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Frédéric Bozo and Christian Wenkel, eds., *France and the German Question, 1945-1990*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019. vii +299 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$135.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 978-1-78920-226-7.

Review by Talbot Imlay, Université Laval.

As the title indicates, Frédéric Bozo and Christian Wenkel's edited collection focuses on French policy towards Germany from the end of World War II to the country's reunification in 1990. Together, the contributors constitute an impressive group of scholars, many of whom have and are working actively on various aspects of Franco-German relations. As might be expected from an edited collection, there is some recycling of material with several contributors drawing on previously published work. Nevertheless, there is much to be said for gathering such an array of contributions in a single volume.

It is not easy to review an edited collection, even one as centred as this one is on a single subject: French policy towards Germany. The chapters range across four decades of the Cold War as well as across multiple aspects of French policy. Rather than discuss each chapter in turn, which would be tiresome for any reader, I will discuss several common themes that emerge from the collection.

One theme, highlighted in the editors' introduction, is that of continuity in French policy. Throughout the period, it appears, policymakers in Paris not only supported German reunification, but also envisaged Germany's future in a wider European context. A reunified Germany was only conceivable in a framework of European political and economic integration. Whether led by Georges Bidault, Charles de Gaulle or François Mitterrand, whether under the Fourth Republic's parliamentary regime or the more executive-oriented Fifth Republic, French policy emerges as strikingly consistent. This is something of a revisionist position, particularly for non-specialists. The more familiar story of postwar French policy is often divided into two distinct approaches: the first, in the immediate postwar years, was marked by France's determination to permanently weaken Germany, preferably through territorial dismemberment and severe controls on its economic and military capabilities; the second and subsequent approach saw France reluctantly abandon its hardline stance in the face of Anglo-American opposition, accepting Washington and London's proposal for a West German state, a proposal made palatable by Germany's division into two separate states. What was initially a second-best option quickly became a key element of French security as Paris embraced the existence of two Germanies. In François Mauriac's well-known bon-mot, "J'aime tellement l'Allemagne que je suis ravi qu'il y en ait deux." In this story a principal appeal of European integration was the added security it promised through some oversight of Germany's economic development.

Together, the various chapters make short work of this familiar story of French policy. Drawing on a rich vein of scholarship, much of it by scholars associated with the Universität des Saarlandes, Rainer Hudemann underscores the bold and innovative nature of French policy in its occupation zone from 1945-1949, suggesting that this laid the groundwork for a more generous and collaborative approach to the Federal Republic afterwards. Garret Martin and Bendikt Schoenborn both emphasize de Gaulle's favourable position towards German reunification, with Schoenborn suggesting that the General was more far-sighted on this score than the Adenauer governments, which lacked "any viable reunification concept" (p. 111). Most striking in this regard is Bozo's chapter, which provides a useful summary of his recent work arguing that Mitterrand, contrary to a popular view, sought neither to prevent nor even retard German reunification in the fast-moving period from 1989-1990, but rather to guide developments in a European direction. In this way, as in others, Mitterrand was de Gaulle's faithful heir.

Another theme is the focus on France and on French policy. In their introduction, the editors highlight the importance of the opening of French archives to researchers, lamenting that earlier work relied too heavily on non-French sources. The focus on France and the use of French archives is, of course, to be welcomed. And it is probably true, as the editors suggest, that the international history of the postwar (Cold War) period in general has downplayed France's role, concentrating more on the superpowers or on Britain, China, and other countries. France was an important player, and on no issue was it more so than on Germany's future, if only because of France's status as a victorious and occupying power.

At the same time, the focus on France raises some potential problems. One is the circularity of the argument: because France was important, one should closely examine its policy from a French perspective, which confirms the importance of France. When seen from Paris, all roads lead back to Paris. But the same can be said of any country. There are at least two safeguards against such circularity. One consists of considering sources from other countries as complementary, rather than as an alternative to French sources. American, British or any other non-French sources offer less a "distorted prism" (p. 6), as the editors contend, than another perspective on French policy. For example, what French leaders and officials said to their foreign counterparts can be just as important as what they said among themselves. But the more important point is that both conversations are needed to assess French policy. A second safeguard consists of placing French policy in a multilateral context. Perhaps unwittingly, the collection as a whole drives home the point that Franco-German relations cannot be understood in bilateral terms: it was not only the Americans, the Soviets, and the British who wielded influence, but others as well, among them the Eastern Europeans and, as Thomas Angerer's chapter shows, even the Austrians. The course of Franco-German relations did not depend solely or even preponderantly on decisions in Paris--or even in Paris and Bonn.

The collection's focus on France arguably reflects more general trends in French scholarship. In recent years, several prominent French historians have identified a French school of international history (*histoire des relations internationales*), whose claim to distinction rests on just such a focus. Indeed, in perusing *Pour l'histoire des relations internationales*, an influential collection edited by Robert Frank and aimed at promoting a distinct approach, one has the impression that the French school amounts to an almost exclusive focus on France together with a predilection for scholarship in French--either by French scholars or by foreign scholars who have studied in France.[1] The risk in all this, perhaps, is that French international history becomes a local

affair—*une histoire franco-française*. In this context, it is striking how many of the contributors to the volume under review have or are working in European universities (mostly French and German), with only two North American scholars (and one British scholar).

The collection's focus is not only on French policy but also on policymaking at the highest level. With rare exception, the contributors examine the thinking and policies of a tiny elite (prime ministers, presidents, foreign ministers and high-ranking diplomats), with many of the chapters discussing particular Fifth Republic presidents: de Gaulle, Pompidou, Giscard, and Mitterrand. To be sure, the Fifth Republic was a presidential regime, designed by de Gaulle to concentrate power, especially in the foreign and military realms, in his hands—a practice his successors happily continued. Nevertheless, such an exclusive perspective leaves out a great deal. Reading the chapters, one would never know that France—and Western Europe in general—underwent profound social, economic and cultural changes in the second half of the twentieth century, which presumably had some effect on policy. A discussion of what Paul Kennedy, long ago and in another context, called the “realities behind diplomacy” which help to set the parameters of policy, would be welcome.^[2] Such an approach need not necessarily be at the expense of an emphasis on high policy: Daniel Sargent, for example, has described how a handful of American policymakers across three American presidential administrations reacted in the 1970s to the breakdown of the global political and economic order established after World War II.^[3] Or to take a more pertinent example, beginning in the 1950s the balance of economic and financial power between France and Germany shifted strongly in Bonn's favour, a reality French policymakers presumably could not ignore.

A final theme concerns the emphasis on success. Reading the chapters, one gets the impression that France was not only an important player in postwar and Cold War European politics, but also that French policymakers often achieved their goals. This is evident in Michael Creswell's chapter on the EDC and its fall-out in which West Germany's entry into NATO, albeit with some restrictions (renunciation of ABC weapons), becomes evidence of French skill; in Nicolas Badalassi's chapter on the CSCE in which the French almost single-handedly managed to ensure that the Helsinki Final Act kept open the possibility of a peaceful revision of borders and thus of Germany's eventual reunification; and, as already mentioned, in Bozo's chapter on Mitterrand's efforts in 1989–1990 to encase a reunited Germany in a more deeply integrated Europe. At times, the emphasis on success seems a little forced: after all, it is not always easy to determine when France took the initiative and when it reacted and adapted to factors over which French policymakers had limited control. It is perhaps also worth considering whether a focus on France privileges an emphasis on French initiative at the expense of a more reactive and even adaptive French policy.

An emphasis on success, in any case, also raises the question of vantage point. From that of the Paris agreements in October 1954, France emerged relatively well from the EDC saga; but from that of 1952, when almost all French politicians rejected West Germany's entry into NATO as unacceptable, assessments become more complicated. Vantage point aside, there is the issue of the gap between broad policy aspirations and concrete policy—a gap Garret Martin's chapter on de Gaulle's “Grand Design” underscores. Once in power, de Gaulle envisaged forging a “Paris-Moscow-Bonn triangle” that would not only elevate France's international role but would also reduce American (or Anglo-American/Anglo-Saxon) influence in Europe. Such a “Grand Design” was never likely to succeed and not simply because France obviously lacked the resources to pull it off. It also failed because international relations were too complex for such

grand designs: there were too many countries involved, too many “independent variables” at play and too many uncertainties, to imagine that France—or any other country, for that matter—could proceed in such a linear and successful fashion. As a guide to understanding unfolding events, a little more of Tolstoy and little less of Bismarck might be useful.

And this brings us back to the theme of continuity and particularly the argument, running through many chapters, that French policy always favoured German reunification in a broadly European framework. Leaving aside the complicated story of France’s changing position on Europe after 1945, the claim that, collectively, French policymakers desired—and even worked for—a reunited Germany is questionable. George-Henri Soutou’s recent and much-anticipated history of Cold War French policy suggests far less consistency on this issue.[4] Going further, one could argue that France’s support for German reunification during the Cold War was largely meaningless, or, more accurately, simply rhetorical, because there was little reason to believe that it could happen in any foreseeable future. During the 1950s there was some talk of creating a demilitarized and neutralized Central and Eastern Europe, which would encompass a reunited Germany, but no serious international negotiations ensued. Afterwards, the prospects of reunification quickly receded beyond sight, a situation that became a precondition for Soviet and East German acceptance of *Ostpolitik* during the 1970s. French policymakers, in other words, could endorse Germany’s eventual reunification, always emphasizing the gradual and negotiated nature of the process, because it involved no concrete commitment. It is worth adding that a reunited Germany was arguably not in France’s interest, and not only because of fears of what such a Germany might do. France’s standing as a leading European power rested partly on its status as one of the four victorious powers, providing it a say in (and a potential veto over) any changes to a postwar order founded on the division of Europe and Germany. This status amounted to the European equivalent of France’s permanent seat on the United Nations’ Security Council. A reunified Germany necessarily meant a revised order, regardless of the European Union’s ultimate configuration, and this revised order almost certainly meant a diminished role for France.

This is a valuable collection of articles that illuminates French policy towards Germany, a key issue in Cold War European and transatlantic politics. The goal of emphasizing France’s influential role is certainly to be welcomed. But a fuller understanding of this role arguably requires scholars to broaden their focus well beyond France in order to integrate French policy in a complex interactive web of multilateral relations.

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NOTES

[1] Robert Frank, ed., *Pour l'histoire des relations internationales* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2012).

[2] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Realities behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London: Fontana, 1985).

[3] Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[4] Georges-Henri Soutou, *La Guerre froide de la France, 1941-1990* (Paris: Tallandier, 2018).

Talbot Imlay
Université Laval
Talbot.Imlay@hst.ulaval.ca

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