Building Global Partnerships

112 Gripes about the French Revisited

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"You ride on the subway, and the smell almost knocks you out, garlic, sweat—and perfume!" Anyone who has ever ridden on the metro in Paris on a hot summer day can likely relate to this "gripe," in this case expressed by American servicemen posted in France after the end of World War II in 1945. Although a severe shortage of soap caused by four years of German occupation made the odor on the metro worse, a crowded metro is still not a pleasant place to be.

Since President Charles de Gaulle's decision in 1966 to withdraw from the integrated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command structure and to expel American bases from France, no widescale interaction has occurred between American and French airmen. For many American Airmen, their direct impressions of France and the French likely depend upon what they retain from a weekend visit to Paris or Euro Disneyland from their bases in Germany. Without any

other references, Airmen may have picked up opinions and stereotypes unwittingly from pop culture, from other Airmen, from their families, and so forth. Insidiously, they become part of an Airman's mind-set. Although complaints about the smell on the French metro may seem innocuous, other commonly held stereotypes reflect underlying misunderstandings and prejudices against the French. At a time in which the Department of Defense (DOD) has identified "building partnerships" as one of its essential core competencies and the Air Force has embarked on an ambitious "Global Partnership Strategy," these prejudices are counterproductive, impeding the very partnership the service seeks with the Armée de l'Air (French air force). These partnerships become crucial as the DOD reduces its size and looks to cut costs whenever possible, thus leveraging off the strength of partnerships.

Identifying the Problem: Francophobes, They Are among Us

Last year, the saga of the sexual assault charges brought against Mr. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a Frenchman and former director of the International Monetary Fund, once again revealed the all-too-familiar anti-French sentiments that exist in the United States. These sentiments are often evidenced by the open bashing of the French by everyday Americans on television, in the newspaper, and on the Internet. Justin Vaïsse, historian and researcher at the Brookings Institution, identified four categories of "francophobes" in the United States, including the State Department and the diplomatic realm; liberals; conservatives and neoconservatives; and the Jewish-American community.[1] Certainly, American military members likely fit into one of the three latter groups, but it is instructive to consider them separately as a fifth group that holds predictable (and negative) views of the French. As a distinct subculture within American society, US military members are particularly sensitive to certain actions of the French, such as their perceived abandonment of NATO in 1966, the refusal to grant overflight of French airspace in the 1986 bombing of Muʿammar Gadhafi's

compound in Libya, and, of course, the most recent flare-up over the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

A case in point: at the Air Force Association's annual convention held in September 2011 in Washington, DC, Charles Krauthammer delivered a keynote address in which he outlined the current geopolitical landscape and national security challenges. This serious presentation addressed the threat posed by Iran and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He made the point that nuclear weapons in and of themselves don't pose an existential threat but that the possessor could. He noted that Americans aren't threatened by Great Britain's having such weapons and that, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, we are no longer worried about a nuclear exchange with the Russians. Nor are we concerned about the French, Krauthammer declared, but then seemed to reconsider—well, we're not so sure about the French. Alas, thence it came, out of the blue (no pun intended), an impromptu joke—and, of course, it was "just a joke." However, it wasn't so much the joke but the resultant laughter that resounded in the hall filled with senior Air Force officers, chiefs, and noncommissioned officers which made clear to even the most casual observer—and to the French *aviateurs* in the audience—the particular perception we American Airmen have of our "enemy." This took place on the same platform from which senior Air Force leaders invoked the necessity to build global partnerships and extolled the virtues of French and other European airmen.

This is not a new phenomenon. Nor is it a perception that began, as some believe, with the recalcitrant President de Gaulle and his decision to withdraw France from the integrated military command structure of NATO. Back in 1945, negative perceptions and stereotypes about the French were so prevalent amongst American GIs stationed in postwar France that the Army Department felt compelled to produce a small handbook, *112 Gripes about the French*. Issued to enlisted personnel, it served as a tool to defuse the growing tension between the American military and the locals.[2] Set out in a question-and-answer format, *112 Gripes about the French* posed a series of complaints about

the French and then provided a commonsense rejoinder to each, doing so, according to the original editors, not "to 'defend' the French or to chastise Americans who don't like the French" but to give average American Soldiers a fuller understanding of their hosts. In a straightforward manner, it presented "facts and judgments which even the well-intentioned may tend to overlook."[3]

In the same spirit, this article addresses three stereotypes of the French that many American Airmen hold—or, one could say, *still* hold, since they are all gripes taken directly from the 1945 handbook. Like that publication, this article does not make a conclusive attempt to "convince those who are hopelessly prejudiced." Rather, it offers a different perspective—an opportunity to rethink stereotypes that, unless checked, form the sole basis of one's perspective of an important ally. Like the common cold, that viewpoint often spreads to others; thus, as did the Army pamphlet, at a minimum it seeks to "keep others from being infected by the same lamentable virus."[4] However, in a more positive sense, the article hopes to complement the various Air Force efforts under way to build an enduring partnership with one of the most capable air forces on the planet, as recently demonstrated in the air operations over Libya. Reexamining our own perceptions represents an important first step in this effort.

We Saved the French (Twice) . . . How Can They Be So Ungrateful?

112 Gripes about the French: "We came to Europe twice in twenty five years to save the French. . . . We're always pulling the French out of a jam. Did they ever do anything for us? . . . They've forgotten. They're ungrateful."[5]

These were among the first gripes addressed in 1945, complaints that continue to manifest themselves to this day. Their expression is evident in the many jokes found on the Internet, such as the follow-

ing: "Q: What English word has no equivalent in the French language? A: Gratitude."[6]

To this day, when many Americans think of France, they recall the valiant acts of courage displayed by American Soldiers as they fought in the trenches of World War I and as they landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-day, 6 June 1944. The following citation sums up what many Americans, and certainly American military members, may think regarding French gratitude for American intervention:

> France is under a solemn obligation to the United States, as a matter of honor and gratitude for our having saved her independence in two terrible wars, and our having expended so much American wealth for her sake in peacetime, to refrain from enacting any measure . . . that would disclose to us . . . that she is unmindful of America's immeasurable sacrifices and generosity.[7]

Interestingly, this observation appeared in a newspaper editorial more than 60 years ago, but it still accurately captures the perspective of many Americans. Nonetheless, before we examine the perceived French lack of gratitude for these interventions, let's travel back in time to another conflict that would determine the survival of our own nation. The year was 1778; the conflict was the American Revolutionary War.

Let's start here because, simply put, had the French not saved America in the Revolutionary War, America could not have saved the French in 1944. In February 1778, two years into the war, things were going badly for the Americans, and America desperately sought France's help. General Washington unequivocally expressed this desperation in a letter imploring help from France: "We are at this hour suspended in the balance; not from choice but from hard and absolute necessity. . . Our troops are fast approaching nakedness. . . our hospitals are without medicines and our sick without nutrition. . . in a word, we are at the end of our tether, and. . . now or never our deliverance must come."[8] The needed deliverance from France did come, as the United

States entered into its first and only formal alliance prior to World War I. The Army's pocket guide reminded American GIs that

> France loaned the thirteen states $6,000,000—and *gave us* over $3,000,000 more.
>
> 45,000 Frenchmen volunteered in the army of George Washington.—They crossed the Atlantic in small boats that took two months to make the voyage.
>
> Washington's army had no military engineers; it was French engineers who designed and built our fortifications (emphasis in original).[9]

Thus, the beleaguered Continental Army received new life. To the very end, French assistance proved crucial—witness the actions of the French navy in securing the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781.[10]

Ten short years later, the French Revolution and France's subsequent war with England and other European monarchs put the "gratitude" of the young United States to the test. On one side were men like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, who argued that America must come to revolutionary France's aid to demonstrate gratitude for previous French assistance.[11] Alexander Hamilton, however, countered their proposal, saying that the country's first obligation was to itself and that it should act not on sentiment but according to the national interest. He made the point that, in helping the Americans, France had served its own national interests.[12] Accordingly, history shows that Charles Gravier de Vergennes, the French foreign minister, explained the French rationale exactly along completely nationalistic lines: "First, it will diminish the power of England, and increase in proportion that of France. Second, it will cause irreparable loss to English trade, while it will considerably extend ours. Third, it presents to us as very probable the recovery of a part of the possessions which the English have taken from us in America."[13]

Thus, Hamilton, who served at the Battle of Yorktown and knew firsthand the essential role played by the French, contended that America must now also look after its own interests. In the end, Washington accepted Hamilton's arguments rather than those of Paine and

Jefferson, and even though the formal alliance with France had never been dissolved, he issued the Neutrality Proclamation in 1794. Additionally, seven years later, President Jefferson himself had to change his approach. Even though his foreign politics had always been friendly to France and hostile to Britain, the dispute over the control of New Orleans, through which so much of the nation's commerce passed, forced him to threaten an alliance with Britain and war against Napoleon.[14]

Was Jefferson, the former ambassador to France, *ungrateful*? Had he *forgotten* his friends in Paris, of whom he said, "A more benevolent people I have never known, nor greater warmth and devotedness in their selected friendships."[15] Or had Washington, who developed such an intimate friendship with the Marquis de Lafayette, forgotten his indebtedness to the French for the role they played? After all, on the day of the British surrender, Washington said, "I wish it was in my power to express to Congress how much I feel indebted to the Count de Grasse and his fleet."[16]

At the time, many Frenchmen felt betrayed by their "unreliable" ally, a sentiment that would appropriately describe how many Americans feel today about the French. However, Hamilton did not say that gratitude, benevolence, and generosity had no place. He simply argued that these were sentiments left to *individuals*, not governments. In declaring its neutrality, the young American republic was simply acting in its own national self-interest, knowing that entangling itself in European affairs could spell doom for the fledgling nation. As Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence wrote, "Perhaps one principle, self interest, may account for all."[17]

With this historical backdrop, one can see the American involvement in both world wars in a different light. In June 1940, as Germany was routing the French army, the French prime minister cabled President Franklin Roosevelt the following plea, resembling George Washington's to the French during the American Revolutionary War: "If you cannot give to France in the coming hours the certainty that the United States will enter the war in a short time . . . the destiny of the

world will change. . . . You will then see France go down like a drowning man and disappear, after having thrown a last look toward the land of liberty where she sought salvation."[18]

Certainly such an emotional plea, coupled with American gratitude for the French intervention in the American Revolution would spur the United States into action, right? Not quite. The United States would wait a year and a half to enter the war, after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, and another two years to disembark the first troops on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa.

On the eve of the D-day invasion of Normandy, young GIs waited to risk their lives for their country, an act that requires courage. To do so for another country might demand more convincing. To help prepare them, the Army Department issued each GI a small guide, reminding them of why they were about to risk their lives for France:

> The Allied offensive you are taking part in is based upon a hard-boiled fact. It's this. We democracies aren't just doing favors in fighting for each other when history gets tough. We're all in the same boat. Take a look around you as you move into France and you'll see what the Nazis do to a democracy when they can get it down by itself.
>
> In "Mein Kampf," Hitler stated that his plan was to destroy France first, then get England, after which he would have the United States cornered without a fight. The Allies are going to open up conquered France, re-establish the old allied liberties and destroy the Nazi regime everywhere.[19]

One year later, as American GIs griped about life in postwar France, the Army Department felt it necessary to remind them, in a straightforward manner, why the United States intervened in the first place:

> We didn't come to Europe to save the French, either in 1917 or in 1944. We didn't come to Europe to do anyone any favors. We came to Europe because we in America were threatened by a hostile, aggressive and very dangerous power.
>
> In this war, France fell in June of 1940. We didn't invade Europe until June of 1944. We didn't even think of "saving the French" through military action until after Pearl Harbor—after the Germans declared war on

> us. We came to Europe, in two wars, because it was better to fight our enemy in Europe than in America. . . .
>
> American security and American foreign policy have always rested on this hard fact: we cannot permit a hostile power on the Atlantic Ocean. We can not be secure if we are threatened on the Atlantic. That's why we went to war in 1917; that's why we had to fight in 1944. And that's why, as a matter of common sense and the national interest, President Roosevelt declared (November 11, 1941): "The defense of any territory under the control of the French Volunteer Forces (the Free French) is vital to the defense of the United States."[20]

Thus, much like the French intervention in the American Revolutionary War, these citations make clear that the rationale for saving the French was clearly based on national self-interest. This is not to say that personal gratitude for the American intervention in France is not merited or doesn't exist. On the contrary, as any American who has traveled in Normandy or other regions of France can attest to, ample evidence exists that the French are grateful and hold a special reverence for the Americans who twice traveled across the ocean to fight alongside their countrymen in the world wars. However, as Hamilton effectively pointed out over two centuries ago, no matter how strong and appropriate these personal sentiments, they do not directly translate into national policy. One only has to look to the debate about American intervention in Libya to validate that at the end of the day, leaders must justify why or why not it is in the national interest to ally with another nation and support a foreign policy or intervene militarily at a given time and place. Before addressing the next American stereotype of the French, we close this section by examining President Barack Obama's speech at the National Defense University in March 2011, in which he emphasized the primordial place of national interest:

> But when our *interests* and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act. . . .
>
> . . . If we waited one more day, Benghazi . . . could suffer a massacre. It was not in our *national interest* to let that happen. . . .
>
> . . . On the one hand, some question why America should intervene at all—even in limited ways—in this distant land.

> . . . Given the costs and risks of intervention, we must always measure our *interests* against the need for action. . . .
>
> America has an *important strategic interest* in preventing Gaddafi from overrunning those who oppose him. . . . I am convinced that a failure to act in Libya would have carried a far greater price for America (emphasis added).[21]

The French Would Rather Surrender than Fight

112 Gripes about the French: "The French have no courage. . . . They got off pretty easy in the war. . . . They just waited for us to liberate them. Why didn't they put up a fight?"[22]

A second major gripe, ever present in American culture, is that the French are cowards, unwilling to stand and fight. As expressed in American pop culture, the French are "cheese-eating surrender monkeys."[23] Other degrading references abound, such as the Subway restaurant advertising campaign of 2005, which portrayed a chicken dressed as a French soldier under the caption "France and Chicken—Somehow it just goes together."[24] Further, jokes such as the following abound on the Internet and on late-night television: "I don't know why people are surprised that France won't help us get Saddam out of Iraq. . . . After all, France wouldn't help us get the Germans out of France."[25]

Not much seems to have changed in 65 years. These same sentiments existed in 1945, as American GIs complained that the French hadn't put up a real fight against the Germans. The US Army addressed this gripe head-on:

> No one—least of all the French themselves—will try to deny the enormity of the defeat and the humiliation France suffered in 1940. French military leadership and strategy was tragically inadequate. But this does not mean that the French did not put up a "real fight."
>
> In the six week Battle of France, from May 10 to June 22, 1940, the French lost, in military personnel alone, 260,000 wounded and 108,000 killed. A total of 368,000 casualties in six weeks is not something to pass off lightly.[26]

All told, during World War II alone, 1,115,000 French men, women, and children died, suffered wounds, languished in concentration camps, or died as hostages—not exactly what one would call "getting off easy."

Furthermore, like the American Soldiers stationed in France after the war, most Americans today know very little about the brave French citizens who continued to take the fight to the enemy during the German occupation. Again the US Army reminded its troops of French courage during the war:

- They sabotaged production in war plants. They destroyed parts, damaged machinery, slowed down production, changed blue-prints.
- They dynamited power plants, warehouses, transmission lines. They wrecked trains. They destroyed bridges. They damaged locomotives.
- They organized armed groups which fought the German police, the Gestapo, the Vichy militia. They executed French collaborationists.
- They acted as a great spy army for SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] in London. They transmitted as many as 300 reports a day to SHAEF on German troops' movements, military installations, and the nature and movement of military supplies.
- They got samples of new German weapons and explosive powder to London.
- They ran an elaborate "underground railway" for getting shot-down American and British flyers back to England. . . . On an average, one Frenchman was shot every two hours, from 1940 to 1944 by the Germans in an effort to stop French sabotage and assistance to the Allies.[27]

However, as poignant as these examples may be, one does not have to go as far back as World War II to find examples of French willingness to fight. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the French have intervened in many conflicts in Africa and have courageously fought alongside Americans in nearly every recently assembled coalition, including the first Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan—with the notable exception of Iraq. However, despite jokes to the contrary, French opposition to the second Iraq war had nothing to do with cowardice, stemming instead from confidence in their intelligence sources, which had concluded that Saddam Hussein didn't possess weapons of mass destruction. Thus, they pushed for further weapons inspections to bear

this truth out, arguing that Saddam did not pose the immediate threat portrayed by the American administration.[28]

Currently, the French have the fourth largest contingent in Afghanistan and, correspondingly, have had the fourth largest number of servicemen die in the conflict—78 to date.[29] Beyond Afghanistan, France is one of the few countries with air force bases outside its territory, having them in strategic hot spots such as Djibouti as well as the United Arab Emirates, directly across the Strait of Hormuz from Iran. Finally, and perhaps surprising to many people, the French air force capably led the coalition's enforcement of United Nations Resolution 1973, which called for a "no-fly zone" over Libya to protect the civilian population.

In addition to these efforts at the national level, one can reflect on two recent events that highlight individual acts displaying both American and French courage in the current conflict in Afghanistan. Recently, Gen Norton A. Schwartz, the Air Force chief of staff, awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with valor to a young French major in the 41st Rescue Squadron from Moody AFB, Georgia. During a deployment to Afghanistan, the major gallantly launched as part of a four-ship task force sent at night to rescue a British casualty whose injury put the lives of 160 British soldiers in jeopardy. Evading rocket-propelled grenades, he successfully rescued not only that soldier but also another, enabling the ground unit to complete its mission.

Three days previously, under the austere backdrop of the forward operating base in Kapisa, French brigadier general Emmanuel Maurin, commander of French ground troops in eastern Afghanistan, awarded three American Airmen the French National Defense Medal for their heroic actions during a nighttime helicopter rescue of two French airmen whose Gazelle attack helicopter had crashed in inclement weather. Dispatched to find the downed pilots, they dropped off their rescue crew, who found the French pilot waving a strobe light but unable to move his legs. The crew then found the copilot, still strapped to his seat, which had dislodged and slid to the back of the helicopter. The 37-year-old veteran of conflicts in Croatia, Kosovo, and the Ivory

Coast was valiantly struggling to breathe, so the Airmen made a small incision in his neck and inserted a breathing tube. The helicopter ferried the two injured men to the hospital at Bagram Airfield. Although the pilot survived and is expected to walk again, tragically, the copilot died, leaving behind a widow and four children in France.

As these vignettes poignantly demonstrate, the French serve courageously beside their American allies in Afghanistan, and in some cases, like the French copilot, they die *pour la patrie* (for the homeland). In the above anecdotes, the three *Americans* who received the *French* National Defense Medal for their daring rescue would not find humor in jokes about French cowardice. Neither would the downed British soldiers, saved by a young *French* major (*commandant*), decorated by General Schwartz for his service while serving as an exchange officer with the US Air Force. General Schwartz stood alongside Gen Jean-Paul Paloméros, the French chief of staff, in front of the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial—the final resting place of 66 of the very first American Airmen, laid to rest alongside their French squadron commanders.[30] The two air chiefs observed a moment of silence for five French soldiers killed that day in an ambush in Afghanistan—a poignant reminder of the military calling, regardless of the color of the uniform or the patch on the shoulder. There were no gripes or jokes about cowardice, surrender, or running away from a fight. As we move on to the third stereotype, it's time to silence and lay to rest these gripes and jokes as well.

We Can't Rely on the French. . . They Are Too Damned Independent

112 Gripes About the French: "We can't rely on these French. . . . The French are too damned independent."[31]

The story is familiar to most American Airmen—and it seems like just yesterday. The dictator of a Middle Eastern country defies the West as he provocatively evokes his dream of uniting other Arab coun-

tries under his leadership. Western countries deem his actions a threat, but one nation presses to allow more time, to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis, while another, though continuing diplomatic efforts, considers further diplomacy futile and builds a coalition for war. In the end, one goes go to war without the support of the other, feeling angry and betrayed by the lack of support from this unreliable ally.

In 1945 American Soldiers stationed in France griped that the United States can't rely on the French. To this day, much of the American public, including many American Airmen, holds essentially the same sentiment, particularly after French opposition to the second Iraq war. In response, the House of Representatives replaced French fries with "Freedom Fries," and many members called for a boycott of French products, reminiscent of the response in the mid-1960s when President de Gaulle attacked the existing international monetary order that privileged the status of the dollar as a reserve currency. American businesses responded to de Gaulle by threatening to boycott French imports, and one New York bar owner appeared on TV "cleansing" his wine cellar by pouring bottles of Bordeaux down the drain.[32]

These same sentiments existed late in 2003, when Thomas Friedman, a popular columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote a piece entitled "Our War with France." He began his column with these words: "It's time we Americans came to terms with something: France is not just our annoying ally. It is not just our jealous rival. France is becoming our enemy."[33] Along the same lines, authors John J. Miller and Mark Molesky wrote a book published the following year in which they objected to the popular historical view that France is America's oldest ally, rather unabashedly declaring that France is America's oldest enemy.[34]

At the same time, during the run-up to the 2004 campaign for the presidency, Republicans attacked Democratic candidate John Kerry for being too close to the French.[35] Late in 2003, Tom Brokaw asked Kerry, "What about the French? Are they friends? Are they enemies? Or something in-between at this point?" Kerry responded, "The French are the French." Chastised by Brokaw for the "profound" statement,

Kerry responded, "Well, trust me . . . it has a meaning and I think most people know exactly what I mean."[36]

What exactly does this mean? Perhaps Kerry, a veteran of the Vietnam War, had read somewhere the Army's response in 1945 to this same gripe about French unreliability: "[It] depends on what you mean by 'rely.' If you expect the French to react like Americans, you will be disappointed. They are not Americans; they are French."[37] Or perhaps it simply means that France is a sovereign nation and acts in its own interest. As does the United States. Does that mean that America can't rely on the French? Does it also mean that the French cannot rely on America?

Let's return to the scenario at the beginning of this section. Most readers will recall vividly the debate leading up to the second Iraq invasion. Americans are less well versed in the circumstances surrounding the Suez crisis in 1956, in which case the tables were turned, and one could consider France, not the United States, the "victim" of opposition by an "unreliable" ally. At that time, the United States favored diplomacy over force to confront a Middle East dictator. During the Suez crisis, President Dwight Eisenhower used a variety of means to undermine French and British efforts to forcibly take back control of the Suez Canal, which the leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, had nationalized. The brief conflict ended in Britain's and France's total humiliation and weakened their standing as global powers. As evidence, Douglas Dillon, the American ambassador to France, warned Washington of the "bitter flood of anti-American feeling now seething through France." More specifically, he noted the "deep emotional conviction" that in the Suez affair the United States proved "callously indifferent" to the vital interests of its principal allies and stood ready to "humiliate them unnecessarily."[38] A French poll indicated that as many as half of the French population had either "no confidence" in the United States or "not much."[39] From this point forward, whereas the British decided they could never go to war without the United States, the *French* concluded they could no longer *rely on the United States*. For de Gaulle,

who two years later would become the president of France, these were formative events, certainly influencing his later decision in 1966 to withdraw from the integrated military command structure of NATO. Of course, as mentioned in the introduction, his action is exactly the reference point for many *Americans* to say that we cannot *rely on the French*.

When one gripes about "reliability," one must keep in mind what we discussed in the first section—that nations act in their own self-interest. Washington never lost sight of this fact even in the midst of the Revolutionary War. He was concerned that America might defeat Britain only to have France reclaim Quebec. Washington was "heartily disposed to entertain the most favorable sentiments" of the French, but he rested on "a maxim founded on the universal experience of mankind, that no nation can be trusted farther that it is bound by its interests."[40] In a more current context, as Robert A. Levine, economist and defense analyst for the RAND Corporation, aptly perceives, "the USA and France do have different interests. And on those interests, the USA will continue to act as a unilateral superpower. It will because it can."[41] And France will continue to act, well, as Senator Kerry might say, like the French.

It is important once again to note that this gripe about reliability and independence existed well before de Gaulle became president of France and has continued throughout the half century that has since passed. In fact Franco-American relations have followed a similar cycle—with every change in administration, a certain rapprochement occurs between France and the United States, and then inevitably something happens that pushes the two countries apart.[42] One can only understand these rapprochements and cyclical "falling-outs" not as a question of reliability but within the context of two sovereign nations acting within their own self-interest. They don't, however, automatically lead to the conclusion that either country is "unreliable."

In their book, Miller and Molesky paint the picture of how French and American national interests have collided over the past three centuries, beginning with the massacres of American colonists during the

French and Indian Wars a quarter century before we declared our independence from Great Britain. Nonetheless, one has to wait until the second-to-last page of the book to find the unsatisfying conclusion—where the authors pose the question about what their 250-page tirade against the French means for the future. On the one hand, they posit that "it may not even matter whether France is an ally of the United States. . . . As the United States rose to the position of the world's most powerful country, France often has been relegated to the role of a mere irritant."[43] On the other hand, they conclude that the "future undoubtedly will bring new challenges, including many that cannot be anticipated." In this light, they write that it would be helpful to have France on board with the US agenda, but "given the distorted prism through which the French view their role in the world, this may be difficult." They conclude by asking, "Will the French, in short, continue to be the French?" In other words, will they continue to maintain a "shortsighted view of their own national interest," or will they realize "that the twenty-first century requires a wholly different vision?"[44]

To answer this question, one can look to a much-quoted editorial that appeared in *Le Monde*, the largest French daily newspaper, two days after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11). The writers boldly declared in their headline, "*Nous Sommes Tous Américains*" (We are all Americans). Many Americans, and perhaps authors such as Miller and Molesky, would like this to mean that finally, after 300 years of difficult relations, the French have seen the light. Well, not exactly. The editorial was more than an outpouring of emotion after the tragic attacks—it claimed that the latter ushered in a new era, one far removed from now-distant cries of joy as the wall separating the East and West fell two decades before. It boldly stated that even with all that divides us, France would always stand side by side with America on the most vital of issues—the liberty of mankind. In this new struggle against a more ubiquitous enemy, the West will need even more resolve and unity. In this way, *Nous Sommes Tous Américains*.[45]

In this new era, we don't have the luxury of dismissing those with whom we disagree as "mere irritants" or branding them the enemy. As emphasized in the recently released national defense strategy, the United States must partner with its European allies.[46] Yes, we need the French. Through professional military education, American Airmen have become familiar with Sun Tzu, who wisely wrote that to win a war, one must know the enemy. But in this new post-9/11 era, in which fiscal realities and the diverse nature of the threat necessitate a network of global partnerships, it is perhaps more important—and at times even more difficult—to understand our allies. As articulated by Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley and General Schwartz in the *2011 US Air Force Global Partnership Strategy*,

> The impacts of the global economic crisis, violent extremism, shifting regional balances of power, and the proliferation of advanced technologies will characterize the future security environment, making it unlikely for any one nation to address every global challenge and priority alone. With this guidance, we are increasing our emphasis on developing access and relationships with international partners while forging coalitions to meet both current and emerging global strategic challenges. Successful partnership development optimizes interoperability, integration, and interdependence between coalition forces while providing our partner nations the capability and capacity to resolve national security challenges on their own merit.[47]

As the *Le Monde* editorial observed, both France and the United States realize that what unites them, such as common democratic values, necessitates a vibrant partnership to meet the challenges of this new era. We need to move beyond our stereotypes in order to build a strong and lasting partnership with France, no matter how unreliable, independent, or recalcitrant the French may seem to be.[48]

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, presenting a conclusive defense of an ally that we have historically perceived as independent, unreliable, un-

grateful, and even cowardly lies beyond the scope and intent of this article. Rather, it offers a starting point for further reflection. Are the French reliable? "The French are the French." This does have meaning. Our challenge lies in understanding what this means: how the French see the world. France acts in its perceived national self-interest, as does the United States. Although people may dispute what interests are "vital," in the 65 years since *112 Gripes about the French* appeared, France and the United States have steadfastly supported each other in vital interests.

In conclusion, though not yet codified in Air Force doctrine, the Air Force has adopted the DOD's joint capabilities area concept of building partnerships, defined as "the ability to set the conditions for interaction with partner . . . leaders, military forces or relevant populations by developing and presenting information and conducting activities to affect their perceptions, will, behavior, and capabilities."[49] Despite the soundness of this definition, this article suggests that perhaps the first step in building a partnership and "set[ting] the conditions for interaction" resides not in affecting *others'* perceptions but in challenging our own—not by excusing others but by examining our own stereotypes through the lens of history and common sense. One often hears the slogan "the mission begins at home." As Airmen, our efforts to build global partnerships must also begin at home, and in these times of fiscal austerity, they can begin with a simple, low-technology, cost-effective tool—a mirror. ✪

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