

Responses

Comment on Moravcsik

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A detailed commentary on Andrew Moravcsik's article would probably end up being even longer than his essay. With much regret (but life is too short) I will therefore concentrate on essentials and leave aside many of the questions raised by Moravcsik in the last pages of his article.

He has made a major contribution to our understanding of both de Gaulle's statecraft and France's European policy under the General by proving that an exclusively geopolitical interpretation minimizes or even neglects the importance of economic considerations. De Gaulle devoted a very large amount of his time, his speeches, and his press conferences to economic affairs (far more than did the journalists who commented on his acts and words). Economic issues mattered greatly to him, but not, as Moravcsik sometimes suggests, because he had to use them to obtain public support. The referendums, which were all held for that purpose, never dealt with economic or social affairs. The presidential election of 1965 came precisely at a moment when he had deliberately antagonized the farmers' organizations by his high-handed tactics in Brussels.

Economics mattered because de Gaulle was a relentless modernizer, and because he believed, rightly, that economic modernization was essential for France's *grandeur*. It was part and parcel of his overall geopolitical design. The military may have been the "backbone" of the "skeleton," but economic strength was the ribcage (it may be time to stop that metaphor). De Gaulle's view of the world was a highly agonistic one, and he saw economic competition as a crucial component of the endless contest of states. Economic modernization thus was a means of the highest importance to the goals of power, *grandeur*, and activism, set by a modern mercantilist (by which I mean a leader who was pragmatic enough to believe in state intervention whenever necessary, and in free markets and competition whenever these could help

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the modernization of a country deemed incorrigibly archaic by many observers in the 1940s and 1950s; a man who saw the virtues of shock therapy such as the opening of borders and understood the deadening effects of industrial protectionism; a man for whom wealth was power, and power and activism in world affairs were the coins of *grandeur*).

De Gaulle and his prime minister, Michel Debré, whose reformist zeal and administrative imagination Moravcsik dismisses or ignores, understood that, for France's influence abroad as well as for its transformation at home, a common European agricultural policy would be a crucial enterprise—indeed, one for which the politicians of the Fourth Republic who had signed the Treaty of Rome had failed to push sufficiently hard. De Gaulle may have disdained discussions of the price of wheat but assuredly not the production of wheat for export and domination of the European market. The subsidies to the favorite farm organization of the Fifth Republic, the *Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles* (FNSEA), were quite different from the subsidies the Fourth Republic had wasted in its attempt to keep alive thoroughly unproductive and uncompetitive traditional farmers. The merit of the agricultural policies set up by Debré at home and by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was to give France an agricultural *force de frappe* comparable to West Germany's industrial might *and* to "free" the great majority of French farmers for jobs in industry and the services. A much smaller rural population was far more productive than the traditional *France paysanne*. De Gaulle did not have to reverse his preferences, as Moravcsik would have us believe.

An economic reading of de Gaulle's European policy is overdue, and Moravcsik provides us with much scholarship. But it is partly wrong-headed and quite incomplete. What is wrong is the glide from an economic interpretation to an interpretation in terms of economic pressure groups. He asserts, but nowhere proves, that de Gaulle's agricultural policy in the European Economic Community (EEC) was a response to, or aimed at satisfying, the demands "of powerful domestic economic constituencies." De Gaulle was, as a clever politician, happy to satisfy them and to receive their support when their preferences coincided with his policies (the FNSEA's ideas about the transformation of French agriculture went in the direction de Gaulle and Debré wanted). But when their preferences clashed with his priorities, he did not hesitate to oppose them, as he did during the crisis of 1965. It is true that his policies toward labor, students, and teachers were often timid, and he was reluctant to confront well-entrenched interests, but this was in areas far less directly related to France's power on the world stage.

As for the incomplete character of Moravcsik's analysis, one can see it better if one begins by realizing that de Gaulle's policy toward Europe had

three quite distinct components. First, there was the EEC set up by the Treaty of Rome, which he saw as a potentially useful “treaty of commerce.” He therefore wanted both to exploit it and to keep it limited to the economic sphere. This, in turn, meant three imperatives: First, the EEC had to be made into a mechanism for French modernization and power. Second (and here we are already on the bridge to “geopolitics”), it had to be a tool of his West German policy, a factor so important that it ruled out any sabotage or abandonment of the EEC (despite its unwelcome institutional features) and made the EEC’s survival crucial even after the fiasco of the Franco-West German Treaty of 1963 (indeed, *especially* after that fiasco). Third, the supranational features had to be erased or eroded—hence the crisis of 1965, which Moravcsik treats as if de Gaulle deliberately provoked, even though, *en passant*, Moravcsik notes that the General mainly took advantage of the imprudent initiatives of the Hallstein Commission, just as in 1962 he had exploited a botched assassination attempt as an opportunity to mandate the election of the President by universal suffrage. Contrary to Moravcsik, I consider that de Gaulle in 1965 achieved the two objectives he had in mind: the dilution and delaying of qualified majority voting and the downgrading of the Commission, which for the next twenty years played a minor role in EEC developments.

One of the concrete reasons for his wanting to get rid of supranational features (which he disliked in any case as a matter of principle) was also the reason he so carefully and consistently dealt with the EEC exclusively as an economic organization (thus arguing against British entry in purely economic terms). He knew that, for France’s partners, the EEC was not just an economic tool, or a means to tie West Germany’s economy to the economies of its associates; it was a beachhead toward a federal Europe he did not want, partly because he sought to protect French independence, and partly because he had a conception of Europe’s role in the world that his partners did not share.

The second component of de Gaulle’s European policy was the building of a political and strategic “European Europe” on an intergovernmental basis. This was at the heart of three moves: the Fouchet plan, the veto of British entry into the EEC, and the opening to Soames. The Fouchet plan was certainly not an elaborate deception. De Gaulle had sketched out a comparable design as early as 1945. The idea of coordinating foreign and defense policies was always important to him, but it had to be done in an intergovernmental set-up. The target he wanted to strike was not the EEC, which he viewed as a mere “treaty of commerce”; his target was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He made considerable efforts to get his partners to accept the plan, and a compromise was on the verge of being reached in the summer of 1961. But Belgium and the Netherlands, encouraged by Great Britain, wanted

a treaty that would explicitly refer to a possible future evolution toward supranationality and to the primacy of NATO. Hence his decision to take back the concessions he had made. Given the stakes, he wanted a Fouchet Plan on his terms or not at all. He may well have had no alternative to the EEC (hence the sharp limits of his “reprisals” against the Commission in 1965), but in terms of both *Weltpolitik* and NATO, he had an alternative to the Fouchet Plan: unilateral action, plus a Franco-West German treaty.

The veto of British entry was not the result of economic considerations only. De Gaulle stressed these in public to be consistent with his desire to restrict the EEC to economic issues. Many of the economic disagreements might have been negotiable. But despite Britain’s and France’s parallel distrust of supranationality, the two states had made incompatible geopolitical choices. Britain had remained “subordinate” to Washington (as shown after Rambouillet and confirmed by the Nassau deal), whereas the whole of de Gaulle’s effort was to reduce the weight of the (necessary) American alliance and to build up a European capacity for autonomous action. As usual with de Gaulle, his rejection of Britain was a complex calculation. He knew from his experience in World War II that the chief diplomatic characteristics of the British were obstinacy and persistence, and therefore he had two fears. Even if an agreement could be reached on economic issues, Britain once within the EEC would try to turn it into a mere free trade area, sabotage the CAP, and ally itself with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) against France in negotiations for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Also, Britain in the EEC would work to bolster the already considerable resistance of the other Five to de Gaulle’s geopolitical designs (he alluded to this in the press conference of January 1963).

The opening to Soames in 1969 was not a reversal of de Gaulle’s economic strategy; all he was offering the UK was an association agreement with the EEC. It was a revival of the Fouchet Plan: a great power directory for Europe. He resurrected it because of the limited results of his East-West and Third World policies and because of the temporary return to the Cold War climate of the early 1960s after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Also, the results of the Franco-West German alliance had been disappointing both on the strategic front (Ludwig Erhard had not taken up de Gaulle’s offer of nuclear cooperation) and on the monetary front (during the financial crisis of November 1968). This was not the same thing as Georges Pompidou’s lifting of the veto on Britain’s accession to the EEC. Both moves entailed a turn toward the United Kingdom and away from Bonn; but de Gaulle remained hostile—yes, partly on economic grounds—to having Britain in the EEC. Pompidou wanted to end the stalemate within the Community so that it could resume its march toward economic and monetary union, industrial policy,

and other common goals. Unlike de Gaulle, Pompidou before 1973 had little interest in the geopolitical dimension of world affairs. Like de Gaulle, he disliked supranationality in the EEC, and he hoped Britain's presence in the organization would reinforce his opposition to supranationality.

The third "volet" of de Gaulle's European policy was his opening to the USSR, his policy of *détente*, and his bid for European unification. We know that it failed—in the short run.

To conclude: Moravcsik has pushed a sound point too far; he is too "either-or" here as well as in his splendid book. Like Churchill, de Gaulle could, at times, be discouraged and depressed. But he was consistent and put a highly complex policy at the service of very clear and simple goals. He failed to "realize his distinctive geopolitical and ideological vision," but not for the reasons Moravcsik lists. Moravcsik may be right in saying that de Gaulle's first priority was "to maintain his electoral position in France," but that does not explain French setbacks in Europe. De Gaulle failed to get the Fouchet Plan—at a time when his domestic mandate was extraordinarily strong—because his partners did not like either the structure or the purposes of the plan. He was unable to limit the EEC to pure intergovernmentalism, not because of domestic constraints but because of the other members' resistance (and he got much of what he wanted in this case anyhow). The economic origins of de Gaulle's policies deserve to be explored as thoroughly as Moravcsik has done. But they were neither dominated by interest group considerations nor exclusive of other calculations, to which they were closely bound.