of the Communauté), the Ghanaian leader opened the conference with an attempt to convince the crowd of the merits of his radical ideology. Nkrumah began his verbal assault on the Communauté by enumerating the four sequential steps required for Africa's development, in stark contrast to France's preferred methods. He argued that complete independence had to be reached and unity achieved in Africa *before* development was possible.⁸⁴ In a further bid to entice the attendees to join him instead of the Communauté, Nkrumah ended his speech by affirming that the liberation of Africa was an important duty for Africans to "close our ranks" in order to combat imperialism and its remnants in Africa, namely the "European communities on our continent."⁸⁵ Nkrumah's speech had set the tone for the conference since discussion of the topics of imperialism and colonialism led the proceedings. After being drafted by five committees, the conference adopted the resolution condemning imperialist and colonial practices

⁸³ Charles de Gaulle, "Lettre à Sékou Touré, Président de la République Guinéenne, à Conakry, 29 novembre, 1958," letter reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets: juin 1958 – décembre 1958* (Paris: Plon, 1985), 144-145.

⁸⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech by the Prime Minister of Ghana at the Opening Session of the All-African People's Conference on Monday, 8th December, 1958," speech reprinted in Kwame Nkrumah, *All-African People's Conference: Speeches by the Prime Minister of Ghana*, 4. For the list of those in attendance at the conference, see Carol Johnson, "Conferences of Independent African States," *International Organization*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1962): 429.

⁸⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, "Speech by the Prime Minister of Ghana at the Opening Session of the All-African People's Conference on Monday, 8th December, 1958," 6-8.

and demanded “that the political and economic exploitation of Africans by Europeans should cease forthwith.”⁸⁶ The conference further attacked France by adopting a resolution declaring the support of freedom-fighters in Algeria and demanded that African states “accelerate the independence and sovereignty of all dependent and colonial African territories.” Worse for the French was the fact that the conference decided to establish a permanent secretariat in Accra to promote the resolutions.⁸⁷ The foundation the African alliance of radical states was not welcome news to the French since they began to undermine France’s African policy by radicalizing trade-union and political leaders from the Communauté itself. Not only were the radical African states threatening France’s hold on its territories because they were flaunting their independence by staging official conferences, they were also promoting a rival model of development.

While the member states of the Communauté enjoyed a system of development under Paris’ supervision, it did not prevent them from being seduced by the status of complete independence. After all, many states in Africa had proclaimed their independence and seemed to be doing well. Ghana was hosting conferences and was a member of the United Nations, Guinea was conducting trade outside of Africa and had obtained technical aid, while the UAR received development aid from the superpowers and was regularly invited to many major conferences worldwide.⁸⁸ From the point of view of the member states attached to France, their neighbors had become success stories after becoming independent. After much pressure exerted from the radical states, the member states of Soudan and Senegal succumbed to temptation in an executive meeting of the Communauté on the 11th of September and told de Gaulle that they would soon ask for their independence. De Gaulle, however, stood by his paternalist opinion and replied that

⁸⁶ Carol Johnson, “Conferences of Independent African States,” 430.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ John H. Morrow noted that by April 1959, Guinea had obtained Czechoslovak advisors and that many Eastern Bloc states were supplying Guinea with tractors, consumer goods, industrial machinery in return for agricultural products. See, John H. Morrow, *First American Ambassador to Guinea*, 37-38.

they could not yet rule themselves. Before contemplating independence, de Gaulle argued, they had better organize their own states if their independence was to be viable.⁸⁹ As Léopold Senghor explained, part of the reason why he had asked de Gaulle for independence was because the French constitution had misled the member states of the Communauté. Senghor correctly identified a problem in the constitution; while it claimed that France and the member states of the Communauté would eventually achieve equality, France had demonstrated the contrary since it did not want to “relinquish some of her prerogatives of sovereignty.”⁹⁰ De Gaulle, in short, had unfairly stacked the deck in France's favor by keeping executive control of the Communauté. What infuriated de Gaulle the most was a condition set by Senegal and Soudan – they explicitly stated that they wanted to be both independent *and* remain members of the Communauté, in contradiction to the French constitution.⁹¹ In other words, by challenging the constitution, Senghor and Keita undermined the whole colonial spirit behind the Communauté. Not only did they directly dispute article 86 which stipulated that a declaration of independence meant an immediate exit from the Communauté, but they also wanted to keep drawing its advantages under a status of equality with France. Such an option effectively rendered de Gaulle's control over them moot because their exit from the Communauté meant that they no longer had to comply with de Gaulle's executive council. Even though de Gaulle had refused Soudan and Senegal's request, they were undeterred and decided to lay their cards on the table. On September 28th, Soudan and Senegal united their states into the Union of Mali and declared their independence.⁹² De Gaulle was backed into a corner; his entire system of control over France's old colonies was on the verge of implosion.

⁸⁹ Charles de Gaulle, as quoted in Jacques Foccart, *Foccart Parle*, 197.

⁹⁰ Léopold Senghor, “West Africa in Evolution,” 240.

⁹¹ Yves Guéna, *Historique de la Communauté* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1962), 111-112.

⁹² Maurice Vaïsse, *La Grandeur*, 97.

After being put under pressure, de Gaulle weighed his options carefully and chose to take a conciliatory attitude. He suggested to the Union of Mali that they join the Communauté during its sixth executive council for talks in early December 1959.⁹³ De Gaulle's strategy for the negotiations was reflected in the opening speech of the council on the 12th; after he spoke about the 300 years of links grounded in liberty, fraternity, and equality between France and many of its territories, de Gaulle ended his speech by stating "it is imperative that the French, the Africans and the Malagasy stay tightly together," clearly advising the Union of Mali to stay in the Communauté.⁹⁴ This council meeting between the member states and de Gaulle changed the French President dramatically and it marked watershed moment not just for de Gaulle's relationship with former French colonies, but the entire Third World. After a day of talks during the council meeting, de Gaulle realized that short of a show of direct force, he was powerless to stop the member states from remaining under his control. De Gaulle was noticeably saddened; as one of his aides later remembered, de Gaulle remarked with "tears in his voice [...] 'they're leaving, they're leaving...'"⁹⁵ Thus, it was with a heavy heart that he announced to an anxious crowd that he had considered Mali to have acceded a new set of responsibilities, that of "international sovereignty."⁹⁶ De Gaulle finally gave Mali an important right that it had not possessed under the Communauté – the control of its external affairs – which amounted to a *de facto* recognition of independence.

The French leader also reversed course completely and announced a further dramatic measure. De Gaulle gave in and admitted that Mali could claim its independence *and* count on

⁹³ Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Avec le Renouveau*, 148.

⁹⁴ Translated from "il faut que les Français, les Africains et les Malgaches restent étroitement ensemble," Charles de Gaulle, "Allocution Prononcée À Saint-Louis du Sénégal, 12 décembre 1959," speech reprinted in Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages: Avec le Renouveau*, 148-150.

⁹⁵ Translated from "[avec] des larmes dans la voix [...] 'Ils s'en vont, ils s'en vont...'" Raymond Triboulet, as quoted in Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: Le Souverain*, 418-419.

⁹⁶ Charles de Gaulle, "Allocution Prononcée à l'Assemblée Fédérale du Mali, 13 décembre 1959," speech reprinted in *Discours et Messages: Avec le Renouveau*, 152.

France to help build its state: France, said de Gaulle, “offers you her loyal and friendly concourse for your construction, for your establishment and for your progress.”⁹⁷ Unlike Guinea, which had also claimed independence, Mali was not automatically cut off from French aid. In the span of one day, de Gaulle had incredibly given up years of belief in controlling the member states through an executive council and opted instead for a policy of development, which he named “la coopération.”⁹⁸ In sum, the French leader stumbled into a true policy of decolonization. Although saddened by the decision, de Gaulle still managed to conserve some influence in Mali with a pledge of cooperation. His decision, however, sounded the death knell of the old arrangements with France's territories enshrined in the constitution of the Fifth Republic.

Mali's successful bid to begin its decolonization process by first claiming its independence brought a new and enticing option for other member states and they quickly lost interest in the Communauté. With the remaining member states no longer showing interest in staying member states, de Gaulle appointed Jacques Foccart, a dedicated official with extensive service in Africa, to oversee French decolonization in Africa. As Foccart later explained in his memoirs, de Gaulle decided to do so to conserve France's rank and international appeal:

“France lost Indochina, and there is no point returning to that. Our positions in Algeria were spoiled by so many errors, of blood and suffering. Only black Africa remains, where the ongoing decolonization must be a success, in friendship, and by assisting the populations of these countries.”⁹⁹

On June 4th 1960, the French government allowed the other African states to become independent and it invited them to sign bilateral economic, cultural, and defence agreements with

⁹⁷ Translated from “elle vous offre son concours, loyal et amical, pour votre construction, pour votre établissement et pour votre progrès.” Ibid, 153.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 152.

⁹⁹ Translated from “La France a perdu l'Indochine, et il n'y a plus à revenir là-dessus. Nos positions en Algérie ont été gâchées par tant d'erreurs, de sang et de souffrances. Il reste l'Afrique noire, où la décolonisation en cours doit être une réussite, dans l'amitié, en accompagnant les populations de ces pays.” Charles de Gaulle as quoted in Jacques Foccart, *Foccart Parle*, 216. Foccart also stated in the book that de Gaulle's interest for African affairs was extremely high. In fact, de Gaulle saw Foccart once a week compared to his Foreign Minister, whom he saw once a week. See page 156.

France. After splitting from the Union of Mali, Senegal was the first to sign on June 22nd (Mali decided to enter the radical states' camp) and Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), the Central African Republic, and Gabon quickly followed in mid-July, with Cameroon trailing on November 13th.¹⁰⁰ As a result from months of negotiations, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Upper-Volta and Niger also signed bilateral accords in April 1961. Considering France's colonial past, the substance of these agreements was remarkable. In exchange for French rights to access and deploy small numbers of troops on their soil, De Gaulle pledged five years of economic aid for their development with an option of renewal, a promise to build their universities, and vowed to train and supply their new national armies.¹⁰¹ France's links with its former colonies were radically altered. Instead of keeping its rapports with the territories under an authoritative multilateral arrangement like they had in 1958 and 1959, France changed its entire approach in Africa by treating the new states fairly under proper bilateral agreements that respected their newly acquired independent status. Although de Gaulle remarked to Jacques Foccart in late 1959 that France was to salvage what she could from the wreckage of the Communauté, the radical states' final onslaught on France in 1960 made him realize that instead of being a liquidation, his African policy was in fact a golden opportunity to reclaim France's *grandeur*.

The Radical African States' Last Stand: the Struggle at the United Nations, 1959-1960

As the radical African leaders expressed in their declarations, they believed that the United Nations was an appropriate forum to discuss issues and were optimistic about its potential

¹⁰⁰ Frédéric Turpin, *De Gaulle, Pompidou et l'Afrique (1958-1974) : Décoloniser et Coopérer* (Paris : Les Indes Savantes, 2010), 49-51.

¹⁰¹ "Note d'Information du Secrétaire d'État aux Relations avec les États de la Communauté, sur les accords de coopération France-États de l'Entente signés à Paris le 24 avril 1961, Paris 24 avril 1961," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1961, Tome I, (1er janvier – 30 juin)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1997), 522-524.

to bring about change and “to assert our African Personality.”¹⁰² Furthermore, Nkrumah and Nasser believed that taking part in the United Nations was an important part of their integration into the community of states. Thus, concerted action in the United Nations became an important feature of the two leaders' foreign policies.¹⁰³ Ghana and the UAR vigorously pursued anti-imperialist resolutions and sometimes achieved success by singling out France. The most notable of these came in November 1959 at the 840th Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly after a proposed resolution co-sponsored by the Ghanaian delegation was adopted as resolution 1379. This resolution expressed great concern over France's announced nuclear testing in the Sahara because of concerns over safety and the anxiety of African peoples, as well as to urge France to refrain from staging further tests.¹⁰⁴ Although France protested shortly before the vote on the basis that it was both discriminatory against an individual country and that two African delegates from the Communauté vouched that France was dedicated to finding a solution for universal disarmament, it was adopted after a vote of 51 for, 16 against, and 15 abstentions.¹⁰⁵ Despite France's establishment of new states in the Communauté, the member states could not assist the

¹⁰² The declaration of the First Conference of Independent African States in April 1958 is a great example of both Egyptian and Ghanaian beliefs since both proclaimed the wish to exert an African influence in world affairs while maintaining their “unswerving loyalty to the Charter of the United Nations.” This declaration also mentioned that their delegations at the UN were charged with coordinating “all matters of common concern to our states, for examining and making recommendations on concrete practical steps for implementing decisions.” See, “Conference of Independent African States: Declaration, 1958,” reprinted in Colin Legum, *Bandung, Cairo and Accra*, 28.

¹⁰³ According to the memoirs of the Principal Secretary at the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nkrumah's attributed importance to the UN lies in the fact that it formed one of three pillars of Ghana's foreign policy and that it was thought that the UN could be used as an instrument to decolonize Africa. See, Michael Dei-Anang, *The Administration of Ghana's Foreign Relations, 1957-1965: A Personal Memoir* (London: Athlone Press, 1975), 50. Nasser's case is less well documented, but given that he was present to give speeches to the United Nations in 1960 and his dedication to the plight of the Palestinians, it is very likely that he thought much like Nkrumah.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, “840th Plenary Meeting, Friday, 20 November 1959, at 10.30 a.m., New York,” reprinted in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Plenary Meetings: Verbatim Records of Meetings, 15 September – 13 December 1959* (New York, 1959), 583. For the printed resolution see, United Nations, *Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly during its Fourteenth Session, 15 September – 13 December 1959, General Assembly Official Records: Fourteenth Session Supplement No.16 (A/4354)* (New York, 1960), 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, “840th Plenary Meeting, Friday, 20 November 1959, at 10.30 a.m., New York,” 581-582, 586. This vote was opposed mostly by European states and the only African state to join was South Africa; those who voted for included states from the Third and Socialist Worlds.

French at the United Nations because they were not yet recognized by the U.N. since France still held sovereignty over them. Thus, de Gaulle was at the mercy of Third World states, which supported Ghana's efforts against France. Although this resolution was a success because it embarrassed the French, it only provided with a moral victory since it did not provide a binding framework for UN action to stop the French from testing nuclear weapons. While the radical African states did find it easy enough to gather enough support for very popular issues like nuclear testing, they were less successful on more divisive issues like the Algerian War.

On December 12th 1959, the UAR, Ghana, and Guinea joined twenty other Afro-Asian states behind a draft resolution on the Algerian conflict that urged the two parties to negotiate for a ceasefire and to find a peaceful solution respecting the Algerians' right to self-determination.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately for the radical African states, the draft resolution was defeated because it failed to gather a two-thirds majority.¹⁰⁷ It was a tough loss for the Third World states, which were simply not numerous enough to gain a majority. Although their goal to push important African issues through the General Assembly was dented, it was not enough to convince Ghana, Guinea, and the UAR from continuing their charge at the United Nations. In fact, the influx of independent African states gaining entry to the United Nations in 1960 fuelled the Radical African states' hopes that they could affect change in Africa through the United Nations.

Their optimism for the potential to introduce a pro-African agenda through the international forum peaked in 1960 when sixteen new African states (thirteen of them formerly

¹⁰⁶ United Nations, "Agenda Item 59, Annexes, Fourteenth Session, New York, 1959," in *Official Records of the General Assembly of the Fourteenth Session: Annexes, 15 September – 13 December 1959* (New York, 1959), 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, "856th Plenary Meeting, Saturday, 12 December 1959, at 3 p.m.," reprinted in *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fourteenth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 735, 747. The final vote for the resolution was 39 in favour, 22 against and 20 abstentions.

members of the Communauté) were admitted to the United Nations by October of that year.¹⁰⁸

The wave of newly independent African states gaining entry into the United Nations for the 15th Session of the General Assembly in 1960 raised the hopes of the radical African alliance to new heights. The hopes of Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Sékou Touré were raised because they felt they were at the dawn of a historic moment for Africa because it held higher numbers of representatives than before. Not willing to spoil an opportunity, they raced to New York to deliver speeches at the General Assembly to rally other states to their cause. On 23 September, Nkrumah gripped the podium and delivered a scathing attack at ongoing imperialist policies in Africa: “cast your eyes across Africa: the colonialists and imperialists are still there. In this twentieth century of enlightenment, some nations still extol the vain glories of colonialism and imperialism.”¹⁰⁹ The Ghanaian leader then turned to the Algerian problem and stated that the United Nations was solely responsible for finding an end to the fighting because the French government had not been genuine in its calls for Algerian self-determination. The only solution, according to Nkrumah, was to apply in the whole of Africa “one principle, namely, the right of people to rule themselves.”¹¹⁰ In his speech to the General Assembly on 27 November, Nasser welcomed the 13 new African states to the United Nations and described Africa’s higher representation as “the real echo of the aspirations of the peoples.” He did, however, express regret that there were still many more peoples fighting for their independence against imperialist policies and he hoped that the United Nations would help these peoples advance their “economic

¹⁰⁸ “Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly during its Fifteenth Session,” United Nations, accessed February 5, 2012, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/15/ares15.htm>.

¹⁰⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, “869th Plenary Meeting, Friday, 23 September 1960, at 10.30 a.m.,” speech reprinted in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Plenary Meetings, Volume I: Verbatim Records of Meetings, 20 September – 17 October 1960* (New York, 1960), 61.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

independence side by side with political freedom.”¹¹¹ Nasser also warned the assembly of the continued imperialist policies in Africa conducted by the French in Algeria and of the need for the United Nations to push “for the right of the Algerian people to self-determination” because the French government had not showed a genuine interest in finding peace with the GPRA.¹¹² As for Sékou Touré, he believed that the enlarged African membership at the 15th General Assembly was a potential “turning point in human history” because he felt that the United Nations could be used to affect change on the colonial states still exploiting Africans, especially in Algeria. As he argued at the General Assembly, the United Nations now stood poised to act on its principles and take up its duty to end African exploitation by imperialists by proclaiming “the immediate and general independence of all colonized peoples.”¹¹³ The recent admission of the new African states influenced the three radical African leaders to believe that significant change on the major issues of the Algerian War and the decolonization of Africa could come from the United Nations, but their enthusiasm concealed a major flaw in their thinking. Unbeknownst to them, they erroneously presupposed that the states that had gained independence in former French colonial territories were going to join them and that together, they would gather enough votes to introduce resolutions backed by action from the United Nations.

With the higher number of African states attending the 15th General Assembly, the French were tremendously worried. Not only did they believe a shifting balance of power was taking place at the General Assembly since the addition of sixteen new African states made Africa the largest group at the United Nations with twenty-five members, but the French feared that the UAR and Ghana's attempted leadership of a new group with pan-African rhetoric would

¹¹¹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, “873rd Plenary Meeting, Tuesday, 27 September 1960, at 10.30 a.m.,” speech reprinted in *ibid*, 145-146, 150-151.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 148.

¹¹³ Sékou Touré, “896th Plenary Meeting, Monday, 10 October 1960, at 10.30 a.m.,” speech reprinted *ibid*, 563-564.

pressure the former members of the Communauté to side with them on resolutions undermining French interests.¹¹⁴ France could only hope that their loyalty survive the influence and pressure exerted by the more radical African states. The first test came on December 14th when Ghana, Guinea, and the UAR acted on a proposed resolution congruent with the themes expressed by the three leaders' speeches at the General Assembly. The draft resolution, devised by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, proposed the adoption of a "declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples" which proclaimed the immediate end of colonialism and the granting of peoples' right to self-determination.¹¹⁵ When the draft proposal came to a vote, one of the resolution's attached conditions was hotly debated by different members of the assembly because it "called upon the Powers concerned to ensure the transfer of full and sovereign power to the peoples of all dependent territories [...] [and] to enter negotiations with representatives of the colonial peoples elected on the basis of universal suffrage, if necessary under United Nations supervision" in order for all these peoples to achieve independence within the time limit of one year.¹¹⁶ While this resolution represented the same opinion held by Guinea, Ghana, and the UAR, the adoption of this last clause was not adopted because it was voted against by France, which did not wish to have mediation in its attempts to find a solution to the Algerian problem, and any foreign intrusion into its affairs in Western Africa.¹¹⁷ Having removed any framework

¹¹⁴ These fears are well expressed in a departmental note which circulated at the Quai d'Orsay, see "Note de la Direction d'Afrique-Levant (Affaires de la Communauté): Les États africains d'expression française à la quinzième session de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies, Paris, fin décembre 1960," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1960, Tome II (1er juillet – 31 décembre)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1996), 833-834, 836.

¹¹⁵ "947th Plenary Meeting, Wednesday, 14 December 1960, at 3 p.m.," in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Plenary Meetings, Volume 2: Verbatim Records of Meetings, 27 October – 20 December 1960* (New York, 1960), 1271.

¹¹⁶ "Document A/L.328, Amendment of Soviet Socialist Republics: amendment to document A/L.323," reprinted in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Annexes: 20 September – 20 December 1960 and 7 March – 21 April 1961* (New York, 1961), 7.

¹¹⁷ "947th Plenary Meeting, Wednesday, 14 December 1960, at 3 p.m.," in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Plenary Meetings, Volume 2*, 1273. Ghana, Guinea, and the UAR joined the USSR and most Afro-Asian states in voting for this condition. Apart from the United States and the European

for action from the Soviet proposal, the resolution was then supported by the Franco-African states and it was unanimously adopted.¹¹⁸ Although the radical African leaders were undoubtedly dismayed with the result of a harmless and watered-down resolution, their hopes of adding the weight of all the African states against colonial states in the United Nations were dashed because they had not been able to sway the Franco-African states to their side. It would also not be the last time that they would see any conditions calling for U.N. action in resolutions during the 15th Session withdrawn, since this time, France fought back with new means.

Four days after the adoption of a Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, another important African issue came to the General Assembly's agenda. A resolution on the Algerian conflict drafted by a mixture of Arab, Asian, and the African states of Guinea and Ghana was approved by the 1st Committee for proposition to the General Assembly for adoption. This draft resolution aimed to intervene directly to solve the Algerian problem with an operative clause contained in paragraph 4: "[this resolution] *decides* that a referendum shall be conducted in Algeria, organized and controlled by the United Nations, whereby the Algerian people shall freely determine the destiny of their entire country."¹¹⁹ The French, however, had anticipated the efforts waged against their interests in Algeria. On the 11th of December, Couve de Murville had already issued instructions to the delegations from the former Communauté at the United Nations to vote against the fourth

powers, Congo (Brazzaville), the Ivory Coast, Niger, Madagascar and Gabon voted against while Senegal, Cameroun and the Central African Republic abstained, effectively rejecting this clause for lack of a majority for adoption.

¹¹⁸ "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 1514 (XV). Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples," in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Annexes*, 8.

¹¹⁹ "Agenda Item 71: Question of Algeria, Document A/4660: Report of the First Committee, 16 December 1960," United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Annexes*, 4. (Italics in the original)

paragraph and against the whole draft resolution.¹²⁰ Remarkably, all of the Franco-African states complied with the French instructions and like the vote on the resolution for colonial peoples, they did not side with the radical African states.¹²¹ Despite the fact that the Franco-African states also voted against the final resolution on Algeria, the resolution was adopted and only recognized “the right of the Algerian people to self-determination and independence” without a call for action by the United Nations to realize or enforce this right, and kept France’s Algerian policy intact.¹²² Nevertheless, the French *Département d’Afrique-Levant* noted in a report made shortly after the closing of the session that it had achieved a major victory over its opponents. Not only had the support of Franco-African states proved crucial to maintain French interests in Algeria by rejecting mediation from the United Nations, but the emergence of a solid bloc of African states against the Afro-Asian states prevented the latter group’s hegemony of the U.N. General Assembly.¹²³

Part III: De Gaulle Finds *Grandeur* in an Unlikely Place

After seeing two binding paragraphs deleted from resolutions they had supported, the radical African states’ strategy to affect change in Africa was thwarted because the Franco-African states had created an opposition bloc at the United Nations to protect French interests. With the help of its allies from the former member states of the Communauté, France parried the

¹²⁰ Couve de Murville, “M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, aux Hauts-Représentants de France à Dakar, Brazzaville, Libreville, Bangui, Fort-Lamy, Tananarive; aux Représentants Extraordinaires de France à Abidjan, Cotonou, Ouagadougou, Niamey, Paris, 11 décembre 1960,” telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1960, Tome II*, 734.

¹²¹ The vote was defeated with a 40/40 split and 16 abstentions see United Nations, 956th Plenary Meeting, Monday, 19 December 1960, at 3 p.m., in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Plenary Meetings, Volume 2*, 1429.

¹²² “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 1573 (XV). Question of Algeria,” resolution reprinted in United Nations, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Session, Annexes*, 6.

¹²³ “Note de la Direction d’Afrique-Levant (Affaires de la Communauté): Les États africains d’expression française à la quinzième session de l’Assemblée générale des Nations Unies, Paris, fin décembre 1960,” note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1960, Tome II*, 839, 842.

radical African states' attempts to introduce an operative clause against their interests in Algeria. Despite no longer holding direct control over the new African states, de Gaulle had found them still very useful for French interests because they stayed at France's side in a show of solidarity. Thus, the new states' independence did not come as a detriment to France's interests at all because they helped France break out of its siege at the United Nations. After France's victory in New York, de Gaulle went on the offensive and attempted to destroy the opposing alliance. Given that his policy of cooperation and his new commitment of Africa's development had begun to shed France's image as an imperialist state, the French president knew he could lure the UAR and Guinea away from Ghana while trying to find new friends outside of Africa.

The General's Counterattack: France Unravels the Radical African Alliance

After the new African states had declared their intent to keep important links to France by agreeing to bilateral agreements and had shown France that they would stand with it in times of hardship, de Gaulle realized that his new African policy had served France's interests very well. But he also sensed that his African policy held much more potential since it could attract more African states and collapse the remaining opposition in Africa. One major roadblock stood in front of de Gaulle, however, because the issue of the Algerian War was still unresolved. After all, the radical African states had supported the Algerian National Movement since 1958 and showed no signs of letting up well into 1961.¹²⁴ With the settlement of the Algerian War on March 18th 1962, France had effectively removed a central cause of the radical states' opposition to France. Nasser's response to the Algerian peace accords was immediate. Upon the war's conclusion, Nasser notified French diplomatic officials that he wished to restore Egyptian

¹²⁴ For information on two 1961 resolutions declaring Ghanaian, Egyptian and Guinean support for the FLN's efforts in the Algerian War, see Ibrahim Shukrallah, *The African Summit Conference at Casablanca, January 3 to 7, 1961* (Cairo: National Publications House Press, 1961), 26 and the "Declaration of the Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries," in *The Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries: Belgrade, September 1-6, 1961* (Belgrade: Jugoslavija, 1961), 257.

relations with France. As these French officials learned, Nasser no longer believed that close relations with France were incompatible with the Arab Revolution.¹²⁵ As the French chargé d'affaires sent to Cairo to restore diplomatic relations remarked in his memoirs, Egypt had taken note of France's economic policies with developing states and hoped that it too could gain economic aid from France.¹²⁶ France's policy of cooperation had therefore gained the attention of its staunchest opponent in Africa and rendered it jealous. With the end of the long-standing Algerian issue and the possibility of acquiring economic aid, Egypt rushed to France to restore their relations. Although France never concluded an economic agreement with Egypt, their relations were finally re-established with an exchange of ambassadors in January 1964.¹²⁷

Egypt was not alone to signal to France its wishes to restore relations. Despite a mutual dislike and a recent history of tensions between Guinea and France, the Guinean President, Sékou Touré, immediately sent a congratulatory note to the de Gaulle at the conclusion of the Algerian War.¹²⁸ For the entire month of March, French diplomatic officials reported that Guinea considerably softened its attitude towards France because it had released three French citizens imprisoned in Conakry and had unblocked the French embassy's bank account.¹²⁹ Underpinning the Guinean attempt at reconciliation was an economic objective. On April 2nd, Touré sent a delegation to Paris to notify de Gaulle that Guinea wanted a progressive restoration of their commercial and economic relations.¹³⁰ After coming to the conclusion that Guinea desperately

¹²⁵ "Note du Service du Levant: Éventuelle Reprise des Relations avec le Monde Arabe, 2 avril 1962," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1962, Tome I, (1^{er} janvier – 30 juin)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), 378.

¹²⁶ Henri Froment-Meurice, *Vu du Quai: Mémoires, 1945-1983* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 261-262.

¹²⁷ Henri Froment-Meurice wrote in his memoirs that France had lost an excellent opportunity by failing to present an economic agreement with Egypt. *Ibid*, 262-263.

¹²⁸ "Note de la Direction des Affaires Africaines et Malgaches: Normalisation des rapports avec la Guinée, Paris, 2 mai 1962," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1962, Tome I*, 448. Franco-Guinean relations had hit their lowest in April 1960 when the French Secret Services helped militants from the Ivory Coast in a failed coup attempt on Sékou Touré. See, Jacques Foccart, *Foccart Parle*, 175.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 449, 449n.

needed financial aid and technical advisors to help run its affairs, De Gaulle responded favorably to Touré's request and sent two officials to draft a plan for an economic agreement in September.¹³¹ After entering negotiations in May 1963, France and Guinea signed a commercial agreement and a technical assistance agreement.¹³² Due to the mixture of the popularity of his African economic policy and the termination of the Algerian War, de Gaulle managed to spell the demise of the alliance that stood against France's interests in Africa.

De Gaulle's change in attitude with regard to his relations with Africa led to the policy of cooperation that became a resounding success. Not only had the policy ensured France's presence on the continent for a considerable amount of time, but it also convinced African leaders that France was no longer a colonial power and could now be trusted to help their development. Most important for de Gaulle was the fact that his policy severely crippled France's opposition in Africa. Furthermore, France's policy of cooperation also stirred considerable interest outside of Africa. After the Evian Accords were reached, many states in the Arab World sent officials to Paris to renew their relations and ask for economic assistance. After re-establishing his relations with France in November 1962, King Faysal of Saudi Arabia repeatedly told the French ambassador that he wanted France to take a role in his state's development.¹³³ The following January, Syrian officials asked the French Ambassador in Damascus if they could send a delegation to Paris to discuss their plan for Syria's long-term economic development; in September, King Hussein, during a state visit to Paris, pressed the French to agree to an accord of "unlimited cooperation" with the Hashemite Kingdom to develop

¹³¹ "Note de la Direction d'Afrique-Levant, Relations franco-guinéennes, Paris, 4 juin 1963," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français, 1963, Tome I (1er janvier – 30 juin)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2000), 589-590.

¹³² *Ibid*, 590-591.

¹³³ "M. Soulié, Ambassadeur à Djeddah, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 22 novembre 1962," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1962, Tome II*, 432-433.

its economy.¹³⁴ By the end of 1966, five Arab states from the Middle East had either signed or obtained pledges of economic agreements with France.¹³⁵ After shedding its colonial identity, France's doors to the Third World finally opened and de Gaulle found more friends and potential allies than he ever could have dreamed of having at the start of his presidency.

Conclusion

De Gaulle's road to recapture France's *grandeur* was neither straight nor smooth because from 1958 to 1959, he refused to abandon France's colonial policy. In a move reminiscent of the Fourth Republic, de Gaulle rashly tried to partake in an intervention in the Middle East in the summer of 1958. Realizing that the Anglo-Saxon powers had kept him out of a former French sphere of interest, de Gaulle refused to accept a subordinate status and instead focused on a region where France could operate freely. In reaction to his fears of seeing national liberation movement pop up throughout Africa, de Gaulle resorted to using a neo-colonial approach and created the Communauté. The creation of this body caused more friction for de Gaulle's foreign policy because he faced an alliance of radical states espousing an antithetical ideology in Africa and at the United Nations. Despite having built the Communauté to last, the member states saw through de Gaulle's deception and faced the former general in December 1959. Up until the end of 1959, de Gaulle's early reluctance to move away from a neo-colonial practice had made his success in Africa very unlikely. But his incredible change of attitude towards the French

¹³⁴ "M. Sébilleau, Ambassadeur de France à Damas, à M. Couve de Murville, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 17 janvier 1963," telegram reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1963, Tome I, 60-62* and "Entretien du Général de Gaulle et du Roi Hussein de Jordanie à l'Élysée, 10 septembre 1963," reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1963, Tome II (1^{er} juillet – 31 décembre)* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 2001), 247-249.

¹³⁵ The five states were Kuwait, Libya, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, see "Note du Service du Levant: Relations avec le Koweït, 5 novembre 1963," note reprinted in *ibid*, 461n, and "Note de la Direction d'Afrique du Nord: La Libye et les Rapports franco-libyens, 6 février 1964," note reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1964, Tome I (1^{er} janvier – 30 juin)* (Bruxelles : P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2002), 172-174, "Entretien entre le général de Gaulle et le Dr Ibrahim Makhos, le 20 décembre 1966" *compte-rendu* reprinted in Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français: 1966, Tome II (1^{er} juin – 31 décembre)* (Bruxelles : P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2006), 1045n, Charles de Gaulle, "Audience de Monsieur Pachachi, Ministre Irakien des Affaires Étrangères," audience reprinted in *ibid*, 287.

territories in December 1959 proved to have been the climactic moment for de Gaulle's foreign policy in Africa and the Third World because it permitted de Gaulle to convince states that France had shed its colonialist identity. As a result, France gained more friends on the international stage in the early 1960s. The fact that de Gaulle treated the new African states with respect and helped them develop also captured the Third World's attention and it came to him. With more friends, popularity, bilateral agreements, and an independent policy from the Anglo-Saxon powers, De Gaulle had once again made France a player in international affairs. He had finally reclaimed France's *grandeur*.

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