

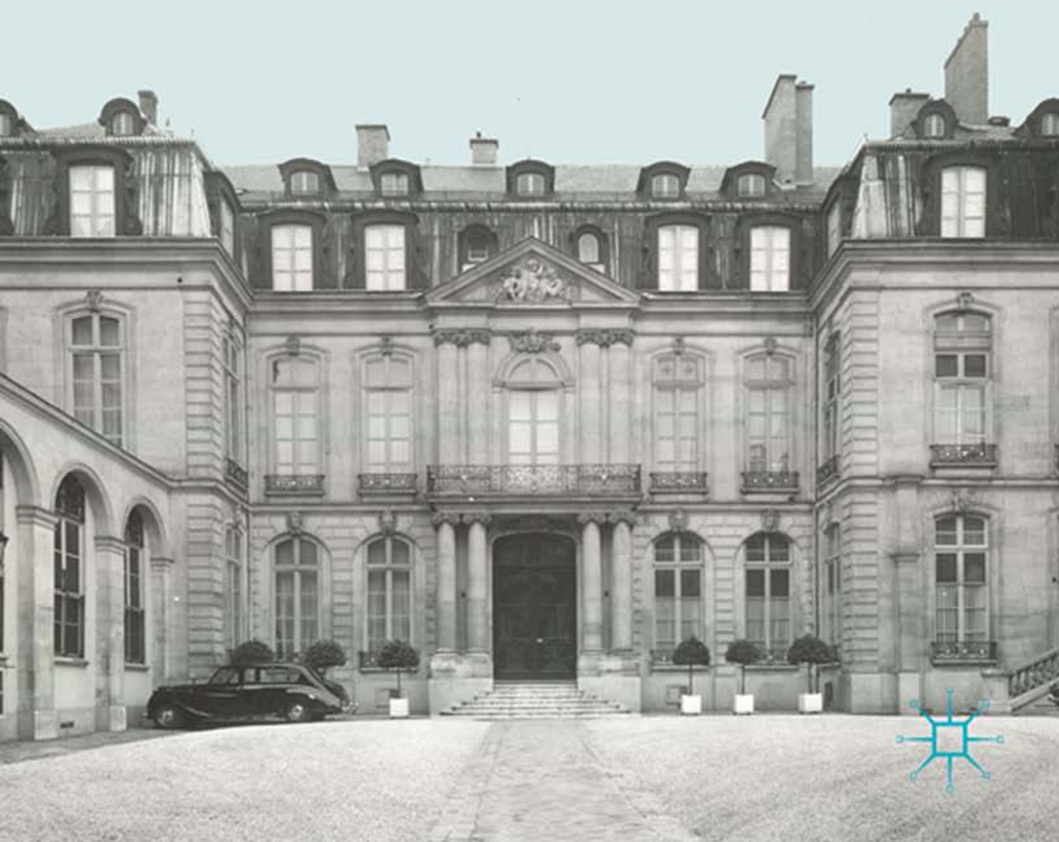
The Paris Embassy

British Ambassadors &
Anglo-French Relations

Edited by

ROGELIA PASTOR-CASTRO

JOHN W. YOUNG



The Paris Embassy

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The Paris Embassy

British Ambassadors and Anglo–French Relations 1944–79

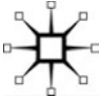
Edited by

Rogelia Pastor-Castro
*Lecturer in International History,
University of Strathclyde, UK*

and

John W. Young
*Professor of International History,
University of Nottingham, UK*

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*Rogelia Pastor-Castro and John W. Young
April 2013*

Notes on Contributors

James Ellison is Reader in International History in the School of History, Queen Mary University of London. He has written two books, *Threatening Europe: Britain and the Creation of the European Economic Community, 1955–58* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000) and *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963–68* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

Daniel Furby is an analyst of European affairs at Fipra International and EuroComment, specialising in economic and financial affairs, and EU trade policy. He completed his doctorate at Queen Mary, University of London in 2010. His thesis examined the politics and diplomacy of British entry to the European Community.

Christopher Goldsmith is Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Politics in the Department of Politics and Public Policy at De Montfort University. He has published previously on Franco–British relations with a particular focus on the Suez Crisis and the Algerian War.

Edward Hampshire is Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He has written on diplomatic, defence, end of empire and intelligence history. His most recent book is *From East of Suez to the Eastern Atlantic, British Naval Policy 1964 to 1970* (2013), and he is currently editing a volume for the Foreign and Commonwealth Historians on the 1947 Treaty of Dunkirk.

N. Piers Ludlow is Reader in International History at the London School of Economics. His main field of expertise is Western Europe since 1945, with a particular focus on the European integration process, the Cold War and Transatlantic Relations. His last monograph was *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s: Negotiating the Gaullist Challenge* (2006); his next is likely to be a detailed study of Roy Jenkins' presidency of the European Commission.

Alastair Noble works in Whitehall and was previously a historian in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He is the author of *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany, 1944–1945* (2009) and of numerous articles and contributions to edited volumes on military and diplomatic history.

Helen Parr is Lecturer in International Relations at Keele University. Her publications include *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community:*

Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role (2006) and, co-edited with Glen O'Hara, *The Wilson Governments 1964–1970 Reconsidered* (2006).

Rogelia Pastor-Castro is Lecturer in International History at the University of Strathclyde. Her main area of expertise is Anglo–French relations since 1945, with particular focus on European security and integration. She has written on diplomacy and French foreign policy and has published on the European Defence Community.

Isabelle Tombs is a senior researcher with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians. She has worked on international history during the Second World War and on Franco–British relations. Her publications include articles and chapters in books on exiled socialists in London and on British intelligence in France. She is co-author of *That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present* (2006) and of *Britain in NATO: the First Six Decades* (2009).

John W. Young is Professor of International History at the University of Nottingham and Chair of the British International History Group. His recent publications include *Twentieth Century Diplomacy: A Case Study in British Practice, 1963–76* (2008) and, as co-editor with Michael Hopkins and Saul Kelly, *The Washington Embassy: British Ambassadors to the United States, 1939–77* (2009).

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| AFHQ | Allied Forces Headquarters (North Africa) |
| AI | Airbus Industrie |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| CAP | Common Agricultural Policy |
| CO | Colonial Office |
| CPRS | Central Policy Review Staff |
| EC | European Community |
| ECSC | European Coal-Steel Community |
| EDC | European Defence Community |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| EEOD | European Economic Organisations Department |
| EPC | European Political Community |
| ERM | Exchange Rate Mechanism |
| FCO | Foreign and Commonwealth Office |
| FO | Foreign Office |
| FRG | Federal Republic of Germany |
| FTA | Free Trade Area |
| GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| HMG | Her Majesty's Government |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| JIC | Joint Intelligence Committee |
| MI6 | British Secret Intelligence Service |
| MLF | Multilateral Force |
| MOD | Ministry of Defence |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| OEEC | Organisation of European Economic Cooperation |
| OPD | Overseas Policy and Defence Committee |
| PUS | Permanent Under-Secretary |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| US | United States |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WEU | Western European Union |

Additionally, in the Endnotes

| | |
|-------|---|
| BDOHP | British Diplomatic Oral History Project |
| CAB | Cabinet Papers and Memoranda |
| DNB | Dictionary of National Biography |
| FRUS | Foreign Relations of the United States |
| MAE | Ministère des Affaires étrangères |
| Ms | Manuscript |
| PREM | Prime Minister's Office |
| TNA | The National Archives (UK) |
| WORK | Ministry of Works files |

Introduction

John W. Young

Few themes in the history of post-war British foreign policy feature more prominently than relations with the European Union, which themselves have been shaped to a large extent by relations with France.¹ Yet, while a number of insightful works have been written about the bilateral relationship between these two countries, they tend to concern themselves with the vicissitudes of the political relationship, looking at particular challenges and crises. They also tend to focus on contacts at the highest level, between presidents and prime ministers.² It is easy to overlook the importance of the resident embassy as the institution that handles daily contact between them. In contrast, there are some excellent works that look at particular ambassadorships,³ and there is a large number of memoirs by diplomats,⁴ but these tend to provide only a narrow snapshot of the life of a particular embassy.⁵

This book takes a different approach, charting and analysing the activities of the *Hôtel de Charost*, at 35 rue du Faubourg St. Honoré – the British embassy in Paris – through studies of the successive ambassadors who gave direction and character to the mission's activities. It combines an examination of policy with a consideration of the role of individual ambassadors and, by so doing, provides a case study of what this embassy reveals about the significance of the permanent mission to diplomatic practice. In this, it is closely based on the approach taken by an earlier study published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2009, *The Washington Embassy: British ambassadors to the United States, 1939–1977*, edited by Michael Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young.⁶ In asking such questions, on the basis of extensive references to British government documents, it is very different from the earlier study of the Paris embassy by Cynthia Gladwyn, a general history of the building that included short essays on each ambassador who served between 1814 and 1947.⁷

Following this introductory chapter, which discusses the role of ambassadors in diplomacy and sketches the historical background to Anglo–French relations, there is a chapter on each ambassador, from the appointment of Alfred Duff Cooper in 1944 to the end of Nicholas Henderson’s embassy in 1979. This choice is based partly on the availability of the documents in both countries. More importantly, the period offers a coherent phase in the relationship, in that Duff Cooper became ambassador towards the end of the Second World War, when Paris was liberated from the Nazis, while Henderson was the first ambassador to be appointed after Britain joined the European Community. His departure also coincided with the arrival in power of Margaret Thatcher. Of the various ambassadors, Duff Cooper and Gladwyn Jebb have been the subject of biographies,⁸ but in both cases we have chosen a contributor other than the biographer, so as to provide a stronger element of originality in the discussion. Each chapter discusses why, in light of their earlier career and experience, these ambassadors were chosen for the prestigious Paris post. The main issues and problems that they met are analysed and conclusions are drawn about their relative success, the nature of their relations with both governments and their contribution to broader Franco–British relations. The essays look at the role of the Paris post in fulfilling such functions of a permanent mission as promoting friendly relations, negotiating agreements, reporting developments in Paris and providing policy advice to London – in other words, what might be termed the ‘political’ role of the Embassy. Given the constraints of space, we have not been able to deal exhaustively with the work of the Embassy, in its consular role for example. Neither do we cover all the day-to-day work of the Ambassador, which also includes such elements as interaction with the rest of the diplomatic corps. However, we hope to have addressed issues that are central to the relevance of the permanent mission to modern diplomacy. The authors address such general questions as whether there was a partnership or an unequal relationship between Paris and London at particular points, whether individual British ambassadors were able to establish a ‘special’ relationship with the French government and, of course, how relations were affected by the wider question European integration.

Ambassadors and diplomacy

This collection of chapters, then, combines traditional historical research, which seeks to reconstruct events in the past on the basis of the surviving (in this case, archival) evidence, with more conceptual questions asked

by those working on diplomatic studies, about the work of resident ambassadors in the late twentieth century. It contributes to the case, argued in several recent studies that, while the centrality of ambassadors to international relations was much reduced as the century went on, they remained a vital factor in communications between states. The resident embassy first emerged as an institution in fifteenth century Italy. Before then, reliance had been placed on ad hoc embassies, sent whenever the occasion demanded and returning to home afterwards. The new system had numerous advantages, including the ability to gather information on other governments, to act quickly if necessary, to build relationships with political leaders and opinion formers and to counter the machinations of rivals. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while meetings of heads of government and even multilateral conferences (such as the Congress of Vienna of 1815) were not unknown, heavy reliance was placed on permanent ambassadors as channels of communication. In some crises the Ambassador, as the 'man on the spot', remote from his own government, could effectively commit the country to war. The prime example in Britain's case was Stratford de Redcliffe, who served in Constantinople and had an important part in the outbreak of the Crimean War.⁹ The ambassadors of the European great powers were still a central factor in the diplomatic exchanges of 1914.

After that, a number of factors contributed to their apparent 'decline'. The crisis itself, followed as it was by a drawn-out, bloody conflict, helped encourage direct links between heads of state and government, while the League of Nations, a powerful international organisation, was created in an attempt to prevent a similar conflict from breaking out again in the future. Both developments seemed to sideline ambassadors. Meanwhile, the growth of the press meant that one of the original roles of embassies, simple news gathering, was being usurped and technological progress, heralded by the invention of wireless telegraphy in the Victorian era, tended to undermine any independent activity by 'the man on the spot'. Even in 1904, one British diplomat could complain that, 'In Downing Street one can at least pull the wires whereas an Ambassador is only a d...d marionette'.¹⁰ After 1945, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary could meet regularly with the ministers of other countries, or even talk directly with them over the telephone. Governments could discover much about developments abroad from radio and television. The League of Nations may have failed, but it was succeeded by the United Nations and the number of multilateral organisations was growing apace. Embassies and ambassadors might even prove a liability, a ready-made target for opponents. In the mid-1960s, British embassies

in China, Cambodia and Indonesia were all attacked by rioters. Around that time, the value of the ambassador was questioned by such leading figures as Zbigniew Brzezinski, soon to become US President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser.¹¹ In 1982, George Ball, who had been American Under-Secretary of State two decades earlier, wrote that 'jet planes and telephones ... now largely restricted ambassadors to ritual and public relations'.¹² Summit meetings, international organisations and direct talks between governments over secure communication links all helped to sideline the embassy as a diplomatic institution. In the public mind, too, ambassadors seemed of marginal importance, as remote, elitist figures inhabiting a world of receptions and dinner parties.

Nonetheless, throughout the twentieth century the 'diplomatic corps', made up of the representatives of all other states in any capital, was becoming larger than ever. As more countries became independent, with the retreat of the European empires, so their governments created their own embassies; and established powers like the United Kingdom – despite its own economic difficulties and military-imperial decline – found that the expansion in the number of states made it prudent to expand their system of embassies around the world. Clearly, resident ambassadors had survived the challenges of the twentieth century and shrugged off claims of becoming 'an anachronism'. Why was this? One possible explanation is that embassies were closely linked to the State's very identity in the international system: ambassadors symbolise the way governments recognise each other's existence, representing their own state's sovereignty. Such an argument, however, does not tell us much about what practical purposes an ambassador fulfils. An alternative explanation is that 'diplomats are called upon to mediate some of the complex processes that make up modern life'.¹³ Embassies have a functional purpose, as illustrated by the various sections of which they are comprised, sections that may deal with commerce, public diplomacy, economic monitoring, military co-operation, aid programmes and consular affairs – as well as the roles of political reporting, negotiation and maintaining friendly relations, the 'high politics' if you like, which are the focus of this book. Furthermore, they are flexible institutions, for whom some roles (such as everyday news reporting) may shrink, while others may grow (with a shift, since the 1990s, into work on environmental diplomacy, counterterrorism, or the war on drugs).

The basic functions of embassies were set out in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, negotiated under the auspices of the UN. They are: to represent one state in another state; 'protecting in

the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals'; negotiating agreements; reporting on 'conditions and developments' in a foreign country; and 'promoting friendly relations'.¹⁴ Geoffrey Berridge has analysed the work of embassies based on the criteria outlined by the Vienna Convention and argued that these cannot properly be fulfilled by any alternative institution. Such roles as the protection of individual citizens abroad, the promotion of 'friendly relations' on a day-to-day basis and carrying out negotiations on such mundane issues as mutual taxation or air transport routes, would all be much more difficult without an embassy. Newspapers, for example, may be able to report what is publicly known about political events in another capital, they may even sometimes be able to 'scoop' an insight into a more secret world, but they do not have continuous, high quality information that a professional diplomat may build up. Journalists have a transitory interest in making headlines, rather than clarifying the intentions another government as the basis for a delicate negotiation.¹⁵

Regarding the ability of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers to meet their opposite numbers directly, the 1963 Plowden Report on British diplomacy makes the following argument:

Although the frequency with which Ministers now travel abroad may take away some of the prestige of the role of an Ambassador... these visits do not reduce the need for an Ambassador or the burden and importance of his work. The necessity for him to be in touch with local personalities and sources of informed opinion is all the greater because reliable advice is required from him much more quickly and on a vastly increased range of subjects. An Ambassador may still have to make rapid decisions without instructions.¹⁶

As to the threat posed by multilateral organisations, it is certainly true that, by the mid-1970s much British business was done with its European partners via international organisations like the European Community, NATO and the UN. This evidently reduced the significance of embassies to an extent. Ivor Lucas, who served in Britain's Copenhagen mission felt that once Denmark and the UK entered the EC, 'the Embassy tended to be on the sidelines'.¹⁷ However, it is worth pointing out that European Union members continue to maintain bilateral embassies, presumably because these do still have a valuable purpose. It is also worth noting that, far from killing off large numbers of embassies, multilateral organisations tend to have bred them in a new form, that of the office of a permanent representative. Thus, the UK has permanent representatives'

offices in the EC, NATO and the UN, headed by an official with the rank of ambassador.

Anglo–French relations, 1944–79

The key question addressed in this collection is whether ambassadors retained a significant role in international relations after the Second World War or whether they had, indeed, become mere marionettes, closely controlled by London, their significance shrinking as technological progress allowed political leaders to meet and talk directly, while the most important negotiations came to focus on multilateral organisations like the EEC. Before exploring the evidence, however, a broad understanding of Anglo–French diplomatic relations in the period is necessary, especially on the all-important issue of European integration. This will put the individual chapters that follow into context.¹⁸ In his memoirs, Lord Redesdale recalled that, when he joined the French Department of the Foreign Office in 1860, ‘the Paris Embassy was looked upon as a sort of branch of the Foreign Office; there could be no diplomatic subject in which France was not interested equally with England, whether in agreement or rivalry’.¹⁹ The same was true a century later. The two states, while they had declined in the world, especially relative to the United States, were still major players on the world stage, with nuclear arsenals, the ability to act militarily outside Europe, considerable economic strength and permanent seats on the UN Security Council. Their bilateral relationship had undergone radical changes, from the colonial rivalry of the late nineteenth century, through the heady days of the *entente cordiale*, to the uncertainties of the inter-war years but, when it came to the great conflicts of 1914 and 1939, they stood together as allies. They were rent apart in 1940, when the Nazi *blitzkrieg* overran France but, at the end of the Second World War, and as the Cold War loomed, their positions had much in common. They were Western European neighbours, with global empires, committed to both a liberal-democratic political system and a form of capitalism whose individualist and profiteering excesses were tempered by a strong element of state intervention. This approach was represented by the presence of Communists and Socialists, alongside Christian Democrats, in the French coalition governments of 1944–47, and by the victory of Clement Attlee’s Labour government in Britain’s July 1945 election.

Britain did much to bring about the liberation of France in 1944–45, worked for the restoration of French power, as a Security Council member with a zone of occupation in Germany, and had ambitions of creating

a 'western bloc' in Europe, of which France would be a significant part, to match Soviet predominance in the East. In July 1945, when Orme Sargent, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, drew up his memorandum 'Stocktaking after VE-day', it argued that, in order to be treated as an equal by Washington and Moscow, London, which had been financially drained by the war, must make itself the leader of both the Empire-Commonwealth and Western Europe. However, the French leader, General Charles de Gaulle, was also determined to be treated on a basis of equality and his view of French interests did not necessarily dovetail with London's. In December 1944, four months after the liberation of Paris, he went to Moscow and made an anti-German security pact with Josef Stalin, similar to the Anglo-Soviet treaty of 1942. He was also determined to restore authority in the colonial empire, but in May 1945, when violence erupted between French forces and Syrian nationalists in Damascus, the British, for whom the Middle East was a vital area of interest, intervened between the two sides. At this point, just after the war in Europe ended, a furious de Gaulle called in Britain's Ambassador, Duff Cooper, and told him that, if France had the resources, he would declare war. The two countries also disagreed on the future of Germany, which had invaded France three times since 1870. The US, USSR and Britain had agreed, at the July-August 1945 Potsdam conference, to maintain German unity. But de Gaulle, who had been excluded from Potsdam, hoped to detach the Rhineland and the industrial Ruhr valley from the old enemy and, in September, began to veto all attempts to create common institutions across the four occupation zones in Germany. Even de Gaulle's sudden resignation, in January 1946, did not herald a major improvement in Anglo-French relations. His successors maintained his firm approach to the German questions while the British, in July 1946, facing continued financial pressures, decided to merge their zone with that of the Americans. This in itself was a sign of the Anglo-American tendency to side with one another in the face of Soviet communism. Another complicating factor in Anglo-French relations was the continuing presence of Communists in the French governments and the fact that they emerged in first place in two of the first three post-war general elections.

Significantly, it was during a short-lived all-Socialist government, which took office in December, helped by the enthusiasm of Duff Cooper, that progress was finally made on an Anglo-French treaty. Designed to last fifty years and aimed against Germany, this was signed at Dunkirk on 4 March 1947 by Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and French foreign minister Georges Bidault, thus restoring the alliance

where it had been broken seven years before. By the time of the ceremony, the Communists were back in government, but they were ejected for good in May, as the signs of an East–West division in Europe grew. The next few years saw the formation of a Western alliance structure in Europe, fostered by Washington, but with Britain and France as key players. In May 1947, at a conference in Paris, after the Soviets walked out, it was Bevin and Bidault who invited other European states to talks on a US-financed economic recovery programme, the Marshall Plan. In January 1948, Bevin showed renewed enthusiasm for a ‘Western Union’ of European states and, in March, he and Bidault joined Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in forming the Brussels Pact. The following month, another multilateral institution, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was created, to manage the Marshall Aid Programme. In May, former premier Winston Churchill was among those attending a conference in The Hague, which called for the creation of a European Parliament. Furthermore, after talks in London through the first half of 1948, the French agreed, with the US and Britain, on the creation of a West German state, a decision that triggered a Soviet attempt to disrupt the plan by blockading the Western sectors of Berlin. In some ways, the scene seemed set for close Anglo–French co-operation at the heart of a more integrated Europe, under US protection in the face of a Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc. The new system was crowned, in April 1949, by the North Atlantic Treaty, between West European states, America and Canada; while the new West German state came into existence in September 1949.

However, the moves towards European co-operation were actually to result in a long-lasting Anglo–French divide over precisely how far the process should go. This divide was partly shaped by London’s determination not to compromise its leadership of the loose organisation of former imperial possessions, the Commonwealth, with which it had preferential trading arrangements, and by France’s growing belief that it could only control Germany’s reviving power by creating strong common institutions with a ‘supranational’ element – that is, which involved a ‘pooling’ of sovereignty. Although he had previously shown an interest in ideas for a European customs union, Bevin was sceptical about bold schemes to create a European Parliament, which was why the Council of Europe, founded in May 1949, in Strasbourg, was only a consultative body. London also wanted to ensure that Britain could survive independently if Europe was overrun by the Soviets, and to maintain special links to the US, the only power that could out-match the USSR. So, in May 1950, when the French foreign minister, Robert

Schuman, launched a plan for the creation of a coal-steel community, with a powerful central authority, the British decided to stand aside. They did so, even though Washington, which believed that a more integrated European economy could better deliver growth and employment, thus undermining the appeal of communism, backed the scheme. When the European Coal-Steel Community (ECSC) was created in August 1952, in Luxembourg, it had six members – France, West Germany (whose Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, saw European union as a way to restore equality on the world stage, while safeguarding liberal democracy), Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – known for the following two decades as ‘the Six’.

The process of supranational integration did not prove a smooth one and, in the short-term, the British decision to stand aside from it, while taking part in non-supranational forms of co-operation (like the OEEC and Council of Europe), did not seem disastrous. The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 not only intensified the Cold War globally but led Washington, in September, to advocate German rearmament as part of a strengthened North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), under an American Supreme Commander. The British were quickly won round to this idea, but German rearmament was not easily accepted by the French. In order to safeguard the nascent rapprochement with Germany, Jean Monnet, the brains behind the Schuman Plan, hastily devised a scheme for a supranational European Defence Community (EDC), in which German forces would be incapable of independent action. Talks on this complex plan, between ‘the Six’, dragged on until August 1954, when the French Assembly finally threw it out. London had reluctantly supported the EDC proposal from the outside, seeing it as the only viable route to German rearmament and the way, therefore, to secure a deeper US military commitment to NATO. Churchill’s post-1951 Conservative government rejected full membership of any ‘federal’ organisation, but negotiated ‘association’ agreements with both the EDC, in April 1954, and ECSC, in December 1954. Furthermore, when the EDC collapsed, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, led efforts to create a new way forward for the Western alliance, by calling a conference in London in September 1954. Here it was agreed that Germany would join NATO, but only after voluntarily giving up atomic, bacteriological and chemical weapons, and after joining (together with Italy) a revamped version of the Brussels Pact, known as the Western European Union (WEU). The WEU seemed to tie together the Six and Britain in a non-supranational body that, in a way, restored British leadership of the European side of NATO. That London and Paris could cooperate closely

was also confirmed by the 1956 Suez crisis, when they joined with Israel in an attack on Egypt, and there was even talk of France joining the Commonwealth.

Yet again, however, close Anglo–French co-operation proved short-lived. The factors working in favour of supranational integration, especially between France and Germany, proved too strong. In June 1955, at Messina in Sicily, the Six discussed ways to ‘relaunch’ their European vision and agreed to pursue two ways forward, one based on a ‘sectoral’ approach, integrating their atomic energy policies, and the other much broader, taking the form of a customs union. Britain, as an associate member of the ECSC, was invited to participate in the work of the committee, set up under the Belgian statesman Paul-Henri Spaak, in Brussels, but left the talks when it became clear that they were likely to create new supranational structures. Neither did Anglo–French unity with regard to the Middle East in 1956 last long. The Suez crisis destroyed Eden’s short-lived premiership and helped confirm France’s commitment to the Six. The differences between them were tellingly revealed in March 1957 when, while the Six signed the Treaties of Rome, launching the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Agency (Euratom), Britain’s new premier, Harold Macmillan, flew to Washington to restore friendly relations with Washington after the damaging Suez fiasco. Nonetheless, London recognised the possible threat to its position posed by a large, discriminatory trading bloc on its very doorstep – one that might turn into a political threat in due course – and had already considered launching its own plan for a free trade area, which would avoid any pooling of sovereignty. Macmillan, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had helped work out ‘Plan G’ in mid-1956, as a scheme to tie the Six and the other OEEC states together, while preserving British trade with the Commonwealth, but by the time he launched it in November, the Suez operation had alienated France, while Spaak feared the British aimed to sabotage the EEC.

Talks on a free trade area did begin in the OEEC in October 1957, but the French were unenthusiastic and British concessions (including an element of majority voting) were made too slowly. On 1 January 1958, the EEC came into being, in Brussels, with Germany’s Walter Hallstein as the first President of the European Commission, whose powers were not as great as the British had feared. Worse still, following several years of French political instability, which had sometimes raised hopes of Paris falling in with British plans, ended in May, with the return to power of de Gaulle. His love-hate relationship with Britain, combined

with a determination to maximise French power and reduce what he saw as American domination of Western Europe, gravely complicated Anglo–French relations for the next eleven years. In September, he called on London and Washington to accept Paris as the third member of a ‘directorship’ over the Western alliance, an idea they rejected. In November, he effectively killed off talks on the free trade area, leaving the British to negotiate the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), launched in November 1959, with a group of six other, small, non-EEC states – who became known as ‘the Seven’. Even Washington saw this as a divisive step; the new Association lacked much economic strength and further attempts at ‘bridge-building’ with the EEC came to nothing. By mid-1960, Britain was faced by a growing sense of national failure, its empire fast disappearing, its economic power in decline relative to its main competitors, including Germany and France. Meanwhile, the Six had decided to accelerate the reduction of trade barriers between them and the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, feared that ‘the Americans will think more and more of the Six as the group which they have to consult’ in Europe.²⁰ It was a message underlined by the failure of the East–West summit, in Paris in May 1960, at which Macmillan had hoped to play a key role. The *Economist* and *Guardian* called for an attempt to join the EEC, but only in July 1961 did the Cabinet decide to attempt this.

From the start, the first EEC application was surrounded by problems. The British had to consider the views of the Commonwealth and EFTA, and sceptical Conservative backbenchers, as well as British industry and agriculture, the last group already concerned by the possible implications of an EEC Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The application was backed by John F. Kennedy’s administration in Washington, but this was hardly calculated to win over de Gaulle, who had his own ambitions for creating a French-led political dimension to the Six. Although the EEC agreed to the idea of talks in September 1961 and ministerial talks began in Brussels soon after, with Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, leading the British team, detailed bargaining did not properly get underway until May 1962. London’s desire for concessions on Commonwealth trade meant that the talks were sure to take some time, an impression strengthened by a difficult Commonwealth premiers’ conference, in September, and by a vitriolic attack on the entry bid by the Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell. The challenge was worsened by an improvement in de Gaulle’s position, as he finally resolved the long-running problem of Algerian independence and his Gaullist supporters went on to win the October elections. Thus strengthened at home, and claiming to be offended by the

latest evidence of the Anglo–American ‘special relationship’ when, at Nassau in December, Kennedy agreed to provide Macmillan with Polaris nuclear missiles, de Gaulle vetoed the entry bid in January 1963. It was one of a number of embarrassments for Macmillan, who resigned in October and was succeeded by Alec Douglas-Home, whose government seemed more concerned with the residue of empire – with crises over Cyprus, Rhodesia and Malaysia – than with finding any way forward in Europe. It was not that Anglo–French co-operation was impossible. They worked together on a number of technological projects, for example, most notably the Concorde supersonic airliner. But, on the political future of Europe, their differences were further underlined by de Gaulle’s decision to quit the military structures of NATO in March 1966.

By then, a Labour government was back in power in London, under Harold Wilson, and he was able to secure a clear win the March 1966 general election. Continuing balance of payments crises (including one that struck only four months after the election victory), an abortive attempt at talks between the Six and the Seven in 1965, and the failure of the Commonwealth to provide a basis for international influence – instead it was almost torn apart over Rhodesia independence in 1965–66 – helped bring about renewed interest in membership of the EEC. A second application was launched in May 1967, despite expectations that de Gaulle would again use his veto. He did so in November, this time helped by clear evidence of British economic weakness, as exposed in a substantial devaluation of the Pound. This time, however, London made clear that it would not take ‘no’ for an answer. The application was left ‘on the table’, with the evident support of the EEC members other than France, known as the ‘Friendly Five’. In early 1969, the chances of progress seemed as far off as ever when, in the ‘Soames Affair’, de Gaulle felt betrayed by the British for revealing to the rest of the EEC his thoughts about a recasting of the institution, which he had revealed to their ambassador. But in April, offended by losing a referendum, the General suddenly resigned. His successor, Georges Pompidou, was another Gaullist, but he was concerned about signs of growing German economic power and, as seen in the development of links to the eastern bloc through *Ostpolitik*, independence. His foreign minister, Maurice Schumann, was well-disposed to Britain and, in any case, the French needed to strike a deal with the Friendly Five on the financing of the CAP. The result was that, at a conference in The Hague, in December 1969, Pompidou agreed to open talks on EEC enlargement with Britain and other states.

Although preparations for the enlargement talks were made under Wilson, they only actually got underway in June 1970, following an election win by the Conservatives, now led by Heath. He pursued the negotiations far more vigorously than in 1962–63, his personal commitment to membership could not be doubted and, despite signs that Pompidou might yet revert to an anti-British line, a summit between the two leaders, in Paris in May 1971, proved a decisive point, suggesting that their countries finally had a shared vision of Europe. Although Wilson and the Labour Party were critical of the entry terms, especially the budget deal, a Treaty of Accession was signed on 22 January 1972 and Britain, alongside Ireland and Denmark, joined the European Community (EC) on 1 January 1973. A few months before that, in October 1972, the Nine met in Paris and agreed on an ambitious plan for a full union, complete with a common monetary policy, by 1980. Unfortunately, even this dramatic breakthrough proved short-lived. Even before Heath lost office, in a hastily called election in February 1974, the dream was turning sour. An American bid to recast the NATO alliance, with the so-called ‘Year of Europe’ initiative, followed by oil price rises sparked by the October 1973 Middle East War, led to differences between London and Paris over how to deal both with the ‘energy crisis’ and the United States. The energy crisis also added further inflationary pressures, which made the mid-seventies a period of stagnant growth and rising prices, which helped kill off hopes of monetary union for the time being. At home, Heath’s attempts to stimulate growth led only to a short, unsustainable ‘boom’ that made inflation worse and encouraged trades unions to demand higher wages. As his premiership ended, despite EEC membership, Britain’s position in the world seemed low indeed, as the population faced power cuts and a three-day working week. West Germany, France and Japan had all overtaken Britain in terms of gross domestic product.

In February 1974, Wilson returned to office and sought to renegotiate the EEC entry terms, before putting these to a referendum in June 1975. Actually, despite an initial delay while Labour secured its hold on power in a second election, the re-negotiation was not as extensive as originally feared and a deal was struck at the first-ever European Council (regular meetings of heads of state and government), at Dublin in March 1975, helped by the positive attitude of the new French President, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. Wilson backed the new terms, there was an overwhelming ‘yes’ vote on 67 per cent in the referendum and the British supported certain EEC initiatives, not least further enlargement to the