

De Gaulle, JFK, and stopping war: a lesson for today

by Mary M. Burdman

Thirty-five years ago, on Jan. 27, 1964, France, led by President Charles de Gaulle, became the first leading Western nation to establish full ambassadorial relations with the government of the People's Republic of China.¹ De Gaulle had sent Edgar Faure, who had been President of the Council (Prime Minister under the Fourth Republic), to China in late October 1963, to discuss setting up diplomatic relations with the Chinese government. On Nov. 2, Faure signed a protocol of agreement for establishing relations, and then, upon his departure from China, stopped over in India to meet with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, as he had visited Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia, on his way to China. Upon his return to France, Faure presented his agreement to President de Gaulle in the Elysée Palace—on Nov. 22, 1963.

That same day, U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

Jean Lacouture, the biographer of de Gaulle, wrote: "The General had taken recognition of [Faure's agreement with China] when he received his envoy, on Nov. 22, 1963, the same day as the assassination of President Kennedy—which, together, they deplored, since, wrote Edgar Faure, 'we had the vague idea that the Americans would draw advantage . . . of our initiative, notably for the part of it concerning Vietnam. . . . I think that that would have (or, could have) been the case for the Kennedy administration.'"

De Gaulle declared a full week of national mourning in

1. In 1950, Great Britain had recognized the existence of the P.R.C. government, on the basis that Britain always recognized whatever government was in place, and, in June 1954, established a chargé d'affaires in Beijing. Britain, however, adhered to the economic blockade imposed on China by the United States. Britain did not exchange ambassadors with China until March 1972, after China re-gained its seat in the United Nations in October 1971.

France for the murdered American President.

On Jan. 31, 1964, President de Gaulle explained his reasons for recognizing the government of the People's Republic of China. Not only was it necessary to recognize "the world as it is," because, "for 15 years, almost the entirety of China" had been "brought together under a government that applies to it its law [and] manifests itself to be a sovereign and independent power," he said. But also, France had a clear interest that the prolonged wars in Indochina should finally be ended, and that it would be impossible to do so without engaging the great nation of China in that process.

De Gaulle was certainly also aware of the role which Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai had played in the Geneva conference ten years earlier, in the effort to create "an area of collective peace" in Indochina.

France and China also had joint economic interests, de Gaulle said. France was producing more and more valuable technologies, "for which China has an infinite field of uses." France, de Gaulle said, thought "that sooner or later, some governments that are still hesitating will favor following its example."

Vietnam and the Cultural Revolution

Had John Kennedy lived, the United States might have been spared the debacle in Vietnam, about which de Gaulle had warned him during their first meetings in Paris in 1961. There are many indications that, shortly before his death, Kennedy was considering withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam. These include papers released from U.S. archives in December 1997, which include an October 1963 memo from Gen. Maxwell Taylor to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, telling them to prepare for the withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel from Vietnam by the end of 1965. Most compelling,



President John Kennedy (left) and President of France Gen. Charles de Gaulle. Said de Gaulle of the American President: “John Kennedy had the ability, and had it not been for the crime which killed him, might have had the time to leave his mark on our age.”

are the statements of Kennedy’s brother Robert, before he was assassinated during his own Presidential campaign in 1968, that John Kennedy had been determined to avoid a land war in Asia.

Had Kennedy followed de Gaulle’s lead, 15 more years of estrangement between the United States and China—the world’s largest developed nation, and the world’s largest developing nation—might well have been avoided.

In China in 1963, Liu Shaoqi was President, Zhou Enlai was Prime Minister, and Deng Xiaoping, from his position on the Communist Party Central Committee Secretariat, was the day-to-day administrator of China. Liu and Deng were the architects of the nation-building economic policies, which had been attempted several times since 1949, and finally were implemented consistently beginning in 1978. Zhou Enlai, who, in cooperation with the independent Republic of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, promoted the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence,” was another great nationalist leader of China, and along with Marshal Nie Rongzhen, father of China’s nuclear program.

The power of Mao Zedong, who had already been “retired” once in 1959, was vulnerable in the wake of the economic disasters of the Great Leap Forward. Mao’s Cultural Revolution, which killed Liu Shaoqi, ousted Deng Xiaoping, and besieged Zhou Enlai, had not yet been unleashed. There is reason to consider that, had the United States, along with France, established diplomatic ties with China, with the intention to supply China with the advanced technologies neces-

sary to develop an economy of well more than 650 million people, devastated by 30 years of war and civil war, the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution might have been avoided.

As history transpired, the opportunity to open relations between the United States and China fell to the geopolitician Henry Kissinger, who, as Kissinger himself confessed at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on May 10, 1982, always held British policy interests above American interests. President Richard Nixon wanted to open ties with China; Kissinger, as his Secretary of State and National Security Adviser, first visited Beijing in July 1971. The visit of President Nixon followed in February 1972. Even so, the United States did not establish full diplomatic relations with China until January 1979.

Nationalist policies

After he established the Fifth Republic in 1959, de Gaulle’s policy toward Indochina, and Vietnam in particular, reflected France’s disastrous experiences there after World War II. De Gaulle had drawn a profound lesson from this debacle, and determined that he and France would make every effort to prevent history from being repeated.

De Gaulle was also a statesman, who understood well the genuine power of effective war-prevention. He insisted that France must develop its own, independent *force de frappe* nuclear capability, and deploy it, as the “*dissuasion du faible au fort*”: a weak power’s deterrence against the strong. His finger on the nuclear trigger, de Gaulle said, could be used to

stop wars from happening. He insisted that the *force de frappe* be kept independent within NATO, so that France could deploy it in French national interests: perhaps against the East bloc, but also, if needed, “à tout azimuts”—against any enemy.

For carrying out such nationalist policies, de Gaulle’s life was threatened repeatedly, by the same networks that assassinated President John Kennedy.²

In Kennedy, de Gaulle had found an American President he considered an “interlocutor.” Franklin Roosevelt and de Gaulle had been hostile toward each other. One source of conflict was that, during World War II, Roosevelt had wanted de Gaulle to form a coalition with the incompetent Gen. Henri Giraud, whose associates, such as resistance leader Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, abandoned him to work with de Gaulle. Also, the United States was the only anti-Axis government to recognize the Vichy regime in France, and to maintain an ambassador, Adm. William D. Leahy, an admirer of Marshal Pétain, at least until December 1941.

However, the most serious source of conflict was that Roosevelt despised French colonial policy, and was determined that, once World War II were won, France would not be allowed to re-take control of its colonies in Indochina. De Gaulle opposed Roosevelt’s anti-colonial policy; in the period immediately following World War II, he was determined to reestablish French control over its colonies, although with the long-term goal of eventually creating an international union of all nations influenced by French language and culture.

These conflicts were never resolved. De Gaulle mistrusted Roosevelt’s successor, Harry Truman; with Dwight Eisenhower, his relations were cordial, but, as Lacouture wrote, “the questions went unanswered.”

However, President Kennedy “posed the questions, understanding that de Gaulle could be the best defender of the rights and traditions of the West, and could want a profound transformation of the Atlantic Pact.” De Gaulle and Kennedy, both Catholics (John Kennedy was the first, and only, Catholic ever elected U.S. President) were also brought together by the efforts of Pope John XXIII, whom Kennedy met at the Vatican in spring 1961.

De Gaulle was very optimistic about relations with the United States after meeting Kennedy. As he wrote in his *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor, 1958-62*: “The new President was determined to devote himself to the cause of freedom, justice, and progress. It is true that, persuaded that it was the duty of the United States and himself to redress wrongs, he would be drawn into ill-advised interventions. But the experience of the statesman would no doubt have gradually restrained the impulsiveness of the idealist. John Kennedy had the ability, and had it not been for the crime

which killed him, might have had the time to leave his mark on our age.”

No peace in Indochina

Indochina was occupied by Japan in 1941, although the Japanese allowed the French colonial representatives of the Vichy regime to remain nominally in power until March 1945, when the Japanese staged a coup and took full control.

Already in 1942, Franklin Roosevelt had Indochina assigned to the China war theater, but British Prime Minister Winston Churchill demanded the creation of a South East Asian Command (SEAC), which was assigned to Lord Louis Mountbatten, a grandson of Queen Victoria, in November 1943. The United States, however, insisted that Indochina and Siam (Thailand) be excluded from SEAC, and assigned to U.S.-Chinese command.

Yet, after the death of Roosevelt, and Truman’s succession, all the lines were rapidly redrawn. At the July 17, 1945 Potsdam Conference, the division of Mountbatten’s SEAC and U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s South West Pacific Area was changed, and those areas of Southeast Asia which had previously been under MacArthur’s command, were turned over to Mountbatten. The changes were formally announced on Aug. 15, 1945. Thus, Java and Sumatra, the most densely populated islands of Indonesia (which had been a Dutch colony when the Japanese invaded in 1941, and was still claimed by the Dutch), and the portion Indochina south of the 16th parallel, close to the later division of Vietnam, were shifted to the British command. As of October 1945, all U.S. activities in SEAC ceased, on the decision of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This was a big change. Not only Roosevelt, but also American military leaders in the Asian theater in World War II, including Generals Joseph Stillwell and A.C. Wedemeyer, Stillwell’s successor in China, had despised the British, both for their military incompetence and their obvious determination to re-assert colonial control after the war. Among U.S. military in the region, SEAC was better known as “Save England’s Asian Colonies.” The British were open about their opposition to Roosevelt’s intentions for Indochina: Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, noted in February 1945, that the area would create problems for Anglo-American relations, and the basis of the whole dispute was “the President’s sinister intentions in regard to Indochina.”

Roosevelt definitively told Secretary of State Cordell Hull in January 1943, that Indochina “should not go back to France.” He did not call for its immediate independence, however. At the Cairo Conference in 1943, Roosevelt proposed that, after the defeat of Japan, a trusteeship should be established in the region for 25 years. However, at Yalta in February 1945, the issue was set aside, to be decided at the conference to establish the United Nations in San Francisco in May. After the Japanese coup against the Vichy government, Roo-

2. See Mark Burdman, “Permindex Revisited: British Threaten Clinton and Chirac,” and Joseph Brewda, “Permindex Oversaw Assassination of Kennedy, Attempts on de Gaulle,” *EIR*, Sept. 8, 1995.

sevelt did agree to allow the French resistance forces to go to Indochina to fight Japan. France might be Indochina's trustee, Roosevelt stated in March, "with the proviso that independence was the ultimate goal. . . . It must be independence, . . . and you can quote me at the State Department."

On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died. Truman immediately modified Roosevelt's policies, and only weeks after the President's death, at the UN Conference in San Francisco, Secretary of State Edward Stettinius and Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Grew told the French delegation: "The record is entirely innocent of any official statements of this government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indochina."

French rely on Japanese troops

The actual situation in Indochina at the time of the Japanese surrender on Aug. 15, 1945, was astonishing. Japan had been defeated by General MacArthur's strategy of striking the Japanese at strategic points where they had the least forces, leaping over many Japanese concentrations of forces which, once cut off from the Japanese home islands, were left essentially to rot. However, in the SEAC command, except within Burma, the Japanese were never defeated in battle. At least 600,000 undefeated Japanese troops were still occupying huge areas throughout Indochina and Indonesia.

For many months after the end of the war, France did not have the resources to make any decisive intervention in Indochina. British forces in the region, as was the situation throughout the war, were "imperial" forces—the vast majority of "British" troops were actually Indian troops. France was in an even worse condition, totally dependent on British forces and resources.

After the Japanese surrender, Mountbatten assigned Maj. Gen. Douglas Gracey of the 20th Indian Division to go to Saigon. The situation there was moving rapidly. The Viet Minh, led by the nationalist Ho Chi Minh, had deposed Emperor Bao Dai and, on Aug. 23, set up a provisional government in Hanoi, Saigon, and Hue. On Sept. 2, 1945, in Hanoi, Ho declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, reading a Declaration of Independence, which quoted directly the opening passages of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

The only basis, on which the imperial powers, Britain, Holland, and France, could return to the region, was by using the power of the still-present, defeated Japanese military.

When Gracey arrived, Japanese General Terauchi was given responsibility for maintaining "order." The airfield was surrounded by Japanese soldiers; they "guarded" the way into Saigon. Gracey refused to meet the Viet Minh delegation, and intervened against the Viet Minh government, banning newspapers, demonstrations, meetings, and weapons throughout south Indochina. The battle was closed; the Viet Minh called a general strike, and on Sept. 23, Gracey and the French colonialists staged a coup in support of French

imperial rule. Indian troops began disarming the Viet Minh police, and took over the Treasury, post offices, and other offices from the Vietnamese. French colonialist atrocities against the population abrogated future negotiations. While the Vietnamese were disarmed, armed Japanese troops "maintained order" inside Saigon and beyond. When French General Leclerc finally arrived in Saigon on Oct. 5, his route from the airport to Saigon was lined with armed Gurkhas of the British Army, and Japanese soldiers.

The Viet Minh continued to demand the reestablishment of the government ousted by the coup, the disarming of French forces, confinement of French nationals within certain areas, and the end of British military assistance to the French, but all demands were rejected by Gracey. The situation deteriorated rapidly.

France began to bring in its troops from Europe in November 1945. This in no way resolved the situation. These French troops were by no means necessarily sympathetic to the situation they found: Many of them had been recruited from the "maquis," the resistance fighters in France, and wanted to fight the Japanese, not the "Vietnamese maquis."

In January 1946, the British surrendered their "control" to the French; on March 26, 1946, with the repatriation of the Japanese military finally under way, the last "British" troops left Indochina. American Lend Lease matériel, which had been used by the British, was turned over to the French forces, with the consent of President Truman.

Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence

In this situation, an alternative existed. One group within the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), led by Capt. Archimedes Patti in Hanoi, had developed very good ties with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, and supported Vietnamese independence.

During the war, Ho Chi Minh wrote admiring letters to Roosevelt from his guerrilla headquarters in the jungle. In February 1945, when Viet Minh guerrillas rescued an American pilot shot down by the Japanese, Ho Chi Minh accompanied him 600 kilometers to Allied headquarters in Kunming, China, where Ho met Charles Fenn, of the OSS. Ho also met Gen. Claire Chennault; he was flown back to the border in mid-April on an American plane, carrying a signed photo of the famous Chennault and six U.S. pistols. Ho was also accompanied by two Chinese-American officers, a radio operator, and an intelligence officer. In mid-July, a six-man OSS training team parachuted into Viet Minh headquarters in Tan Trao, to train a 100-man "Vietnamese-American company." After the Japanese surrender in Tokyo, Ho's force marched to Hanoi, still fighting the Japanese, and accompanied by OSS officers.

When Ho Chi Minh read out his Declaration of Independence, Captain Patti was present. Two U.S. Lightnings staged a fly-past for the celebrations. The French population of Hanoi was kept confined; the Americans moved about freely. Ho

sent a message to the United Nations, transmitted by the OSS, that if Vietnam were not granted independence, it would fight for it. A message was also sent to de Gaulle, in the name of Emperor Bao Dai, saying: "You would understand better, if you could see what is happening here, if you could feel this desire for independence which is in everyone's heart and which no human force can any longer restrain."

De Gaulle's envoy to Saigon in southern Indochina, Vice Adm. Thierry d'Argenlieu, was worse than useless, but Maj. Jean Sainteny, who had been head of de Gaulle's wartime military mission in China, at Kunming, saw a real possibility of a political settlement with Ho Chi Minh, whom he greatly respected. Sainteny went to Hanoi as France's first postwar emissary, where he witnessed the establishment of the Viet Minh government in northern Vietnam.

Sainteny wrote (although not positively) of the demonstration in Hanoi, on Sept. 14, 1945, "which marked Vietnam's declaration of war on the British Empire. Throughout this memorable day, Vietnamese youths marched through the streets of Hanoi, waving, shouting, and carrying banners which informed the British Empire that, Vietnam having declared war, if the empire did not want to become involved in the direst catastrophes, it had no alternative but to withdraw the troops which General Gracey had just landed in Saigon."

Yet, only one week after the declaration of independence, Washington told the U.S. agents in Hanoi that steps were being taken "to facilitate the recovery of power by the French." By mid-October, all U.S. uniformed personnel were ordered to leave Indochina.

Another group of 12 OSS men in Saigon, led by Lt. Col. Peter Dewey, developed contacts with a whole range of groups, including the local Viet Minh. Gracey, after he arrived on Sept. 13, complained of Dewey's activities as subversive; Dewey was killed at a Viet Minh roadblock to the north of Saigon on Sept. 26, 1945.

The 'Gandhi of Indochina'

The growing French forces went first to Saigon, "retook" southern Vietnam and Cambodia, and then made an assault on Tonkin.

Sainteny, however, maintained his respect for Ho Chi Minh. He wrote of Ho in early 1946, "His wide knowledge, his intelligence, his unbelievable energy, his abstemiousness and his total dedication had earned him incomparable prestige and popularity in the eyes of the people. It is undeniably tragic that France had minimized this man and not known how to understand his strength and the power which he commanded. . . . His words, his conduct, his attitude, his personality all led to the conviction that he was opposed to the use of force. Throughout this period, it is beyond question that he aspired to become the Gandhi of Indochina."

Sainteny also considered Vo Nguyen Giap, a doctor of law, a "brilliant product" of French culture.

Although the French were already fighting the Viet Minh

in southern Vietnam, on March 6, 1946, Ho and Sainteny signed an accord that the French could return peacefully to Hanoi. Soon thereafter, General Leclerc came to Hanoi. The Viet Minh ordered a cease-fire for all Vietnam; France recognized the Republic of Vietnam as a "free state with [its] own government, parliament, army, and finances," but as part of the Indochinese Union and the French Union—an entity yet to be established.

The political chaos that was the French Fourth Republic, aborted this potential step toward a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The new government in Paris recognized a separate "state" in southern Vietnam, undermining Ho Chi Minh. The 1946 Fontainebleau conference refused to recognize the Viet Minh government, despite the fact that it was the only one in all Indochina which had been democratically elected, in National Assembly elections in 1945. In the wild, right-left political battles in France, Vietnam was an "issue" only as it could be used by one faction against the other; there was no policy beyond French party politics. Ho's peace proposals were rejected. By the end of 1946, the Viet Minh government moved out into the jungle, and full-scale war began.

In Paris for the Fontainebleau conference, Ho had met the U.S. Ambassador, and told him that the Viet Minh wanted independence within the French Union, rather than communism. However, the United States did not exercise any pressure on the French to negotiate, as they had pressured the Dutch on Indonesia.

The war degenerated, sinking into quicksand. Like the Japanese forces in China in the 1940s, outside the cities the French controlled only the roads, and those only during the day; all other areas were contested.

In 1949, a government under former Emperor Bao Dai was set up in Saigon and promised "independence" by the Fourth Republic. This "government" was recognized by the United States, and U.S. financial support for the French war effort soared: By 1954, *the United States was paying for 80% of the French war effort*. Already by 1951, France was using napalm supplied by the United States.

In the same period, by December 1949, the Chinese People's Liberation Army had reached the border with Vietnam; by January 1950, China and the Soviet Union recognized Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

'The last stronghold'

In 1953, General Giap moved his forces toward the Mekong Valley via Laos. The potential for the Viet Minh to reach Cambodia and southern Vietnam by this route, induced the French, in November 1953, to take the ill-fated decision to set up a stronghold in the highlands west of Hanoi. The place selected was called Dien Bien Phu. On March 13, 1954, the French forces there came under heavy assault by the Viet Minh.

U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, that most committed cold warrior, was quick to rattle his atomic sabre. In

May 1952, Dulles announced the U.S. policy of massive retaliation to stop even prospective “aggressors.” They must be convinced in advance, that they would be “subjected to retaliatory blows so costly that their aggression [would] not be a profitable operation,” Dulles stated. In January 1954, Dulles spoke at the New York Council on Foreign Relations, where he warned China against any intervention in Indochina in support of Ho Chi Minh. American policy, proclaimed Dulles, was “to depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate instantly by means and at places of our choosing.” This retaliation would use “a selection of military means, instead of a multiplication of means,” as the way to get what Dulles termed protection, against “an aggressive state, which was glutted with manpower.” He warned that if China intervened in Vietnam, it would incur “grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina.”

As the situation in Dien Bien Phu worsened for the troops of French Expeditionary Force, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Arthur Radford warned of what he called the danger of the “communization” of all Asia, and proposed the use of tactical atomic weapons against the Viet Minh. This was not approved: The proposal was submitted orally to General MacArthur, then Counselor to the Defense Department, who opposed even threatening the use of such weapons.

Later, in April 1961, MacArthur also met President Kennedy, and advised him not to commit American ground forces to a war on the Asian mainland; after the meeting, Kennedy told an adviser that he would not risk sending U.S. troops to Indochina. MacArthur repeated this advice to Kennedy in 1963, and after Kennedy’s assassination, to Lyndon Johnson, but in vain.

The Viet Minh destroyed the French airstrip at Dien Bien Phu, and cut off all supplies. The French Expeditionary Force was rapidly destroyed. They capitulated on May 7, after the loss of 15,000 lives in less than two months.

Geneva: an effort to end the war

Russian Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov proposed the five-power conference, including China, which was convened in Geneva in May 1954 to negotiate a settlement for Vietnam.

In France, Pierre Mendès-France became Prime Minister in June 1954. Acting decisively, Mendès-France declared that he would end the war in Vietnam within 30 days, by July 21, or resign. The Prime Minister meant what he said: He gave force to his policy, by declaring that if no ceasefire were agreed to at Geneva, France’s General Assembly would have to enact conscription to raise an army to fight in Vietnam. Such a law would never have passed, as Mendès-France well knew, and he went to Geneva to negotiate a settlement. He and Ho finally agreed to partition Vietnam at the 17th parallel, and to hold elections for final reunification within two years.

(In his brief period in power, Mendès-France, an admirer



Pierre Mendès-France became Prime Minister in June 1954, and acted decisively to end the war in Vietnam. He and Ho Chi Minh agreed to partition Vietnam at the 17th parallel, and to hold elections for final reunification within two years, but the government of the United States, as well as those of Hanoi and Saigon, refused to sign the accord.

of the New Deal policies of Franklin Roosevelt and a founder of the French Atomic Energy Commission, attempted to build up France’s nuclear potential within the European context, but de Gaulle later said that France must build its nuclear energy program on the basis of its own national resources. Mendès-France also attempted to solve the crises of Morocco, Tunisia, and Indochina, but he was ousted by pro-Anglo-American forces. A Jew, he was later attacked by the French right wing for his efforts to resolve these critical situations: Along with de Gaulle and Roosevelt, he was labelled a “seller” of the French empire.)

The concept of an overall solution for the political situation in Indochina based on the independence and neutralization, or non-alignment, of the three nations in the region—Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—was put forward at the Geneva Conference by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai.

This concept of a peace-generating neutralism, was the foundation of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s international policy. Nehru could be called a “nationalistic internationalist,” who strove to pursue peace, not through alignment with any power blocs, but through cooperation among sovereign, independent nations.

On Dec. 31, 1953, India and China articulated the famous “Five Principles for Peaceful Co-Existence,” as they opened their negotiations on the status of Tibet. The Five Principles were later incorporated into the Chinese-Indian and Chinese-Burmese joint statements issued during Zhou Enlai’s visits to those nations in June 1954.

The Five Principles are: “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.”

It was in Geneva, that the notorious incident took place, where John Foster Dulles refused to shake Zhou Enlai’s hand. Dulles encountered Zhou in a room, and Zhou, who had not met Dulles before, proffered his hand. Dulles refused all contact, and stalked out of the room.

Despite Dulles, Zhou Enlai played a key role in ensuring that a settlement was achieved. India, Burma, and other non-aligned nations in the region supported the neutrality policy. Zhou himself was motivated by China’s urgent need for a peaceful environment to rebuild its own economy.

Neutrality was also welcomed by the Europeans, who were concerned that the implacable, hostile anti-communist stance of Dulles could only prolong the war. Zhou met privately with Mendès-France in Berne in June 1954, where they agreed that a united government should be formed in Vietnam on the basis of a national election, and Zhou agreed to recognize the royal governments of Cambodia and Laos, if their neutrality were confirmed.

Zhou visited India and Burma during a conference recess, in June 1954. In New Delhi, Zhou and Nehru issued a joint statement calling for a political settlement for Indochina and neutrality for all three Indochinese states.

At the beginning of the Geneva conference, Zhou proposed to end the Vietnamese war and prohibit reintroduction of military personnel and armaments into Indochina. This, he said, was the “most important condition” for putting an “end to foreign interference.” Zhou warned of the international effects of continued war in Indochina: “The existence of this state of affairs, and its further continuation, hinder the peaceful settlement of urgent international questions, especially those of Asia, and aggravate uneasiness and tension in international relations.”

The Geneva Accord, finally signed on July 21, 1954, declared a cease-fire, and pledged that the signatories would not impair the sovereignty, independence, and neutrality of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Vietnam was partitioned at the 17th parallel, but the accord affirmed that “the military demarcation is provisional, and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary.” Elections were to be held in July 1956, to form a national government for all Vietnam.

Military bases of any foreign country on their territories were forbidden. Zhou noted that these measures “will enable the people of the three states of Indochina to engage in the construction of their respective countries in a peaceful environment.” In a speech in Beijing in August 1954, Zhou stated that it was now possible to establish “an area of collective peace in Indochina and its surrounding countries.”

There was one great flaw: The government of the United

States, as well as those of Hanoi and Saigon, refused to sign the accord. The United States only pledged to refrain from “the threat or use of force” against the arrangements.

Vietnam becomes an American issue

President de Gaulle, in his *Memoirs*, wrote of the autumn of 1958, when he had been appointed Prime Minister as the Fifth Republic was collapsing:

“My aim, then, was to disengage France, not from the Atlantic Alliance, which I intended to maintain by way of ultimate precaution, but from the integration carried out by NATO under American command; to establish relations with each of the states of the East bloc, first and foremost Russia, with the object of bringing about a *détente*, followed by understanding and cooperation; to do likewise, when the time was ripe, with China; and finally, to provide France with a nuclear capability such that no one could attack us without running the risk of frightful damage. But I was anxious to proceed gradually, linking each stage with overall developments and continuing to cultivate France’s traditional friendships.

“As early as Sept. 14, 1958, I hoisted my colors. In a memorandum addressed personally to President Eisenhower and Mr. [British Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan, I called into question our membership in NATO. . . . My memorandum pointed out that a genuine organization of collective defense would need to cover the whole surface of the earth, instead of being limited to the North Atlantic sector, and that the worldwide character of France’s responsibilities and security made it essential for Paris to participate directly in the political and strategic decisions of the Alliance, decisions which were in reality taken by *America alone with separate consultation with England*. . . . As I expected, the two recipients of my memorandum replied evasively. So there was nothing to prevent us from taking action.”

However, due to complicated circumstances, including France’s lack of nuclear weapons, the unresolved crisis in Algeria, and the threats to Berlin from Nikita Khrushchov, de Gaulle waited.

Beginning in 1959 until 1962, de Gaulle took steps to ensure the independence of Algeria. This process went in phases, first granting Algeria self-determination, then power-sharing with France, and finally, full independence in 1962. That this was a cooperative process, is demonstrated by the fact that, as late as 1968-69, the Algerian government agreed to allow France to conduct its nuclear tests in the Algerian Sahara. De Gaulle, when he came to power in 1958, had been supported by the French Army in Algeria, whose leaders had assumed that he would oppose independence. Once in power, de Gaulle acted on the basis of necessity, and not on whoever had supported him. There was a brutal reaction by the pro-NATO elements in the French Army, led by General Challe, resulting in two coup attempts against de Gaulle, in 1960 and 1961.

De Gaulle meets Kennedy

Early in John Kennedy's Presidency, in March 1961, President of the French National Assembly Jacques Chaban-Delmas visited Washington. De Gaulle instructed him to tell the U.S. President "not to get bogged down in this Vietnam affair, where the United States can lose its forces and its soul." Kennedy authorized Chaban-Delmas to give the French view of a neutralist solution for the region, beginning with Laos, to the Pentagon and State Department.

De Gaulle received a positive report about JFK from Chaban-Delmas and from the French Ambassador in Washington, Hervé Alphand.

On May 31, 1961, de Gaulle received President Kennedy in Paris. De Gaulle wrote in his *Memoirs* of Kennedy: "Chosen to get things done, but elected only by the skin of his teeth; placed at the head of a vast and wealthy country, but one with grave internal problems; by nature inclined to act swiftly and boldly, but hampered by the cumbersome machinery of Federal administration; entering upon the scene in a world in which American power and glory had spread far and wide, but whose every wound was suppurating and in which a hostile monolithic bloc stood opposed to America; enjoying the advantages of youth, but suffering the drawbacks of a novice—in spite of so many obstacles, the new President was determined to devote himself to the cause of freedom, justice, and progress. It is true that, persuaded that it was the duty of the United States and himself to redress wrongs, he was to be drawn into ill-advised interventions. But the experience of the statesman would no doubt have gradually restrained the impulsiveness of the idealist. John Kennedy had the ability, and had it not been for the crime which killed him, might have had the time to leave his mark on our age."

As soon as he had been elected, Kennedy had begun a correspondence with de Gaulle on many issues: the Congo, Laos, his proposed summit with Khrushchov in Vienna.

For de Gaulle, wrote his biographer Lacouture, the golden rule in Indochina had become to prevent any military intervention, of whatever type. He stated this to JFK, who objected, that if the adversary saw no risk of intervention, he would not yield. De Gaulle stressed to Kennedy how complex the problems were, the diversity of the nations of the region, and the role of China, which must be taken into account. There were already Chinese-Soviet tensions, de Gaulle said. Kennedy, however, remained under the influence of the "Manichean thesis of a Communist bloc confronting the Free World, which had the force of law in Washington at that time. . . .

"He arrived in Paris brimming over with dynamism, he and his dazzling and cultivated wife forming a remarkably attractive couple. . . . It emerged that the attitude of the United States toward France had undergone a very decided change. The day was long past when—traditional friendship aside—



General de Gaulle with President Dwight Eisenhower, in September 1959, where de Gaulle warned the United States against military intervention in Vietnam.

Washington insisted on regarding Paris as just another of its protégés. . . . Now, the Americans acknowledged our independence and dealt with us directly and specially. But . . . basically, what Kennedy offered me in every case was a share in his projects. What he heard from me in reply was that Paris was by all means disposed to collaborate closely with Washington, but that whatever France did, it did of its own accord. . . .

"It was above all on the subject of Indochina that I pointed out to Kennedy how far apart our policies were. He made no secret of the fact that the United States were planning to intervene. In Siam, thanks to the virtually exclusive influence they exercised over the government of Marshal Sarit, they were setting up air bases. In Laos, whose neutrality was about to be reaffirmed at a conference in Geneva, they were nonetheless introducing their 'military advisers' in collusion with some of the local chiefs, in spite of the reservations of Prince Souvanna Phouma and the neutralist party. In South Vietnam, after having encouraged the seizure of dictatorial power by Ngo Dinh Diem and hastened the departure of the French advisers, they were beginning to install the first elements of

an expeditionary corps under cover of economic aid. John Kennedy gave me to understand that the American aim was to establish a bulwark against the Soviets in the Indochinese peninsula. But instead of giving him the approval he wanted, I told the President that he was taking the wrong road.

“‘You will find,’ I said to him, ‘that intervention in this area will be an endless entanglement. Once a nation has been aroused, no foreign power, however strong, can impose its will. You will discover this for yourselves. For even if you find local leaders who, in their own interests, are prepared to obey you, the people will not agree to it, and indeed do not want you. The ideology which you invoke will make no difference. Indeed, in the eyes of the masses it will become identified with your will to power. That is why the more you become involved out there against Communism, the more the Communists will appear as the champions of national independence, and the more support they will receive, if only from despair.

“‘We French have had this experience. You Americans wanted to take our place in Indochina. Now you want to take over where we left off and revive a war which we brought to an end. I predict that you will sink, step by step, into a bottomless military and political quagmire, however much you spend in men and money. What you, we, and others ought to do for unfortunate Asia is not to take over running these states ourselves, but to provide them with the means to escape from the misery and humiliation which, there as elsewhere, are the causes of totalitarian regimes. I tell you this in the name of the West.’

“Kennedy listened to me. But events were to prove that I had failed to convince him. . . .

“Kennedy left Paris. I had been dealing with a man whose ability, whose age, and whose justifiable ambition inspired immense hopes. He seemed to me to be on the point of taking off into the heights, like some great bird that beats its wings as it approaches the mountain tops. For his part, on his return to Washington he was to say in a ‘report to the American people’ on June 6 that he had found General de Gaulle ‘a wise counsellor for the future and an informative guide to the history that he had helped to make. . . . I could not have more confidence in any man.’ Having taken stock of one another, we continued on our road, each carrying his burden and marching toward his own destiny.”

Six months later, at the end of 1961, the United States doubled its deployment of “advisers” in Saigon.

A real policy for Asia

De Gaulle had the strategic vision to consider a real policy for Asia, then a region of “2 billion people, 50 centuries of history, the infinite space from Sinai to Kamchatka. . . . A Gaullist horizon,” wrote Lacouture.

When de Gaulle returned to power in June 1958, Indochina was still only on the verge of cataclysm. In Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem’s problems were only beginning; in Cambo-

dia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk had made “his neutralism more dynamic by recognizing the P.R.C.”; Laos suffered a coup d’état by pro-American Marshal Phoumi Nosavan. From 1958 to 1962, the situation in Vietnam worsened. In December 1960, the National Liberation Front, or Vietcong, was established, and the United States escalated its involvement.

De Gaulle’s reactions to the deepening involvement of the United States in Indochina, wrote Lacouture, were inspired not only by his respect for peoples’ rights to determine their own destiny, but also by his quasi-prophetic vision of the consequences of this involvement. De Gaulle was “haunted” by Roosevelt’s policy of 20 years earlier, to evict France from Indochina. It was one thing to understand—with hindsight—the necessity to finally do in 1954, what had not been done in 1946; it was another to watch Washington walk in France’s footsteps.

Had he been a genuine anti-American, de Gaulle might have savored the U.S. course into the swamp, especially because he had forecast each step. He might have perceived an opportunity for France to have greater freedom of action, as the United States became enmeshed, but de Gaulle was far more committed to world peace than to France’s opportunities, wrote Lacouture. De Gaulle saw a threat to world peace in the American involvement in Indochina, so close to China, itself in turmoil.

De Gaulle had a strategy for Indochina, which he launched in respect to Laos in 1962. In 1963, he proposed a neutralist solution for Vietnam, and this policy was adopted for Cambodia on Sept. 1, 1966. He expressed the hope that the Vietnamese people would make a “national effort” to attain unity and “independence from foreign influences,” and pledged that the French would make every effort to cooperate.

There were indications that North Vietnam was interested in such a proposal, and French officials had been sending out feelers to Hanoi from various capitals. But the situation deteriorated, with the generals’ coup and the assassinations of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu.

De Gaulle’s policy was founded on three ideas: that no military intervention in Asia would serve the cause of the West; that neutrality, at least for the Indochinese nations, or better for all Southeast Asia, would be the best way to establish an equilibrium, on the basis of which China, Hanoi’s policy for control of all Vietnam, and the Russian presence in Vietnam, could be dealt with.

De Gaulle had tried to bring Kennedy to support this policy. He also tried to work with all the leaders of the region, especially with Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, who had chosen the doctrine of the “just middle.” If, by their steadfastness, the Vietnamese people had succeeded in convincing de Gaulle of his error, this could also be made true of the Americans.

De Gaulle had warned President Eisenhower against military intervention on Sept. 1, 1959, and President Kennedy on

June 1, 1961, but his cautions were restrained, as long as the American engagement remained limited.

But, after the military coup against Ngo Dinh Diem, and as the Saigon government launched its brutal suppression of the Buddhist protests on Aug. 29, 1963, de Gaulle announced his views on Vietnam to the world. He wrote with his own hand, a statement that France, knowing the “value of this people,” wanted Vietnam to “deploy its activity into independence vis-à-vis the outside, into peace and unity internally.” Speaking of “the entirety of Vietnam,” he said that it was for its people to “choose the means” to achieve unity, and that France was ready to help it in this direction.

De Gaulle did not make an explicit reference to neutrality, but advocated reunification, without civil war. However, in Vietnam, he did not have the capability to carry out this policy, that he had had in Algeria.

Therefore, de Gaulle made a bold move: He established relations with the People’s Republic of China, making clear, in his speech on Jan. 31, 1964, that the fate of Indochina was an important element in this decision.

In establishing relations with Beijing, ending, for France, the political, economic, and military blockade that had been imposed on China for 15 years, de Gaulle changed the agenda. The London *Observer* reacted on Feb. 2, 1964: “De Gaulle has just entered Asian affairs like a diplomatic icebreaker,” the paper said.

But, wanting only to see this as a “challenge” from the French, the Americans and their Indochinese allies reacted negatively.

About de Gaulle’s Indochina diplomacy, Lacouture wrote: “What would it have been without the decisive gesture accomplished [in Algeria] 30 months previously, and which had already made him the privileged interlocutor of the Asian masses? In announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and the People’s Republic of China, on Jan. 27, 1964, General de Gaulle saw himself accorded in the Far East—including by India and Japan—a credit without rival.

“The business had been thoroughly reflected on and prepared by him, and conducted by him alone. . . . The ground had been prepared by the predecessors of Charles de Gaulle from the 1950s: in the course of the Geneva conference of 1954, Pierre Mendès-France had met, in Berne, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, whose efforts toward a peace settlement had appeared to be the promise of yet more positive days ahead. But the support given afterwards by Beijing to the Algerian insurgents had blocked the process—to say nothing of the latent veto from Washington, on any rapprochement between the allied and the Chinese revolution.

“This last argument was not of the kind to stop de Gaulle. On the contrary, the minor pleasure that he took in reminding Washington that French diplomacy was elaborated only in Paris, was combined with the major satisfaction, of bringing reason to history, and law to geopolitics. How could it be

possible, not to recognize that China was governed by the powers—good or bad—of Beijing, and not those of Taipei? And how could it be possible, to exclude from the great debates of Asia and the world in general, this giant nation, still exhausted and diminished, but richer in history than any other, and comprising, by itself, a quarter of humanity?”

Chiang Kai-shek remained an issue for de Gaulle, who remembered the common struggle of World War II. The wartime Chongqing government had based its legitimacy on its contribution to safeguarding the independence of China, not on its control of national territory. But on this point, Lacouture wrote, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai “had as much title as Chiang—for whom no organized movement, on the Chinese mainland, seemed any more to support the claim to legitimacy.”

As he wrote when he returned to power, de Gaulle made the recognition of Beijing a long-term project, to be realized as soon as the settlement of the Algerian conflict made that possible. In 1957, the General had read *The Serpent and the Tortoise*, a book written by Edgar Faure on his return from a stay in China, whose title was inspired by a poem by Mao. Faure called for establishing a “diplomatic link” between France and the P.R.C. He sent his book to de Gaulle, who sent him a response “totally favorable to [his] point of view,” accompanied by his habitual reservation, “If France had a state!”

In 1961, France had one, wrote Lacouture. Then, de Gaulle invited Faure to come “to speak to him about the Chinese problem.” Faure counselled caution, until the Algerian conflict were resolved.

Three years later, de Gaulle again asked Faure for his view. By then, not only was the Algerian conflict resolved—by the independence of Algeria in 1962—but China was also facing difficulties due to its frictions with the Soviets. “What better moment to choose to extend them a hand?” Faure asked de Gaulle. He also told the President that he was going to be invited to China.

De Gaulle the statesman said: “Yes, you will go to China. But you will go as my representative.”

The trip was combined with two other visits: one, on the way to China, to Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia, and on the way back, to Nehru in India. Lacouture wrote that this was done to cover up the real objective of the trip. But there was also, possibly, more to it. China and India had fought a short, but bitter boundary dispute in 1962—at the same time as the Cuban Missile Crisis—which had taken an enormous toll on the developing sector. Sending his envoy also to New Delhi at this point, was a wise move by de Gaulle.

The President gave Faure a personal letter of accreditation to the Chinese government. Faure noted that, on landing in China at the end of October 1963, the Chinese leaders treated him as a negotiator. “It was Zhou Enlai who took the affair in hand, and established, with Edgar Faure, a protocol of agreement that, on Nov. 2, the French envoy took upon himself to

sign, with the reservation that it must be approved by the official authorities, as he had only been charged with a mission of sounding things out. . . .

“A visit to Mao Zedong having put the most solemn seal on his mission, Faure left for Europe,” wrote Lacouture. During his stopover in New Delhi, he transmitted the agreement to the Elysée. “The General expressed his gratitude when he received his envoy, Nov. 22, 1963, the same day as the assassination of President Kennedy.”

With the loss of the young President, the two men were convinced that the conclusion of the affair had to take place in January 1964. De Gaulle made the effort to write to Chiang Kai-shek, on Jan. 14, 1964, to inform him personally. “But,” he wrote, “France could not for much longer ignore an established fact.”

A discreet mission by Jacques de Beaumarchais (Europe director in the French Foreign Ministry, very close to Couve de Murville) to the Ambassador of China in Berne, made possible the completion of the text initialled in November by Faure. A joint communiqué was simultaneously published on Jan. 27, in Beijing and in Paris, specifying that the two governments had decided “to establish diplomatic relations” and to exchange ambassadors, “in a three-month period.” The government of Beijing specified that France had accepted “one China.”

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Documentation

De Gaulle: ‘We shall talk about China’

On Jan. 31, 1964, de Gaulle spoke at the Elysée Palace on the new relations with China. Here are his remarks:

We shall talk about China.

I have been asked many questions. I shall answer everyone at the same time, and explain what the story is about.

China, a great people, the most numerous on earth; a race whose patient, laborious, and industrious capacity, over thousands of years, has with difficulty compensated its collective lack of method and cohesion, and constructed a very distinctive and profound civilization; a very vast, geographically compact country, although without unity, stretching from Asia Minor and the steppes of Europe, to the vast Pacific shore, and from the Siberian ice down to the tropical regions of the Indies and the Tonkin; a state more ancient than history, constantly resolved on independence, striving, without rest, for centralization, instinctively directed inward and distrustful of foreigners, but conscious and proud of an immutable perpetuity; such China has always been.

Coming into contact with modern nations was very hard and costly. In one century, numerous interventions, expeditions, and Japanese, European, and American invasions, brought it as many humiliations as dismemberments.

These terrible national upheavals, together with the elites’ desire to transform their country at all costs, to bring it to the same level of power and living conditions as the peoples that had oppressed it, led China to a revolution. Without doubt, Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, to whose valor, patriotism, and greatness of soul I must pay homage—I am convinced that one day history and the Chinese people will not fail to do as I have done—Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, after having led China to the Allied victory that concluded World War II in the Pacific, had attempted to hold back the flood. But the situation was such that it excluded all possibilities except the extreme. As soon as the United States, which had given the Marshal direct military support on the mainland, had to withdraw, he retreated to Formosa and the communist regime, long prepared by Mao Zedong, established its dictatorship. This took place 15 years ago.

Since then, the enormous effort which, in any case, was necessary for developing natural resources, for industrial development, for agricultural production, for educating the nation, for fighting against the country’s inherent scourges—hunger, epidemics, soil erosion, flooding of rivers, etc.—has

been deployed over the entire territory. As is always the case in a communist system, what had been achieved caused terrible suffering to the people, implacable coercion of the masses, huge losses and waste of goods, the crushing and decimation of innumerable human values. Nonetheless, it appears that at the price of so many sacrifices, some results have been attained, due in part to the action of the totalitarian apparatus and also, largely due to the passion of a proud people, deeply determined to elevate itself, in all cases, and also to the treasures of courage and ingenuity they are able to call forth, whatever the circumstances.

It is true that Soviet Russia, in the beginning, helped China a great deal, providing credits for machinery and purchases of supplies, providing mining and industrial equipment, installing entire factories, direct student and specialist training, sending engineers on site, technicians, skilled workers, etc. This was the time when the Kremlin, using there as elsewhere its rigorous preponderance within the communist Church to support Russian supremacy over the peoples whom a dictatorship similar to its own, had subordinated, counted on keeping China under its thumb, and, thereby to dominate Asia. But the illusion vanished.

Of course, there still remains, between the ruling regimes in Moscow and Beijing, a certain doctrinal solidarity that can manifest itself in the world ideological contest. But under a mantle, more torn every day, appears the inevitable difference of national politics. The least we can say on that subject is that in Asia, where the border between the two states from the Hindu Kush up to Vladivostok, is the longest in the world, the interest of Russia, which keeps and maintains, and that of China, which needs to grow and take, are by no means the same. It follows, that the attitude and action of a population of 700 million, can only be properly determined by its own government. Given that, for 15 years, almost the whole of China has been under a government that implements its laws and manifests itself abroad as an independent and sovereign power, France was prepared to establish regular relations with Beijing. Undoubtedly, some economic and cultural exchanges have already been put into practice. Undoubtedly, we were compelled, as were America, England, the Soviet Union, India, and other states, to negotiate with the Chinese representatives in 1954, when the Geneva Conference determined the fate of Indochina, or, as in 1962, in the same form and in the same city, the situation in Laos was somewhat defined. However, the weight of evidence and that of reason growing, day by day, the French Republic has decided, for its part, that the time is ripe to put its relations with the People's Republic of China on a normal level — otherwise called diplomatic. We have met identical intentions in Beijing, and we know that, on this point, President Edgar Faure, asked to carry out an informal survey on site (who visited China for the purpose at the end of 1963), reported positive indications to Paris. It was then that the two states agreed officially to do what was necessary.

I talked about the weight of evidence and of reason. In Asia, there is no political reality concerning, notably, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, or, either India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, Korea, or Soviet Russia as well, or also Japan, which does not interest or touch China. There is, in particular, no conceivable war or peace, on this continent, in which it would not be involved.

It would, therefore, be absolutely inconceivable without it to have an eventual neutrality agreement regarding the states of Southeast Asia—to which we Frenchmen, for so many reasons, pay such special and cordial attention; neutrality which, by definition, should be accepted by them all, guaranteed on the international scene, and would forbid armed incitements supported by any one of them in another, as well as many-sided interventions from abroad. Neutrality, in this period, seems to be the only situation compatible with a peaceful life and the progress of populations. But also, China's own mass, its values and present needs, the dimension of its future, makes it more and more an object of interest and concern to the world as a whole. For all these reasons, it is clear that France must hear China directly and also be heard by it.

Why not also mention, how fruitful personal relations can be between peoples, if they can be established, thanks to contacts established between two states? We should not entertain too many illusions in this regard. Economic trade, which is now being undertaken, and can, for sure, be improved, will remain limited for a long time. The same is true for investment in Chinese industrial development. But the case is different concerning technology, whose sources in France are more and more valuable, and for which China has an infinite number of uses. Finally, who knows if the affinities between the two nations concerning all things of the mind, given their deep-rooted, reciprocal sympathy and consideration, will not lead them to a growing cultural cooperation? That is, in any case, sincerely hoped for here.

Paris and Beijing have agreed to exchange ambassadors. Need it be said that, on our part, there is nothing in this decision that indicates any approbation for the political system that currently dominates China. After many free nations have done so, by establishing official relations with this state, as it has done with others that are subjected to a similar regime, France recognizes simply the world as it is. It believes that sooner or later, some governments that are still hesitating will follow its example. Above all, it may be, in the immense evolution of the world, that by multiplying exchanges between peoples, we would serve the cause of mankind, that is to say, that of wisdom, of progress, and of peace. It may be, that such contacts contribute to lessening the dramatic contrasts and opposition between different camps that divide the world. It may be that souls, wherever they may be on earth, arrive a bit sooner at the cross-road that France gave to the world 175 years ago, that of liberty, equality, and fraternity.