Martin S. Alexander

The Franco-German Balance of Power in the Appeasement Era: Perspectives from the Hôtel Matignon and the French Army

Few subjects of contemporary history have been as extensively and intensively researched as Franco-German relations in the 1930s. Because of limitations of time and space, this essay will limit itself to a reappraisal of perspectives from the Hôtel Matignon, the French prime minister's office, on the problem of German power, in the period between Hitler's public announcement of rearmament (March 1935) and the coming of war in Europe (September 1939).

French prime ministers may have received less attention than they should from historians of the later Third Republic. A distorting effect results from the brief duration in office of many prime ministers – epitomised at its most extreme by the fleeting, four-day tenure of Fernand Buisson from 1 to 4 June 1935. Yet the men in the Matignon could significantly shape French external policy. Three prime ministers who put discernible personal stamps on French relations with Germany and gave a particular cast to France's way of tackling her "German Problem" in the middle and later 1930s were Pierre Laval (June 1935 – January 1936), Edouard Daladier (April 1938 – March 1940), and Paul Reynaud (March – June 1940). Each offered a distinctive approach to the problem of nascent German power, with a distinctive outlook toward the Third Reich, National Socialism, Hitler's aggressive revisionism toward the Versailles Treaty, and his territorial expansionism.

Laval, in 1935–36, was convinced that deals could be done in international politics. He had enormous self-confidence, thinking it unproblematic to apply in negotiations with leading Nazis the same cunning that had made him an effective wheeler and dealer around Châteldon in the Auvergne, enabling him to amass lucrative business interests in the mineral-water and newspaper industries. Prefiguring his subsequent style at Vichy in 1940–44, Laval persuaded himself that any problem in international relations was susceptible to concession, mediation, accommodation, arrangement. His approach to foreign policy reflected his pragmatic philosophy in domestic politics. Laval was possessed of a zealous hostility to left-wing politics often remarked-on in ex-socialists. Whilst occupying the Hôtel Matignon in 1935–36, he strove to obstruct the path to power of the French Popular Front, and his domestic politics made him naturally seek conservative

allies abroad too. From January to June 1935, as French foreign minister, he met Mussolini and encouraged the Italian fascists to understand that France, under Laval, would not take firm steps to baulk Italian expansion in East Africa. With French military leaders such as the war minister, Jean Fabry, and Maurice Gamelin, chief of the general staff, also persuaded of the value of Italian military co-operation, Laval's approach reflected a conviction that Mussolini figured both as a viable and necessary partner in a system to contain Germany. In that perspective, the Matignon and the Invalides (home of the French army high command) were ready in the summer and autumn of 1935 to acquiesce in Italian expansion in East Africa if there were a prospect, in exchange, of Italian diplomatic and military support against German remilitarisation of the Rhineland – a move whose occurrence the French intelligence services, the *2e Bureau* and the *Service de Renseignements* (SR) saw as a probability in 1936¹.

Most indicative of Laval's approach to Germany was the notorious search for rapprochement in October–November 1935. Laval was evidently working hand-in-glove with elements of French big-business, notably the coal-mine owners and the steel industry. A loose politico-industrial coalition existed, embracing existing French conservative networks that since the early 1920s had sought to promote good relations, and especially to expand trade and economic cartelization, with Germany. The intermediaries Laval used to pursue rapprochement with Berlin in late 1935 included the *Comité France-Allemagne* and Count Fernand de Brinon (later Vichy ambassador to the German occupation authority in Paris), as well as regular diplomatic channels involving André François-Poncet, French ambassador in Germany, and Roland Koester, German ambassador to France.

The failure of Laval to understand what he was dealing with is most apparent in the meeting of the *Haut Comité Militaire* (HCM) in Paris on 21 November 1935. Laval used the meeting to justify his policy toward Italian aggression in Abyssinia. But he also expounded his strategy towards Germany. First, he sought a declaration of peaceful intentions from Hitler; then he wished to negotiate a wide-ranging Franco-German détente, whose twin pillars would be an agreement on preferential commercial relationships and another on long-term armaments limitation.

Without an equal desire from Hitler for such an accommodation, however, Laval's scheme was doomed to stillbirth. To the HCM, Laval said that in dealing

¹ Cf. *Baron de Gaiffier*, Belgian ambassador in France, to Paul Hymans (Belgian foreign minister), 8 Feb. 1935, Carton 11.185 (2–3), sub-dossier “Belgique: défense nationale, 1935”, Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives, Brussels; Col. T. G. G. Heywood, British military attaché, Paris, 9 Apr. 1935 (and minute thereon, 15 Apr. 1935, by Sir R. Vansittart, permanent secretary at the Foreign Office), FO 371 (Foreign Office General Correspondence), 18800: C3080/227/17, Public Record Office, London (hereafter: PRO, FO 371); Col. Louis Koeltz, head of 2e Bureau, French Army, quoted in Heywood to London, 22 Mar. 1935, PRO, FO 371/18832: C2543/55/18. Cf. *Maurice-Henri Gauché*, *Le Deuxième Bureau au travail (1935–1940)* (Paris 1953); *M. S. Alexander*, Did the Deuxième Bureau work? The role of intelligence in French defence policy and strategy, 1919–1939, *Intelligence and National Security* 6 (2) April 1991, 293–333.

with Hitler "il ne faut pas avoir l'air d'être demandeur"². The problem was that Hitler perceived that this was precisely the position from which Laval's policy sprang. Ironically, even as Laval presented his plan to the HCM, François-Poncet in Berlin was having an audience with the Führer. During the meeting Hitler made plain his rejection of French aspirations³. As early as the autumn of 1935, therefore, Franco-German relations were not bargained on a basis of approximate equality of power. In the pithy summation of Laval's biographer, Fred Kupferman: "Son échec traduit surtout l'affaiblissement de la France."⁴

Daladier, by contrast, had a sharper, more realistic understanding of Nazi aims. He, more than most members of the French political class, possessed an insight into the nightmarish quality of Nazi ideology. In May 1938, during talks with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, Daladier warned prophetically that Hitler was worse than Genghis Khan. Nazi ambitions, he perceived, threatened to enslave all Europe in a Dark Age of barbarism. Civilization, as understood by western European liberals, was at risk of extinction. Daladier was not one of those French politicians prepared to cosy up to the Third Reich to help spare Europe the fate feared by many conservatives – the swamping of central and western Europe by a Soviet Communist takeover. He may fairly be enumerated among those in the camp of "firmness" in dealing with Germany under National Socialism⁵.

However, if Daladier had no illusions about the grisly fate that would await a Nazified Europe, he had no more idea than others we are discussing here – except for Reynaud – how to prevent Hitler's progressive domination of the continent. As Maurice Vaisse has aptly written:

In the France of 1933 and 1934 firmness toward Germany was a snare. Its adherents almost all rejected the only means capable of stopping German rearmament and leading to the downfall of Hitler, that is to say, preventive war. ... What was lacking was not lucidity about events in Germany, but on the one hand political will and on the other the means of intervention. France in fact at that time did not have a force capable of intervening quickly in Germany and in addition to the other factors [French pacifist sentiment, domestic political divisions and understandable fear of another war so soon after 1918] this reason explains the lack of realism of the advocates of firmness⁶.

An enervating sense of the shortcomings of France herself beset Daladier. This led to indecision, procrastination, inertia. The same ambiguity is apparent in Gen-

² "Réflexions d'une mauvaise nuit au sortir d'un Haut Comité Militaire – déclaration grave de M. Laval, nuit du 21–22 novembre 1935", Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 7, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes (hereafter: SHAT).

³ See Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series C, vol. IV (London 1962), no. 425; A. François-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une ambassade à Berlin, septembre 1931 – octobre 1938* (Paris 1946) 247–248.

⁴ F. Kupferman, *Pierre Laval* (Paris 1976) 52.

⁵ See Maurice Vaisse, *Against Appeasement: French advocates of firmness, 1933–38*, in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London 1983) 227–235.

⁶ Ibid. 231–232.

eral Maurice Gamelin, the chief of the French defence staff, Daladier's senior military advisor. Pride as a Frenchman – as a French *soldier* who had helped draft Joffre's Marne counterattack to save the nation in 1914 – would not allow Gamelin to admit in public that France was permanently, structurally inferior, “un brillant second”. At the same time, he was depressed by his knowledge of French rearmament delays, material deficiencies, the uneven quality of active and reserve divisions, the chaos that since 1936 had plagued rearmament in the air (where he set responsibility squarely at the feet of Pierre Cot – “qui a saboté l'aviation française ... nous payons deux ans d'errements”)⁷. In retrospect he thought that the dilemma facing him had been that:

J'avais souvent présente, une angoisse au cœur: celle que la puissance française ne fut pas en état de répondre à tous les espoirs, souvent excessifs, que je sentais fondés sur elle. Non point que je doutasse de la victoire finale. Mais combien même en France ... se faisaient encore des illusions, croyaient à la possibilité de succès rapides, ignoraient les difficultés où nous débattions pour l'accroissement de nos matériels, ne mesuraient pas suffisamment la gravité des dangers. *Nous, qui savions, ne pouvions cependant pas risquer de décourager nos alliés, même pour insister plus obstinément auprès d'eux sur l'effort qu'il leur appartenait d'accomplir de leur côté*⁸.

To recapitulate one of the most perceptive recent analyses of French official opinion in the 1930s, that offered by Robert J. Young in *France and the Origins of the Second World War*, there was a pervasive and paralysing contradiction between elements of strength and elements of weakness; between grounds for self-confidence and profound self-doubt. The outlook of the French people, and French policy, was marked by deep ambiguities or ambivalence⁹.

Among those for whom accommodating Hitler was anathema, two French statesmen of the 1930s stand out: Louis Barthou and Paul Reynaud. The former left the scene in October 1934, killed on a Marseilles dock-side by a stray bullet fired at King Alexander of Yugoslavia, whom Barthou, as foreign minister, had gone to welcome on a state visit to France. For Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Barthou was France's “lost leader” of the desperate years of the later 1930s, a man with a toughness of will, the clear-sighted view of the magnitude of the Nazi German danger, to have embarked on serious rearmament a year or two sooner than was actually done (in the event by Daladier, minister of national defence in 1936–37). For Duroselle the evidence for such confidence in a Barthou-inspired renaissance of national confidence and diplomatic determination was to be seen not only in Barthou's successful bid, as prime minister in 1913, to extend French military service to three years in face of Wilhelmine aggressiveness; it was also indicated by Barthou's travels to Warsaw, Prague, and Bucharest between April and June 1934, with the hope of reviving France's moribund network of alliances with Poland,

⁷ *Gamelin*, Journal de marche, 18 Sept. 1939, Fonds Gamelin, 1K 224, Carton 9, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Vincennes.

⁸ *Maurice-Gustave Gamelin*, Servir, 3 vols. (Paris 1946–47), II, Le prologue du drame. 1930-septembre 1939, 280–281 (emphasis added).

⁹ R. J. Young, *France and the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke 1996).

Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Moreover Barthou, crafting foreign policy toward Germany with an undoctinaire pragmatism untainted by Bolshevophobia, was ready to rebuild France's alliance with the Soviet Union. For Barthou, along with André Tardieu and Reynaud, the German problem was the only problem that mattered for French security. All other nations, whether Soviet Russia or fascist Italy, were legitimate alliance partners in diplomatic (and, if possible, in military) combinations to prevent Germany again bidding for European hegemony. Barthou was unconcerned if that gave an impression to Hitler and his entourage of an "encirclement" of Germany. This no more troubled him in 1934 than had Kaiser Wilhelm II's and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's complaints of "encirclement" by the Triple Entente or Franco-Russian attendance at each other's army manoeuvres in 1913–1914¹⁰. Barthou believed that each generation of German politicians respected diplomatic notes and tough speeches only if these were backed up by meaningful, vibrant alliances and strong armed forces¹¹.

Reynaud, too, incarnated the tradition of Poincaré. Free from the distorted vision of security that afflicted some right-wingers because of their obsessive anti-communism, Reynaud epitomised the conservative nationalist. He held a deep-seated suspicion of Germany. For Reynaud, Germany was a leopard that would not – could not – change its spots. His outlook represented a brand of "made-in-France" Vansittartism. Lunching with Reynaud at his headquarters at the Château de Vincennes in October 1939, the French commander-in-chief Gamelin observed that, in the war just commenced, "comme au moment de Verdun, nous voyons le monde immobile regarder la passe d'armes des héros. C'est une fois de plus le duel franco-allemand qui va décider du sort du monde." Reynaud replied:

Jamais, la situation de la France n'a été aussi grave. A l'époque de la "Patrie en danger" elle était un "mammoth" en face de tout petits pays non organisés. A l'heure actuelle, c'est "la lutte des petits bourgeois contre les gangsters" ... et dans le monde, l'Armée française représente le dernier rempart contre les forces de proie. Sera-t-elle en mesure de résister¹²?

The 1939 war, for Reynaud, was a further stage in a century-long Franco-German struggle – a struggle continuing in a direct line from the earlier wars of 1870–71 and 1914–18.

In the light of Reynaud's and Daladier's common view of the unlimited rapaciousness intrinsic to the Nazi regime, it was disastrous for France that these

¹⁰ Flandin, who became prime minister in November 1934, a month after Barthou's death, and retained Barthou's successor, Pierre Laval, at the Quai d'Orsay, wrote later, however, that his wish in 1934–35 was to be able to continue "la politique non d'encerclement de l'Allemagne, mais de barrage aux ambitions allemandes", *Pierre-Étienne Flandin*, *Politique Française*, 1919–1940 (Paris 1947) 169.

¹¹ See *Jean-Baptiste Duroselle*, *La Décadence, 1932–1939. Politique étrangère de la France, 1871–1969* (Paris 1979) 88–121. Cf. *Robert J. Young*, *Power and Pleasure. Louis Barthou and the Third French Republic* (Montreal 1991); *idem*, *The Making of a Foreign Minister: Louis Barthou (1862–1934)*, in: *Michael G. Fry* (ed.), *Power, Personalities and Politics: Essays in Honour of Donald Cameron Watt* (London 1992) 83–106.

¹² *Gamelin*, *Journal de marche*, 9 Oct. 1939, 1K 224, Carton 9, SHAT.

two were temperamentally unable to co-operate. If they had been able to harness and channel their distinct qualities of energy, leadership, and – in Daladier’s case – empathy with the French man-in-the-street, they could have provided France with firm, competent, even visionary direction. As a partnership in government they might reasonably have been expected to furnish the steadiness of purpose, national unity, and defensive power to resist Germany. A France under their united direction from 1938 should have secured, if not victory in 1939–41, at least the avoidance of defeat. And that outcome, a stalemate of the war in Western Europe, would have afforded a platform for the development of the world-wide mobilization of allied empires, economies, and peoples that would ultimately have doomed the Third Reich¹³.

Who can gauge the true extent to which French capacity to resist Germany effectively, whether by diplomatic means or by military ones, was undermined by the Daladier-Reynaud rivalry? This is well-worn ground for historians of the Fall of France. But that should not deter us from retreading it. Some anticipated a bolder, more aggressive French conduct of the war once Reynaud succeeded Daladier as head of government on 21 March 1940. Oliver Harvey, private secretary to Lord Halifax at the Foreign Office in London, had hoped that Reynaud, back in office since his appointment as Daladier’s finance minister in November 1938, would invigorate the government. Harvey had his fingers crossed that Reynaud would eradicate all vestige of appeasement, of the “ambivalence” (in Robert Young’s term) that had prevented French policy towards Germany from following a consistent line for more than a few months at a time between 1933 and 1938. To Harvey, Reynaud seemed “to understand the nature of the threat and the need for real action. He is something of a French Winston”¹⁴. Yet Reynaud’s position in the Chamber of Deputies was weak. He had not built a large or loyal parliamentary following. A lawyer by training, he never grasped that success in politics required more than the preparation of a brief. He had campaigned in 1934–35 for devaluation of the franc, and in 1936–37 for a radical restructuring of army recruitment (as suggested by his protégé, Colonel Charles de Gaulle). But his arrogance won few friends; his style was arid, strident, and self-righteous. He commanded respect from many in the Chamber of Deputies, but little loyalty and no affection.

As the U.S. ambassador to Paris, William C. Bullitt, colourfully noted just a month before disaster struck in May 1940: “It is too bad that there should be anything but close friendship between Reynaud and Daladier, since... they are both able men; but the lady love of each hates the lady love of the other; and as an old *roué* like you would know, venom distilled in a horizontal position is always fatal.”¹⁵

¹³ See *Richard J. Overy, Why the Allies Won* (London 1995).

¹⁴ *John Harvey* (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937–1940* (London 1970) 218–219.

¹⁵ Bullitt to Moore, 18 April 1940, R. Walton Moore Papers, Group 55, Box 3, U.S. National

The evidence suggests that both Daladier and Reynaud relied on a desperate hope – almost a blind faith – that an external agency, a guardian angel or *deus ex machina*, would intervene. Outside forces, it was hoped, would make up France's lack of strength, save France from her earlier policy contradictions and inconsistencies, and reinvigorate the weakened sinews of Western democracy. Reynaud and Daladier agreed on one thing at least – a shared yearning that the New World would come to the rescue of the Old. The American effort of 1917–18 would repeat itself, they hoped – but at the outset of war, not three years into the struggle and almost too late. French leaders persuaded themselves that, in desperate times, “the Americans would come”. The evidence is found in Bullitt's published correspondence with Roosevelt, in the archives of the U.S. Department of State, and in the papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park. It is to be seen in the dispatches of Colonel Horace Fuller and Lt.-Colonel Sumner Waite, the U.S. military attachés in Paris, and in the reports from Brigadier-Generals Bradford Chynoweth and Raymond E. Lee, the attachés in London¹⁶.

The American envoys in Paris – and in London, for that matter – tried repeatedly, for their part, to dispel those French illusions. Writing to prepare Roosevelt for his first meeting with the Count de Saint-Quentin, appointed French ambassador to Washington at the end of 1937, Bullitt prompted that it might “be useful if you should say to him that the United States intends to stay out of any war which may start on the continent of Europe just as long as possible”¹⁷. There was a difficulty, however, arising out of the willingness of Roosevelt and some of his senior officials to help France circumvent American neutrality legislation. This nod-and-a-wink relaxation of the rules was done to give France access to American armaments and machine tools required to plug gaps in France's defences. Purchase of U.S. fighter planes is the best-known example. Reynaud played a key part in this. As minister of finance, at a meeting of the *Comité permanent de la Défense nationale* on 5 December 1938, Reynaud helped set aside the French air force's lingering obsession with fashioning a strategic bomber force. Instead, he released funds to purchase 1,000 American-built Curtiss interceptor aircraft. Jean Monnet, along with French air-force officers, was sent as head of a purchasing mission to the United States, where a British team under Arthur Purvis soon joined him¹⁸.

Archives and Records Administration: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁶ See Brigadier-General Bradford G. Chynoweth Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; *James R. Leutze* (ed.), *The London Observer. The Journal of General Raymond E. Lee, 1940–1941* (London 1971). The dispatches of the US attachés in Paris are found in Record Group 165 (US Army Military Intelligence Division), US National Archives, Suitland/College Park, Maryland.

¹⁷ Bullitt to FDR, 10 Jan. 1938, in: *Orville H. Bullitt* (ed.), *For the President. Personal and Secret: Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt* (London 1973) 251.

¹⁸ See *John McVickar Haight, Jr.*, *American Aid to France, 1938–1940* (New York 1970); *idem*, Jean Monnet and the American Arsenal after the Beginning of the War, in: *Evelyn M.*

The trouble was, however, that during 1939 French political leaders came to believe what they wished to believe about the extent of American political – and by implication military – readiness to defend France. In their own minds they exaggerated the degree of U.S. commitment to the European democracies betokened by Roosevelt's willingness to export munitions and machine tools. The President was determined not to risk entangling the USA in a conflict between Hitler and the reemergent Franco-British alliance. He concurred with the advice given him in January 1938 by Bullitt: "Henceforth, your chief job is going to be to maintain our national honor while avoiding involvement in war."¹⁹ Yet no repetition of warnings from Bullitt ever dispelled Daladier and Reynaud's deeply-held illusion that the USA would spring into Europe's war, if it ever perceived the Anglo-French alliance to be facing collapse.

In the middle 1930s, indeed till Daladier's return to the Hôtel Matignon in April 1938, French leaders mistakenly regarded Hitler as merely another German nationalist – more violent, more vulgar, to be sure, than his Wilhelmine or Weimar predecessors, but not fundamentally different in the nature and scope of his intentions. J.-B. Duroselle, writing in 1979, argued powerfully that during 1934, France had a leader in Barthou with an unsentimental and hard-nosed approach to the problem of German power. Perhaps, perhaps not. Even Duroselle conceded that "On ne peut évidemment pas expliquer toute l'histoire française des années 1930 par l'assassinat de Barthou. Si la France est retombée d'une politique ferme à une politique inconsistante n'est-ce pas parce qu'elle était singulièrement prédisposée à la facilité ?"²⁰

Ultimately the quality of Barthou's analysis, the depth of his understanding of the nature of National Socialism, hardly matters. Barthou in 1934 was not head of government, merely foreign minister. His assassination that October leaves us with only the tool of speculation – a tool that historians are normally wise to eschew – to imagine how, under his leadership, France might have responded to the blows struck against her security in March 1935 and March 1936 (Germany's reintroduction of conscription, refounding of the Luftwaffe, and remilitarization of the Rhineland). As Maurice Vaisse and others have emphasized, Barthou would not have possessed the offensively-trained and well-equipped mobile armies essential for a swift riposte by force to German incursions.

And to account for this, we have to examine the roles of politicians and military chiefs other than Barthou in 1934. These included the war minister, Marshal Philippe Pétain. The latter's record in office in 1934 was dismal. He failed to strengthen French defences or quicken the pace at which France modernized her military forces. Indeed, one disappointed general referred to Pétain's tenure at the rue Saint-Dominique in 1934 as "un trêve, pas plus". Rearmament worthy of the

Acomb and Marvin L. Brown (eds.), *French Society and Culture since the Old Regime* (New York 1966) 269–283.

¹⁹ Bullitt to FDR, 10 Jan. 1938, in: O. H. Bullitt (ed.), *For the President* 250.

²⁰ Duroselle, *op.cit.* 125.

name had to await September 1936. When it occurred, it was at the instigation of a left-centre Popular Front government elected, with much irony, under a slogan of "pain, paix et liberté". The Popular Front, as Robert Frank has demonstrated, did far more in practice to give guns to French soldiers than to provide social security to French workers²¹. And for that rearmament it was Daladier who could best claim the lion's share of the credit.

On the other hand, Daladier was too characteristic a product of the French political system, the *République des Camarades* as Robert de Jouvenel had styled the regime, to overcome the institutional sclerosis and blockages, the "goulots d'étranglement" (Robert Frank), that made French policy appear so timid, unconvincing, and indecisive in face of Germany's dynamism. The progress of French rearmament was slowed by a real, not imagined, insufficiency of modern assembly lines and by having too few skilled engineering workers to fill huge new orders at the factories. But there was also an undeniable fatalism among the French elites that ceded the initiative to Germany. French ministers tended to accept problems rather than meet them head-on and overcome them, as the industrialist Raoul Dautry would try to do once Daladier appointed him minister of armaments in September 1939²².

Bullitt discerned the fatalism pervading the Quai d'Orsay. Of that fatalism, he warned Roosevelt, Saint-Quentin was "the quintessence" among French diplomats. "When I asked him if he saw any possibility of preserving peace, he said that he saw none. He did not feel that there was anything that France or England could or should do except wait. I said that this seemed to me not the policy of a statesman but the policy of an undertaker."²³ René Girault in the 1970s and early 1980s stimulated important new perspectives in our analysis of twentieth-century international history by urging closer study of the shared outlooks, common education and training, and the "group characteristics" of what he termed *les décideurs*. Elisabeth du Réau, Maurice Vaisse, Robert Frank, and Girault himself have greatly assisted our understanding of French policymaking machinery and elites in the 1930s with the insights provided by that concept. Nor did they confine application of this framework of analysis to the career foreign-service officials. They also applied it to the attitudes, prejudices, and influence of groups such as military, naval, and financial attachés, the press corps, and businessmen.

Nonetheless, as the interpretative wheel continues to turn, we may feel that it was one of those interwar journalists, André Géraud ("Pertinax"), who chose the

²¹ R. Frank, *Le Front Populaire, a-t-il perdu la guerre?*, in: *L'Histoire* 58 (July – Aug. 1983) 58–66; *Le Prix du réarmement français, 1935–1939* (Paris 1982); *La Hantise du déclin. La France, 1920–1960. Finances, défense et identité nationale* (Paris 1994).

²² Cf. Rémi Baudouin, *Raoul Dautry, 1880–1951. Le technocrate de la République* (Paris 1992) 178–233; Michel Avril, *Raoul Dautry, 1880–1951. La passion de servir* (Paris 1993) 111–145; Vladimir Halperin, *Raoul Dautry. Du rail à l'atome* (Paris 1997) 119–148; Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *Les Français de l'an 40*, vol. II, *Ouvriers et soldats* (Paris 1990) 64–173.

²³ Bullitt to FDR, 10 Jan. 1938, in: O. H. Bullitt (ed.), *For the President* 250.

right metaphor when, writing in exile in 1943, he entitled his portrait of the *classe dirigeante* of pre-war France *Les Fossoyeurs* – “The Gravediggers”. For all the revisionism attempted by the present author, and by historians such as Robert Young who urge sympathy for the Third Republic’s last governments and military chiefs – an assessment that credits them with patriotism and an awareness of the Nazi threat – we face one awkward but inescapable fact. This fact is that France proved unready for war with Germany in 1939–40, no matter how much that war had been expected for years by French leaders. This is the reason that the debates continue.