



CHARLES DE GAULLE, MYTHOLOGIZED, YET BETRAYED, PART I OF III

Posted on July 1, 2020 by Arnaud Imatz



Part II and Part III

The Military, Man Of Letters, Leader Of Free France

Since the start of the pandemic, essayists, journalists and politicians have kept repeating that “a new page in history has now been opened;” “that nothing will be the same as before;” and that “we must prepare the world for 'after'.”

Minions and sycophants let the media believe that the crisis was most skillfully handled by the authorities, while heedless of the deluge of harsh criticism. Shortsightedness, irresponsibility, belated and erratic management of the health crisis have all been constantly pointed out. Many observers have announced the end of happy globalization and the dictatorship of the markets, the death of Maastricht, neoliberal Europe and globalization, the death knell of financial capitalism, the ecological collapse—worse, the signal of the “convergence of disasters.” Pessimists, such as the philosopher Marcel Gauchet or the writer Michel Houellebecq, predict that “nothing will change;” on the contrary, “we will not wake up, after confinement, in a new world, [but] it will be the same, even a little worse.”

“Official” personalities, hitherto reputedly well-meaning and among the most unexpected, seized the ideas of their adversaries whom earlier they crushed under the weight of contempt. Doing a hundred-and-eighty-degree turn, they proclaimed the urgent need to reconsolidate the nations, to relocate production, to recover the autonomy and independence of the strategic State in order to meet the needs of a world become multipolar.

Others, more irreducible, the convinced “globalizers,” the self-proclaimed “progressives” (in fact neoconservatives, neoliberals and neo-social democrats lost in past reveries), wanted to see in the crisis only the demonstration of the imperious need to relaunch as quickly as possible an updated, reformed version of global “governance” and the EU “big market.” Listening to them, the maintenance of the freedom of movement of capital and people, the defense of the euro, the regularization of the “undocumented” (illegal immigrants), and above all, the precept “do not close the borders,” key dogma of liberal-libertarian ideology, remain inescapable, irrefutable requirements.

In short, everyone went about their analyses and their predictions according to their ideological reading

grid. With or without a “war on the epidemic,” the metapolitical and cultural struggle knew no truce. “When the crisis is over,” some imagine, “the upper portions of the state will be held accountable!” One can always dream about intentions. Was it not said in 1940, the day after the rout, and in 1945, after the Liberation, that those responsible were to be tried? And, finally, what did we see? Nothing, or almost nothing, except politicians and soldiers who invariably passed the buck—eighty years of debate and research on the causes and responsibilities of defeat, without a semblance of consensus among historians.

It is by chance that 2020, the year of disruption and the health debacle—which will come to shed more light on the extent of the general crisis (political, economic, cultural and moral)—coincides with the triple commemoration of General Charles de Gaulle: His birth on November 22, 1890; the Appeal on June 18, 1940, and his death on November 9, 1970. De Gaulle who is, with Napoleon, in France and outside France, the most famous of the French, even more so than [Saint Louis](#), [Louis XIV](#), [Joan of Arc](#), [Clémenceau](#), [Molière](#), [Racine](#), [Pasteur](#) and many others.

De Gaulle who, in public opinion in France, is a giant among the dwarfs, despite his often controversial choices and his sometimes Machiavellian methods. De Gaulle, whose qualities as a statesman cannot be disputed with regard to history, despite the age-old, litany and angry recriminations of the Gaullophobes, who are ever ready to rant against “ambition, presumption, vanity, arrogance, contempt, arrogance, self-centeredness, bitterness, resentment, ingratitude, meanness, the spirit of division, despotism, etc.” And against the “Grand Constable,” “the Idiot on High,” “the Two Meters Tall,” “the Big Asparagus.” And let us not forget of course the extravagant invectives against “the follower of totalitarianism,” the “anti-nationalist fanatic American,” the “Henchman of Communism,” the “Ally of the [FLN](#),” the “Apprentice Dictator,” the “Fascist General,” and so on and so forth.

De Gaulle, who contrasts with the mediocrity of his successors by his actions, his charisma, his energy, his voluntarism, his rectitude, his honesty and his morals without reproach. De Gaulle the statesman with integrity, incorruptibility, who distrusted luxury and money, abhorred prejudices, privileges, the influence peddlers, and made it a point of honor to pay out of his pocket the electricity bills for his private apartments at the Élysée. The General wished to observe a strict separation between his private life and his function as president. As soon as he arrived at the [Élysée Palace](#), he had a tiny chapel installed so that he could attend mass regularly. He had asked his aide-de-camp to find him all the objects necessary for religious service and had paid for them himself. We know that his wife had even bought an ordinary table service for private meals, and that De Gaulle scrupulously paid for guests

during the few family meals.

De Gaulle, finally, the great unknown, the little known, the apostle of the [Third Way](#) between liberalism and socialism, whose political thought was shamefully distorted, basely betrayed, emptied of its ideological content, reduced to a conventional attitude (the so-called "love of France" and the "refusal of the inevitable" that only serve to camouflage abandonment and renunciation in everyday life). De Gaulle, reduced to a vulgar pragmatism or even opportunism, a mixture of neoliberalism ([Balladur](#), [Sarkozy](#)) and neo-social-democratism ([Chirac](#), [Juppé](#)), and as such has been praised, mythologized and instrumentalized by the whole of the political class.

Let us remember these few words from the General's War Memoirs: "Since everything always starts over, all that I have done will, sooner or later, be a source of new ardor after I have disappeared." On the occasion of the triple Gaullian commemoration, it may be useful to mention the main facts and dates that marked the life and action of Charles de Gaulle, and to recall the great contours of his political thought. Obviously, we must avoid the double pitfall of apology and rant, hagiography and denigration, even if that is not an easy task. So, let's try to be, if not perfectly objective, at least rigorous, honest and sincere.

From 1962 to 1969, when I was a young ordinary citizen, I saw, heard and faithfully followed the first president of the Fifth French Republic. Almost all the students of my generation—at least activists and the most politicized—hated him. For my part, I was one of his devotees, in 1968. Since then, I have of course stepped back with age. I know the successes of Gaulle. I hold him to be "the last great figure in the history of France." But I also recognize, without reservations, his dithering and his errors. One can be an admirer of the Great Charles, and/or a supporter of historical or philosophical Gaullism, and consider that De Gaulle was right and that he was visionary (to use the suggestive title of Gérard Bardy's book), without being "Gaullite."

If we want to take the measure of the unusual, exceptional character of the man, it is enough to refer to some major works. There are of course those by declared sympathizers, like [Michel Tauriac](#), [Arnaud Teyssier](#), [Jean-Paul Bled](#), [François Broche](#), [Éric Branca](#), [Chantal Morelle](#), [Paul-Marie de la Gorce](#), [Alain Peyrefitte](#) or [François-Georges Dreyfus](#). There are those by repented antigaullists, like the ex-communists and ex-socialists Marxists, [Max Gallo](#) and [Régis Debray](#), the ex-admirer of the [Khmer Rouge](#), [Jean Lacouture](#), or the ex-president of the [Institut Mendés France](#), [Éric Roussel](#). There is also the biography of British historian Julian Jackson who, at the risk of straining credulity a little, says, "In

France he is a figure even more revered than Churchill in Great Britain." Finally, there are the very critical works, such as that of the ex-OAS activist, [Dominique Venner](#), author of one of the most severe indictments, who nevertheless was forced to admit de Gaulle's "the stature" of a "special character."

Military Man And A Man Of Letters

Charles de Gaulle was born in [Lille](#), on November 22, 1890, into a family of petty nobles, or even the old French bourgeoisie, Catholic, monarchist-[legitimist](#), which had recently joined the Republic. He was the son of Jeanne Maillot and Henri de Gaulle, a civil servant, a lawyer at the Paris Court of Appeal, a teacher of literature, history and mathematics at Stanislas High School. Charles, the third of the couple's five children, went to primary and secondary school in Paris, at private Catholic institutions. In 1909, he was enrolled 119th at [Saint Cyr Military Academy](#), from which he graduated 13th in his class, in 1912. The young second lieutenant was then assigned to the 33rd Infantry Regiment, commanded by [Colonel Philippe Pétain](#). For almost twenty years, the future Marshal, who made note of him favorably and even saw him as "the best hopes for the future," became a role model for de Gaulle.

On August 15, 1914, less than a month after the declaration of war, the young lieutenant de Gaulle was wounded in [Dinant](#). Decorated with the [Croix de Guerre](#) in January, he was again wounded in the hand, in the Somme, in March, and promoted to the rank of captain on September 3. On March 2, 1916, he was again injured, this time in the thigh, and taken prisoner in [Douaumont](#). Despite five escape attempts, he remained detained in Germany until the end of the war on November 11, 1918.

In July 1920, de Gaulle was assigned to the staff of [General Weygand](#), and participated in Polish army operations on the [Vistula](#). The purpose was to contain the Red Army which had invaded Poland. Back in France, in February of 1921, he was responsible for giving history lessons at Saint-Cyr. On April 6 of the same year, he married [Yvonne Vendroux](#), daughter of an industrialist from Calais, with whom he had three children (Philippe, Élizabeth and little Anne, who unfortunately remained mentally handicapped all her life and died of bronchopneumonia at the age of twenty).

At the [École de Guerre](#), which he entered in 1921, his independence of mind soon attracted the enmity of a few professors, who wrote notes criticizing him severely when he left in 1924. Marshal Pétain, also known for similar independence, trait, was Marshal Pétain took umbrage at this and made it known. His intervention probably led to the correction of these critical notes.

1924 was the year when de Gaulle, an excellent connoisseur of the German language, published his first book, *The Enemy's House Divided*. He explained the last months of the war and the causes of the enemy's defeat. Among Pétain's staff, *Colonel Laure* read the young captain's writings. He knew that good writing was hardly a common trait in the army and therefore recommended de Gaulle's name to the Marshal, who was vice president of the *Supreme War Council*. Invited to work on his staff, on July 1, 1925, de Gaulle was responsible for drafting articles and speeches and even writing a book on "the Soldier" that Pétain had been pondering for some time. Satisfied with the first drafts, the Marshal only asked for a few changes. Twelve years later, the project of this book would become the reason for a rupture between the two men.

During the summer of 1926, Marshal Pétain took de Gaulle on a tour to plot fortified sites in the East. "I will," he wrote, "go over to front with the most intelligent officer in the French army, to find out what he would have done if, before me, he had been the *Kronprinz*." In April 1927, at the request of Pétain, de Gaulle gave three lectures in the large amphitheater of the *École Supérieure de Guerre*. In the fall, he began again his lectures at the Sorbonne, at the invitation of the *Cercle Fustel de Coulanges*, a satellite organization of the *Action Française*. Promoted to the rank of Commandant in September, he then left to take command of the 19th *Chasseurs* Battalion, in *Trier*.

From 1929 to 1931, de Gaulle was assigned to Beirut in the intelligence service (2nd and 3rd Bureaus) of the army of the Levant. From his experience, he co-wrote with Commander Yvon, *Histoire des troupes du Levant* (A History of the Troops in the Levant), published in 1931.

Back in France, he was appointed to the 3rd Bureau of the Secretariat of the Superior Council of National Defense. In July 1932, de Gaulle published, *The Edge of the Sword*, in which he compiled and completed the lectures given at the École de Guerre. In his dedication, erased in 1945, he expressed his gratitude to Pétain: "This attempt, Monsieur le Maréchal, can only be dedicated to you, because nothing shows better than your glory what the virtues of action can draw from the light of thought." On copy number one, he added in his own hand, "a tribute to a very respectful and very deep devotion."

In 1934, a book appeared that became famous, *Vers l'armée de métier* (Towards the Professional Army, but strangely translated into English as *The Army of the Future*), in which de Gaulle defended the creation of a professionally powerful motorized and mechanical army. At the same time, he met the former vice-president of the Council of Ministers, *Paul Reynaud*, member of the *Democratic Alliance*, a moderate right-wing party, and gradually became his adviser on defense and strategy. Lecturer at the

[Center for Advanced Military Studies](#), from 1935 to 1936, de Gaulle was subsequently assigned to the command of the 507th tank destroyer regiment of Metz and promoted to colonel in December 1937.

In September 1938, de Gaulle published [La France et son armée](#) (*France and Her Army*), a work in which he traced the war episodes of France. We will return to the difficult and ambiguous circumstances of this publication. On September 2, 1939, the day before England and France declared war on the Third Reich (September 3), Colonel de Gaulle was appointed acting commander of the tanks of the Fifth Army in the Lorraine-Alsace region.

On May 10, 1940, after eight months of the [Phoney War](#) (the *Sitzkrieg*), the real war began. In less than five days, the [19th Army Corps](#), Panzer Group [Guderian](#), crossed the [Meuse out of the Ardennes](#) (May 12) and broke through the French defenses in the Sedan sector (May 14). On May 19, faced with the magnitude of the disaster, Reynaud (chairman of the board since March 22) dismissed [General-in-Chief Gamelin](#) and appointed Generalissimo Maxime Weygand (73 years of age) in his place. Simultaneously, on May 18, he recalled, from his embassy in Madrid, the old Marshal Pétain (84 years old) and brought him into the government as vice-president of the council of ministers.

On May 17, 1939, de Gaulle launched the Montcornet counteroffensive near Laon, at the head of the 4th Armored Division, the best French armored unit. Facing the rear of the 2nd Panzer, it had to fall back with heavy losses, the enemy having decimated two thirds of its tanks. On May 25, Reynaud and General Weygand appointed de Gaulle brigadier general and acting commander of the [Fourth Armored Reserve Division](#).

On May 28, de Gaulle launched a new offensive against the Abbeville communications node. But after an appreciable advance of its tanks, the Germans regrouped. In 10 days, the Fourth Armored Division lost 40% of its force and came to know the limits of exhaustion. In Dunkirk, British and Canadian troops were evacuated between May 24 and June 4. On June 6, Reynaud entrusted de Gaulle with the portfolio of Under-Secretary of State for War. Then, Reynaud de Gaulle went to London on June 9 to meet Churchill and obtain air reinforcements.

On June 10, 1939, stabbed in the back, Italy declared war on France. In the evening of the 13th, the Council of Ministers was told about a possible transfer of the government to North Africa, but the project was rejected, as had been the idea of a withdrawal to Brittany earlier, which was deemed unrealistic at the time, and where the French army was defeated. Pétain, vice-president of the council,

categorically refused any government-in-exile project. For him, to abandon French territory, to go into exile was to desert.

Two cliques were formed; one, favorable to the departure to Africa and the Empire, around the radicals [Édouard Daladier](#), [Édouard Herriot](#) and [Jules Jeanneney](#); the other, for staying on in France, around [Adrien Marquet](#), the radical-socialist, and [Pierre Laval](#), the defector from the Socialist Party (SFIO) who went to the center-right.

On June 14, de Gaulle was again charged with the difficult mission of obtaining essential reinforcements from England, but his attempts in London remained unsuccessful. When he returned to Bordeaux, where the government of Paul Reynaud had withdrawn, he was the bearer of a surprising offer from Winston Churchill, an offer that seems to have originated with [Jean Monnet](#), the future American agent. This was the political union of Great Britain and France. Arousing suspicion in the Council of Ministers, due to France's catastrophic situation and its imbalance *vis-à-vis* Great Britain, the proposal to merge the two nations into a Franco-British nation was quickly dismissed.

At the front, the debacle was in full swing. Nine million civilians were scattered on the roads. Two million prisoners had already been captured. On June 14, 1940, the Germans entered Paris, an open city. On the 15th, Paul Reynaud expressed the possibility of putting an end to hostilities. He even mentioned for the first time in the Council of Ministers the word "armistice."

The radical socialist, [César Campinchi](#), Minister of the Navy (who was given this position by [Léon Blum](#) and [Camille Chautemps](#)), also expressed the opinion that it was advisable to start talks quickly with the Germans, and asked if a man, who had not been involved in the pre-war political struggles, would not be more likely to make this terrible solution accepted in the country. On that day, the idea of an armistice was put forward by two parliamentarians (one from the left, Campinchi, and one from the right, who would later reverse, Reynaud). The two designated the man who could do it best, the old Marshal Pétain, now eighty-four years old!

At the exit door, Reynaud went straight to Weygand: "General, as we agreed earlier, you are going to ask for the capitulation of the army." Weygand, in agreement with Pétain, shouted, it was out of the question: Capitulation is a military act of surrender, while the armistice is a political act which puts an end to hostilities without definitively ending the state of war. Capitulation would allow the army to be defeated; it would be infamy, for it would place the country at the mercy of the winner. The armistice,

on the other hand, a political ceasefire agreement resulting from negotiations, could help to protect the interests of the defeated.

Head Of Free France

On June 16, 1940, Paul Reynaud (now in favor of the continuation of the war in North Africa but now a minority view), tendered his resignation, after having advised the President of the Republic, [Albert Lebrun](#), to get Marshal Pétain to constitute a government. According to Lebrun, it was with the agreement of the presidents of the chambers, Édouard Herriot (Chamber of Deputies) and Jules Jeanneney (Senate), that he appeal to the Marshal, who would agree to constitute a government of national unity ranging from conservatives to socialists.

The next day, through the Spanish ambassador to Paris, [José Félix de Lequerica](#), Pétain ordered an armistice with Germany. At dawn on June 17, the French request for an armistice reached German headquarters. The same day, at nine in the morning, de Gaulle left Bordeaux for London, in the airplane of [General Spears](#), personal representative of Churchill in France.

Also on June 17, 1940, Marshal Pétain addressed the French on the radio: "I give France the gift of my person." The next day, June 18, the BBC opened its studios to de Gaulle who launched a first appeal to French soldiers, which has remained famous in history, even though few French have heard it: "Whatever happens, the flame of resistance must not go out and will not go out."

The armistice was signed on June 22, 1940 with Germany (on the one hand, by [General Charles Huntzinger](#) and Ambassador [Léon Noël](#), and on the other, by General [Wilhelm Keitel](#)), and on June 24, with Italy (by General Huntzinger, Marshal [Pietro Badoglio](#) and Minister [Galeazzo Ciano](#)).

On June 23, the appointment of Charles de Gaulle to the rank of general on a temporary basis was canceled for having left France without authorization and for having carried out a political act on London radio. Demoted to the rank of colonel, de Gaulle, was automatically retired by a decree signed by the President of the Republic, Albert Lebrun. But on June 28, 1940, Churchill's British government recognized de Gaulle as "leader of the Free French."

For de Gaulle, the armistice was dishonorable and unacceptable. Once the army was demobilized, the

fleet, the planes, the tanks, all the weapons had to be delivered intact to the Nazi adversary, who would be able to use them against the allies of France. The homeland and its government would be reduced to servitude. This was cowardice. This was forfeiture. This was a crime. Creating the [French National Committee](#), a government body in exile, Charles de Gaulle did not hesitate to challenge the legality and legitimacy of the government of Pétain, formed at the request of the President of the Republic and confirmed on July 10 by the vote of the two chambers (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) gathered in [Vichy](#).

De Gaulle, who had enjoyed an estimable military career until then, was to prove himself, as head of Free France an outstanding politician, to be the most gifted of all French politicians of the 20th century. "In times of revolutions," writes Talleyrand, "one finds skill only in boldness, and greatness only in exaggeration." His path was to be strewn with pitfalls and obstacles, for there are always more thistles and thorns than flowers.

But de Gaulle did win most of the political battles he waged. On July 3, 1940, without informing him, the British navy captured, in quick succession, the French fleet at harbor in Alexandria; then the marines of his Gracious Majesty seized French ships which had taken refuge in the English ports; and the English fleet, at the orders of Admiral [James Somerville](#), sank unarmed French ships harbored at [Mers el-Kébir](#) (1300 French sailors were killed).

On August 2, de Gaulle was stripped of his rank and sentenced to death in absentia, by court martial, under General [Aubert Frère](#) (the future head of [Organisation de résistance de l'armée](#), who died in deportation to Germany). September 23 saw the failure of the Franco-British landing operation in [Dakar](#), which was repulsed by the troops of the Vichy government, under the command of [Pierre-François Boisson](#), Governor of [French West Africa](#) (AOF).

A year later, in June 1941, when the Anglo-Gaullist forces entered Syria and Lebanon, they encountered the army of the Vichy government. An armistice was concluded, but only between the English and Vichy, which led to a serious crisis between Churchill and de Gaulle, the leader of [Free France](#), when the latter was confronted with a *fait accompli*.

In July 1940, in the early days of Free France, the supporters of de Gaulle were only a handful of men. The 50,000 French people present in England were mostly repatriated. Only 1,200, mostly young nationalists or patriots on the far right, chose to stay with him. Ever careful, the General sadly admitted

years later: "Out of 39 million inhabitants, this was very little."

But three years later, in the summer of 1943, there were between 50,000 and 70,000 (including 32,000 AOF colonials, who were not French citizens). After the American landing in North Africa in November 1942, and the subsequent joining of the Vichy African Army (generals [Jean De Lattre](#), [Alphonse Juin](#), [Henri Giraud](#)), the headcount increased to more than 300,000 men.

De Gaulle's authority was finally admitted, but not without numerous open conflicts and severe friction. In London, the first form of antigaullist opposition came, on the one hand, from intellectuals and journalists from the review, [France-Libre](#), founded by [André Labarthe](#) and [Raymond Aron](#); and, on the other hand, from certain hosts of [Radio-London](#) ([Robert Mengin](#)). These Free French, who had the ear of the American State Department, did not stop criticizing the "Bonapartism" of the General, even "the fascist tendencies" of "the apprentice dictator," "the child of the Action Française," and "la [Cagoule](#)."

For their part, the Vichyssois of North Africa, who found also themselves in the fight against Germany, after putting up a limp resistance to the [American landing](#) (November 8, 1942), and blundering with the help of the German invasion of the [Free Zone](#) (November 11, 1942), were not very convinced either. Algiers was once a veritable nest of vipers. General Maxime Weygand, a supporter of the "National Revolution" and loyal to the Marshal, embodied an attempt at "Pétainist resistance." He tried to strengthen the French Armistice Army, more particularly that of Africa, but arrested by the Gestapo, he was placed with Daladier, Reynaud and Gamelin under house arrest in the Austrian Tyrol ([Itter Castle](#)). Admiral [François Darlan](#), ex-successor to Pétain, went to Algiers and joined the Americans in November 1942, after much hesitation and about-turns.

After the invasion of the Free Zone, the [scuttling of the French fleet](#) in the harbor of Toulon was ordered, on November 27, 1942, by the admiralty of Vichy in agreement with the instructions of 1940 (which had been ordered by Darlan himself, justified as a foreign power trying to seize French assets). A month later, Darlan was arrested and murdered in Algiers, on the orders of the royalist resistance fighter, fiercely anti-Vichyist, [Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie](#).

General Giraud, who had escaped from Germany with the help of members of the 2nd Vichy office, came to embody the resistance of the traditional right. One time seen by the Americans and the English as a counter to de Gaulle, Giraud was definitively excluded from the French Committee of National Liberation ([CFLN](#)) in April 1944.

Two other generals, both ex-Vichysts, Juin and De Lattre, may serve as examples, one at the head of the French expeditionary force in Italy; the other, during the [landing in Provence](#) and during the [Rhine](#) and [Danube](#) campaigns. In fact, one of the few officers rallying from the very beginning to de Gaulle was Captain [Philippe Leclerc](#), a former sympathizer of Action Française who became general in August 1944. His division (2nd Armored Division), landed in Normandy on August 1, 1944, a month after the Allies, and participated actively, with the Americans, in the liberation of [Paris](#) and [Strasbourg](#).

De Gaulle's authority over Free France had been debated among the Allies for a long time as well. The double game of the English and the Americans was almost permanent throughout the war. Roosevelt never stopped riling Marshal Pétain, not ruling out the idea of relying on him to rebuild France when liberation came. He won some time, hoping to find a more docile French representative, less irreducible than de Gaulle. There were the Vichysts, who rallied after 1942 to the Allies, such as, Generals Weygand and De Lattre, then Admiral Darlan, then General Giraud.

The Americans planned to administer France liberated by the armies, and they did not give up on this idea. In this regard, de Gaulle confided to his son: "Roosevelt only cares about occupying France as he will occupy Nazi Germany. He wants to transform our country into a condominium [a territory over which several sovereign states would exercise joint sovereignty, NDLA], and Churchill is not far from advocating the same thing." In fact, Churchill seemed to agree with him when he said: "Whenever we have to choose between Europe and the open sea, we will always choose the open sea."

During the landing in North Africa on November 1942, de Gaulle was kept away by the Americans. In May 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill demanded de Gaulle cooperate with General Giraud. In June, Vice-Admiral Émile Muselier, a free Frenchman from the outset, joined General Giraud's camp.

The White House secretly conspired, until the very end, against de Gaulle. His only true ally, the only important American friend, seems to have been General [Dwight Eisenhower](#). Ever the realist, de Gaulle noted: "Until the last day of the war, we should have fought on that front too. But it must be said that in a war of alliance, each ally is actually waging his own war and not that of others." He added, without mincing words: "The English who died while liberating France, gave their lives for Great Britain and the king. The Americans who died in liberating France, died for the United States of America and for no one else. Just as all the French who died on the battlefield, including for the independence of the United States of America, died for France and the king who personified it."

On June 6, 1944, on the eve of the Normandy landings, de Gaulle was still kept away by the Allies. On February 4, 1945, at the Yalta conference, France was absent. It was so also at the Potsdam conference in August 1945. But on May 8, 1945, in Berlin, during the [German capitulation](#), de Gaulle, the French representative was a signatory and not just a witness, as in May 7 in Reims. De Lattre signed, along with the three Allied generals—[A.W. Tedder](#) for the British, [G. Zhukov](#) for the Soviets, and [Carl Spaatz](#) for the Americans. De Gaulle, who had always been aware of France's weaknesses and the size of the armed forces mobilized during the Second World War, said to [Georges Pompidou](#) in 1950: "We just bluffed." Be that as it may, in 1945, after eight months of tough negotiations, he managed to bring France's voice into the United Nations. Thanks to him, France became one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Until 1943, the resistance fighters inside France were more or less unanimous far from unanimous supporters of General de Gaulle. In 1941, resistance, especially fueled by young patriotic and nationalist idealists, was relatively marginal. Then, after the German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941, a first group of Communists joined the fight. Up till then, the French Communists fraternized with the occupier, in the name of the "struggle against the capitalist bourgeoisie."

The [PCF](#) political bureau even wrote a letter to the German [Kommandantur](#) in Paris, on June 25, 1940, asking for authorization to publish the newspaper [L'Humanité](#), in the name of the [German-Soviet Pact](#) (August 23, 1939). This did not prevent the PCF from presenting itself at the Liberation as the first resistant party in France, tirelessly promoting the myth of the 75,000 Communists shot by the Germans; while, in actuality, historians count less than 4,000.

Communist propaganda also claimed that the Secretary General of the PCF, [Maurice Thorez](#), was the "first of the communist resisters," when he had actually deserted on October 3, 1939 and had spent the entire duration of the war in the USSR (Pardoned by de Gaulle, in the name of realpolitik, he became minister of State with three other PCF ministers in the second provisional government of the head of Free France, from November 1945 to January 1946, then, vice-president of the council in 1947).

In reality, it was only after the invasion of the Free Zone in November 1942, and especially after the great German defeats on the Eastern Front, in 1943, that we can really speak of an anti-German and anti-Pétainist resistance. Many historians agree on this point: Pétain's capital fault was not leaving France in November 1942. "If he had left," said de Gaulle, "he would have returned on his white horse, winning as in 1918." Until the end of 1942, you could be both Petainist and belong to the Resistance.

The Pétain doctrine was above all a wait-and-see attitude, which ulcerated, as happened with the Gaullists of London and the internal Resistance, and as happened with the authentic fascists, anti-Vichyssois and ultras of the collaborationists of Paris. As a stubborn old man, Pétain imagined that he would be able to allow France to rebuild its forces apart from its neutrality. He waited until the deals were made among the various belligerents, hoping to be able to reappear one day. A striking example of a Pétainist passing on Resistance, while also being anti-Gaullist was the future Minister of the Fourth Republic, and President of the Fifth Republic, [François Mitterrand](#). In the spring of 1943, sponsored by two members of Marshal Pétain's cabinet, Mitterrand was decorated with the Order of the Francisque, the highest distinction of the Vichy regime. But in November, he approached the ORA (Organization of Resistance of the Army which was Giraudist) and went into hiding.

At the beginning of 1943, the various Resistance organizations brought together 40,000 people, a number which soon rose to 100,000 and then to 300,000 at the time of the Liberation. Of course, as de Gaulle would say, of these 300,000 resistance fighters, "many resisted without having carried arms." In addition, half fled the [STO](#) (Compulsory Labor Service), while 700,000 men went to work in German factories, either forced or voluntarily (like the future Secretary General of the PCF, [Georges Marchais](#)).

Against all odds, de Gaulle resisted. His tenacity, his perseverance, was ultimately crowned with success. In the difficult process of unification of the Resistance, two stages were essential: The creation of the [National Council of the Resistance](#), on May 27, 1943, by [Jean Moulin](#), the delegate of De Gaulle, and the creation of the [French Forces of the Interior](#) (FFI), on February 1, 1944, by his other delegate, [Jacques Bingen](#). In Algiers, de Gaulle won over all of his competitors. On October 3, 1943, he became the only undisputed president of the French Committee for National Liberation (CFLN). A year later, on June 14, 1944, in Bayeux, he had the immense pleasure of [delivering a first speech](#) on the soil of liberated France. On August 26, de Gaulle triumphantly [walked the Champs-Élysées](#).

On November 13, 1945, he was unanimously elected President of the provisional government by members of the Constituent Assembly. The General presided over two governments, from June 1944 to January 1946. Being a supporter of a regime with a strong executive, he soon ran up against socialists, communists and Christian Democrats who wanted nothing from the world. The old ruling caste of the [Third Republic](#), once believed to be definitively discredited by defeat and occupation, resurfaced and once again took over the great levers of power of the state. De Gaulle, who denounced the exclusive party regime, was forced to resign on January 20, 1946.

Part II and Part III

The original version of this article appeared in Le Cercle Aristote. Translated by N. Dass.

Arnaud Imatz, a Basque-French political scientist and historian, holds a State Doctorate (DrE) in political science and is a correspondent-member of the Royal Academy of History (Spain), and a former international civil servant at OECD. He is a specialist in the Spanish Civil War, European populism, and the political struggles of the Right and the Left – all subjects on which he has written several books. He has also published numerous articles on the political thought of the founder and theoretician of the Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, as well as the Liberal philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, and the Catholic traditionalist, Juan Donoso Cortés.

The image shows a portrait of Charles de Gaulle.

