

A Tran-Atlantic Condominium of Democratic Power: the grand design for a post-war order at the heart of French policy at the Paris Peace Conference

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France's policy at the Paris Peace Conference has long been characterised as a bid to destroy German power and to secure a dominant position in the post-1918 European political order. The strategy and tactics of French premier Georges Clemenceau are nearly always contrasted with those of American president Woodrow Wilson. Clemenceau is represented as an arch cynic and committed practitioner of Realpolitik while Wilson is depicted as an idealist proponent of a new approach to international politics. The earliest, and one of the most extreme, articulation of this view was advanced by John Maynard Keynes in his *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. In what remains the most influential book ever written about the peace conference, Keynes characterised Clemenceau as a French Bismarck and the chief advocate of a

‘Carthaginian peace’.¹ This judgement has reverberated through the historiography of the European international politics ever since.²

This general picture misses important dimensions to French planning and thus to the possibilities for peace in 1919. The evidence reveals that the peace programme of the Clemenceau government was much more open-ended and innovative than is generally recognised. French negotiators did propose a highly traditional project to overthrow the European balance of power by detaching the Left Bank of the Rhine from Germany and placing this region under permanent occupation. But there were other currents in French planning and policy that have been neglected. The French peace programme, as it emerged in February-March 1919, was a complex combination of power political calculation and an ideological commitment to a democratic peace based on new principles of international politics. Alongside the aim of territorial adjustment and a weakening of German power was a thoroughly trans-Atlantic conception of a democratic post-war order that allowed for the possibility of political and economic co-operation with a reformed and democratic Germany.³

The flexible and fundamentally multilateral character of this ‘larger strategic design’ overlapped with prevailing internationalist visions of peace and security in ways that have been missed by most scholars. French policy was much more

¹ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd., 1919), p. 32 and p. 35 respectively: ‘His theory of politics was Bismarck’s. He had one illusion – France; and one disillusion – mankind’.

² The most recent study of French policy at before and during the peace conference by Georges-Henri Soutou concludes that it was thoroughly ‘realist’ in its inspiration: *La Grande illusion: quand la France perdait la paix* (Paris: Tallandier, 2015). See also H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 20-22, 44-54; P. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the stabilisation of Europe, 1919-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 48-51; A. Lentin, ‘A Comment’ in M. Boemke, G. Feldman and E. Glaser (eds.), *The Treaty of Versailles: a reassessment after 75 years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 229; see also A. Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 188-94; Bell, *Entente and estrangement*, pp. 110-119, 157-203. More nuanced are M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001), pp. 29-32 and pp. 157-203; Steiner, *Lights that Failed*, pp. 21-4 and pp. 69-70 and R. Boyce, *The Great Inter-War and the Collapse of Capitalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 23-74. For penetrating assessments of the historiographical issues at stake see W.R. Keylor, ‘Versailles and International Diplomacy’ and D. Stevenson, ‘French War Aims and Peace Planning’ both in Boemke, Feldman and Glaser (eds.), *Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 87-109 and pp. 469-505.

³ Georges-Henri Soutou alludes to the role of ideology in ‘The French Peacemakers and their Homefront’ in , pp. 169-72 but does not develop the notion of a Trans-Atlantic community of democratic power.

ambiguous than Clemenceau was later willing to admit. Along with his chief lieutenant André Tardieu, he would spend much of the 1920s denouncing the failure of successive governments to impose the letter of the Versailles Treaty.⁴ But this post-war posturing has done much to obscure the complex character of his government's peace programme.

I

The stock image of Clemenceau is that of an incorrigible cynic who understood French security as a permanent effort to keep Germany down. This image is overdrawn.⁵ There can be no denying the premier's profound suspicion of Germany. He was convinced that long years must pass before the Allies could put any faith in Germany. But the emphasis on Clemenceau's pessimism in the historiography comes overshadows other important aspects of his political catechism that shaped his approach to peace-making. The French premier had a long record as a radical defender of democratic liberties in both the parliament and the press. His commitment to the principles of democracy and self-determination was genuine and would prove pivotal to the most fundamental decisions concerning security at the peace conference.

Georges Clemenceau was a veteran politician from a fiercely republican family in the western department of the Vendée. His political convictions were forged in the heat of republican protest under the Second Empire. Clemenceau participated first-hand in the tragedies of the siege of Paris and the Commune and voted against the peace settlement of 1871 that surrendered Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. In the early years of the Third Republic, he was a prominent voice on the radical left whose political outlook was characterised above all by a profound commitment to democratic freedoms and an abiding belief that a powerful Germany posed an existential threat to France.

⁴ See esp. Duroselle, J.-B. *Clemenceau* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), pp. 896-952 and M. Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 102.

⁵ It is difficult to find studies of either French policy, or the peace conference more generally, that do not attribute critical importance to the premier's pessimism, cynicism or 'realism'. Partial exceptions, interestingly, are Clemenceau's biographers David Watson, *Georges Clemenceau: a political biography* (London: David McKay Co., 1974) and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Clemenceau* (cited above).

These core convictions made him an ardent defender of republican ideals, a ferocious critic of Tsarist regime in Russia and a committed advocate of *entente* with Great Britain.

There were at the same time a number of interesting contradictions at the heart of Clemenceau's worldview. He was famous for his pessimistic pronouncements about the human condition. Yet his passion for democracy (which had earned him several spells in jail under the Second Republic) was a genuine expression of the nineteenth-century positivist tradition, with all of its optimistic assumptions concerning mankind's potential for self-improvement. He combined ardent patriotism and profound belief in the genius of France with a thoroughly cosmopolitan outlook informed by a lifelong passion for travel and wide knowledge of the world beyond France. Clemenceau had spent a year in the US as a young man, married an American woman, spoke fluent English and had cultivated an extensive network of friends and political contacts in Great Britain. His skills and experiences were most uncommon in mainstream French politics under the Third Republic.

In November 1918 Clemenceau enjoyed an unusually powerful position from which to speak for France in peace negotiations. Fêted as *père-la-victoire*, he enjoyed unprecedented levels of popular support for a politician of the Third Republic. This popularity translated into immense political authority and placed him in a virtually unassailable position in relation to parliament. Clemenceau used this authority to claim absolute control of peace negotiations. Virtually all of the crucial decisions during the peace conference were taken by the premier in consultation with a narrow circle of advisors that included Louis Loucheur, Étienne Clémentel and André Tardieu. Leading parliamentarians were rarely informed about the course of negotiations and never consulted. Even Clemenceau's cabinet was marginalised and played no part in deliberations over momentous issues such as France's frontier with Germany, the fate of eastern Europe or reparations.⁶

⁶ D. R. Watson, *Georges Clemenceau: France* (London: Haus Publishing, 2008), pp. 331-43; Duroselle, *Clemenceau*, pp. 720-31.

Andrew Tardieu exercised by far the greatest influence over questions related to the security.⁷ Tardieu was a brilliant product of the Third Republic's education system who had ranked first in the national entry examination for the foreign ministry but spent less than a year as a diplomat before leaving to serve as personal secretary to premier Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau at the age of twenty-one. Thereafter he took up journalism and was appointed diplomatic editor of *Le Temps* at the age of twenty-eight. In this latter role Tardieu developed such a formidable network of contacts across Europe that was labelled the 'seventh great power of Europe' by German chancellor Bernhard von Bülow.⁸ He volunteered for the army shortly after his election as deputy in 1914. His wartime service included a stint on the staff of then general Ferdinand Foch and frontline duty, where he was wounded. He was named France's high commissioner to the United States after that country entered the war as an 'Associated Power' in April 1917.

Tardieu, who spoke English fluently, had long been convinced of the growing importance of American power for world politics.⁹ His well-informed and trenchant analyses of US policy and Franco-American relations caught the attention of Clemenceau (who had long-standing ties to America). The war, Tardieu argued, 'the significance for France of America's entry into world affairs', which had taken place 'two generations sooner than would otherwise have been the case'. Tardieu argued that this presented French policy with a chance to 'bring the United States around to the idea of an alliance under the cover of the League of Nations'. This opportunity would be undermined by an open rejection of American policy initiatives. 'It would be disastrous' Tardieu warned 'if the President and the [American] people drew the conclusion from their experience at Paris ... that Washington and Monroe were right after all, and that the United States is better off leaving Europe to its own affairs'.¹⁰ After the armistice Tardieu was summoned back to France to join Clemenceau's team.

⁷ This section on Tardieu is drawn principally from G. Puaux et. al., *André Tardieu*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957) and F. Monnet, *Refaire la république: André Tardieu, une dérive réactionnaire, 1876-1945*, (Paris: J. Dülffer, 1993).

⁸ Monnet, *Refaire la république*, p. 50-1.

⁹ See, for example, Tardieu's *Notes sur les États-Unis* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1908).

¹⁰ France, Service historique de la défense – Département de l'armée de terre [hereafter SHD-DAT], *Fonds Clemenceau*, carton 6N 137-3, 'L'opinion française et le président Wilson: note pour le président du conseil', 26 Nov. 1926; see also David Stevenson, *War Aims*, pp. 146-7.

His consistent emphasis on the need for a close relationship with the United States would prove crucial to the evolution of French policy in 1918-1919.

Clemenceau and his team could not make peace in any way they liked. 'We may not have the peace that you and I should wish for' the premier observed to president Raymond Poincaré even before the fighting had ceased.¹¹ In November 1918 the pre-war order had been destroyed. France's population emerged traumatised from a conflict that had pushed it to the very limit of national endurance. The terrible human and material costs of the war, along with the expectations for social and political transformation that came with victory, placed powerful constraints on French policy. These expectations, crucially, often ran counter to the policy aims of France's allies.

British and American policy presented a formidable challenge to French peace-makers. President Wilson had repeatedly framed the war as a struggle to install a new international system based on morality and co-operation rather than power politics:

The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? ... There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace'.¹²

At the centre of Wilson's ideas for an 'organized common peace' was a League of Nations that would serve as an engine for the moral regeneration of world politics.¹³ This conception stood in diametric opposition to projects for dismembering Germany or placing parts of the Reich territory under permanent Allied occupation that were circulating in both the public and official spheres in Paris at this time. British prime minister David Lloyd George was just as opposed to such traditional solutions to

¹¹ R. Poincaré, *Au Service de la France. Neuf années de souvenirs*, vol. X, *Victoire et armistice* (Paris: Presses Modernes, 1928), entry for 6 Sep. 1918: p. 336.

¹² A.S. Link et. al. (eds.), *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 40, *20 November 1916 – 23 January 1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), Wilson Speech, 22 Jan. 1917, pp. 535-6;

¹³ On Wilson's overall conception see, among many others, L. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and his legacy in American foreign relations* (London: Palgrave, 2002); T. Knock, *To End all War: Woodrow Wilson and the quest for a new World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); J. Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: a biography* (New York: Random House, 2009) and R. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009).

European security. British policy was characterised by a hard-line position over reparations and the destruction of German imperial and naval power but an essentially moderate stance when it came to territorial issues. A central aim of the Lloyd George government was a settlement that would ensure German economic recovery so that the Reich could once again constitute a lucrative trading partner for Britain.¹⁴

All of these constraints on French policy were compounded by important changes in the normative context within which foreign and security policy was made. In 1919 the global tide of popular enthusiasm for transforming world politics – and more specifically for replacing the balance of power with international co-operation and collective security - could not be ignored. President Wilson's widely publicised calls for a new world order served as a magnetic pole for this enthusiasm. One of the chief reasons that support for a new approach to international relations could not be ignored was that during the war French government pronouncements and official propaganda had framed France's war aims along the same lines. The war effort in France had been held together not least by arguments that the conflict was a crusade for civilisation and the rule of law against barbarism and the rule of brute force.¹⁵

Two emergent norms were particularly influential in shaping the international political realm of 1918-1919. The first and most powerful was 'self-determination'. This principle, never defined with precision by Wilson or any other major political figure, was intended primarily to signify the right to democratic representation. Wilson famously proclaimed that a central aim of the war, and a guiding principle of the peace,

¹⁴ E. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 104-162; D. Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918-1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); M. Dockrill and J.D. Goold, *Peace Without Promise: Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-1923* (Hamden CT.: Archon Books, 1981), pp. 17-29. For sympathetic treatments of Lloyd George at the peace conference see MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, pp. 36-45 and esp. M.G. Fry, *And Fortune Fled: David Lloyd George: the first democratic statesman, 1916-1922* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); for more critical perspectives see A. Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles: Lloyd George and the pre-history of appeasement* (London: Methuen, 1984); idem., 'Several Types of Ambiguity: Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 6, 1 (1995): pp. 223-51; S. Marks, 'David Lloyd George: an infernally clever chap' in S. Casey and J. Wright (eds.), *Mental Maps in the Ear of the Two World Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 21-35.

¹⁵ P. Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the politics of national security in the era of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. pp. 203-35.

must be to make the world 'safe for democracy'.¹⁶ Jan Smuts proclaimed 'No annexations and the self-determination of nations' in his hugely influential pamphlet on the League of Nations.¹⁷ As one recent study of self-determination has shown, however, public advocacy for this concept took on a life of its own that was quite independent of the intentions of its proponents.¹⁸ Accepting self-determination as one of the core principles of the peace thus had far-reaching implications for peacemaking. Local populations would no longer be treated as spoils of war in great power horse-trading to establish a favourable balance of power. This opened up the Pandora's Box of ethnicity and national identity.¹⁹

At the same time, in 1918 a virtual consensus existed within both elite and popular opinion in France that Germany was responsible for the war and must be punished. There was also wide agreement that the very nature of the German national character posed a permanent threat to peace. Pre-1914 ideas that there existed both a 'good' and 'bad' Germany had been eroded by four and a half years of human sacrifice, material destruction and official war propaganda. The assumption that Germany was malign, that it had caused the war and that it must be forced to pay for reconstruction went virtually unchallenged across the political spectrum. Opposition to this conviction was concentrated within a small minority on the left of the political spectrum, among socialists, trade unionists and a tiny fringe of pre-war internationalists.²⁰

The ambiguities and complexities in both national and international opinion regarding peace made up the structural context in which France's security policy took shape. But policymaking was also shaped to an important extent by the instincts and ideological convictions of Georges Clemenceau. The premier's predispositions are impossible to categorise neatly, they had been acquired over the course of a long and

¹⁶ Keylor, 'Versailles and International Diplomacy', pp. 474-6; see also, more generally, C. Bouchard, *Le citoyen et l'ordre mondiale (1914-1918): le rêve d'une paix durable au lendemain de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 112-4; J. Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson, and the fight for the League of Nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 9-56.

¹⁷ Smuts, *The League of Nations: a practical suggestion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), p. 12.

¹⁸ E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: self-determination and the international origins of anti-colonial nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 10.

¹⁹ E. Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris System: international politics and the entangled histories of human rights, forced deportations and civilising missions' *AHR* 113, 5 (2008): pp. 1313-43

²⁰ Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, pp. 224-31 and P. Miquel, *La Paix de Versailles et l'opinion publique française* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973), pp. 236-48.

varied political career that stretched back to the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune. Put simply, Clemenceau the patriot of the generation of 1871 aimed at a peace based on a favourable balance of power and territorial guarantees against future German aggression. At the same time, Clemenceau the old radical of the generation of 1870 (and even 1848) remained attached to the ideals of democratisation and self-determination. He therefore attached greatest priority to co-operation with the great Atlantic democracies. The ambiguity that resulted, which reflected wider divergences over national security within the French public sphere, was a central characteristic of peace planning. The problem is that historians have underlined the importance of 1871 in shaping Clemenceau's peace programme but ignored that of 1870 and 1848.²¹

II

The heart of the great French security dilemma in 1919 was the future of the Left Bank of the Rhine. André Tardieu described the future political and military status of this region as 'the essential problem which dominates all others in our preparations'.²² The territory stretching west of the Rhine from the Netherlands in the north to the Saar coal basin on the French and German frontiers to the south was a traditional highway for invasions both eastward and westward. Denying Germany the right to use the Left Bank as a staging ground for yet another attack on France was an undisputed priority for French policymakers. No single issue took up more time or generated greater tensions during the peace conference.²³ French demands to neutralise the Rhineland brought negotiations with the British and Americans to breaking point. And the compromise agreed to end this impasse sparked a full-blown civil-military crisis in France.

²¹ These ambiguities are also acknowledged in Watson, *Clemenceau*, pp. 331-76; Duroselle, *Clemenceau*, pp. 720-7 and Soutou, 'French Peacemakers', pp. 169-72.

²² France, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, archives diplomatiques [hereafter MAE, Papiers d'agents – Archives privées [hereafter PA-AP] 166, *Papiers André Tardieu*, vol. 412, 'Congrès de la paix: plan général', 5 Jan. 1919; also A. Tardieu, *La paix*, (Paris: Payot & cie, 1921), pp. 97-101.

²³ Stephen Schuker describes the Rhineland settlement as 'the cornerstone of the whole diplomatic edifice' under construction at the peace conference: 'The Rhineland Question: West European Security at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919' in Boemke, Feldman and Glaser (eds.) *The Treaty of Versailles*, p. 275.

A desire to assert control over the territories west of the Rhine had been a central theme in French war aims and peace planning since the beginning of the war. As the war drew to a close, the fate of the Left Bank dominated internal discussions on the post-war order. The Quai d'Orsay [France's foreign ministry] typically, took the lead in this process. Gabriel Hanotaux, the diplomat, historian and former foreign minister, called for a 'grand peace' of 'European organisation'. By this he meant in effect rolling back the 1871 unification of Germany. The Left Bank would be detached and the Reich would be occupied 'to the line of the Elbe River'. Hanotaux also call for 'a vast strategic glacis' to be created to protect northern France from eastern Germany. Most of the Left Bank, including Luxemburg, would be ceded to France. Germany would be reconstituted into a loose federation of states, each with its own legislature and foreign policy.²⁴

Hanotaux's analysis was at the radical end of security prescriptions in Paris.²⁵ A more common objective among foreign ministry officials was a neutralised and demilitarised left bank. Jules Laroche, for example, judged that the central aim of French policy must be 'to forbid Germany all of the military attributes of sovereignty on the Left Bank'. An inter-allied military occupation would deliver this solution. Laroche added, however, that the Left Bank should be given privileged commercial relations with France which would establish the conditions 'for its eventual political detachment from Germany'.²⁶ This gradualist solution was endorsed by Philippe Berthelot, the most powerful voice within the Quai d'Orsay at this time, and by Paul Cambon, France's most senior diplomat.²⁷

It was at this early stage that Marshal Ferdinand Foch intervened in discussions of the future peace. Foch had been the commander-in-chief of Allied armies since the previous spring. He was the product of a conservative, religious and highly patriotic family and, like Clemenceau, the defeat of 1871 was one of the great formative events

²⁴ MAE, *Série A (Paix)*, vol. 60, 'De la future frontière' and 'Du sort de l'Allemagne unifiée', both dated 11 Nov. 1918; see also MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 417, 'Deux notes de M. Hanotaux', undated.

²⁵ Walter McDougall, *France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914-1924: the last bid for a balance of power in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 69.

²⁶ MAE, *Série A (Paix)*, vol. 289, 'La frontière de l'Alsace-Lorraine et le statut de la rive gauche du Rhin', 1 Nov. 1918.

²⁷ MAE, *Série A (Paix)*, vol. 289, 'Note sur la future frontière', (Berthelot) 10 Nov. 1918; MAE, *Série Z (Europe 1918-1940)*, Grande Bretagne, vol. 36, 'Conditions de paix', (Cambon) 21 Nov. 1918.

in his life. The product of a rigorous Jesuit education, Foch had been a brilliant student at the *École Polytechnique*. He made his name before the war as an officer of extraordinary intellect, energy and charisma.²⁸ Widely considered France's foremost philosopher of war, Foch was a Clausewitzian who believed that military action must be determined by an understanding of political objectives. His Jesuit education, however, made him reluctant to admit that ends should not be subordinated to means. 'The essential thing is to know what one wants to do' was one of his favourite observations on the nature of strategy. This imbued Foch's strategic thought a dynamic and aggressive character that would also shape his conception of the post-war order.²⁹

Foch played an important central role in the formulation of the French programme through late February 1919. His staff produced a steady stream of detailed memoranda on the strategic importance of the Rhine, the ethnic make-up and political views of the Rhenish population and strategies for attracting this region into France's political orbit.³⁰ From the moment armistice negotiations began Foch urged a settlement that would result in a 'definitive regime for the Rhineland and the bridgeheads'.³¹ Even after the return of Alsace-Lorraine, he argued, France and Belgium would be in a situation of serious demographic inferiority in relation to Germany. This would be compounded by the fact that Russia, which had played the role of eastern counterweight to German power before 1914, could no longer be counted upon. The logical solution was therefore to constitute the provinces of the Left Bank of the Rhine as independent states tied politically to France and her allies. Foch

²⁸ J.-C. Notin, *Foch* (Paris: Perrin, 2008), p. 18; the following paragraph draws heavily on this study as well as R. Recouly, *Le mémorial de Foch: mes entretiens avec le maréchal*, (Paris: Les Editions De France, 1929).

²⁹ Notin, *Foch*, pp. 17-18; A. Martel, *Relire Foch au XXI^{ème} siècle: stratégies et doctrines* (Paris: Economica, 2008), pp. 23-69; P. Jackson, 'Foch et la politique de sécurité française, 1919-1924' in F. Cochet and R. Porte (eds.), *Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929): apprenez à penser* (Paris: Soteca, 2010), pp. 333-47.

³⁰ SHD-DAT, 4N 92, *État-major du maréchal Foch*, 'Étude sur le regime futur des pays de la rive gauche du Rhin', 17 Nov. 1918; 'Étude sur la situation déficitaire actuelle des pays de la Rive gauche du Rhine en Houille et Coke', 19 Nov. 1918; 'Le Rhin frontière militaire' 3 Dec. 1918; 'Note sur la Rive gauche du Rhin: Importance que lui ont attribuée les allemands – rôle qu'elle a joué en 1870 et en 1914' undated; 'Note sur l'organisation militaire des pays de la Rive gauche du Rhin', 19 Dec. 1918.

³¹ Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, pp. 191-6 and D. Stevenson, *French War Aims in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 117-26.

concluded that only a grouping of states that included 'the natural barrier of the Rhine' could assure peace and security in Europe.³²

One remarkable aspect of the host of internal memoranda drafted in late 1918 was the absence of any reference to the United States. This *lacuna* was rectified after Tardieu asserted his control over the planning process in late December 1918. American power was central to a lengthy survey of European security requirements drafted by Foch and Tardieu and forwarded to Allied leaders on 10 January 1919. This document retreated from the idea of incorporating the Left Bank into a western defensive alliance and emphasised instead the common security interests of western democracies. It argued for the creation of a new state or states that would be neutralised, placed under Allied occupation and granted a favourable customs regime with the 'states of the west' with whom they might eventually 'desire to attach themselves as they had in the past'. The US would join with the other Allied states in the military occupation of the Left Bank. The Rhine would thus constitute 'the military frontier of the western democracies'.³³

Normative arguments invoking self-determination and democratic freedom were deployed by foreign ministry officials in proposals aimed at weakening the bonds of German unity. Philippe Berthelot, for example, pointed to 'particularist and federalist currents' within the German Reichstag and concluded that 'It is in our interest to favour [German] federalism by furnishing it with the opportunity to express itself through elections based on universal suffrage'. The chief aim, predictably, was an autonomous Left Bank. Berthelot recommended what was essentially a strategy of economic bribery to facilitate the 'gradual evolution of popular sentiment on the Left Bank in favour of France'. But Berthelot made no mention of annexing that territory or unilaterally altering its political status in the peace terms. The strategy was instead to

³² SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, 'Note', 27 Nov. 1918 (forwarded to Clemenceau on 28 Nov.); Foch outlined this argument to Lloyd George during a visit to London on 1 Dec. 1918: see 'Conversation entre M. Lloyd George et le maréchal Foch, 10 Downing Street' in the same carton.

³³ SHD-DITEEX, *Fonds Privés*, 1K 129, *Archives du maréchal Foch*, carton 1, dr. 7, 'Note', Foch to Allied plenipotentiaries, 10 Jan. 1919; see also Soutou, 'Marches de l'est', p. 384; Stevenson, *War Aims*, p. 156 and Schuker, 'West European Security', p. 290-1.

convince the Rhinelanders over time that their political future lay with France.³⁴ Tardieu endorsed this gradualist solution. He judged that the 'creation of a different economic orientation' on the Left Bank would 'create the *eventual* conditions for a political reorientation'.³⁵

This gradual approach to detaching the Rhineland was judged overcautious by senior military commanders. The newly established *Contrôle-général des territoires rhénans*, headed by former colonial official Paul Tirard but under Foch's authority, advocated a more ambitious policy. Tirard worked closely with Foch and other military elites to establish political and administrative conditions favourable to Rhenish separatism in the region. In late 1918 and early 1919 the *Contrôle général* provided a steady stream of intelligence reports indicating goodwill towards France and support for separation from Germany. Foch and Pétain used this reporting to agitate for a more forward policy aimed at encouraging the industries of the Left Bank to 'turn towards France'.³⁶

These assessments of were greeted with scepticism by Clemenceau's team in Paris. The picture they painted of public opinion in the Rhineland was at odds with assessments prepared by the Quai d'Orsay.³⁷ This scepticism was important because it cast early doubt the argument that an autonomous Left Bank was an exercise in self-determination and thus an extension of democratic liberties. Louis Aubert, a young academic historian working at the nerve-centre of the policy machinery set up by Tardieu, underlined this fact. Aubert observed that 'moral arguments based on the principle that peoples have the right to determine their own political future have little

³⁴ MAE, PA-AP 141, *Papiers Pichon*, vol. 6, 'Note sur les règlements de la paix', 23 Dec. 1918; see also Hanotaux's observations on the 'artificial' political character of Germany in MAE, *Série A (Paix)*, vol. 60, 'Du sort de l'Allemagne unifiée', 11 Nov. 1918

³⁵ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 417, 'Note sur l'organisation des provinces Rhénanes', 26 Jan. 1919, emphasis added.

³⁶ Many of these reports (along with voluminous other intelligence on the situation in Germany) can be consulted in SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 81, 112-120, 249 and 6N 261-268 as well as in MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vols 426 and 427 (with a greater concentration on the Rhineland); MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 420, Pétain to Foch, 30 Dec. 1918 (forwarded by Foch on 3 Jan. 1919; see also McDougall, *Rhineland Diplomacy*, pp. 51-66.

³⁷ See esp. McDougall, *Rhineland Diplomacy*, p. 66 and Schuker, 'Rhineland Question', pp. 289-90.

force in relation to the immediate status of the Rhineland'.³⁸ This was a very important intervention in policy debates concerning the Rhineland. Aubert was raising the possibility that a traditional bid for strategic advantage might be at odds with the most prominently stated principles endorsed by France and its allies both during and after the war.

This contradiction was papered over in a lengthy and detailed statement of France's initial bargaining position drafted by Tardieu's team and presented to the Allies with the premier's approval on 25 February 1919.³⁹ On the surface, this document made a case for the detaching the Left Bank of the Rhine to create an autonomous and demilitarised zone between France and Germany under permanent Allied occupation. If one reads it carefully, however, it is also an invitation to construct an Atlantic Security Community of western Democracies. To understand this dimension of the document it is necessary to look at the pre-history of its drafting. Over the final two years of peace growing importance had been attributed by French officials to the economic and ideological bonds uniting France with its Atlantic allies. The chief economic manifestation of this trend was the evolution of the 'Clémentel Plan' for economic collaboration between France, Britain and the US. Plans for the creation of an Atlantic customs area and for sharing vital raw materials were at the centre of the French planning for postwar economic security.⁴⁰ The ideological dimension this wider vision was in many ways only a continuation of familiar discourses depicting the forces of 'liberty' and 'civilisation' as locked in mortal combat with German 'barbarism' that had pervaded the French public sphere since 1914. But the trend towards an Atlantic Community also reflected geo-political developments during the war.

³⁸ France, Archives Nationales [hereafter AN], 324 AP 51, *Papiers André Tardieu*, 'Rhin', handwritten note by Aubert, undated but drafted the first week of March; MAE, PA-AP 141, *Papiers Pichon*, vol. 7., 'Sarre: note B', 20 Jan. 1919.

³⁹ SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, 'Mémoire du gouvernement français sur la fixation de la frontière occidentale de l'Allemagne et l'occupation interalliée des ponts du fleuve', 25 Feb. 1919 (reprinted in Tardieu, *La paix*, pp. 165-84 and Cmd. 2169, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, pp. 41-57).

⁴⁰ On the Clémentel Plan, which is beyond the scope of this paper, see especially Soutou, *L'or et le sang*; Stevenson, *French War Aims*, M. Trachtenberg, "'A New Economic Order": Etienne Clémentel and French economic diplomacy during the First World War', *French Historical Studies* 10, 2, (1977): pp. 315-41 and Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*.

Tardieu, as we have seen, spent the latter stages of the war as an emissary to the American government and was convinced that the centre of gravity in world politics was moving slowly but inevitably away from Europe. The importance both Tardieu and Aubert attached to this seismic geo-political development is reflected in the frequency with which they referred to the importance of a 'Atlantic' or 'North-Atlantic' grouping of powers in planning documents.⁴¹ One of their favourite discursive strategies was to elide the specific interests of France with those of the western allies as a whole by representing the 'western' or 'Atlantic' powers as a coherent political and cultural unit. The Rhine could thus be depicted as 'the international frontier of liberty' dividing the 'civilised democracies of the west' from German barbarism and autocracy.⁴² In rhetoric that anticipated the propaganda battles of the Cold War, power-political security aims were dressed up as vital to the future of freedom and democracy in the face of an elemental threat from Germany.

It was Aubert, interestingly, who had first sketched the broad outlines of an Atlantic alliance in a memorandum of 2 January 1919 when he argued that:

The Rhine, which for centuries has been considered as the natural frontier between France and Germany, must, as a result of this war, be considered as the natural frontier between the democracies of the North-Atlantic and Germany'.⁴³

The concept of a trans-Atlantic security community was taken up by Tardieu one week later when he inserted the phrase 'co-operation between all democratic powers' into Foch's 10 January Memorandum to Allied Leaders. He also anticipated the course of negotiations to come when he advocated 'an engagement of reciprocal assurance and military assistance ... in the case of a new German aggression'.⁴⁴ This crucial passage

⁴¹ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 417, 'Rive gauche de Rhin: la neutralisation militaire', 2 Feb. 1919. David Stevenson notes this strategy in *War Aims*, p. 155, but he does not reflect upon its significance; Georges-Henri Soutou goes further in 'French Peacemakers', but does not link Clemenceau's ideological affinities to the views of other members of the policy and political elite.

⁴² MAE, PA-AP, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 417: 'Note sur le rôle international du Rhine comme "Frontière de la Liberté"', 20 Jan. 1917 (note drafted by Tardieu with assistance from Aubert and Réquin).

⁴³ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, 'Rive gauche de Rhin', Aubert note, 2 Feb. 1919.

⁴⁴ Compare the final draft forwarded by Foch with Tardieu's revisions in MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 422.

provides an early glimpse at what would be the core security requirement of the Clemenceau government in the peace negotiations.

There were no less than fifteen references to the 'western democracies' as a single political and cultural entity in the 'Rhineland memorandum' prepared for the Allies by Tardieu in late February. The following passage is indicative of the ideologically-charged language used throughout:

The common security of the western and overseas democracies requires that Germany be deprived of the means to once again mount the sudden attacks of 1870 and 1914 ... [we must] ... take from Germany not only the Left Bank but also the bridgeheads of the Rhine – so that its western frontier is once again fixed on the Rhine ... [t]he history of the past century demonstrates the need for this protection. The common security of the Allies demands that the Rhine must become, in the words of President Wilson "the frontier of Liberty".

The memo also deployed Aubert's argument that the proposed 'physical guarantee' would provide support the aims of the League of Nations. The French proposal was thus 'animated by the spirit of the League of Nations' and therefore 'in the general interest of humanity'. 'France' the Allies were assured 'demands nothing for itself, not one inch of territory nor any right of sovereignty ... What it proposes instead is the creation, in the general interest, of a common protection for all pacific democracies, for the League of Nations, for liberty and for peace'.⁴⁵

Great emphasis was also placed on the extent to which the French programme constituted a break with past practices. 'Our solution is a liberal solution' Tardieu insisted, 'it is clearly different to the old solutions of the past'.⁴⁶ Such claims were more than mere rhetoric. They flowed from a realisation that close postwar relations with the Anglo-Saxon democracies was incompatible with a return to exclusively traditional practices. The attractions of a north-Atlantic community, moreover, were based on more than on power political considerations. They rested also on the belief that political and cultural affinities made the United States and Britain the most reliable

⁴⁵ SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, 'Mémoire sur la fixation ...', 25 Feb. 1919.

⁴⁶ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 421, 'Conversation du 11 mars 1919', this is the Tardieu's account of his meeting with Sidney Mezes and Philip Kerr (who Tardieu erroneously identifies as 'M. Carr').

allies for France in the long-term. When put to the test, this conviction would prove decisive when difficult choices had to be made concerning the foundations of France's security. The strategy pursued by Clemenceau's team therefore combined traditional power politics with an ideological vision of the postwar international order as a community of democratic power. Should these two pillars of French planning prove incompatible, however, a choice would have to be made.

The fact was that France's great power allies were not willing to break up Germany. The British and Americans instead took the unprecedented step of offering to guarantee France's security from unprovoked aggression. In return, French negotiators were asked to give up the claim to an autonomous Left Bank buffer state. From the American perspective, measures imposed on Germany could only be justified either as an application of self-determination or as temporary measures to ensure German compliance and preserve peace until the League of Nations was working effectively. The French proposal to detach the Left Bank fulfilled neither of these criteria.⁴⁷ Wilson was highly critical of French attempts to 'interpret the principle of self-determination with a lawyer's cunning'.⁴⁸

British prime minister Lloyd George suspected a French bid for continental pre-eminence and was determined to oppose any occupation of the Left Bank.⁴⁹ He proposed an Anglo-American military guarantee to France as a substitute. This idea was first mooted to the British cabinet on 4 March 1919. Lloyd George predicted that the Clemenceau government would renounce its plan for dismembering and occupying Germany in return for a promise of immediate British and American military assistance in the event of a German attack.⁵⁰ The guarantee idea was first broached with the French by Lloyd George's private secretary in a meeting with Tardieu on 11 March.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Wilson quoted in MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, p. 174; for House see Col. E.H. House, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, edited by C. Seymour (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), entry for 9 Feb. 1919: p. 345.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Schuker, 'West European Security', p. 302 and p. 290 respectively.

⁴⁹ Fry, *Fortune Fled*, pp. 195-6, 200, 218-23; MacMillan, *Paris 1918*, pp. 144-5, 170-4, 194-8.

⁵⁰ Great Britain, The National Archives – Public Records Office (Kew) [hereafter TNA-PRO], CAB, 23/15/541A, War Cabinet minutes, 4 Mar. 1919.

⁵¹ The British and French records of this meeting differ. In Tardieu's account, the idea of a guarantee is outlined clearly by Kerr on 11 Mar. 1919. According to Kerr's record, he made no mention of the idea on 11 Mar. but hinted at a guarantee the following day. See MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 421,

Lloyd George raised the possibility of a guarantee in a conversation with Clemenceau the following day. He sugar-coated the suggestion with disingenuous references to a possible channel tunnel to expedite future British military intervention. The formal proposal of British and American treaties of guarantee was extended in a meeting between Lloyd George, Wilson and Clemenceau on the afternoon of 14 March. The treaties were to remain in force until the League was capable of ensuring European security on its own.⁵²

III

The guarantee offer was the pivot upon which French security policy turned at the peace conference. It forced the Clemenceau government to define its 'bottom line' in national security terms. The round of negotiations that ensued determined the contours of the Rhineland settlement at the heart of the Treaty of Versailles.

A crucial but relatively unknown aspect of this drama is the fact that Clemenceau and his advisors appear to have anticipated some kind of guarantee offer all along. What is more, they had even indicated their willingness to discuss this issue. The previous December Jean Monnet, a protégé of Clemenceau's at the commerce ministry, met with American treasury official Norman Davis in London. Monnet advised Davis that France's territorial demands would be uncompromising unless it received some form of Anglo-American guarantee against future German aggression.⁵³ There were also hints in the Rhineland memo that the 'physical guarantee' demanded by France on the Left Bank could be temporary rather than permanent.⁵⁴ In conversations with the British Tardieu revealed that his government was 'ready to consider anything which the

'Conversation du 11 mars 1919' and Cmd. 2169, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact*, pp. 59-62: 'Notes of a discussion between Mr P.H. Kerr, M. Tardieu and Dr Mezes'.

⁵² Fry, *Fortune Fled*, 218-9 and 235-6; A. Lentin, 'Several Types of Ambiguity: Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 6, 1 (1995): pp. 223-51; Seymour (ed.), *Intimate Papers*, pp. 356-60 and pp. 392-4; Nelson, *Land and Power*, pp. 219-28.

⁵³ United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Paris Peace Conference*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), vol. I, Report on a conversation between Norman Davis and Jean Monnet, 3 Dec. 1918: pp. 334-6; see also Miller, *My Diary*, vol. I, 3 Dec. 1918: p. 25.

⁵⁴ 'It is essential to reinforce, at least temporarily, the legal guarantees [in the Covenant] with a guarantee of a physical character': SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, 'Mémoire sur la fixation ...', 25 Feb. 1919.

Allies thought reasonable' as long as the Left Bank was closed for all time to the German military.⁵⁵ He later admitted that the 25 February memorandum was an 'instrument of discussion' drafted at a time when France had 'no peacetime commitment from its allies'.⁵⁶

A fascinating note on the strategic importance of the Rhine prepared in early March by Louis Aubert puts Tardieu's observation into context. Aubert began by listing, in their order of importance, the key arguments for staying on the Rhine as they had been presented to France's allies: first, the Rhine constituted an excellent defensive position to protect French soil from another German attack; second, it would also serve as a base of offensive operations in support of the newly formed eastern states; third, the Rhine provided the Allies with an excellent *gage* to ensure German treaty compliance. But Aubert then went on to argue that the Germany's weakened state, and in particular the rising levels of political disorder in that country, meant that that 'this order of importance must be reversed'. A position on the Rhine was foremost a means to compel German compliance, then a means of supporting the eastern successor states and finally a defensive position. His key point was that German weakness, when combined with the principle of self-determination, called into question French demands for Left Bank autonomy. 'We must recognise' Aubert observed

... that for the moment the danger of a resurgence of the German peril is assuming an ever more academic character that does not justify great political decisions such as the permanent detachment from Germany of five million Germans of the Left Bank ... Our allies can, not without a strong case, offer us a substitute in the form of an alliance.

If such an offer was made, he advised, '[i]t would be wise to recognise the temporary character of our case for a watch on the Rhine ... and envisage an occupation for as long as Germany remains a threat'.⁵⁷ In Aubert's judgement, a temporary but

⁵⁵ The British Library (London) [hereafter BL], *Lord Robert Cecil Papers*, MSS 51131, 'Diary', 28 Feb. 1919.

⁵⁶ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 421, 'Réponse du gouvernement' to a questionnaire submitted by the chamber foreign affairs commission, 29 Jul. 1919.

⁵⁷ AN, 324 AP 51, *Papiers Tardieu*, 'Rhin', Aubert note, the subject matter and tense used in this document leave little doubt that it dates from the first week in March.

prolonged occupation, if supplemented by a strategic commitment from Britain and the US, was preferable to permanent occupation and political isolation.

Aubert's observations provide an important window into the thinking of Clemenceau's inner circle. The premier and his advisors were moving away from security based on traditional military preponderance and towards security based on treaty enforcement under-written by great power co-operation. The normative power of self-determination played a key role in this evolution. The importance attached to self-determination is evident in the position taken by Tardieu in conversations with British and American officials in late February and early March. On 28 February 1919 Tardieu assured British delegate Robert Cecil that, as long as the Rhine bridgeheads were occupied, the Left Bank could remain 'in all other respects German'.⁵⁸ He went further in conversations with Wilson confidant Colonel Edward House and British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour to suggest that neither the Allied occupation nor the Rhineland buffer would necessarily need to be permanent. Once Germany was no longer a threat to peace, 'in five, ten or some other number of years', Tardieu advised his interlocutors, France would 'have no objection to [the Left Bank] going where the inclination of the people might lead them'.⁵⁹ Tardieu reiterated this offer in meetings with Kerr and Mezes on 11 and 12 March.⁶⁰ These hints convinced Lloyd George that the French government was not 'really behind' its Rhineland proposal. He judged that the programme had been adopted to appease Foch and other hard-liners.⁶¹

This was only partly true. The French government would have welcomed an autonomous Rhineland had such a solution been obtainable. But Clemenceau and his advisors were unwilling to impose such a solution against the wishes of France's allies and in violation of the principle of self-determination. Such a policy would have lacked

⁵⁸ BL, *Cecil Papers*, MSS 51131, 'Diary', 28 Feb. 1919.

⁵⁹ Seuymour (ed.), *Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, entry for 23 Feb. 1919; pp. 346-7; TNA-PRO, FO/608/142, 'Summary of a Conversation with M. Tardieu: an independent republic on the west bank of the Rhine', undated but late Feb. 1919; see also Stevenson, *War Aims*, p. 167 and McCrum, 'French Rhineland Policy', p. 628.

⁶⁰ Britain, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Command Paper 2169, *Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1924), pp. 59-65: 'Notes of a discussion between Mr P.H. Kerr, M. Tardieu and Dr. Mezes', 11, 12 and 13 Mar. 1919.

⁶¹ TNA-PRO, CAB, 23/15/541A, Cabinet Minutes, 4 Mar. 1919.

legitimacy abroad but also at home. It would also have provoked a rupture with Britain and the United States.

‘We must thus choose’ Clemenceau observed to a gathering of his closest advisors in his apartment on the evening of 14 March. ‘Either France alone on the Left Bank of the Rhine or France with the return of the 1814 frontier, that is to say with Alsace-Lorraine and part, if not all, of the Saar, and America and Britain allied to us’. The fact that Clemenceau framed the choice provides a clear indication of his thinking. There was general agreement that the guarantee offer could not be refused. The following morning Tardieu was instructed to draw up a response.⁶²

Tardieu outlined six conditions for accepting the guarantee offer, four of which, significantly, rested upon the integrity of the rule of international public law as opposed to the ‘physical guarantee’ of permanent occupation and political autonomy for the Left Bank of the Rhine. In the end, a deal was negotiated providing for an occupation of fifteen years with a three-stage evacuation contingent on German execution of the treaty. Clemenceau obtained two important further conditions in difficult negotiations with Wilson and Lloyd George. The first was the right to reoccupy the Left Bank in the event of a German default in reparations payments. The second was a stipulation in the peace treaty that any violation of the demilitarised status of the Rhineland would be defined as a *casus foederis*.

The legal character of the above guarantees is important. Rather than constituting secret clauses written into traditional alliances, they were embedded in international public law (the Treaty of Versailles). This established French security on a legal basis. This dimension to French policy has been overlooked in the literature on the peace conference. The guarantees were far from classic mechanisms of traditional power politics. The French delegation relinquished its demand for a ‘physical guarantee’ in exchange for a temporary occupation and the rule of international law.

⁶² The only primary source record of these discussions is the diary of Louis Loucheur, *Carnets secrets, 1908-1932*, edited by Jacques de Launay (Paris: Brepols, 1962), entries for Friday 14 and Saturday 15 March 1919: pp. 71-2.

IV

The great difficulty for the Clemenceau government was that most of France's soldiers and diplomats, along with a great many parliamentarians, favoured the more traditional prescription of security through permanent domination of the Rhineland. These constituencies included most of the right and centre-right in parliament, many diplomats, virtually all senior military officials, president Raymond Poincaré and especially Marshal Foch. The story of the civil-military crisis provoked by resistance, which culminated in Clemenceau's opponents using Foch as the lead figure in an attempt to force a change of policy, is relatively well-known. The premier dealt with this effort easily and the end result was that both Poincaré and Foch found themselves utterly marginalised from the decision-making process and powerless to affect the debates over ratification of the settlement when it came before parliament in the summer of 1919.⁶³

The strategies adopted by both Clemenceau and Tardieu when defending the Versailles Treaty before parliament provide fascinating insight into the conceptual underpinnings of French policy. Responding to trenchant criticisms of the settlement from conservative nationalists, the government's case was a combination of ideological and balance of power arguments, all underlining advantages offered by the Anglo-American guarantees. Aubert, who played a key role in putting together the government's case, emphasised the future importance of American power to world politics. He argued that the guarantees with the Anglo-Saxon powers 'provide our policy with the most persuasive threat that one could use against Germany to prevent another war'.⁶⁴ But Aubert also laid great emphasis on political and cultural affinities binding France to its great power allies. An 'association of liberal great powers', he insisted, would establish the basis for 'a new era in international politics'. He stressed that 'France, Britain and the United States share more than one hundred years of democratic ideas'. This common ideological affinity, Aubert argued, constituted 'a

⁶³ Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, pp. 298-313.

⁶⁴ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 418, Aubert note marked 'Négociat. rive g. du Rhin' and dated 'fin mars'; the exact same phrase appears in an untitled document prepared for Tardieu's appearance before the chamber peace treaty commission on 29 Jul. 1919 that is in MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 419.

more powerful bond than any combination of material interests one can find in the long tradition of our diplomacy'.⁶⁵

Many international political theorists would nowadays point to Aubert's language as evidence of a nascent 'security community': a grouping of states for whom shared interests combine with political and cultural affinities to make war between them 'unthinkable'. Aubert's call for co-operation among Atlantic liberal powers in many ways anticipated the 1947 North Atlantic Alliance. It was an early iteration of what International Relations theorists nowadays call a 'security community'.⁶⁶

Both Clemenceau and Tardieu would take up Aubert's language and his arguments in their defence of the Rhineland settlement before parliament during the summer of 1919. Both referred to the guarantees as 'alliances' and emphasised the strategic advantages they offered in terms of traditional power politics. But both also made repeated references to the 'moral authority' that association with the world's most powerful democracies would provide France. Just as importantly, both Clemenceau and Tardieu also defended the decision not to demand an autonomous Rhineland with reference to the principle of self-determination.

Tardieu appeared before the senate and chamber commissions assembled to approve the peace settlement in July and August 1919. During these appearances he consistently underlined the importance of British and American economic, maritime and military power. This power combination made the strategic commitment embodied in the guarantees 'a decisive advantage in the European balance of power that no physical guarantee can replace'.⁶⁷ But he also deployed a series of ideological and normative arguments. Britain and America, Tardieu pointed out, were 'not only the world's two greatest financial, industrial and commercial powers', they were also

⁶⁵ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 423, 'L'alliance défensive franco-anglo-américain', 12 May 1919.

⁶⁶ The concept of a security community was first developed in K. Deutsch (et. al.), *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 1-25; E. Adler and M. Barnett refined the term, stressing the importance of shared political identities and long-term interests: see their *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ Quotations from AN, C7773, CAEAN, CTP, twentieth *séance*, 29 Jul. 1919 and MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 420, 'Réponse du gouvernement', 29 Jul. 1919 (note prepared for Tardieu's appearance at the above session); see also *ibid.*, vol. 419, 'Piecce 52', 28 Jul. 1919 and AN, *Papiers Tardieu*, 324 AP 51, 'Note: gains de la France', undated.

‘the two greatest liberal powers with whom we are most certain to share a unity of democratic views’.⁶⁸ Shared ideology made the guarantees reliable and durable instruments of policy. ‘The French government’ Tardieu enthused, ‘sees in this grouping of three free peoples, united by the League of Nations, a powerful source of security at the service of shared ideals’.⁶⁹ Ideological affinity provided powerful cement for the envisaged north-Atlantic alliance. Accepting the Anglo-American guarantees constituted a strategy of ‘engagement’ that would deliver ‘a *democratic* alliance with Britain and the United States ... [that is] ... an advantage that *nothing* can replace’.⁷⁰

Tardieu went further to stress the extent to which the peace treaty with Germany reflected France’s publicly avowed war aims as well as the democratic principle of self-determination that was so influential at war’s end. ‘The treaty of peace’ he asserted, ‘in all of its articles ... conforms exactly, as far as France is concerned, to all of the declarations it has made concerning its war aims’. This gave the treaty a ‘high moral authority’ both in France and abroad. The alternative, to detach the Left Bank with its more than five million inhabitants, would have undermined this authority.⁷¹

To break up the German empire would have meant only one thing: it would have been to say, following the principle of state self-interest, we will use our force as victors to impose on Germany a change in the constitution that it had reaffirmed continually in free votes since 1871. The Allied and Associated powers, having waged the war for the liberation of peoples, would not have accepted that their peace could result in damaging the internal liberties of even a defeated people ... We [therefore] considered German unity an established fact. In changing it we would

⁶⁸ AN, C7773, Commission des Affaires étrangères de l’Assemblée nationale [hereafter CAEAN], Commission du Traité de la Paix [hereafter CTP], twentieth séance, 29 Jul. 1919; almost identical language in JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 2 Sep. 1919.

⁶⁹ MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 419, ‘Note pour M. Clemenceau: la question du Rhin’, 23 Apr. 1919 - used by the premier during his 10 Jul. 1919 appearance before the chamber treaty commission.

⁷⁰ SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, ‘Question du Rhin’: 2ème solution (engagement’), 19 Mar. 1919, emphasis in original; MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 418, ‘Note sur la conversation du 14 mars’, 15 Mar. 1919; SHD-DAT, *Fonds Clemenceau*, 6N 73-2, ‘Note sur la suggestion présentée le 14 mars’, 16 Mar. 1919.

⁷¹ AN, *Papiers Tardieu*, 324 AP 51, ‘Ce que lepaix avec l’Allemagne apporte à la France’, undated; MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, vol. 420, ‘Réponse du gouvernement’, 29 Jul. 1919.

have given the Germans arguments against the treaty that would have been powerful and, what is more, legitimate'.⁷²

Tardieu's central point was that traditional balance of power schemes for ending German unity were fundamentally incompatible with the new normative standards ushered into international society by the First World War.

Clemenceau laid great emphasis on the open-ended character of the Versailles settlement when defending it before parliamentarians. He had long been preoccupied with France's relative decline. He therefore recognised the need for safeguards that would allow France to deal from a position of strength with a Germany that desired to overthrow the post-war order. But Clemenceau also understood the need for a settlement that could also accommodate gradual reconciliation and, eventually, Franco-German co-operation. A strategic relationship with the world's other two great liberal powers would provide a solid basis for France to deal with either a revisionist or a co-operative Germany. Such an arrangement would provide a favourable balance of power in Europe. But it also held open the possibility of a more optimistic future based on co-operation and the rule of law. For these reasons Clemenceau described the peace treaty with Germany as 'a collection of possibilities' that was 'not even a beginning' but instead 'the beginning of a beginning'.⁷³

Clemenceau invoked the changed international environment, and in particular the democratic principle of self-determination, constantly in his defence of the peace settlement. If he mocked Wilson's 'desire to resolve all the difficulties before us by applying the axiom of self-determination', his own justification for renouncing a buffer state was framed entirely in terms of this axiom. 'On the Left Bank' Clemenceau observed 'there is a German population, more German than many of us would like to admit'. He noted that this 'inconvenient fact' had 'important implications for our

⁷² République française, Journal Officiel [hereafter JO], Chambre, *Débats parlementaires*, 1919, 2 Sep. 1919, which draws on MAE, PA-AP 166, *Papiers Tardieu*, 'Réponse du gouvernement', 29 Jul. 1919; see also MAE, PA-AP 141, *Papiers Pichon*, 'Observations sur la discussion du traité devant la Chambre: séance du 2 septembre', 7 Sep. 1919.

⁷³ JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 25 Sep. 1919; see also Beau de Lomenie, *Débat de ratification*, pp. 173-202; Duroselle, *Clemenceau*, pp.765-73 and Watson, pp. 359-65

policy'.⁷⁴ The premier characterised attempts by French occupiers to stir up separatist feeling on the Left Bank as 'a policy that weakens us morally and physically'.⁷⁵ Violation of the principle of self-determination, he warned, would create permanent tensions with Germany, deprive France of its great power allies and 'damage our moral standing in the world'.⁷⁶ French pursuit of a new status for the Left Bank of the Rhine was circumscribed by the norm of self-determination.

Deploying ideological arguments, Clemenceau argued that the ties between France and the US, in particular, transcended traditional diplomatic practices. 'As we counted on America in during the war, so we will be able to count on America in peacetime ... If you want my innermost thoughts, there is no written treaty that I would count on in this way'.⁷⁷ This absolute priority stood in opposition to the arguments put forward by Marshal Foch:

[when Foch declared] "I would rather have the Rhine and Britain and America" I said to myself "this is the view of a military official and not a politician". After having waged war with these two powers, if you lose the political, economic and military union we have forged, I put it to you, what do you have left?⁷⁸

The French premier's preference for the North-Atlantic alliance was based on this admixture of power politics, ideological conviction and cultural affinity.

Clemenceau went further – indeed much further – to underline the need to come to terms with a reformed Germany. 'Our central challenge' he insisted to the senate commission

... consists in demilitarising Germany, and all of our efforts must focus on this objective. I would not go so far as to use the word "conciliation", but

⁷⁴ France, Archives du Sénat [hereafter AS], Commission des Affaires Etrangères du Sénat [hereafter CAES], vol. 1893, 69S 266, 1919, Clemenceau *audition*, 25 Aug. 1919.

⁷⁵ JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 25 Sep. 1919.

⁷⁶ Quotes from AS, CAES, vol. 1893, 69S 266, 1919, Clemenceau *audition*, 25 Aug. 1919 and JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 25 Sep. 1919 respectively.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Beau de Loménie, *Débat de ratification*, 190.

⁷⁸ AN, C7773, CAEAN, CTP, twentieth séance, 29 Jul. 1919.

all the same, we must find an accommodation with Germany and its 60 million inhabitants while we have only 40 million.⁷⁹

Clemenceau therefore stressed the need to transform German political culture: 'For us it is not a matter of destroying the German people. To give you my entire thoughts, civilisation would gain nothing by this ... I propose instead to destroy the Germany that lusts for conquest and domination'.⁸⁰

The premier returned to this theme before the entire chamber in late September. France could not seriously propose the destruction of a nation of more than 60 million inhabitants. 'We must live with them, support them even, endeavour to find an accommodation. This is a problem that cannot be addressed resolved in any other sense than that of accommodation'.⁸¹ The premier returned to this theme before the entire chamber in late September. France could not seriously propose the destruction of a nation of more than 60 million inhabitants. 'We must live with them, support them even, endeavour to find an accommodation. This is a problem that cannot be addressed resolved in any other sense than that of accommodation'.⁸² German unity, for Clemenceau, was an established fact. Franco-German reconciliation and cooperation were therefore essential for the future.

This argument anticipated very interestingly an influential missive from Berthelot to Aristide Briand some four years later, the logic of which underpinned Briand's policy of Franco-German rapprochement culminating in the Locarno Accords:

It should not be forgotten that, even if we are stronger today and will remain so for another decade, in twenty to fifty years the weight of 70 million organised and hard-working Germans will ultimately overcome that of 38 million Frenchmen. If therefore we do not succeed in the creation of a German republic hostile to war, we are doomed. Far from gaining ground among democratic opinion, we ceaselessly attract its hatred. In the event that we succeed in forcing Germany to give in through our pressure

⁷⁹ AS, CAES, vol. 1893, 69S 266, 1919, Clemenceau *audition*, 25 Aug. 1919.

⁸⁰ AN, C7773, CAEAN, CTP, twentieth séance, 29 Jul. 1919.

⁸¹ JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 25 Sep. 1919.

⁸² JO, Chambre, *Débats*, 1919, 25 Sep. 1919.

in the Ruhr, our immediate policy thereafter will have to be very generous and very probably sacrifice the original objective of our action.⁸³

The sense that French security must rest ultimately on some form of durable Franco-German reconciliation would remain an important element in policy calculations for the remainder of the twentieth century.

To conclude, the Clemenceau government's peace programme is best understood as a cocktail of power politics, commitment to liberal democratic principles and the aspiration to construct a trans-Atlantic strategic condominium. The initial programme put forward in Tardieu's Rhineland memorandum aimed to transform the balance of power to the advantage of France. And yet, upon close examination, it is clear that even this early expression of French policy aim was a fusion of traditional concepts, such as the balance of power and 'physical guarantees', with normative references to an 'Atlantic' political and cultural entity united in defence of democracy and international justice. And the evidence is clear that Clemenceau government was from the outset willing to bargain away the more uncompromising aspects of its security programme for a strategic commitment from the world's two most powerful democracies.

The doctrine of self-determination and the aim to establish a democratic 'community of power' conditioned planning for post-war security in ways that have not been acknowledged in the existing literature. It is true that this aim was underpinned by a reading of the global power balance that attributed decisive importance to the rise of the United States. Equally important, however, was an ideological vision of a democratic international order in which Germany would be enmeshed and constrained. When forced to choose between this conception of an Atlantic security community and a traditional arrangement based on dominating the Rhine, Clemenceau and his advisors opted with little hesitation for the Atlanticist alternative. They justified this decision, moreover, with reference to *both* power politics and the ideological and cultural bonds uniting France to its Anglo-Saxon allies.

There can be no argument that the faith Clemenceau's team placed in the political and cultural bonds linking France to its Anglo-Saxon allies was misplaced in

⁸³ Quoted in G. Suarez, *Aristide Briand: sa vie, son œuvre, avec son journal et de nombreux documents inédits*, vol. V, *Artisan de la paix, 1918-1923* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1941), pp. 429–30.

1919. Clemenceau and Tardieu badly misread political dynamics in the United States. America was not yet ready to assume the global leadership role allotted to it in French policy. Yet both at least understood that France was no longer a first-rank power. It is not a simplification to say that the premier and his advisors looked to the future. Traditionally-minded critics of government policy, conversely, wanted to turn back the clock to an era of French predominance.

It is puzzling that historians have focused almost exclusively on the balance of power and ignored the importance of ideology. The result is that core elements of the French policy for peace and security have been written out of the historical record.