From the Entente Cordiale to New Ententes

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Edited by

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FOREWORD

A REFLECTION ON FOUR GENERATIONS OF THE ENTENTE CORDIALE AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE

RT HON DOMINIC GRIEVE KC

As I found during my career in politics it is all too easy to see the positives in current Franco-British relations solely through the prism of defence and national security collaboration, a few *Grands Projets* such as Concorde and the Channel Tunnel, co-operation over energy and nuclear power and some high-level research and development. And even with these, if one reads the press of both countries, the positives are often masked by endless tales of disagreements that might make one wonder what sort of Entente exists at all. It is indeed a curious feature of the United Kingdom and France that two countries currently so close in global status and facing such similar challenges are usually compared by the extent to which the details of their functioning and global outlook are different and by the extent to which they disagree on international policy issues.

There is of course little new about this. In the late Middle Ages, the French regarded the English as an ungovernable and unstable nation with a shocking propensity for violence and the deposition and/or regicide of their Kings, something which they viewed with particular horror. After the French Revolution, it was the British who viewed the French in this light. Years of political rivalry have embedded caricature images of the other that often bear little relation to reality.

That reality, I suggest, is that far from the Entente of 1904 being some revolutionary moment in the relationship, it was more the logical outward expression and development of a truth that had been present and growing for a long time. As a trustee of Westminster Abbey, I can go freely into a

building that perfectly illustrates the cultural entanglement that already existed between the two nations in the XIIIth century and found expression in the architectural rivalries of Henry III and Louis IX and which survived the loss of Plantagenet lands in France. The Hundred Years War, although later often expressed as an Anglo-French confrontation, owed its start to, essentially, dynastic disputes over the French crown and was for significant periods fuelled by internal French power politics in which English Kings were internal, not external players. Had Henry V succeeded in his aims, then, as I have pointed out to Jacob Rees Mogg when he romanticises Agincourt, it is England that would have become the very junior partner in a combined monarchy – assuming it had lasted! The war may certainly have helped to develop a sense of nationhood in both countries, but it did not sever cultural contact any more than did the Reformation. It is too easily forgotten that from the late XVth century to the last quarter of the XVIIth century the two countries were largely at peace and occasionally allies. It is only with Louis XIV's hegemonic continental European ambitions and the British determination to stop them, that the two countries embarked on lengthy periods of warfare and global rivalry that lasted until 1815. And I am struck by how that process was played out. While warfare is always appalling, the period was characterised by the development of conventions of war designed to minimise its worst impacts. It was not just a question of Marshal Tallard, captured at Blenheim, being housed for the next five years in a fine house in Nottingham where his *jardin à la française* was the subject of admiration, as was his introduction of celery to English cuisine. It was also how the far less celebrated were treated. My five times great grandfather, a Scottish merchant of no great wealth, was captured by a St Malo *corsaire* in 1808 on his way back to Britain from the Caribbean. I have his letters written from the *Tour Solidor* at St Servan and from the large civilian camp at Nantes, before he was ransomed home. The letters do complain of conditions in the XIVth century tower where he spent three months, but not really of his captors. The enthusiasm with which intervals of peace and the final peace allowed the British to go to France to visit and make purchases of furniture, clothing and *objets de luxe* is a striking testament to its enduring attractions. That prolonged period of warfare may have shaped British national identity as a Protestant nation. But it never cut it off culturally from its neighbour.

In the case of my family, the main benefit came with the first significant political rapprochement after the Napoleonic Wars that took place under Louis Philippe. My great great grandfather John Levey Roberts married in 1838 in London and within a year was in Paris where his wife's sister had

married into a Jewish family from the Palatinate who were in business as traders there. In the case of both families the attraction was, I think, France's acceptance of Jews as equal citizens from the Revolution, something on which it was in advance on the British. Yet in the years that my great grandfather George Roberts was a boy, born in Paris in 1859 and being educated at the Lycée Louis le Grand, he always had solely a British Passport. He was not alone in this. He was friends with the father of Louis Spears who went on to be a liaison officer in World War I and serve De Gaulle in 1940 and had a similar background. The British business community in Paris was significant in the XIXth century and survived the war of 1870 and the *Commune*. Indeed, the strength of the relationship was shown by the size of the Lord Mayor of London's Relief Fund after the end of the Siege of Paris and the 2.5 million francs provided by Sir Richard Wallace for the city.

After my great grandfather married a French wife in 1886, from a Catholic bourgeois family of doctors, engineers, and industrialists, he left for London to run the British end of the business, bringing with him the furniture, paintings, books and culture of his childhood. After the Entente Cordiale was concluded in 1904, he was amongst the leading members of the Franco-British business community in London who helped promote and organise the International Exhibition at the White City in 1908, co-sponsored by both governments, for which he was awarded the Legion of Honour. We associate the Entente as the start of military co-operation following the resolution of colonial territorial disputes and finding first expression at the Algeciras conference in facing down Germany. But the Exhibition suggests that the partnership was capable of achieving something more and its intention was to show this. We see the Entente as achieving fruition in military support and co-operation at the start of World War I, that ended with the placing of British armies in France under unified command in 1918. But none of this would have been possible without the co-ordination of the production and development of munitions and the UK underpinning two thirds of the war costs of France by 1916. The career of Jean Monnet and his belief in internationalism and co-operation between states sharing like values, was shaped by his participation in these processes that helped ensure Allied victory.

It also shaped my family too. In 1914 my grandmother Liliane Roberts, brought up in Britain, married a French army officer. After he was severely wounded in 1915, he was sent to London, precisely to work on this co-operation and my mother was born there, a dual national of both countries.

World War I certainly transformed the relationship. In the post war period, I am struck by how extensive the contacts were at multiple levels between the two countries. From the families visiting war graves to the activities of newly formed Franco-British Society and its French homologue, there was a dense network of contacts. I have in my possession a book published in the 1920s by the *Société Française de Bienfaisance*, founded in 1842 by Count d'Orsay to provide support to impoverished French in the UK. Illustrated by Bernard Partridge, Frank Brangwyn and numerous French artists, the book details the life history of some of the beneficiaries, as part of a fund raiser – an *aperçu* of the diversity of French citizens in the country. The President of the Society at the time was André Simon the top wine merchant, writer and Anglophile.

I sometimes reflect on this when we come to consider the Entente and World War II. At its start it replicated the relationship of 1914. But the fall of France in 1940 might well have destroyed it. When I was a young boy, there was a tendency to view the Entente as somehow transferring seamlessly from co-operation with France to co-operation with the Free French and so back to the restoration of a French government in Paris in 1944, but this, with the benefit of hindsight, is a rose-tinted spectacled narrative. It was far from clear that General De Gaulle was an asset to the UK war effort or would be successful. There was comment in Britain of France having failed as an ally in a wider sense than military defeat. In France, the years were under the influence of both the consequences of defeat and Vichy propaganda, that saw Britain as destroying its navy at Oran and Mers El Kebir and undermining its colonial Empire. It was message that found a receptive audience.

My father, a young British barrister and committed francophile saw some of this at first hand when he was despatched in late 1940 by the Ministry of Information to work with De Gaulle and help improve his image. This was rather hard work. But he was helped by the existence throughout the country of a network of individuals who both understood France and were sympathetic to its survival and revival, just as the, sometimes, explosive differences between De Gaulle and Churchill were smoothed over by individuals who understood the British better than he did and vice versa. When my father left De Gaulle to return to the Army, with a signed photo of appreciation from the General, he found that his time with him had not been wholly to his advantage. Allocated to the SHAEF planning for the administration of liberated parts of France his presence there was objected to by the USA on the grounds he was too Gaullist in outlook. Indeed, if the

USA had had its way, then France would have been relegated to the status of another liberated European state of at best only moderate importance.

That this did not happen was due to Britain's view of its own national interest. Despite the prickly relationship with the Free French, the UK saw the essential need for France to re-emerge as a great power despite its defeat. It was the UK that led in helping De Gaulle avoid the military administration of liberated France, against the wishes of the Americans. It was the UK that secured France a zone of occupation in Germany and France's place as a permanent member of the Security Council. It was the same imperatives that led to the Treaty of Dunkirk in 1947 and the creation of the Western Union of France, the UK, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands which changed into the Western European Union with the addition of Germany and Italy. The military purpose was then subsumed into NATO, but the political purpose of a form of Franco-British leadership in defence in Europe has continued even if the joint failure at Suez, then had profound consequences.

Both countries abandoned the possible development of a European political partnership and shared leadership. France looked to taking a leading role in a political Europe without British support and contrary to what had happened earlier in the Entente, Britain ceased to be seen in practice as a senior partner. My childhood memories of France in the 1960s and early seventies, as a frequent visitor to my grandparents and when on holiday there, is of a nation *en plein essor* as its *Trente Glorieuses* of sustained economic growth transformed it. In contrast returns home to Britain were to a place which, if some aspects of infrastructure were still superior, seemed in most respects much less innovative and rather stagnant save in culture and fashion. The UK was mired in pessimism as to its future that France, post its departure from Algeria, seemed to avoid. De Gaulle's *Non* to UK membership of the EEC was a slap in the face from such a close partner and the reasoning underlying his veto, the antithesis of what the Entente had delivered for both countries. It hit my father, as such an ardent Francophile starting out in British politics hard. De Gaulle's reply to Paul Reynaud's note of protest that his policies were flouting the principles of the Entente Cordiale infamously got the reply « to be forwarded to Agincourt and Waterloo », a shallow statement entirely reminiscent of the more recent *bon mots* of Boris Johnson on France. In fairness to De Gaulle, his real objections were based on a view of the UK as the inevitable disrupter of a French invented Cartesian European order if it became a member. The

rest, as is usually the case since the Entente came into being, was the froth of historic prejudice.

And in his view of the UK as a disrupter, De Gaulle was undoubtedly right, as the years of our participation from 1973 to 2016 have shown. But far from the disruption being unproductive, I would argue that until ended by the Brexit referendum it has been of the utmost benefit for both countries. It is the tension and the occasionally identified synergies between two visions of what a settled European continent should look like that has helped it progress, whether through the creation of the single market or its enlargement or how regulatory frameworks to create level playing fields for competition are created and applied or indeed how its values as a place of freedom, human rights and democracy have developed. This, of course, inevitably creates almost continuous tension. But tension, if it is not overwhelming, sharpens focus and thinking. I find it impossible to see how any advantage would have come to either country if the 1975 referendum had gone the other way. It also served well as a forum to repair relations when they have characteristically been strained by foreign policy disagreements particularly over Iraq, where the French analysis has proved to be much better than ours.

Today, of course, we celebrate 120 years of the Entente but live with the consequences of eight years of disruption since the Brexit referendum and our departure from the EU in 2020. It is obvious that its impact has been negative for the Entente. From those *bons mots* of Johnson to British gunboats being sent to Jersey as a "fishing war" was threatened, to French cancellation of inter ministerial meetings to discuss illegal immigration, Brexit has given the relationship many irritants. But as a politician involved in the process, I find it noteworthy how quickly underlying realities reassert themselves. The Leavers vision of a global buccaneering, UK, replacing the benefits of the Single Market with a Free Trade agreement with the USA and a new chapter in the Special Relationship is dead, killed by both Trump and Biden. In France, I was intrigued in 2018 when attending, as Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, the *Université d'été de la Défence*, to note the great emphasis, that was being placed post Brexit, on a Franco-German defence relationship with a veritable diplomatic love fest taking place between Florence Parly and Ursula von der Leyen at the gala dinner. Yet six years on, with Germany's inability to respond adequately to the consequences of Russia's aggression in the Ukraine and despite the row over AUKUS, all this too is gone. Instead, we have a state visit from the King to Paris and a few months later the *Guarde Républicaine* on the forecourt of

Buckingham Palace to the music of *La Marche Lorraine* and an unprecedented level of military co-operation between our two countries, building on a structure from the Lancaster House agreements, that has continued to deepen and function through every political hiccup in the relationship that Brexit induced. Doubtless there is in the UK some suspicion in certain political circles that President Macron's policy is intended to inveigle the UK into underpinning, without real influence, a French ambition to create an autonomous European defence structure under its leadership, while limiting the UK's freedom of international engagement, but that is not the view of those engaged in making it work. The armed forces of both countries show real enthusiasm for its benefits.

It seems to me therefore that the Entente, in its purposes as developed in the 19th century and formalised in 1904 has plenty of vigour in it. But that should not induce complacency. In his book *That Sweet Enemy* Robert Tombs commented in 2006, I think correctly, on the curiosity that, although the previous twenty years had seen an unprecedented level of movement of persons between the two countries for work and recreation, including long term settlement, he was less sure that it had led to any sea change in understanding.

He said:

> "The British and the French came into contact with each other more often, longer and for more reasons than ever before. Both wanted certain things from the other and tended to ignore the rest. No doubt there were exceptions. There must have been young French entrepreneurs who frequented the Tate galleries, sampled country pubs and went walking in the Cairngorms. Equally there were doubtless British homeowners in Provence who followed the political reports in *Le Monde*, read the latest French novels and became experts on local history. But was there that urgent interest in each other's life and culture that gripped so many in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries?"[1] .

I would have added to this the first half of the twentieth century as well- the fruit of those extensive, military political and intellectual contacts that World War I generated, and my own family history reflects.

It may be that this exaggerates the problem. But if those with influence in both countries have greater difficulty or less motivation to really understand the culture and society of the other, than was the case fifty

[1] Robert and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy. The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present*, London: William Heinemann, 2006.

years ago, then that is an issue which will translate into the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Entente. It is noteworthy that the Franco-British Council set up by Edward Heath and Georges Pompidou in 1974 now runs a Young Leader's Programme to bring together the senior leaders of tomorrow and foster understanding and co-operation between them. There are also Entente Cordiale scholarships to promote university study in Britain and France by students of each country. We have had the announcement at last year's Summit of a book prize for similar reasons. But at the same time the scope of the work of the Franco-British Council became much more limited than it was when I first got involved with it twenty years ago. Then, it had the resources to finance meetings for a wide variety of sectors of civil society in both countries, covering topics such as health, education and penal policy. By 2016, its work, apart from the Young Leader's programme, was restricted to Defence and defence industry matters. It is only in the last couple of years that the scope of contacts has widened again to look at Energy and Education.

Pompidou and Heath also envisaged a Colloque to go alongside each Franco-British political summit, bringing together very senior players in civil society with the political leaders. But this fizzled out in the mid 1980s. It was revived by the non-governmental business and financial sector and meets annually and undoubtedly does excellent work. But the fact it was not kept going then by the governments is telling.

There are of course other layers of contact to bring people together. The three twinning associations in my former constituency were examples of this and there is the Franco-British Society of which I am President and its homologue in France. There are the professional organisations such as chambers of commerce and the Franco-British Lawyers Society. But in the busy consumer society in which we live, Robert Tombs critique seems to me to have force. We too often seek quick returns on relationships, beneficial to our own interests, without putting in the effort to build a real understanding of the views and needs of the other. As a member when an MP of the Franco-British Parliamentary Group, I felt I spent too much time on very pleasant but superficial meetings with our French counterparts that seemed on both sides to be a way of reinforcing stereotypes rather than breaking them down.

Ernest Renan famously defined a national identity as twofold drawing on past and present:

> "… one is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage we have jointly received"[2].

The same can be said of the Entente Cordiale. Its creation came from the realisation of how close the shared and mutual interests were, born of entwined history and proximity. Its future depends on wanting to do great things together. History supports the view that they are overwhelmingly to our mutual benefit. But that means putting in the effort to be able to work in a partnership of deep understanding and trust.

[2] Ernest Renan (1992) *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Presses Pocket, translation by Ethan Rundell, [1882], http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

ELIZABETH GIBSON-MORGAN
& GERALDINE GADBIN-GEORGE

As Thomas Otte, a historian of British foreign policy, pointed out: "memories of the 1904 *Entente* will always frame discussions of contemporary Anglo-French relations"[1]. Professor Otte alludes to the mutual understanding reached on 8 April 1904 between Britain and France, two countries deeply attached to their national sovereignty and identity, fuelled by their respective sense of exceptionalism. It came to be known as "the Entente Cordiale". Although the Entente Cordiale has since then, "captured the imagination"[2] to the point of reaching an almost mythical dimension, the original Entente was very limited in scope. It was neither an alliance nor a formal treaty based on military cooperation but an informal agreement that rested on mutual trust and understanding over the two colonial countries' respective territorial possessions in Morocco, Nigeria and Egypt to delineate their respective areas of influence.

John Keiger, a specialist in French foreign policy, explained that the expression *Entente Cordiale* had "also been used to describe the Anglo-American relationship"[3]. The latter was to loom large over the Franco-British *Entente Cordiale,* Britain was constantly torn between its alliance with France and its alleged "special relationship" with the United States – this is brought to light by Professor Haglund in his chapter. It was only in 1912 that the *Entente Cordiale* became a formal naval agreement setting up more clearly the reciprocal duties and commitments between Britain

[1] Thomas Otte, « The Entente Cordiale: bad history but good politics," Engelsberg ideas, 18 October 2023, www.engelsbergideas.com (accessed on 10/11/2023)

[2] James Addison, "Introductory remarks", International Symposium "From the Entente Cordiale to New Ententes 1904-2024", University Panthéon-Assas, Paris, 23 May, 2024.

[3] John Keiger, "A century ago. How the Entente Cordiale began" in Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson and Robert Tombs (eds.), *Cross Channel Currents.100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, London: Routledge, 2004, p3.

and France. The *Entente* found its real *raison d'être* in the first and second World Wars evolving from an informal "settlement of long-standing differences"[4] or, in the words of the British historian Lord Morgan, "an imposed settlement" over borders, to a formal diplomatic and military alliance.

The *Entente Cordiale* would prove critical not only for the relations between the two countries but also for transnational governance. Thus, on 16 June 1940, Britain and France came close to merging their national governments into one based on common institutions and a common citizenship faced with a common enemy, Germany. This "Franco-British Union" – analysed in detail by Dr Chris Monaghan in his chapter – intended this time to be permanent as "a perpetual association" between the two countries, transcending their national borders and sovereignties. Andrea Bosco, an expert on Europe and federalism, wrote for his part that this federalist project, supported by both Jean Monnet and Winston Churchill, was already "an attempt to build a European Union"[5]. If there is no consensus among historians over this interpretation, it is however generally acknowledged that the Entente Cordiale became a symbol of "an enduring commitment to peace and partnership"[6].

Although unique in its longevity and resilience through two world wars, the *Entente Cordiale* - which celebrated its 120th anniversary on 8 April 2024 - has led to different interpretations and misunderstandings from the start. It has survived many disagreements and disputes; the most daunting one since the celebrations of the centenary of the *Entente Cordiale* in 2004 has been over Britain leaving the European Union, more commonly known as Brexit. Britain's departure from the EU on 31 January 2020, led to a level of strain between the two countries of a particular acute kind – whereas their cooperation had until then been in full swing as the former diplomat François-Joseph underlined in his chapter – and even if they succeeded in maintaining key bilateral cooperation notably in terms of defence and justice, as through liaison judges based in their respective embassies.

The thirty-sixth Franco-British summit held in Paris on 10 March 2023 clearly showed some form of *rapprochement* or *détente* between France

[4] *Ibid,* p6.
[5] Andrea Bosco, *June 1940, Great Britain and the First Attempt to Build a European Union*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars publishing, 2016.
[6] Adrian Pabst and James Noyes, "France and the UK must renew the Entente Cordiale to save the West", *New Statesman*, 2 November 2021.

and Britain after the tensions and divisions generated by Brexit. March 2023 also saw the publication of *The Integrated Review Refresh* devoted to Britain's strategic priorities and choices in terms of foreign policy. The latter explicitly refers to France as "a historical ally"[7] putting an end to the remaining doubts about the state of the relations between the two countries raised under the Johnson years (2019-2022) and the short premiership of his successor, Liz Truss (06 September 2022-25 October 2022) whose comments on the Entente were not encouraging. This *détente* was perhaps facilitated by the good personal relationship between the then British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, and the French President, Emmanuel Macron.

The fourth meeting of the European Political Community (EPC) held in the wake of the early General Election in July 2024 in Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire – the birthplace of Winston Churchill, erected to celebrate a great victory of his ancestor, the first Duke of Marlborough, over the French in 1704 – by the new Labour prime minister, Keir Starmer, was used by the latter as part of his objective of "resetting the relations" between the European Union, well represented in Blenheim, and the United Kingdom. Although the latter is generally interpreted as a way of "softening" Brexit[8] rather than a new clearly defined British policy towards its close European neighbours, it could be the beginning of a revival of the *Entente Cordiale* and beyond, the sign of a working, more serene partnership between the United Kingdom and continental Europe, as Great Britain remains part of Europe. The priority given to defence and security in terms of British foreign policy by the Labour government under the leadership of Keir Starmer as well as his commitment to International Law are perceived as reasons for "cautious optimism"[9]. His Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, claimed in July 2024 that "resetting relations with Europe is a particular priority" pleading for "a new geopolitical

[7] "Integrated Review Refresh 2023. Responding to a more contested and volatile world", HM Government, His Majesty's Stationery Office, CP811, March 2023. p22.

[8] In an interview of the new Foreign Secretary - David Lammy – by the journalist of *The Observer* Patrick Wintour, Lammy stated "Britain now has to start reconnecting with the world", The Observer, 7 July 2024.

[9] Alastair Sutton, « The future of EU-UK relations", European Circuit of the Bar, Annual Meeting at Bordeaux on 20 September, 2024, Speaking notes, p1.

partnership" with the EU based on a new formal security pact[10] during his EU tour a few days after the General Election of 2024.

This book provides a fresh, multidisciplinary and transnational perspective on the *Entente Cordiale* for the first time in post-Brexit Britain. Beyond the traditional comparative approach between Britain and France, it offers an American perspective. It takes into consideration the trilateral dimension of the Entente as the impact of the Entente Cordiale on the "special relationship" between the United Kingdom and the United States is covered. More broadly speaking, the influence of the Entente Cordiale on international governance is discussed not only in Europe but also through Franco-British cooperation in Africa and Asia – especially in Dr Suhasini Vincent's chapter. This book thus provides a geopolitical analysis, including one on the attempt at forming a trilateral Entente between India, France and the United Kingdom in the Indo-Pacific region in addition to a historical and legal perspective.

It also gives a rare insight into the negotiations between French and British diplomats on the Entente Cordiale during and after the negotiations that led to Brexit. One of the objectives of this book is to explain how diplomacy operates through the expertise and personal testimonies of both French and British diplomats.

Although this book is based on the expertise of academics – such as French, British and American historians – but also legal practitioners as well as diplomats, it aims at being very accessible. Its main objective is to provide a better understanding of the original Entente Cordiale – explaining its origin and its nature – but also what the Entente means today in post-Brexit Britain. Finally, it explores what form it could take in the future.

[10] "The new Security pact with the EU could involve British cooperation with the European Defence Fund, which co-ordinates investment in defence research" *The Times*, July 8th, 2024 – "Lammy begins EU tour vowing to reset relations".

THE ENTENTE CORDIALE:
AN HISTORICAL APPROACH

CHAPTER ONE

THE ENTENTE CORDIALE: THE ROLES OF DAVID LLOYD GEORGE AND WINSTON CHURCHILL

KENNETH O. MORGAN

Abstract

Both Lloyd George and Churchill took distinctly opposed approaches in supporting the *Entente*. Lloyd George, as befitted the alleged leader of the 'Peace Party' in the Cabinet in 1914, took a strongly ideological view, seeing France as a democratic country with a radical, even revolutionary tradition, of which he approved, felt that it was the natural ally of a liberal country like Britain. Churchill, who went to the Admiralty in 1912 felt rather that it was an issue of strategic and imperial realities, with two great countries agreeing to accept each other's international commitments, as with Morocco in the case of France, and Egypt in that of the United Kingdom. To a degree, this difference of emphasis was to survive down to 1939.

I recently lectured to a group of students at an American college in north Oxfordshire. My topic was the policy of the Attlee government after 1945. There was much discussion of 'the Special relationship,' so-called, between the United Kingdom and the United States, celebrated in Churchill's famous phrase. It was extraordinary, however, that nothing at all was said of the Entente between Britain and its closest neighbour and longest-serving ally, France. There has been a distance since the passage of Brexit. The remarkable tone was set in a brief press conference by our shortest serving prime minister ever, Liz Truss when she was asked by a

journalist whether France was a friend or a foe. Astonishingly, she answered that the jury was still out[1] on that issue. Fortunately, her own party removed her from Downing Street after just a few weeks. But it confirmed the prejudices of the governing elite, symbolized by the aptly named Lord Frost.

I propose to re-examine, and perhaps remedy this situation by surveying the approaches towards France and the Entente by our two greatest prime ministers in the twentieth century, David Lloyd George (1916-22) and Winston Churchill ((1940-5) and (1951-5)). They were two very different politicians though great war leaders, with a strong regard for each other. Lloyd George is commonly associated with domestic politics – the House of Lords, the People's budget, and the post-war divisions within the Liberal Party. As for his role in foreign policy, historians including the present writer have recently engaged in discussion of his long and controversial relationship with Germany from his visit in the summer of 1908 to study German social insurance schemes down to his catastrophic visit to Hitler in Berchtesgaden when he was to praise the Führer, among other things as 'the George Washington of Germany'[2], a phrase which was to alarm President Franklin Roosevelt and to cost the Welshman the post of British ambassadorship in the United States at the end of his career in October 1940.

But this emphasis on Lloyd George and Germany can be very misleading. The European country for which he had most lifelong sympathy was undoubtedly France with which he had strong ties of sympathy in peace and in war. It is right, therefore, that he should be brought prominently into a celebration of the Entente between Britain and France. His collaboration with Georges Clemenceau and Marshal Foch especially in the period 1915 – 19 marked a kind of climax in the ties between the two great nations of western Europe.

The Entente Cordiale in 1904, so named after a passage of closer Anglo-French relations during the reign of Louis Philippe in the 1840s, was a strange, indirect production. It was negotiated by two foreign ministers, Lord Lansdowne for Britain, and Théophile Delcassé for France. It consisted of a series of imposed settlements enforced on a number of colonised small peoples related to boundary adjustments and local rights by two great colonial, capitalist powers. There was no thought of asking

[1] Truss, news conference, June 2022.
[2] *Daily Express*, Sept.1938.

the citizens of Nigeria Persia, Siam (Thailand) and Newfoundland what they felt about what was happening to their countries or territories. It was agreed that Britain should have a free run-in exploiting Egypt (including the vital Suez Canal), and that France should enjoy the same privilege with regard to Syria and Morocco. These provisions were confirmed in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement during the first world war. But from this patchwork of agreements, typical of the high imperialist era, there followed the emergence of a complex restructuring of the balance of power diplomatic, social, cultural, and diplomatic, which was to transform the world.

There were a number of clues which provide an explanation of why Lloyd George himself should be so committed to the Entente. First, he was strongly attached to the French revolutionary tradition from 1789 onwards. In his War memoirs he notes what he saw as the strong British sympathy with French radicalism from Charles James Fox in the 1780s onwards[3]. His argument resonated with Gladstone as a continuous friend of France. Lloyd George himself was more consistent than most in his pro-French attachment. He was to be concerned at the Anglo-French imperial clash on the Nile at Fashoda in Sudan 1898. Although only a young backbencher he argued confidently that, as two liberal democracies, it would be a tragedy if they fell out over a stale imperial territorial issue. In admiring the legacy of the 1789 revolution, Lloyd George included admiration for Napoleon. He had a passion for great men from Alexander the Great onwards. Like Michael Foot's hero, Hazlitt, he was inclined to argue that the wrong side won at Waterloo. France, he felt, was the natural partner for Britain with its regard for human rights and the rule of law, and this should not be jeopardised by a squalid dispute over the spoils of empire. Unlike Winston Churchill, Lloyd George defended the Entente on ideological, rather than strategic-imperial grounds not least the fact that France was a republic. On the contrary, Lloyd George was always a closet republican himself: His views on the unsullied purity of France as a republic was confirmed during the first world war when George V's Toryism led him to offer support to right-wing critics of the prime minister, who was now Lloyd George.

Lloyd George's staunch sympathy for France and the French was confirmed by two more recent events. The pardoning of Alfred Dreyfus after a long campaign by champions of liberty who included Emile Zola and a prolific publisher and political radical called Georges Clemenceau, reassured Lloyd George of how a persecuted Jew could find the protection of the

[3] David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* vol 1.

justice system in the face of the generals, the Roman Catholic church, and other enemies of liberty. A second was the disestablishment of the Catholic church by the Combes ministry in 1902. This was grist to the mill of a Welsh Baptist like Lloyd George (himself a member of the Campbellites a radical fringe of Welsh nonconformity. The battle for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Welsh Church, *Eglwys Loegr*, the Church of England in Wales, increasingly attacked on democratic-nationalist grounds, was a fundamental grievance of the nonconformist conscience[4]. Lloyd George himself was to carry through the eventual disestablishment in Wales in 1919, at the height of the Paris peace conference.

A second clue to Lloyd George's Francophilia was, perhaps surprisingly, first literacy. He was not a great reader of novels – indeed of books of all kinds since he preferred to boost his stock of information from conversation with journalists. But one book stirred him like no other – *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. The young Lloyd George, thought it was a wonderful, deeply moving study of social inequality and human deprivation. The specimen of Lloyd George's personal copy of Hugo's book contained in the library at Llanystumdwy is covered with many appreciative comments (Lloyd George did not read French). Apart from this great book, Hugo himself was something of a hero to the Welsh for his role in the Peace Society, the secretary of which was Henry Richard, a leading Welsh activist and secretary of the Society.

Thirdly, Lloyd George was much attracted to French society and culture in all its aspects. He particularly enjoyed holidays in Nice and chose that city for a spectacular sixtieth wedding anniversary in 1938. He was a notorious womaniser, and one can visualize him, with a congenial friend like the Irish Nationalist MP, T.P. O'Connor, enjoying the spectacle of pretty French women making a slow progress down the Promenade des Anglais, with his wife, Margaret, who did not particularly enjoy foreign travels, safely far away in the valleys of Snowdonia.

Finally, we should never ignore the influence of the most important person in his life in his major years of activity, Frances Stevenson, brought into the Lloyd George's household as tutor to Megan – his daughter – especially in French. She was to be his civil service secretary, his long-term mistress and eventually his second wife. She was part Belgian, part French, and a fluent French speaker. She was to emerge as a centrally

[4] John Grigg, *The Young Lloyd George*. (London, Harpercollins,1997), pp22-23.

influential adviser during the first world war, and especially at the Paris peace conference in 1919 where she helped the prime minister particularly in translation of conversations with foreign dignitaries (though not with Clemenceau who had once lived in America and was briefly married to a woman he met there). She had considerable influence on Lloyd George who called her 'My Darling Pussy'[5].

A highly sympathetic observer, she commented in her diary how the French, political and military, found David more interesting as a personality than the stiff middle-class 'English'[6]. She notes the particular impact he made with a memorable speech in a subterranean chamber beneath the Citadelle at Verdun shortly after the massive battle fought in that city. The speech, a tribute to French patriotism was highly successful save that the premier's Welsh accent somewhat baffled a French audience. Apart from the effect of his oratory, Lloyd George left behind another legacy. To this day, the city of Verdun features a Rue Lloyd George.

As regards the question of language, Lloyd George, a native Welsh speaker spoke virtually no French, nor indeed any other language other than English. Compared with Churchill, this reflected Lloyd Gorge's background. Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace in Woodstock in Oxfordshire, a mighty structure built by Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor with gardens designed by Capability Brown and presented to Churchill's ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough as a reward for his numerous victories over Louis XIV's French armies. Lloyd George, by total contrast, was raised in a shoemaker's cottage, owned by his uncle, William Lloyd. Churchill, of course, was the son of a celebrated politician, at one stage chancellor of the Exchequer He introduced young Winston to prominent French statesmen, like Aristide Briand and later the socialist, Leon Blum. Churchill's mother, who had some French background, introduced her young son into French society, and had a property in a Parisian suburb. The educational difference between Lloyd George and Churchill was a symbol of British social inequality, then and later; Lloyd George went to a small school in Llanystumdwy, a tiny village in Caernarfonshire, near Criccieth; Winston Churchill went to Harrow. As a result, Churchill had instruction in French language and history, and French civilization in general. His spoken French was stronger than he himself chose to claim

[5] A.J.P Taylor, (ed.), *Lloyd George's Diary by Frances Stevenson.* (London, Hutchinson, 1975).
[6] A.J.P Taylor (ed.), *My Darling Pussy*, (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975).

and there was much self-parody, for instance 'Je suis un des gens vous pouvez compter sur'[7].

On balance, Churchill's spoken French was serviceable. It did not cause much difficulty in his relations with General de Gaulle as has sometimes been claimed. De Gaulle himself once argued that it was welcome to him as talking with Churchill improved his own English. In general, Churchill was brought up with a good understanding of French civilization, including the spoken language. After all, his major written work was entitled the *History of the English-speaking peoples*. Like his Cabinet colleague, he had a deep personal attachment to the Entente with France, but for somewhat different reasons. Lloyd George was a supporter on ideological, democratic grounds, Churchill on strategic. Both men had the same kind of private anxiety. They were concerned that the Entente might lead to British military and especially naval strength. They also both worried about the dangerous vagueness of the Entente and uncertainty of long-term purpose. When Churchill went to the Admiralty in 1912, he concluded a naval agreement with the French. It was partly to make sure that there was no unlimited commitment for the British navy if France was again attacked on its eastern frontier. Both ministers were anxious not to move the concentration of the British fleet from the North Sea to the Mediterranean nor to transfer the operations from Gibraltar to Malta.

There was, however, one stirring illustration to try to give substance to the Entente. This came in July 1911 when the Germans provocatively sent a gunboat to the port of Agadir the coast of Morocco. At this point, Lloyd George, now Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered an unexpectedly fierce speech at Mansion House to an audience of bankers and businessmen[8]. His comments went far beyond his individual departmental responsibility at the Treasury. He had similarly strayed in 1906 when he had talks with the German foreign minister Bülow and even some correspondence with the Kaiser, the emperor Wilhelm.

Lloyd George, to general astonishment spoke in aggressive terms about how he saw the Agadir incident affecting British national interests. Strongly defending French priorities, he declared that it could inflict an 'intolerable humiliation' on Britain and its Empire. In his later *War Memoirs*, he was anxious to argue that he had shown an advanced copy of

[7] Ian Ousby, *The Road to Verdun,* (London, Random House), p126.
[8] Douglas Johnson, "Churchill and France", in Robert Blake and Roger Louis (ed.), *Churchill* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p44.

his speech to Asquith and Grey, the prime minister, and Foreign Secretary respectively and that neither had demurred from his comments[9].

Attitudes towards Lloyd George were greatly affected by Lloyd George's remarks. Among other things, Agadir showed that Lloyd George was not a pacifist even though he was alleged to be leader of a 'peace party' in the Cabinet. He had opposed the South African War in 1899 but not on pacifist grounds. Nor was he an isolationist, let alone a 'little Englander' or even 'a little Welshman.' Analyses of the British Cabinet were thus rapidly revised. No longer would Lloyd Geoge be identified with men like Runciman, Simon and McKenna, to whom he was in fact, strongly opposed on many issues notably social reform.

Where Lloyd George stood, in his view on international affairs and support for the French republic is not wholly clear. There was similar ambiguity much later in his career, in the 1930s, when he appeared to endorse a form of appeasement and resistance to fascism at the same time. Some clues emerged in the wide-ranging national proposal for an inter-party coalition during the Buckingham Palace conference, held during the Liberal government's clash with the House of Lords in the summer of 1910[10]. The main themes were those of Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism in 1912, set out by Roosevelt's Progressive party a breakaway party which directly challenged President Taft and the Republican Party.

Roosevelt, a vigorous environmentalist who developed US national parks, was a member of the Harvard University boxing squad, and led the Rough Rides during the Spanish-American war in 1898, had the kind of buoyant personality which appealed to Lloyd George. The two men actually met and were much impressed by each other in 1910 just after Roosevelt had returned from shooting lions and other endangered species in Africa. Roosevelt advocated both a broad policy of social reform (he supported social insurance, old age pensions and workers' compensation along with reform of those trusts alongside a bold foreign policy to raise America's place in the world. He favoured policy of naval expansion and secured US control over the Panama Canal. The 1912 Progressive manifesto included proposals for a fleet of battleships which caused a torment of tension for the liberal social reformer, Jane Addams of Hull House fame, a pacifist.

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[9] David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs,* (London, Odham Press), p81.
[10] The programme is printed in full in Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George*, (Allen and Unwin, 1989), pp.90-2.

There was a revealing incident during the Paris peace conference in 1919 when news came through of the death of Theodore Roosevelt. The US president in the peace conferences, Woodrow Wilson, spoke coolly of Roosevelt, his opponent in the 1912 presidential contest. Wilson was then fiercely rebutted by both his European colleagues. His attitude reminded Lloyd George of a man who had not attended someone's funeral – 'but I very much approved of it.' His criticism was also voiced by the French premier, Wilson was a former head of Princeton University. Lloyd George himself always tended to distrust elitist intellectuals, as he saw them. It is notable that (like Churchill) he was not a university graduate.

During the conference following the first world war, Lloyd Geoge strongly defended French interests as he saw them. He made sure of enforcing the immediate return of Alsace and Lorraine to French possession after hostilities ended. He also made very sure that a French general would follow the manoeuvring of Haig and Robertson in supporting Tory critics of the prime minister.

At the same time, Lloyd George spoke remarkably warmly of his personal relationship with Foch which he compared with his hero, Abraham Lincoln's close bond with General Ulysses Grant during the American civil war – Lloyd George could offer no stronger praise than a comparison with Lincoln.[11] He thought that Foch was not only technically a better general than Haig but also more humane in seeking to minimise the casualties among his forces. Haig's methods at Passchendaele in misrepresenting German military might was a lasting memory and a dark moment in the war.

At Versailles, Lloyd George was foremost among the western allied leaders in trying to seek a middle way, in seeking a defensible compromise between protecting France's eastern front against possible further German attack and not imposing a Carthaginian peace on a defeated Germany, potentially a valuable market for British goods, and this dictated his strategy in the years 1919 – 22 both in relation to German reparations and boundary agreements. Winston Churchill took a very similar line. Lloyd George's own attempted policy of conciliation did not find favour with Clemenceau[12]. The British premier's Fontainebleau memorandum in February 1919, presented to his allies, was rejected by Clemenceau with

[11] John Milton Cowler (Jr), *The Warrior and The Priest*, (Harvard, 1952).
[12] David Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, (London, Gollancz, 1938), pp231-2.

its proposals on reparations payments demanded from Germany and for German-speaking peoples not to be subject to non-German rule as on the Polish corridor running south from Danzig. Clemenceau complained that there were concessions on issues of British interest, such as over 'freedom of the sea.' Lloyd George retorted that it showed that Clemenceau and later, Poincaré had little interest in naval power. The Paris conference dissolved in an atmosphere of quarrels between the Entente partners.

But there was also a serious lost diplomatic opportunity. In the Cannes conference with the new French premier, Aristide Briand, in January 1922. Lloyd George made the dramatic proposal for a Treaty of Guarantee under which Britain would if France were invaded as had occurred in 1870 and in 1914 undertake to protect its Entente partner. Briand, an Anglophile whom Lloyd George believed to be a Brythonic Celt, like himself, was enthusiastic. But then Lloyd George fatally invited Briand to a game of golf on the neighbouring Cannes golf links, which (to the amateur eye) do not appear to be especially hazardous. The Treaty of Guarantee was a major proposal and would have meant the first British long-term commitment to continental Europe since the Peninsular War in the time of Napoleon. Alas! Briand had hardly played golf before, and his ball found its way into bunker after bunker. Lloyd George, a regular player on the golf course annoyed the French prime minister. Briand had to rush back to Paris, his government was defeated in the National Assembly, and he had to resign, to be succeeded by the sour Raymond Poincare, a rigid nationalist of Lorrainer origin. It was not only the press reaction to the game of golf that led to the political crisis and left bad feeling in the Entente. There was also doubt about whether the United States would back up the British offer with aid from its increasingly large navy. But, with the feeble Calvin Coolidge, a weak corrupt man, having succeeded Wilson in the White House, hopes of US assistance rapidly faded[13]. The French frontier would remain vulnerable and undefended. The mood of conflict was symbolized by an angry meeting of Lloyd George and Clemenceau in the premier's room in the House of Commons when Lloyd George made the error of appearing to treat the French premier with light humour. Clemenceau accused Britain of being Frane's enemy. 'Oh.' countered Lloyd George. 'Is not that our traditional policy?'[14]. When Britain resisted French proposals to occupy the west bank of the Rhine, to shore up its frontier

[13] Kenneth O. Morgan, "The Legend of St Jane", *Dialogue*, (Washington DC, 1975), pp7-11.
[14] Kenneth O. Morgan, "Lincoln and Wales" in Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton (ed.), *The Global Lincoln* (Oxford University Press).