

Bilateral Summit Diplomacy in Western European and Transatlantic Relations, 1956–63

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, innovations in transportation and communication facilitated the revival of an old diplomatic tool: summit meetings and personal contacts between heads of state and government. Meetings of sovereigns go back centuries, but with the development of the modern state system and diplomatic practice from the fifteenth century, meetings of leaders had become less important in relations between states. Resident ambassadors and foreign-ministry professionals took on the central roles in diplomacy. However, this practice began to break down in turn during the nineteenth century. Reliable rail travel made it convenient for European leaders to meet on occasion, and some, including Napoleon III, made regular use of the practice. The telegraph and telephone also facilitated greater diplomatic centralization. Prior to these inventions, it could take weeks or months for ambassadors to receive new instructions from their governments. As a result, they had considerable autonomy and policy-making authority as they responded to developments in foreign capitals. However, the development of rapid means of communication gradually reduced many ambassadors from policy-makers to symbolic representatives of their countries and transmitters of messages.

All of these changes were consolidated after the First World War when Woodrow Wilson's 'new diplomacy' called all existing diplomatic practice into question while Wilson and other government leaders travelled to Paris to negotiate the peace settlement personally. Wilsonian diplomacy posited that public meetings of government leaders were a more democratic means of diplomacy

and more conducive to maintaining the peace than the shadowy dealings of ambassadors and foreign ministries in the past. In subsequent decades as air travel to a meeting became possible, the ascendancy of summitry was reinforced. Beginning during the Second World War and continuing during the Cold War, summit meetings became (and remain) the most visible aspect of contemporary relations between states. No longer need a president or prime minister rely exclusively on his or her country's ambassadors or diplomatic staff to represent it abroad or conduct delicate negotiations. Now such delegation of responsibility is only necessary to the degree either that the leader is unwilling or unable to set aside the time to meet foreign counterparts or that the stakes are not high enough to merit his or her attention. Indeed, today much day-to-day diplomatic work focuses on the arrangement of future summits and ensuring their success. The outcome of the most recent summit and the prospects of the next one now often gauge the status of relations between states.

This steady reduction in the roles of ambassadors, foreign ministries and professional diplomats leads to the question of whether the centralization of negotiation and decision-making in the hands of government leaders and the focus of diplomacy on periodic summit meetings has been a positive or a negative development. Unfortunately, the theoretical literature on summitry, as opposed to analyses of specific meetings, is quite sparse. The few studies that exist focus primarily on the bilateral US–Soviet encounters during the Cold War or on unusual multi-lateral conferences such as the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) or the Paris peace conference of 1919. Thus most of the historiography is concerned with meetings among rivals or among the great powers after major wars. Relatively little attention has been paid to bilateral summitry among allies during more normal times.

Proponents of summit diplomacy argue that it serves useful purposes by allowing leaders to form a personal impression of one another, can offer powerful symbols of partnership or reconciliation, propels sluggish diplomatic bureaucracies forward, and places diplomacy in the hands of those with the greatest decision-making power and educates them on the key foreign-policy issues of the day. Politicians and government leaders, of course, are among the strongest advocates of summitry, as it increases their central policy-making roles, provides colourful opportunities for

media attention and propaganda, and reinforces their image as the representatives of the entire country. However, with the exception of the memoirs of such individuals and the works of a few historians, most of the literature on summitry is provided by critics of the practice, many of whom were professional diplomats and resented the intrusion of politicians into their domain. These critics emphasize that government leaders often have little familiarity with, or interest in, the intricate details of diplomacy; that summits are often poorly prepared, with vague goals; that pressures of time and domestic politics can propel leaders to make poor decisions; and that summits are often wrongly viewed by both leaders and public as a panacea for relations that are troubled by profound long-term differences of national interests. These critics argue that diplomacy should be left in the hands of the professionals and that leaders should only meet on rare, well-planned occasions to sign accords reached previously by their subordinates.¹

I began considering the issues of summit diplomacy while researching and preparing a book manuscript on Western European and transatlantic relations in the 1950s and 1960s, because I was struck by the degree to which, during that period, summit meetings and personal diplomacy among government leaders were already relied upon at the expense of lower-level diplomacy by experts drawn from foreign ministries and other government departments.² While working on this project, I constantly found myself weighing the positive and negative effects of such a practice, and ultimately I came to a mixed, although predominantly negative, verdict. This article develops these ideas at greater length than was possible in a study focused on other issues, but it employs examples from the period to illustrate both the potential and the perils of modern summit diplomacy. Although every author has his or her own definition of just what summit diplomacy does or does not include, the focus here is on personal bilateral meetings between government leaders. The historical context is provided by the efforts of the major Western powers to build a stronger and more cohesive Western Europe and Atlantic alliance during a period when the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet bloc seemed a permanent feature of the international system. Examination of summitry in this context is useful precisely because so much of the existing historiography focuses on either East–West summitry or multilateral conference diplo-

macy. Since some critics of multilateral conference diplomacy suggest that bilateral summitry might be a more useful or, at a minimum, less dangerous, practice, it seems worthwhile to consider whether the latter is afflicted by the same problems as the former.³

The potential positive impact of summit diplomacy is best demonstrated in those rare cases when two leaders forge ahead of, or against, domestic opinion and reach agreements, settle conflicts, or symbolically bridge divides previously thought to be immutable and thereby transform their countries' bilateral relations. Needless to say, such episodes are extremely rare and the risks for the leaders involved are very high, but the allure is obvious. In late 1956 France and West Germany were locked in difficult technical negotiations over the formation of the European Common Market, the antecedent of today's European Union and the key to European integration for nearly a half-century now. Other Western European countries were involved in the negotiations, but France and Germany were the keys to a successful outcome. They remained divided by historical mistrust just a decade after the end of their third war in seventy-five years and they were on opposite sides of complicated debates on tariffs and free trade in Europe, agricultural subsidies and protection, nuclear development, and trade relations with the wider world. The government in Paris, led by the socialist Guy Mollet, remained committed to a global role for France, promoted *détente* with the USSR at the expense of German interests, and often seemed more concerned with closer ties to Britain and the United States than the European continent. The conservative government of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in Bonn remained bitter over France's rejection of the European Defence Community (EDC) just two years before, questioned France's commitment to German security, and feared that Paris sought to create a protectionist European bloc that would cut Germany off from its wider markets.⁴

When the complicated negotiations on the Common Market reached a deadlock in October 1956, Adenauer scheduled a visit to Paris to negotiate personally with Mollet. With talks having gone on since May 1955, the chancellor feared that the technical debates between the French and German foreign and economic ministries could be settled no other way. Unfortunately, only days before his planned trip, the French and British launched

their ill-fated Suez expedition. In the international uproar that followed, Adenauer faced strong domestic pressure to abort the summit. Members of the governing conservative coalition, the socialist opposition, the media, the foreign-policy bureaucracy, and even his foreign minister urged Adenauer to cancel the trip. However, the chancellor realized that while Suez (and the simultaneous upheaval in Hungary) made the Paris summit risky, it also offered France and Germany the opportunity and incentive to take a decisive step forward for Europe. Adenauer insisted on travelling to Paris and overruled all objections.⁵

During their one-day summit on 6 November, held away from the public eye, Mollet and Adenauer reached an outline agreement for most of the outstanding problems in the Common Market negotiations and made clear their commitment to resolving the rest. Outside powers unwittingly contributed to the positive outcome. The French, chastened by Soviet nuclear threats, Washington's repudiation of their actions in Egypt, and their abandonment by the British, appreciated Adenauer's willingness to go forward with the summit. They realized that the chancellor offered them a new foundation for influence in Europe and the world: a Western European political and economic bloc. Adenauer's readiness to make most of the necessary technical concessions to bring about the Common Market made clear his political commitment to building Europe with France. The November 1956 Franco-German summit thus broke the log-jam in Western Europe and led directly to the signing in March 1957 of the Treaty of Rome, creating the Common Market. The Common Market rapidly became the core of European co-operation and the foundation for all subsequent steps towards European unity. The November 1956 summit also set the pattern of Franco-German leadership in Western Europe that has existed ever since. It should be noted, however, that more than a year of technical negotiations prior to November 1956 meant that the ground was well prepared for such a summit. Moreover, Adenauer and Mollet did not negotiate the technical agreements personally. Instead, they spent their time discussing the world situation and the prospects for Western European co-operation. They gave their subordinates blunt orders to reach a settlement and the latter complied.⁶

In addition to its potential to make a breakthrough where diplomatic and economic negotiators alone cannot, and to pro-

duce a spectacular turning point, summit diplomacy can also be useful for fostering mutual trust among government leaders. Here the Franco-German relationship of the 1950s and 1960s is also instructive. In the unstable French Fourth Republic (1946–58), governments rose and fell, on average, every six months. Such a pattern was not conducive to the formation of personal relationships between French and foreign leaders and was one reason why negotiations on co-operation in Western Europe were often so difficult. Chancellor Adenauer was only one of many Western leaders who became frustrated at the revolving-door government in Paris. This situation finally changed with the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 and the return of Charles de Gaulle to power as the first president of the much more stable Fifth Republic.

Prior to their first meeting in 1958, de Gaulle and Adenauer had little reason to trust one another. After all, de Gaulle's earlier military and political career had been based primarily on his resistance to the German threat, both potential and actual, to France. During and shortly after the war, de Gaulle, as head of Free France and the provisional government, had pursued a policy of dismembering Germany. While out of power he had opposed the creation of the West German state and even in 1958 he was widely regarded in Germany as a rabid nationalist and a dictator. However, appearances were deceiving. By 1958 de Gaulle recognized that France's future was as a leading (he would have said *the* leading) power of Western Europe. To realize this ambition he would need the co-operation of Germany, and he decided to use summit diplomacy to reassure Adenauer and win the chancellor over to his vision. In September 1958, for the first and only time, he invited a foreign leader, Adenauer, for a visit to his private home at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises. Adenauer was moved by this personal gesture and from this first meeting the two aged leaders found a degree of common ground that amazed and sometimes confounded their subordinates.⁷ During the years that both remained in power, from 1958 through late 1963, the wider Franco-German relationship underwent many ups and downs, but the personal de Gaulle-Adenauer link remained solid. At times when the wider relationship threatened to deteriorate, as in 1958–60 over de Gaulle's demands for a USA-France-Britain directorate in NATO that would reduce Germany to second-class status in the alliance, de

Gaulle–Adenauer summit meetings always restored relations to an even keel. The meetings allowed de Gaulle to reassure Adenauer of his long-term vision of Franco-German co-operation to shape Europe. Between 1958 and 1963, de Gaulle and Adenauer met a total of fifteen times. Most of these meetings were private, substantive exchanges of views and statements of solidarity on the key political issues of the day, reflecting the French desire to establish a general Paris–Bonn alignment that took precedence over any specific issue.

So strong was the de Gaulle–Adenauer summit relationship that the two leaders gradually won much of the French and German public over to it. While most of their meetings were private and substantive, in 1962 they added a spectacular public dimension to their summitry, as each undertook an extended ‘state’ visit to the country of the other. In July Adenauer visited several French cities and accompanied de Gaulle to a joint Mass at Reims cathedral and a Franco-German military parade. In September de Gaulle returned the gesture, touring Germany and giving a number of carefully memorized speeches in German extolling the greatness of Germany and the potential for Franco-German co-operation. The capstone of both the substantive and symbolic summitry that de Gaulle and Adenauer practised was the Franco-German treaty of January 1963, a sweeping arrangement that called for bilateral co-operation and the formation of common policies whenever possible in a wide variety of areas, including defence, foreign policy, cultural and educational affairs, economics, and the organization of Europe.⁸

Unfortunately, all was not as well as it seemed in the Franco-German relationship by 1963, and the growing problems open my discussion of the dangers of summit diplomacy for both domestic and foreign policy. First, one argument in favour of summitry is that it places diplomacy in the hands of those with ultimate decision-making power and thereby facilitates initiatives and results, but in democratic systems of government even the president, prime minister or chancellor does not have absolute power and there is always the risk that such a leader may become isolated from domestic opinion and attempt to take the bilateral relationship further than the public, legislature, business leaders or other powerful forces at home are prepared to accept. Any ambitious or groundbreaking foreign policy runs the risk of domestic repudiation, but when the leader engages his or her

credibility, the risks are all the greater. Second, a close summit relationship can alienate other allies and lead them to sabotage what they view as an exclusive or discriminatory arrangement.

By the early 1960s, so successful was Franco-German summit diplomacy that many observers, including the two principals, made the mistake of concluding that the de Gaulle–Adenauer relationship was the Franco-German relationship. Such was not the case, however. While de Gaulle had a solid domestic base for his policy of greater independence for France and Europe in the Cold War and for his efforts to break up the bilateral international system, Adenauer's position at home grew weaker and weaker after over a decade in power, in large part precisely due to his willingness to follow de Gaulle's lead on many issues. By late 1962 and early 1963 most of Adenauer's cabinet, public opinion, the Bundestag (parliament), and German business leaders all feared that Adenauer would acquiesce in the Gaullist creation of an autarkic, neutralist Western Europe that would cut Germany adrift from the United States, Britain and its other allies, leave it vulnerable to Soviet threats that France could not hope to counter as NATO did, and reduce it to a French satellite state. All of these forces welcomed Franco-German reconciliation, but felt that Adenauer placed too high a priority on his bilateral ties with de Gaulle and that important relations with other countries were suffering as a result. Adenauer was aware of this counter-current to his summitry but believed that he could contain it, and he downplayed it to avoid rocking the boat with de Gaulle.⁹

When in January 1963 Adenauer signed the Franco-German treaty and appeared to support, or at least accept, de Gaulle's attacks on the United States and Britain, his isolation at home finally had an impact and undermined much of what his summit diplomacy with de Gaulle had produced. With the support of Washington, London and most Western European capitals, all of which had grown alarmed over the too-cosy de Gaulle–Adenauer relationship, and almost the entire German political spectrum, the Bundestag refused to ratify the treaty until it had attached a preamble that emphasized Bonn's existing commitments to the United States, the United Kingdom, NATO and European integration and diluted most of the new bilateral arrangements that de Gaulle and Adenauer had hoped to establish. Shortly thereafter, in June 1963, President John F. Kennedy made an

extended visit to Germany during which he largely bypassed Adenauer and appealed to both the chancellor's political opponents and the German public to maintain their country's links with the United States. Kennedy's visit was capped by his spectacular demonstration of transatlantic solidarity at the Berlin Wall ('Ich bin ein Berliner'), which was aimed at undermining the de Gaulle–Adenauer tandem at least as much as it was a warning to Khrushchev to end his threats to West Berlin. Within a few months Adenauer was forced into retirement by his own governing coalition and the sharpest critics of his policy towards France took the reins of government in Bonn. The de Gaulle–Adenauer personal relationship and bilateral summit diplomacy had cemented the idea of France and Germany as the core of Europe, moved public opinion in both countries towards permanent reconciliation, and created a bilateral treaty of co-operation that could be revived down the road, but by 1963 the two leaders had become so out of step with the wider forces in Germany and had so alienated their European and Atlantic partners that they had been dealt a severe setback, which ended Adenauer's career and put the Franco-German relationship on hold until de Gaulle left office in 1969.¹⁰

In most cases of bilateral summit diplomacy among allies neither the successes nor the failures are so dramatic. Often the positive or negative impact of summit diplomacy is negligible, reflecting the fact that summitry is inherently neither a panacea nor kindling for divergent national interests. On the positive side, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and de Gaulle had very cordial relations and a series of positive bilateral and multilateral summit encounters before Eisenhower left office in early 1961. The two men had known each other since the war and had always got along relatively well. Nevertheless, their mutual respect could not overcome the fundamental differences in their policies, from Eisenhower's refusal to recast NATO as de Gaulle demanded, through de Gaulle's rejection of concessions to the Soviets over Berlin, to US efforts to forestall the French nuclear programme. At best summit diplomacy could maintain a positive public face on an increasingly strained French–US relationship. When de Gaulle made his one and only presidential visit to the United States in the spring of 1960, the focus was on symbolism over substance, and the positive public response was for de Gaulle the leader of Free France during the war rather than for de Gaulle

the current president of France who increasingly was at loggerheads with Washington over Europe, the Atlantic alliance and the world. Both Eisenhower and de Gaulle recognized the state of deadlock that existed and did not raise expectations of any breakthrough. Since their meetings were routine and each also met regularly with other leaders in the alliance, they did not alienate the latter.¹¹

While supporters of summitry proclaim the value of personal contacts between leaders, critics point out that face-to-face meetings can easily lead government heads to form negative impressions of one another. Fortunately, if summitry is not central to the bilateral relationship in question, the damage of such negative personal reactions can be contained. If positive de Gaulle–Eisenhower relations had little impact on the wider French–US relationship in the late 1950s, so negative personal contacts between British and US leaders on the one hand and Adenauer on the other had only a limited effect on British and US relations with Germany in the early 1960s. In contrast to his familiarity with and trust of Eisenhower, Adenauer never felt confident in either British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan or President Kennedy. Neither Macmillan, who was a generation younger than the chancellor, nor Kennedy, who was two generations younger, ever had a particularly successful, substantive meeting with the German leader. Macmillan met Adenauer on many occasions, but these summits, unlike those of de Gaulle and Adenauer, generally concentrated on debates and disagreements, rarely on new means of co-operation, and the mutual trust evident in the de Gaulle–Adenauer tie was noticeably absent. Much the same pattern typified Kennedy’s meetings with the chancellor, and it was lower-level contacts that kept German–US relations on a generally even keel between 1961 and 1963, not the summit encounters. Summitry had two obvious negative effects on British and US diplomacy with Germany. First, the stark contrast between their own difficulties with Adenauer, and de Gaulle’s successes with the chancellor, frustrated London and Washington and encouraged their efforts to contain the Franco-German relationship. Second, Adenauer’s personal distrust of Macmillan and Kennedy reinforced his desire to work primarily with de Gaulle. Fortunately for Britain and the USA, however, the chancellor’s subordinates did all they could to contain the damage. The German foreign ministry and Adenauer’s cabinet undercut

the chancellor's inclination towards France and maintained stability in Bonn's policy towards London and Washington.¹²

Thus, when summit diplomacy is not central to a bilateral relationship, its positive or negative effects can be limited. But what happens when a failed relationship between two leaders occupies a more central position in diplomacy? Here the arguments of critics of summitry find vindication. They are illustrated by the evolution of the French–US relationship in the early 1960s. When Kennedy took office in 1961, his administration developed an ambitious 'Grand Design' to reshape European and Atlantic political and economic relations in an 'Atlantic Community' to increase Western co-operation while reinforcing US Cold War leadership. The president and his advisers knew that de Gaulle, who already viewed the United States as an unwelcome hegemon, would be the chief obstacle to such a plan, and they decided to use summit diplomacy to overcome his resistance. Rather than acknowledge that US and French goals were simply irreconcilable, or offer substantive concessions to induce de Gaulle to make compromises of his own, Kennedy would use personal diplomacy to persuade him that the US plan was in France's interests.¹³ Ironically, the French were hoping to use the same means to produce opposite goals. After their frustration at Eisenhower's resistance to de Gaulle's demands for tripartite leadership in the alliance, French planners hoped to use a summit with the new US president to convince him to accept all the things that Eisenhower had rejected, including the French nuclear programme, the reform of the Atlantic alliance to accord France a greater world role, and French leadership of Europe. Both sides raised expectations for the summit very high and even the British and Germans counted on it to ease tensions in Western Europe.¹⁴

When Kennedy and de Gaulle met in late May and early June 1961 in Paris, the summit was a public relations success on the surface, but complete deadlock underneath. Kennedy and his French-speaking wife impressed the French public, but the two presidents disagreed on almost everything in their private meetings. Nothing had been done in advance to bridge the gaps and neither would budge on his plans for Europe and the Atlantic alliance. Kennedy left Paris and went on to his more famous, but equally frustrating, summit with Khrushchev in Vienna. Unfortunately, after the failure in Paris, neither Kennedy nor de Gaulle added any flexibility to his policy or allowed his sub-

ordinates, who were generally more willing to compromise, any leeway to negotiate. Instead, for the remainder of Kennedy's administration, the two leaders made the same arguments back and forth and debated when another summit should be held to settle their differences. Indeed, much of the diplomatic traffic between Paris and Washington after June 1961 centred on the US push for another summit, which Washington believed would symbolize de Gaulle's capitulation, and on French resistance of a second summit until Paris's position on the continent had been solidified and it could dictate terms to Kennedy. This complete deadlock led Kennedy and de Gaulle to work actively against one another, initially behind the scenes but increasingly in public as time passed. By 1963 each viewed the other as the number-one obstacle to his goals and attempted to isolate his rival rather than reach a compromise. The centrality of summit diplomacy had exacerbated existing French-US differences and produced a situation where diplomats on both sides lacked the freedom to work for a settlement.¹⁵

So far we have examined the positive or negative impact of bilateral meetings between leaders without considering one of the greatest dangers in any such encounter: that of misunderstanding, where each side walks away from the meeting with a very different interpretation of what has occurred. Misunderstandings are possible in any diplomatic dialogue of course, but with the stakes at their peak in summitry, the potential for disaster is all the greater. A miscommunication in a routine meeting of professional diplomats is both less likely to occur, given the expertise of the participants, and more likely to be corrected without great difficulty in a subsequent encounter, but misunderstandings at a summit can produce long-term damage. From the period we are considering here, the best illustration of the dangers of miscommunication is provided by the summits between Macmillan and de Gaulle. The two men met approximately twice a year from de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 through to the end of 1962. Most of these meetings were primarily occupied by disagreements over the shape of Western Europe, with Macmillan arguing for wider and looser political and economic arrangements and for co-operation with the United States, and de Gaulle favouring a tighter and more narrow Europe that would exclude both Britain and the USA. As if personal debates between the two leaders on such important

issues were not risky enough, the Franco-British summits were complicated by Macmillan's attempts to carry on portions of the discussion in French, a problem because his command of the language was not what he believed it to be.¹⁶ Year after year, Macmillan would meet with de Gaulle to press his case on Europe. Each time, the French leader would politely rebuff him and suggest that Britain's relations with the continent would only be settled (far) down the road. On most occasions, Macmillan and his subordinates went away convinced that they had opened de Gaulle's eyes to their problems and that he would be more flexible in the future, while the French believed that de Gaulle had made his long-term opposition to British policy clear and that London must now realize that its only choices were acceptance of Gaullist principles or isolation from the continent.¹⁷

This pattern of summit misunderstandings proved a fiasco when Britain applied for membership of the Common Market between 1961 and 1963. The lower-level technical economic negotiations that occurred between the United Kingdom and the members of the group never went very far, so Macmillan counted on summit diplomacy with de Gaulle to break the deadlock. London neglected economic concessions to France and the Common Market in the hope that Macmillan could win de Gaulle over with personal diplomacy and political arguments that would cost Britain nothing. This approach frustrated not only the French but also those sympathetic to the British cause in Europe and the USA. The prime minister, for example, hinted that Britain, once in the Common Market, might be able to aid the French nuclear programme and suggested that France and Britain together would have the weight to shape Europe in a way that France alone could not. In June and December 1962 Macmillan walked away from summits with de Gaulle convinced that while the French leader disliked the prospect of Britain joining Europe, because of its close ties with the USA, he would not actively sabotage its efforts. By contrast, these summits convinced de Gaulle that Macmillan wanted to enter Europe at no cost, dilute the economic protection that the Common Market provided France, replace France as the leader of Western Europe, and maintain the subordination of the continent to the United States. De Gaulle's encounters with Macmillan reinforced his conviction that Britain must for the time being be kept out at all costs. He hoped that Macmillan would read

between the lines of his statements that Britain was not ready to join Europe, but his assurances that the United Kingdom could join the Common Market 'someday' when it was ready to be fully 'European' obscured the extent of his opposition.¹⁸

These summit misunderstandings ultimately led to disaster for both sides. The British failure to persuade de Gaulle of their political case and their slowness to grasp his true views led to the failure of their whole Western European policy in January 1963 when de Gaulle flatly vetoed their application to join the Common Market. French hostility and obstruction had been clear throughout the technical negotiations, but British observers had convinced themselves that one successful summit with de Gaulle could change everything. As a result, they had spent a year and a half negotiating an agreement that de Gaulle had opposed from the outset. Yet de Gaulle's inability to convey his real views to the British earlier, and thereby forestall a spectacular collapse of the negotiations, proved a disaster for France as well. De Gaulle's veto produced widespread sympathy and support for the United Kingdom in Europe and the United States, isolated France, and guaranteed that the British would attempt to join the Common Market again down the road, since they could now blame de Gaulle, rather than the shortcomings of their application and negotiating strategy, for their setback.¹⁹

Macmillan's inclination towards summit diplomacy proved a liability in another way during the Common Market negotiations. One of the great successes of his personal diplomacy was the close relationship he developed with Kennedy. Indeed, this personal tie was crucial to the December 1962 Nassau summit agreement whereby the United States furnished Britain with Polaris missiles to maintain its nuclear force. This arrangement reinforced the British-US 'special relationship' and guaranteed close nuclear co-operation between Washington and London at a time when many of Kennedy's advisers sought to eliminate any nuclear role for the USA's allies and looked upon the British nuclear programme nearly as unfavourably as they did that of the French. However, Nassau and the British-US summit diplomacy of the era cannot be rated an unequivocal success, for the very closeness of Macmillan's ties with Kennedy reinforced de Gaulle's conviction that Britain could not be part of Europe without subordinating it to the United States. It was Nassau that provided de Gaulle with the pretext for his veto of Britain's

Common Market application, an outcome that would not surprise critics of summit diplomacy, who argue that the practice always alienates those left out and encourages hostile and irresponsible behaviour on their part.²⁰

What do all of these episodes suggest about the possibilities and shortcomings of bilateral summit diplomacy among allies? The most obvious conclusion is that both the positive and negative aspects appear much the same in summits among allies as they do in the more widely studied area of Cold War super-power summitry. Historians must thus strike a middle ground between the politicians who support summitry and the professional diplomats who excoriate it. In the case that longstanding grievances and divergent interests make steps to improve relations difficult, a summit clearly can produce a breakthrough and change the terms of debate, as with France and Germany in November 1956. Personal meetings and relations, if well prepared and supported by the work of experts on the concrete differences between the two countries, can take both bilateral relations and domestic opinion in a new direction, or at least smooth over differences in public at times when no real rapprochement is possible.

However, these potential benefits of summit diplomacy can only be obtained when the tool is used carefully and sparingly. Because of the spotlight that naturally falls on meetings between national leaders, there is a strong tendency to exaggerate their potential and thus virtually guarantee disappointment, as when the USA counted on one summit to win de Gaulle over to their entire Atlantic policy in 1961 or the British expected Macmillan's encounters with de Gaulle to bring them into Europe at no cost. In these instances summit meetings were wrongly viewed as a substitute for patient, plodding, day-to-day diplomacy and efforts to resolve differences on a more piecemeal, pragmatic basis via compromise. Indeed, these episodes illustrate how summit diplomacy, by engaging the personal fortunes of government leaders, can raise the stakes so high that it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, for either side to float new ideas or make concessions that are anything more than pro forma.

Summit meetings also encourage hostile reactions on the part of both domestic critics and foreign leaders left out of the meeting. While any government's policy not guided entirely by opinion polls and legislative pressures runs the risk of domestic

repudiation, summit diplomacy is especially risky in this regard, a result of its very focus on the individual leader. It offers domestic opponents a chance to single out the leader for criticism on issues on which the public is likely to be ignorant of the nuances, particularly if he or she is attempting to take the country in a new direction. If the diplomacy in question is truly personal and the leader is working even against elements in his or her own government, summit diplomacy runs the risk of uniting all domestic opponents against him or her in spectacular fashion, a disastrous prospect under any circumstances but especially when elements of the policy require legislative approval. At the same time, any summit relationship strong enough to have a positive, substantive impact on bilateral ties is almost certain to alienate those countries left out and lead them to take action to demonstrate that they cannot simply be bypassed. Given these inherent risks of the practice, leaders who fail to plan and execute summit diplomacy carefully and selectively do so at their own peril.

Notes

1. This extended opening discussion is drawn from: David H. Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry* (New York 1996); Cesare Merlini, ed., *Economic Summits and Western Decision-Making* (New York 1984); A. Denis Clift, *With Presidents to the Summit* (Fairfax, VA 1993); Gordon R. Weihmiller and Dusko Doder, *U.S.–Soviet Summits: An Account of East–West Diplomacy at the Top, 1955–1985* (Lanham 1986); J. Robert Schaezel and H.B. Malmgren, ‘Talking Heads’, *Foreign Policy*, No. 39 (Summer 1980), 130–42; Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (Washington, DC 1988); Elmer Plischke, ed., *Modern Diplomacy: The Art and the Artisans*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC 1981), and *Diplomat in Chief: The President at the Summit* (New York 1986); Charles L. Mee, Jr, *Playing God: Seven Fateful Moments when Great Men Met to Change the World* (New York 1993); Keith Eubank, *The Summit Conferences 1919–1960* (Norman, OK 1966); George W. Ball, *Diplomacy for a Crowded World: An American Foreign Policy* (Boston and Toronto 1973); Robert D. Putnam and Nicholas Bayne, *Hanging Together: The Seven-Power Summits* (London 1984); Michael Mandelbaum and Strobe Talbott, *Reagan and Gorbachev* (New York 1987); Patrick J. Garrity, ‘The Dubious Promise of Summitry’, *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 1984), 71–9; Kenneth L. Adelman, ‘Summitry: the Historical Perspective’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 1986), 435–41; John W. McDonald, ed., *U.S.–Soviet Summitry: Roosevelt through Carter* (Washington, DC 1987).

2. *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe* (Chapel Hill, NC 2002).

3. Eubank, op. cit., 194–209.

4. The EDC was a plan to integrate the armies of Western Europe, thereby permitting German rearmament without creating a German army. It was ultimately rejected by the French parliament in August 1954 out of fear that France would be eclipsed by Germany and lose control of its own army. On the status of Franco-German relations in late 1956, see: Gérard Bossuat, *L'Europe des Français 1943–1959. La IVe République aux sources de l'Europe communautaire* (Paris 1996), 291–377; Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer. Der Staatsmann: 1952–1967* (Stuttgart 1991), 285–307.

5. 2 November 1956, Auswärtiges Amt (German Foreign Ministry) note, B2/106, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter AA); 31 October 1956 and 4 November 1956, Heinrich von Brentano (German Foreign Minister) letters to Adenauer, NL1239/156, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BA); 6 November 1956, AA note on Adenauer views, NL1351/69, BA.

6. 6 November 1956, Mollet–Adenauer meeting, in Commission de Publication des Documents Diplomatiques Français, *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (Paris 1987–), Vol. 9, 231–8 (hereafter *DDF*); 9 November 1956, AA note on the meeting, MB 156, AA; 8 November 1956, Christian Pineau (French Foreign Minister) to French diplomatic stations, in *DDF*, Vol. 9, 249–51; 6 November 1956, Text of Franco-German technical agreements, Europe (1944–1960): Généralités 185, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereafter MAE); Bossuat, op. cit., 336.

7. The first two de Gaulle–Adenauer meetings, both in 1958, were pivotal. 14 September 1958, de Gaulle–Adenauer conversations, in *DDF*, Vol. 13, 341–5; 2 October 1958, AA note on the Colombey meeting, B24/285, AA; 26 November 1958, de Gaulle–Adenauer conversations, in *DDF*, Vol. 13, 754–63; Konrad Adenauer, *Teegespräche* (Berlin 1986–92), Vol. 5, 19, 26, 180; Schwarz, op. cit., 451–6, 464–6; Pierre Maillard, *De Gaulle et l'Allemagne. Le rêve inachevé* (Paris 1990), 145–68, and *De Gaulle et l'Europe. Entre la nation et Maastricht* (Paris 1995), 135–90; Herbert Blankenhorn, *Verständnis und Verständigung. Blätter eines politischen Tagebuchs 1949 bis 1979* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), 335–8; Bossuat, op. cit., 390–4; Maurice Vaisse, *La grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle* (Paris 1998), 225–62; Records of all the de Gaulle–Adenauer meetings are found in 5AG1/160–1, Archives Nationales (hereafter AN).

8. The substantive discussions of the July 1962 Adenauer visit and September 1962 de Gaulle trip are in 5AG1/161, AN. For the public aspects see: Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, (Paris 1994–), Vol. 1, 150–63; Blankenhorn, op. cit., 427–30; Horst Osterheld, 'Ich gehe nicht leichten Herzens'. *Adenauers letzte Kanzlerjahre-ein dokumentarischer Bericht* (Mainz 1986), 130–44; Schwarz, op. cit., 757–69. Etienne Burin des Rozières, *Retour aux Sources. 1962, l'année décisive* (Paris 1986), 138–42; Vaisse, op. cit., 249–52; Maillard, *De Gaulle et l'Europe*, 175–6, 208–12, and *De Gaulle et l'Allemagne*, 176–80; Hermann Kusterer, *Der Kanzler und der General* (Stuttgart 1995), 216–90; Jacques Barity, 'Die Rolle der persönlichen Beziehungen zwischen Bundeskanzler Adenauer und General de Gaulle für die deutsch-französische Politik zwischen 1958 und 1963', in *Adenauer und Frankreich. Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen 1958 bis 1969*, ed. Hans-Peter Schwarz (Bonn 1985), 12–27; Gerhard Kiersch, 'De Gaulle et l'identité allemande', in L'Institut Charles de Gaulle, *De Gaulle en son Siècle* (Paris 1991–2), Vol. 5, 304–12. The treaty text is in Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'Alliance incertaine. Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954–1996* (Paris 1996), 445–9.

9. Frank A. Mayer, *Adenauer and Kennedy: A Study in German–American Relations 1961–1963* (New York 1996), 90; Eckart Conze, *Die gaullistische Herausforderung. Die deutsch-französischen Beziehungen in der amerikanischen Europapolitik 1958–1963* (Munich 1995), 241–50; Simon Bulmer and William Paterson, *The Federal Republic of Germany and the European Community* (London 1987), 127–36; Klaus Hildebrand, ‘“Atlantiker” versus “Gaullisten” zur Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland während der sechziger Jahre’, *Revue d’Allemagne*, Vol. 22 (1990), 583–92; Schwarz, op. cit., 751–826.

10. Haig Simonian, *The Privileged Partnership: Franco-German Relations in the European Community* (Oxford 1985); Pierre Gerbet, ‘Le rôle du couple France-Allemagne dans la création et développement des Communautés Européennes’, in *Motor für Europa. Deutsch-französischer Bilateralismus und europäische Integration/Le couple franco-allemand et l’intégration européenne*, ed. Robert Picht and Wolfgang Wessels (Bonn 1990), 69–119; Peyrefitte, op. cit., Vol. 2, 257–87, 305; Soutou, op. cit., 261–309; Vaisse, op. cit., 563–92; Maurice Couve de Murville, *Le Monde en Face. Entretiens* (Paris 1989), 76–86, and *Une politique étrangère 1958–1969* (Paris 1971), 235–84.

11. 2–4 September 1959, Eisenhower–de Gaulle conversations, in both Ann Whitman International Meetings series, box 3, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (hereafter DDEL) and *DDF*, Vol. 16, 275–96; 19 December 1959, de Gaulle–Eisenhower conversation, in *DDF*, Vol. 16, 757–61; 22 April 1960, de Gaulle–Eisenhower conversation, in both *DDF*, Vol. 17, 513–25, and *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958–1960* (Washington, DC 1861–), Vol. 7, part II, 343–6 (hereafter *FRUS*).

12. Mayer, op.cit., 95–101; Sabine Lee, *An Uneasy Partnership: British–German Relations between 1955 and 1961* (Bochum 1996), 278–88. Accounts of the various US and UK summits with the Germans can be found in *FRUS* and PREM11, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), respectively.

13. 21 April 1961, NSC draft paper, ‘A New Approach to France’, and 15 May 1961, Walt W. Rostow (National Security Council) note for Kennedy, both in NSF, box 70, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL); 18 May 1961, State Department paper for Kennedy on de Gaulle’s motivations, and 25 May 1961, Rostow note for National Security advisor McGeorge Bundy, both in POF, box 116a, JFKL.

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15. The US accounts of the 31 May–2 June 1961 Paris summit are in POF, box 116a, JFKL. The French accounts are found in *DDF*, Vol. 19, 669–710. See also: Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*

(Boston 1965), 357–8; Frédéric Bozo, *Deux Stratégies pour l'Europe. De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique* (Paris 1996), 75–7; Vaïsse, op. cit., 143–5.

16. Dunn, op. cit., 254.

17. Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan* (New York 1989), Vol. 2, 310–30, 428–51; Vaïsse, op. cit., 162–9, 191–224. For a variety of British and French documents illuminating the extent of the summit miscommunications in 1962, see: FO371/166977–8; FO371/164836–7; FO371/171443; FO371/164784; all PRO; 5AG1/170, AN; Service de Coopération Economique (DE-CE) (1961–1966) 516, MAE.

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20. Schaezel and Malmgren, op. cit., 135–7; 19–20 December 1962, Kennedy–Macmillan meetings at Nassau, in both *FRUS 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, 138–41, 1088–112, and PREM11/4229, PRO; Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs* (New York and London 1982), 263–8; Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (New York 1993), 315–20; Richard Aldous, 'A Family Affair: Macmillan and the Art of Personal Diplomacy', in *Harold Macmillan and Britain's World Role*, ed. Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (New York 1996), 9–35. The text of de Gaulle's press conference announcing and justifying the veto is in de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, Vol. 4, 61–79.

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