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Michael Sutton, *France and the Construction of Europe, 1944-2007: The Geopolitical Imperative*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007. xiv + 366 pp. \$85.00 US. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84545-393-0

Review by Herrick Chapman, New York University

Some sixty years after the Schuman Declaration in 1950 gave rise to the European Coal and Steel Community, historians and social scientists are now in a good position to examine afresh the long arc of postwar European integration since World War II.^[1] Michael Sutton's deeply-informed and deftly-woven account of the French role in constructing Europe deserves an important place in this scholarly conversation. He has written an excellent chronicle of the central episodes of European construction, from the invention of the ECSC to the Maastricht Treaty and beyond, keeping French initiatives, breakthroughs, and missteps clearly in view. He has also made the more recondite economic complexities of the story intelligible to general readers. As a result, Sutton has produced an important overview of European integration that highlights the influence French leaders exerted in building what by the 1990s had become the fundamental structures of the European Union we know today.

Sutton's approach to this subject reflects his own unusual experience. Before taking up a professorial post at Aston University in 1995, he published a historical monograph on the politics of Charles Maurras and also worked for over twenty years in Brussels for the Economist Intelligence Unit, part of *The Economist* newspaper group.^[2] He analyzed many of the events he recounts in the book right when they happened in the 1970s and 1980s. This intellectual itinerary may explain why the book manifests so successfully both an economist's command of detail and a historian's appreciation for the power of the past to shape how political actors perceived their circumstances in their own time.

Historical continuity, in fact, serves Sutton as his central analytical theme. He argues that despite profound differences in outlook, nearly every major architect of France's "Europe" policy—from Jean Monnet, Pierre Uri, and Charles de Gaulle to François, Jacques Delors and Elisabeth Guigou—all sought, first and foremost, to respond to the country's "geopolitical imperative": that is, the need to insure French security after three devastating wars with Germany and to secure an enduring position of influence for France on the continent. "The leading aim" of French European policy, Sutton argues, has been "tying Germany firmly down under Europe's roof" (p. 329). This abiding objective had its roots in the interwar years, when in their youth many of these leaders watched the Versailles order unravel, and it became a core objective for nearly the entire political elite from 1945 through at least the 1990s. The "geopolitical imperative," in Sutton's view, accounts for the continuities in French efforts to shape Europe from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic and across all the presidencies of the latter regime.

This argument will hardly startle most students of European integration, since the French struggle with "the German problem" has long been major theme in the post-1945 literature.

But as Sutton points out, his approach runs counter to two alternative views. Andrew Moravcsik, in his landmark study of Britain, France, and West Germany in the making of Europe, took aim at geopolitical explanations when he argued that all three countries, and even France under de Gaulle's leadership in the 1960s, pursued economic objectives above all. "De Gaulle's European policy," Moravcsik asserted, "was aimed primarily at securing commercial advantages for French agriculture and industry" rather than at achieving geopolitical goals.[3] For his part, Sutton is careful not to dismiss the importance of economic objectives, and he devotes the second part of his three-part book to the development of the Common Market and the drift from dirigisme to economic liberalism after the 1960s. A strict distinction between economic and political objectives, he says, would be "both false and artificial." Still, taking issue with Moravcsik, he insists "the dance has been led by politics": the French approach to European union "has derived from geopolitical considerations, rather than from any notions of utility maximization associated with narrowly defined economic advantage" (p. 329).

Sutton's approach also clashes with the "neofunctionalist" perspective associated with political scientist Ernst Haas, who argued that Europe's initial integration through trade liberalization would "spill over" into other policy domains, such as social welfare, military and foreign affairs.[4] Spillover theory has lost a good deal of its luster since the 1950s, but indirect pathways to European integration continue to fascinate historians, as well they should. Scholars are now exploring "hidden" forms of integration in infrastructure development (such as transport and energy grids) and in policy networking behind the scenes.[5] New work on European youth is contributing to what could be described as European integration history from below.[6] Sutton, by contrast, focuses on what he calls the "high politics" of integration, and to press the point he conveys his preference for "construction" rather than "integration" to describe the process (p. 10). Hence he tells the story mainly by focusing, in parts one and three of the book, on personal diplomacy and intergovernmental bargaining by the key players at the commanding heights of the state in France, Germany, Britain, and the United States.

In part one Sutton makes the case for continuity from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic. He does so, first of all, by arguing that each key breakthrough in European construction during the Fourth Republic—the ECSC, the integration of West Germany into NATO in 1955, and the creation of the Common Market via the Treaty of Rome in 1957—depended more on the kind of interstate bargaining and devotion to national interest later associated with de Gaulle than on embracing supranationalism. West Germany's remilitarization under NATO came only after the French National Assembly rejected the more supranationalist proposal of a European Defense Community. France's decisive commitment to a Common Market came only after the Suez debacle motivated Prime Minister Guy Mollet in 1956 to seek stronger ties to West Germany rather than Britain. And if in theory the ECSC pooled the sovereignty of its member states' in its oversight of their coal and steel resources, in practice the ECSC's governing High Authority "proved to be not so much an independent supranational body as an effective international management committee representing national interests" (p. 61). What we might regard as a Gaullist approach to Europe began, in short, during the Fourth Republic.

Sutton goes on to portray Charles de Gaulle as the great consolidator of this nationalist, intergovernmental approach to European construction. De Gaulle's legacy was indeed enormous. Although he initially opposed the Rome Treaty of 1957, as president of the Fifth Republic he accepted the Common Market as a positive stimulus to a French economy in need of the salubrious effects of international competition. He also did much to complete the unfinished business of the Rome Treaty by steering negotiations for the Common Agricultural Program in a fashion beneficial to France. Perhaps most important, after he seriously toyed with a French future built upon the old imperial vision of Eurafrique and then watched that dream collapse in an Algeria War he initially hoped to win, de Gaulle opted decisively for a European continental

strategy.[7] He and Konrad Adenauer institutionalized, by means of the Elysée Treaty of Franco-German Cooperation of 1963, the cross-Rhine partnership that Mollet and Adenauer had begun a few years before, a relationship and that would mature in the 1970s to become the stable fulcrum of European integration for the rest of the century. Although de Gaulle had his European setbacks—most notably, failure to win European support for his Fouchet Plan to create an intergovernmental “Union of States” to function alongside (and overshadow) the more supranational European Community—he succeeded nonetheless, via the “empty chair” crisis of 1965-66, in establishing the principle of unanimous voting in the EC Council of Ministers. Sutton regards all these efforts to restore French preeminence within a European “society of states” not as a uniquely Gaullist preoccupation with rank and grandeur, but rather as a continuation of a long tradition of French diplomacy reaching back to Louis XIV’s vision of a French-led European commonwealth of states (p. 5).

Sutton devotes part three of the book to tracing these continuities forward through the subsequent presidencies of the Fifth Republic. Although Georges Pompidou repudiated de Gaulle’s animus toward Britain and welcomed the latter into the European Community in 1973, he “remained as wedded as ever to the Gaullist idea of Europe as a ‘Union of States’” (p. 187). Likewise, Sutton portrays Giscard d’Éstaing as continuing the Gaullist legacy by trying to create a European Monetary System (EMS) with an eye less toward its economic benefits—the usual way we regard Giscard—and more toward the geopolitical imperative of diminishing West Germany monetary dominance over France. Monetary policy, Sutton says, was more about power and security than money.

Continuity between de Gaulle and François Mitterrand is even more obvious, and indeed few commentators in the 1980s overlooked the irony that de Gaulle’s chief political rival in the 1960s did more to perpetuate than reverse the General’s legacy once he himself occupied the Elysée Palace. Mitterrand distrusted, as did de Gaulle, America’s military commitment to Western Europe, especially once Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev began nuclear disarmament talks, and in response he sought defense cooperation with the Germans. And like de Gaulle Mitterrand sought to play a leading role in shaping the evolution of the European Community, first through the Single European Act of 1986, which he and Jacques Delors did so much to foster, and then through the campaign for monetary unity, the centerpiece of the Maastricht Treaty. Indeed, the push toward European Monetary Union (EMU) became a Holy Grail for the Mitterrand’s presidency, initially as a way to restore French independence from the Bundesbank, and then even more so as a way, after the fall of the Berlin wall, “to contain German power and channel it in the right direction” (p. 243).

Mitterrand’s role in the diplomacy leading up to German unification has been the subject of fierce scholarly debate. Did he, like Margaret Thatcher, seek to impede unification or simply make the process more orderly to protect, as Frédéric Bozo has argued, Gorbachev’s reform experiment in the Soviet Union on which so much of Europe’s future depended?[8] Without saying so directly, Sutton takes what might be described as a middle position in the controversy. He points to Mitterrand’s initial efforts to slow the process down, his swift realization that he was powerless to do so, his subsequent preoccupation with securing Helmut Kohl’s commitment EMU, and his reaffirmation of the Franco-German partnership as the central tenet of France’s European policy. “No reversal of alliance,” Mitterrand is reported to have said when some advisors suggested closer ties to Britain. “The ally is Germany! As to the British, they are aligned with the United States” (p. 264). De Gaulle would hardly have said it more bluntly.

Sutton regards the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 as marking the beginning of the end of the era of French preeminence. With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical context that enabled French leaders to assert themselves in European construction

began to change. German unification, the end of sharp bipolar tensions between the superpowers than had enabled France to play a leading intermediating role on the continent, the enlargement of the European Union eastward, and a new assertiveness by other EU members, especially Britain, altered “the international political parameters” (p. 329). Franco-German stewardship, and France’s role more generally, declined accordingly, especially in the past decade. Recent tensions between Paris and Berlin over how to deal with the Greek debt crisis, only confirms this line of argument. Still, Sutton concludes, recent decline need not blind us to what the French had accomplished during the first five decades of European construction: namely, “the securing of a real peace between France and Germany” (p. 329). France’s principal geopolitical objectives were achieved.

Any approach to a subject as vast as France’s role in constructing Europe across six decades comes with trade-offs. The insights about continuity and geopolitics Sutton gains by focusing on top state elites over this lengthy era come at the cost of having less to say about the impact of domestic politics and interest-group pressures on the story he tells. To some degree, of course, Fourth Republic prime ministers, to say nothing of Fifth Republic presidents, were insulated from public pressures when they contemplated European policy. Hubert Védérine, as Sutton points out, once claimed that Mitterrand ran French foreign policy in the 1980s as an “enlightened despot” (p. 327). But it is easy to overestimate leaders’ autonomy, even in foreign policy, or the extent to which policies in one domain run on separate tracks from others. As Talbot Imlay has argued, for example, domestic politics was a factor in Guy Mollet’s decision to opt for the Common Market in 1956. Mollet hoped the policy would hold together his Socialist party increasingly divided over Algeria and consolidate a pro-Europe bloc against Gaullists and Communists.^[9] Europe had similar domestic political utility for Mitterrand in the 1980s. Once Mitterrand backtracked on leftwing economic policy by making the U-turn of 1983, he made European integration not simply the geopolitical project it had long been but also an ideological focal point for French and European progressives. Europe gave Mitterrand high-minded principles to run on in the elections of 1988. Meanwhile, the logic of European integration gave Socialists an alibi for pursuing neoliberal policies that some voters and interest groups found undesirable. Sutton does not ignore domestic politics altogether; it figures prominently in his account of the referendum battles over Maastricht in 1992 and the European Constitution in 2005. But he does not regard domestic politics as a significant factor motivating the French architects of the European project.

A similar point can be made about pressure groups politics. True, Sutton acknowledges how artificial the distinction between political and economic motives for policy can be. But he does little to interrogate this complexity—just how much, for example, the farm lobby mattered in shaping de Gaulle’s approach to the Common Agricultural Program, or bankers and trade associations in the case of Mitterrand’s monetary reforms. To be fair, a book of this chronological scope can hardly linger long enough on any given episode of European construction to pursue these questions deeply. Such an endeavor would also require different sources than Sutton uses. He relies on an impressive range of scholarly works, newspapers, memoirs, and his own reporting from the period, but not on the kind of governmental and interest group archives that Andrew Moravcsik used in his more chronologically delimited study. Any overarching argument that insists on the primacy of geopolitics (Sutton) or of economic interest (Moravcsik) is likely to flatten out the distinctions between episodes where pressure groups weighed in heavily and where they did not. Future work in this field, then, that digs deeply into archives as they become more available may shed new light on the imbrications of politics and economics and build less one-sided arguments accordingly.

That said, Sutton’s book deserves broad attention on its own terms as an exemplary account of how French leaders put their stamp on the security arrangements and European Union that

insured the peace in postwar Europe. *France and the Construction of Europe* is also indispensable for understanding why such a strong consensus emerged in the French governing elite over European policy. The *pensée unique* that people in France began to notice, and sometimes grouse about, in the 1990s—that is, how the center left and center right seemed to stand for much the same neoliberal policies in preparation for the Euro—had its origins, as Sutton shows us, not simply in a shift in economic ideology in the 1980s; it also had roots in the geopolitical logic of France's European policy. This book, then, also helps us understand public disenchantment with the European Union in the years since Maastricht and the creation of the Euro. As France's leadership role waned and as Europe enlarged, the gap has grown between an elite that built Europe for geopolitical reasons and a public divided over its economic consequences. Michael Sutton's book does a great deal to explain why.

NOTES

[1] One such reassessment is incorporated into Tony Judt's magisterial *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005). The journal *French Politics, Culture & Society* will be publishing a special issue in 2011 to explore the question, "Les idées fondatrices du projet européen sont-elles dépassés?"

[2] Michael Sutton, *Nationalism, Positivism and Catholicism: The Politics of Charles Maurras and French Catholics, 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

[3] Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 198), p. 177.

[4] Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe; Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1958).

[5] For an introduction to this literature, see Christian Kleinschmidt, "Infrastructure, Networks, (Large) Technical Systems: The 'Hidden Integration' of Europe," *Contemporary European History* 19, 3 (August 2010): 275-284.

[6] See, for example, Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest, and Europe in 1968," *American Historical Review* 114, 2 (April 2009): 376-404.

[7] On de Gaulle's interest in an African-oriented global future for France, see Irwin Wall, "France in the Cold War," *Journal of European Studies* 38, 2 (2008): 121-139. See also Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Sutton discusses the reorientation of French trade away from North Africa toward Europe from the 1960s to the 1980s (pp. 155-161), but does less than he might have to situate French European policy in the 1950s and 1960s in the context of decolonization.

[8] Frédéric Bozo, "Mitterrand's France, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification: A Reappraisal," *Cold War History* 7, 4 (2007): 455-78. See also Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification*, trans. Susan Emanuel (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009). For debate over Mitterrand's role in German unification, see H-Diplo Roundtable Review 9, 23 (26 April 2010) www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables.

[9] Talbot Imlay, "A Success Story? The Foreign Politics of France's Fourth Republic," *Contemporary European History* 18, 4 (November 2009), p. 517-518.

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