

Research article

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How to cite: Woolner, D. 'Mackenzie King and the St Pierre and Miquelon Crisis of 1941'. *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 2021, 36(1), pp. 69–108 • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ljcs.2021v36.005>.

Published: 29 September 2022

Peer Review:

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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London Journal of Canadian Studies is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

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Abstract

The St Pierre and Miquelon affair is perhaps the classic example of a Canadian phenomenon whereby the net effect of the country's unusual domestic and international position serves to paralyse Canadian policy. For nearly two years the Canadian military pushed the government to do something about the islands, and for two years the Cabinet – caught between the demands of the British and the Americans, and always concerned about the potential domestic repercussions of any move that involved France – refused to act. And so it did nothing – nothing, that is, until the Cabinet arrived at a tentative plan (initially suggested by the Americans) for the takeover of the radio station on St Pierre. But the plan, in the end, was too heavy-handed for the Americans and too weak for the British, so the Cabinet drew back again to consider the merits of its proposal, unable to take action against two minute and undefended islands just miles from Canada's shore, held by a potentially hostile power in the middle of a world war.

Keywords Winston Churchill; Charles de Gaulle; Mackenzie King; Franklin Roosevelt; St Pierre; Miquelon; Vichy France.

As Prime Minister of Canada during the turbulent years from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, William Lyon Mackenzie King frequently thought of himself as the fulcrum of the North Atlantic Triangle – the leader whose close relationship with the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the President of the United States placed him, and Canada, in a unique position between the two principal Western Allied powers.¹

Certainly Canada's role in such activities as the negotiation of the Anglo-American Trade Agreement of 1938, the ferrying of American aircraft to the Allies in the initial year of the war and the facilitation of the September 1940 Anglo-American Destroyers for Bases Agreement – as well as Mackenzie King's personal involvement in the much celebrated Royal Visit to the United States in 1939 – supports the notion of Canada as a go-between for the United States and Great Britain. So too does Canada's involvement in such key initiatives as the Manhattan Project, and the many joint boards Canada established during the war to help bolster and enhance the ties between London and Washington.²

But Canada's unique position could also land the country in serious difficulty, caught between Great Britain's desire to see its principal Dominion follow the British lead in foreign policy, and the American desire to make sure that Canada – as a fellow occupant of the western hemisphere – did not carry out any external policies that ran counter to traditional American security concerns for the region. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the crisis that erupted over the tiny French islands of St Pierre and Miquelon in late December 1941.³

Located just 12 miles to the south of Newfoundland's Burin peninsula, St Pierre and Miquelon have belonged to France for more than four centuries. Aside from the distinction of being the oldest colony of France, and the attention they have occasionally attracted over fishing disputes or the running of rum,⁴ the islands, over the years, have remained relatively isolated, wholly French and intensely loyal to their mother country.⁵ At first, the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 did not seem to indicate that St Pierre and Miquelon's status as a somewhat isolated and rather insignificant French outpost in the New World would change. But with the fall of France in June 1940, the islands fell under the control of a potentially hostile government – Vichy France – and as a consequence their location, territorial status and potential use as a military installation became a much more serious cause for concern, not only for Canada, but also for Great Britain and the United States.

Complicating all this was the fact that in the weeks and months following the collapse of France, the three powers found it difficult to agree on a policy with respect to the Vichy government (or for that

matter to the emerging Free French movement led by Charles de Gaulle). Thanks to Operation Catapult (the British effort to seize French warships stationed outside France in early July 1940, which resulted in the Royal Navy bombardment of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir), diplomatic relations between the newly established Vichy government and Great Britain had been severed and would remain tense for the duration of the war. But this was not the case in Canada, where the French legation, led by the French minister René Ristelhueber, remained in place and where diplomatic relations between Vichy and Ottawa continued – in part due to the joint British–Canadian desire to gain information about the activities of the Vichy regime, and in part due to Canadian sensitivities concerning the country’s francophone population.

For the Americans, not yet in the war, Vichy also represented both a concern and an opportunity. The United States shared the British and Canadian fears that the Nazis might use the armistice agreement and/or their somewhat uncertain relationship with Vichy as a means to gain control of the French fleet or French North Africa. But Washington’s immediate anxiety lay with the possibility that the Nazis might use their relationship with Vichy as a means to acquire French territory in the western hemisphere. Particularly worrying was the French island of Martinique, which was not only strategically located, but also the site where several French warships were stationed, including the aircraft carrier *Bearn* (with over 100 American-made military aircraft), two French cruisers and 245 million US dollars’ worth of gold bullion.⁶

Well aware of the potential danger this island and other European possessions in the western hemisphere represented, US Secretary of State Cordell Hull wasted no time in calling for an ‘urgent consultative meeting’ of the American republics in the wake of the French collapse.⁷ Building on the legacy of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States felt it was critical to establish a united foreign policy among the American republics based on the explicit principle that no change in territorial status should occur in the western hemisphere as a consequence of the war. At the subsequent Conference of Havana, therefore, the United States secured an understanding with the Latin American states whereby it was agreed that ‘it would be contrary to the interests of the American republics to permit the European possessions in the New World to become a subject for barter in the settlement of European differences’. Moreover, the United States also insisted that the ‘use of these possessions to promote systems alien to the inter-American system could not be countenanced’⁸ and that ‘any effort to modify the existing status of these possessions whether by cession, by transfer, or by any impairment

whatsoever in the control heretofore exercised would be of profound and immediate concern to all the American republics'.⁹ Backing up this 'no-transfer principle' was the Act of Havana, which provided for 'the emergency establishment of a regime of provisional administration' in any territory which was determined by a committee of the republics to be in danger of a change in status.¹⁰

By autumn 1940, and in keeping with the policies articulated by the Conference of Havana, the Roosevelt administration had also reached an understanding with the Vichy government on the maintenance of the status quo in Martinique. Under the terms of this agreement, which was negotiated with the governor of the island, Admiral Robert, it was understood that Martinique would remain neutral for the duration of the war and that the phrase 'status quo' referred not only to the preservation of territorial integrity but also to the movement of ships and gold, neither of which were to be transferred from Martinique without prior notification of the government of the United States.¹¹ In return, the United States would allow oil and foodstuffs as well as sufficient funds to be released from French holdings in the United States to provide for the maintenance of Martinique and other French territories in the New World, including Guadeloupe, French Guiana and the islands of St Pierre and Miquelon.¹²

Having established an understanding with France over the status of Martinique (and by implication other French territories in the western hemisphere), it is not surprising that the United States would view any independent discussion of the future of St Pierre and Miquelon on the part of the British or Canadians with concern. Furthermore, as the war progressed, and the United States invested more and more energy in developing a relationship with the Vichy government, in part to keep Vichy outside the Nazi orbit, and in part to maintain the understandings that had been achieved over the western hemisphere, this sentiment, if anything, intensified.

Although Canada as a Dominion of the British Empire was not a party to the Conference of Havana, Mackenzie King was well aware of the strength of American opinion on the maintenance of the no-transfer principle. The Canadians, in fact, had already experienced the extent of US sensitivity over this issue when, following the German occupation of Denmark, they had suggested that a small Canadian expeditionary force be sent to Greenland to defend it against possible German aggression, a move which the Americans – as the guardians of the western hemisphere – vehemently opposed. From spring 1940, therefore, Mackenzie King had insisted that his government keep the Americans fully informed of any discussions that went on between Ottawa, London and Newfoundland

over the status of St Pierre, or any potential move Canada might make to ensure the islands were not engaged in any activity that might harm the Allied cause.¹³ In 1940 this meant ensuring the economic well-being of the islands (which ultimately involved both US and Vichy cooperation), as well as keeping an eye on the one French warship that was temporarily moored in St Pierre (an armed sloop, named the *Ville d'Ys*), and dealing with the future of the French North Atlantic fishing fleet – two issues that had attracted the interest of the British government in London, but which had ceased to be of concern with the departure of both by December of that year.¹⁴

By January 1941, in fact, it looked as if St Pierre and Miquelon would not present the Allies with any major difficulty. But the apparent calm that had settled over the islands was suddenly disrupted in May 1941 when a disturbing report from the Committee on French Resistance (CFR) reached the War Cabinet in London. The report noted ‘mounting evidence’ that the Vichy government ‘intended using the powerful wireless station on St. Pierre and Miquelon to signal to German U-boats the movement of Allied convoys in the North Atlantic’.¹⁵ Two other developments in the spring of that year rendered this news even more problematic. The first was the rapidly deteriorating situation in the North Atlantic, where Allied losses continued to mount and where U-boats were now being sighted as far west as 38° longitude, and the second was the worsening situation at Vichy, where it appeared that the Vichy French leader, Marshall Petain, might pursue a policy of collaboration with Germany. The most ominous sign of the latter came through the negotiation of the so-called Paris Protocols, a secret understanding signed by Petain’s Vice Premier, Admiral Darlan, in May 1941 that seemed to portend an extensive programme of collaboration between France and Germany.¹⁶ While the texts of these agreements were not available to the Allies, what was known of the proceedings triggered a major crisis over Vichy in the West. Of foremost concern was the possibility that Hitler might use his relationship with Vichy to reap tremendous gains in the Near East and North Africa, where a major campaign through Spain, France and the Levant seemed imminent.¹⁷ For the British, such a move could prove disastrous and potentially result in the loss of their ability to control the Mediterranean or maintain their tenuous hold in Egypt. Moreover, if the Nazis gained North Africa, the consequences for the United States might also be dire. Dakar, on the west coast of the African continent, was only seven hours’ flying time from the eastern tip of Brazil. Should the Nazis take control of it and capture the remainder of the French fleet, the danger to America’s sea lanes and the western hemisphere would be substantial.¹⁸

Britain responded to this crisis by invading Syria in June and by warning Petain through US diplomatic channels that French collaboration with Hitler would make it impossible for Britain 'to maintain in any respect the distinction we have hitherto drawn between unoccupied and occupied France in the execution of our military and economic plans'.¹⁹ US President Franklin Roosevelt also issued warnings to Petain, and in a *Fireside Chat* broadcast to the nation on 27 May he indicated that the military situation in the North Atlantic and in Europe presented the United States with an 'unlimited national emergency'. In the face of this threat, Roosevelt asked the US Army and Navy to draw up a joint plan for the occupation of the Azores, a key outpost for the defence of the western hemisphere should the Nazis successfully take Gibraltar and move into North Africa,²⁰ while his Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, considered sending US troops to Brazil and even contemplated occupying the island of Martinique.²¹

In taking these steps, both countries sought to reduce the chances that France would go ahead with Darlan's plans, but by this time British and American policy with respect to Vichy had diverged. The British favoured a tough approach of maintaining the blockade they had begun following the armistice and refusing to lift it – even for humanitarian reasons – as long as France or French North Africa refused to declare itself unequivocally opposed to the Nazi regime. The Americans, meanwhile, held out the carrot rather than the stick through the somewhat controversial policy of trying to entice France away from collaboration with Germany by offering to supply France and French North Africa with desperately needed provisions.²²

The Canadians, meanwhile, were caught between the diverging British and American views. As noted, Canada had maintained relations with France following its defeat, but its reasons for doing so were more complicated than those of the Americans. Canada had to consider its domestic situation and the sympathy many of its Quebec citizens felt for Petain and his efforts to maintain French sovereignty.²³ Compounding this was the uncertain support (even antipathy) for de Gaulle and the Free French movement within Canada during the early years of the war.²⁴ Prime Minister King, therefore, tried to avoid any activity that might be considered openly hostile to Vichy and dreaded the possibility of war between Britain and France more than any other Western leader. He also tended to look with tacit favour on the Americans' Vichy policy, including US efforts to secure concessions from the French in North Africa through the diplomatic mission of Robert Murphy.²⁵ Still, as the leader of Britain's foremost Dominion, he could not afford to ignore British policy with

respect to Vichy. Nor could he ignore the contempt that most English-speaking Canadians had for Petain or the growing unease felt by many within his own government over St Pierre and Miquelon now that it appeared likely that Petain was prepared to collaborate with Hitler.²⁶ Moreover, with the British fighting Vichy in Syria, and a worsening situation in the North Atlantic, the possibility that pro-Vichy elements on the islands might be using the St Pierre wireless station for purposes inimical to the Allies' interests could no longer be countenanced.²⁷ For all these reasons, it was becoming more and more apparent that the status quo in the islands could not be maintained.²⁸

In response to this mounting anxiety, King's War Cabinet began to discuss the possibility of a Canadian takeover of the islands,²⁹ and by autumn 1941 the Canadian Chief of Staff had fully endorsed this course of action. But Prime Minister King – fearful of the French Canadian reaction and the likely opposition to the move on the part of the Americans – remained opposed to occupation. As an alternative, King preferred a policy whereby Canadian radio personnel would be stationed at the short-wave transmission station 'to control all outgoing messages'. It was also proposed that 'the use of code and cipher be stopped'; that the wireless equipment of all fishing boats be inspected and the equipment limited to a range of 500 miles; and that the small radio stations on the islands furnish Canadian personnel 'with copies of all messages sent'. If the administrator of the islands refused to consent to these arrangements, economic pressures would be applied to see to it that he would 'agree to the proposed supervision of his wireless station'.³⁰

Consistent with past practices, King insisted that before any of these steps were taken, the concurrence of the United States and Great Britain must be obtained, and as a first step a cable detailing Ottawa's plans was sent at once to Washington.³¹ Given that the Americans had already suggested Canadian supervision of the wireless station as a possible solution to the problem, and that the Canadian proposals did not involve occupation of the islands and hence there would be no change in status, the State Department indicated that it had no objection to the proposal.³² Washington also concurred with Ottawa's plan to use Canadian and American economic pressure to force the administrator to comply should he prove recalcitrant. But when Canada's Cabinet War Committee met to discuss the details of the operation a week later, the proposals for applying economic sanctions were curiously absent from the discussion. Instead, the Cabinet agreed that if the administrator proved uncooperative, a landing party of Canadian troops should be put ashore 'which will effectively dismantle all radio transmitters on

the Islands'.³³ This decision, which was communicated to London and Washington in a memo sent on 5 December, brought a swift and negative reply from the State Department. Washington remained firmly opposed to any action that might be perceived as a Canadian occupation of the islands and still believed that the best approach was to apply economic pressure rather than the 'more drastic procedure set forth in the Canadian memorandum'.³⁴

* * *

Before Canada and the United States could work out an agreed-upon response to the Canadian proposal of 5 December, however, the issue of what to do with St Pierre and Miquelon became further complicated by the arrival of a small contingent of the tiny Free French Navy in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on 9 December 1941. The contingent was under the command of Admiral Emile Muselier, who served as Free French Commissioner for the Navy and Merchant Marine as well as Commander-in-Chief of all Free French Naval Forces. Muselier had set sail for Canada on 24 November.³⁵ His stated objective was to make an inspection of the Free French vessels assigned to convoy duty under British command in the North Atlantic.³⁶ But Muselier also had a secret agenda, which was to make for St Pierre at the first opportune moment and to rally the islands to the cause of Free France.³⁷

Both Muselier and de Gaulle insisted that they had thought of rallying the islands to Free France 'since the beginning',³⁸ and over the course of the initial year of the war the idea was informally raised on occasion in both London and Ottawa.³⁹ But it was not until the summer and autumn of 1941 that the two men began to take the matter seriously. As leader of the Free French Navy, under overall British command, Muselier was in an excellent position to press the idea on his superiors at the Admiralty, while de Gaulle's personal relationship with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden gave him access to the highest levels of the British government. It appears that the Free French decision to rally the islands came in mid-November 1941, at roughly the same time as the Canadians and the Americans were in discussion over the Canadian proposal to seek control of the wireless station. De Gaulle had already initiated conversations with Eden and other Foreign Office officials about the possibility of a Free French takeover of the islands.⁴⁰ Throughout these discussions, Eden emphasised the need for de Gaulle to consult the Canadians on the matter before taking any action,⁴¹ although there was considerable support for the idea in London.⁴²

At the time of Muselier's sailing, however, it is not clear whether anyone within the British government knew of or had given sanction to the Free French decision to take over the islands. Had Muselier reached Canada a few days earlier, he might have proceeded at once, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor convinced him that he had no choice but to consult with the Canadians and the Americans before going ahead with the plan. De Gaulle concurred with this decision, and at Muselier's request he agreed to get in touch with Churchill to find out whether His Majesty's Government had any objections to this 'petit coup de main'.⁴³

De Gaulle soon learned that both Churchill and Eden were inclined to allow the operation to go ahead.⁴⁴ So too were the British Chiefs of Staff, who indicated in this instance that they 'were strongly in favor of Admiral Muselier being authorized to rally St. Pierre and Miquelon ... without his saying anything about it until it had been done'.⁴⁵ The Dominions Office, however, urged the Prime Minister to consult the Allies, and Churchill, in spite of his apparent willingness to 'unmuzzle Muselier',⁴⁶ decided to ask de Gaulle to postpone the operation for 36 hours so as to allow him enough time to inform the Canadians and the Americans.⁴⁷

It soon became apparent that both Ottawa and Washington were opposed to the Free French move. Indeed, FDR himself stated that he felt 'it would be a mistake for such an occupation to take place', and, fully briefed on the discussions that had been taking place between the United States and Canada, he felt 'there would be fewer repercussions if the Canadians took control of the communications from the Island, by suasion, if possible, but otherwise by stronger [economic] means'. Thus, the President indicated that he 'entirely approved' of the approach discussed a week earlier with Ottawa.⁴⁸

Having received word that Roosevelt was against the Free French operation, on 17 December Sir William Strang informed M. Dejean of the Free French National Committee that the United States had rejected the plan.⁴⁹ Dejean immediately contacted de Gaulle, who later informed the Foreign Office that 'no orders would be issued for this operation'. London, therefore, considered the Free French operation cancelled and immediately cabled Washington and Ottawa to inform both governments that 'de Gaulle ... agrees that the proposed action should not, repeat not, now be taken'.⁵⁰

By the third week of December, it was clear that the Americans were on record as opposing a Free French takeover of St Pierre and Miquelon. It was also clear that by this point the British and American governments differed in their approach to the problem of the islands, with the Americans urging action by Canada solely to gain control of the radio

station, and the British urging a complete takeover. London, in fact, still felt that the proposal to have Canada take over the wireless station on St Pierre (even with Roosevelt's endorsement) was 'wholly inadequate from a military point of view'. His Majesty's Government preferred 'outright occupation by British or Allied Forces', but since the United States had ruled this out for the moment, London recommended that Canada 'not take any action for the time being'.⁵¹ In the light of this, Prime Minister King urged his Cabinet to refrain from executing the Canadian plan until such time as the US and British governments had agreed upon a common course of action. The Cabinet concurred, and on 22 December both the British and American governments were informed of this decision.⁵²

In the meantime, things had become a bit difficult for Admiral Muselier. By some strange circumstance an article appeared in the *London Sunday Dispatch* on 14 December that 'announced' Admiral Muselier's intention to go to Washington for negotiations with the Americans. Tensions between de Gaulle and Muselier had existed for some time and when de Gaulle, who had not authorised such a visit, read the article, he was furious. He immediately sent a despatch to Muselier ordering him to return to London as soon as his tour of inspection was finished. Muselier agreed, but before he could make the necessary arrangements, a second telegram arrived from de Gaulle which, after taking note of the recent Canadian plan to take over the radio station on St Pierre, countermanded his earlier communication and ordered the Admiral – despite the direct assurances given to the British, Canadian and American governments to the contrary – to take St Pierre and Miquelon 'without saying anything to the foreigners'.⁵³ Muselier, who received this communication while on an official visit to Ottawa, promptly showed the telegram to Colonel Pierrene, the Free French representative in Canada, who is said to have remarked incredulously of de Gaulle, 'Il est fou'.⁵⁴

There has been a great deal of speculation as to why de Gaulle suddenly reversed his position and went back on his word to the Allies not to undertake the operation. De Gaulle himself asserted that on 17 December, the same day he gave the Foreign Office his assurance that no Free French occupation of St Pierre would take place, he also learned of the proposed Canadian operation. This 'foreign intervention', he insisted, meant that there could no longer be any hesitation on his part; he had to act to protect the interests of France Libre and the sovereignty of France. His reference to the Canadian operation in his final telegram to Muselier on 18 December reinforces this interpretation, as does his subsequent communication with Eden, in which the General vehemently protested

the fact that the Allies had planned such an operation on French territory without consulting him.⁵⁵

But it is not entirely clear that the proposed Canadian operation was the principal reason behind the General's dramatic decision. It may have been that he simply wished to disrupt the all-too-comfortable relations between the United States and Vichy. There is some evidence for this in his memoirs, where he admitted that he may have provoked the St Pierre incident in order 'to stir up the bottom of things, as one throws a stone into a pond'.⁵⁶ But the most tangible proof for this interpretation comes from a document sent by Pierre Dupuy, the Canadian Chargé d'Affaires for France, Belgium and the Netherlands, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs in Ottawa. In this telegram, which originated from London, Dupuy insisted that there were three principal reasons for de Gaulle's occupation of St Pierre and Miquelon. The first was to 'prevent an agreement between Washington and Vichy concerning St. Pierre, as in the case of La Martinique'; the second was to 'protest for not having been more closely associated with the conversations in Washington'; and the third, and to this writer the most important, was to 'provoke complications between Washington and Vichy which might lead to [a] severance of diplomatic relations and thus facilitate recognition of his movement as the true French government'.⁵⁷ Thus, while it may be true that de Gaulle, as he claimed, was motivated to take St Pierre out of his desire to protect French sovereignty from 'Canadian intervention', it seems equally true that he did so in a desperate attempt to gain both attention and recognition from Washington.

In any event, if de Gaulle needed an excuse to act, the Canadian plan had provided one, and at 4:00 a.m. on 24 December 1941, Muselier's little fleet quietly made its way into the port of St Pierre.⁵⁸ A colourful scene greeted Muselier when he arrived. News of the Free French arrival 'spread like wildfire', and as the marines disembarked from their ships and fanned out across the town to take control of strategic points, the people of the village rushed out of their homes 'in various stages of dress', cheering wildly, brandishing home-made Free French flags and offering 'wine to every hand'.⁵⁹ Within half an hour St Pierre was reported secure. The citizens then joined the men and sailors of Free France in an emotional chorus of 'La Marseillaise'. Not a shot had been fired, and the Vichy administrator of the islands, M. de Bournat, and other officials surrendered peacefully.⁶⁰ Muselier then announced that as a 'Christmas present' Free France would hold a plebiscite and give the people of the islands the liberty to choose between 'the course of the Free French and

the course of collaboration with the axis powers, who starve, humiliate, and martyrise our country'.⁶¹

In the meantime, Ira Wolfert, a special correspondent for the *New York Times* who had somehow managed to get word of the Free French operation and had shown up in Halifax threatening to expose the whole affair if he were not invited along, was busy cabling the news to New York.⁶² That same afternoon, Muselier himself also sent word to the British Admiralty in London,⁶³ as well as to the Canadians and Americans, that 'conformément aux ordres du général de Gaulle, et appelé par la population, je m'étais rendu à Saint-Pierre et avais libéré les îles'.⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, de Gaulle's sudden reversal of his earlier pledge not to rally the islands was met by considerable disquiet in the Canadian, American and British governments. Prime Minister King was 'shocked' and 'distressed' by the news and took immediate measures to inform Washington, London and Vichy that Muselier's actions had come as a complete surprise to his government.⁶⁵ The State Department was informed, for example, that Canada had no foreknowledge of the Free French move and had acted throughout 'in good faith'.⁶⁶

But these assurances meant little to Secretary Hull, who took the matter so seriously that he himself chaired a Christmas morning meeting of senior department officials to discuss what to do about the Free French seizure of the islands. Hull feared that Muselier's actions ran the risk of upsetting the 'delicate balance' of US relations with Vichy, involving not only the earlier agreements reached between Roosevelt and Petain over the maintenance of the status quo on both sides of the Atlantic, but also additional guarantees that had recently been obtained from Admiral Robert and the Vichy government over the status of Martinique and French possessions in the western hemisphere in the wake of the US entry into the war.⁶⁷ Beyond this, there was the question of how the Free French action might affect the United States' ability to maintain the principles achieved at the Havana Conference, as well as the question of its effect on the US position at the upcoming Rio Conference in which the State Department hoped to strengthen and reaffirm those principles by inducing all the American republics to sign a joint declaration severing relations with the Axis powers.⁶⁸ Finally, there was also the question of how the incident might affect recent American efforts to build a bridge to the Vichy French in North Africa through the work of the American Consul there, Robert Murphy.⁶⁹

Hull, whose patience reportedly 'snapped' upon hearing of the Muselier coup, clearly wanted action.⁷⁰ He insisted that the State Department must 'persuade the Canadians that afternoon to take steps

to restore the status quo', and in a subsequent conversation he had with J. P. Moffat, the American Minister in Ottawa, Hull insisted that the former put the question before the Canadians immediately. Moffat noted that, 'although the Canadians were extremely embarrassed by what had taken place', he feared that 'they would be reluctant to restore the situation, particularly in the event that the plebiscite, which was being held at this moment, went favorably to de Gaulle'.⁷¹ Moffat then said that Prime Minister King (who was scheduled to leave for Washington shortly to attend the Arcadia Conference) hoped to discuss St Pierre and Miquelon upon his arrival. But Hull insisted that 'that was not quick enough, that the situation was so urgent that the Canadians should start steps this very afternoon'. He then referenced Canadian pledges, to which Moffat replied that as he understood it, there had been no pledge, 'but merely an understanding as to policy'. This brought a bitter reply from Hull, who insisted that:

In the first place Mr. Wrong's [previous] conversation with Mr. Atherton virtually involved a pledge, in the second place whether it was a pledge or an understanding was merely a quibble, that in the third place, on the basis of a meeting of minds, the United States had reached an understanding with Admiral Robert, which had now been breached. Unless the *status quo* were immediately restored, Admiral Robert could make the accusation, and with considerable justice, that the agreement had been violated from our side, and Vichy, the Nazis, etcetera, could play that up to a damaging degree. Canada had perhaps greater responsibilities than anybody else, partly because of geography, partly because of her understanding with Admiral Muselier. In any event, we must ask Canada to repair the damage and to do so at once.⁷²

Hull indicated he was thinking of issuing a public statement 'to the effect that Admiral Muselier's action was an arbitrary one contrary to agreements, and that the United States was asking Canada what steps she was prepared to take to restore the status quo'. Moffat, however, urged Secretary Hull to withhold any statement until he had had the chance to discuss it with the Canadians.⁷³

Moffat soon learned through Canada's Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Norman Robertson, that Prime Minister King felt that action by Canada to restore the status quo was out of the question until both the British and the Americans had agreed to it. Furthermore, as the Prime Minister was about to leave for Washington to attend the

Arcadia Conference, it seemed best to defer any action until he had had the opportunity to discuss it with the President and Mr Churchill.⁷⁴ As far as publicity was concerned, all agreed that it was 'essential to keep the matter as quiet as possible'.⁷⁵

In fact, the seizure of the islands had already created a sensation in the press, where – thanks to Wolfert – news of the event had made the Christmas headlines of the *New York Times* and was being widely reported in other newspapers and over the radio.⁷⁶ Moreover, public interest in the event was inadvertently heightened by Hull, who, without warning and at roughly the same moment that Moffat was discussing the problem with the Canadians, issued the following statement to the press:

Our preliminary reports show that the action taken by three so-called Free French ships at St. Pierre Miquelon was an arbitrary action contrary to the agreement of all parties concerned and certainly without the prior knowledge or consent in any sense of the United States Government.

This government has inquired of the Canadian government as to the steps that government is prepared to take to restore the status quo of these Islands.⁷⁷

The statement was a colossal blunder. Hull's use of the phrase 'so-called Free French' created a storm of protest and was widely viewed by the American public as a gratuitous insult to the Free French, who, in seizing St Pierre, had provided the world with the first 'good news' about the war since the stunning blow at Pearl Harbor.⁷⁸ Equally significant was the fact that the Canadians had not been given the opportunity to comment on the statement, which they regarded as 'most embarrassing in its suggestion that the Canadian Government should at once restore the status quo' and 'entirely misleading in its reference to an agreement between Muselier and the Canadian Government'.⁷⁹ Robertson, upon learning of Hull's remarks, immediately telephoned Moffat 'in great perturbation' to protest Hull's actions, to remind the minister of the consistent Canadian efforts to work with both the American and British governments on this question, and to inform him that insofar as the Prime Minister was concerned, 'his whole attitude had changed from one of helpful cooperation to one of most reluctant cooperation'.⁸⁰

None of Ottawa's objections, however, carried much weight at the State Department, where the Canadian attitude was beginning to be viewed as 'obstructive and of doubtful validity', especially with regard to their insistence on bringing the British into what the Americans

regarded as 'essentially a North American problem'.⁸¹ But Prime Minister King would not back down, and at 10:00 p.m. he issued a retort to Hull's earlier statement that left no doubt as to his position:

Canada is in no way responsible for the Free French occupation of St. Pierre. We have kept in close touch with both the United Kingdom and the United States on this question and have always been ready to cooperate in carrying out an agreed policy. We decline to commit ourselves to any action or to take any action pending such agreement. In the circumstances and until we have had an opportunity of considering action with the President and Mr. Churchill, the Canadian Government cannot take the steps requested to expel the Free French and restore the *status quo* in the Islands.⁸²

In London, meanwhile, news of Admiral Muselier's actions led the Foreign Office to call for an immediate meeting with the Free French Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Maurice Dejean, to demand an explanation. Dejean insisted that de Gaulle's reasons for ordering the coup stemmed from his knowledge of the Canadian operation, which, had it been carried out, would have undermined the cause of Free France. Having obtained this information, the Foreign Office quickly dispatched a telegram to Washington that placed the blame for the affair 'squarely on de Gaulle'.⁸³ This did not mean, however, that London approved in any way of Hull's demand that the Free French withdraw from the islands. On the contrary, when word of his suggestion that Canada restore the *status quo* reached the War Cabinet in London, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was called in to send an urgent telegram to Ottawa asking Canada 'to take no action in regard to any proposal to restore the *status quo* in the Islands'.⁸⁴ To do so, London concluded, would not only greatly agitate the British public, who were now as caught up in the news of the affair as the Americans, but also might cause serious harm to de Gaulle and his movement.

Secretary Hull, however, was not to be deterred. On 26 December, in separate meetings with Prime Minister King (who had just arrived in Washington) and British Ambassador Halifax, he suggested settling the controversy by arranging for an agreement with Admiral Robert in Martinique, approved by Vichy, which would allow for Allied supervision of the radio station on St Pierre in return for a British request that the Free French withdraw from the islands. As a face-saving measure, Britain and Canada could then publicly 'praise very highly the part the Free

French occupation had taken in securing the agreement for supervision [of the radio]'.⁸⁵

At White House discussions later that day between Hull, King, Roosevelt and Churchill, the latter observed that FDR – who was not even aware of where Muselier had obtained the ships with which to attack St Pierre – seemed ‘to shrug his shoulders over the whole affair’.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the President and Churchill were inclined to agree on ‘the need to get this incident closed up so as to avoid its developing into a serious question’.⁸⁷ FDR suggested that ‘Canada might appoint a commission of some kind to look after the supervision of wireless transmission, that the Governor might be restored, and the Free French forces withdraw’.⁸⁸ Churchill concurred on the need for some sort of ‘compromise settlement’ and said he was ‘prepared to take de Gaulle by the back of the neck and tell him he had gone too far and bring him to his senses’. The meeting concluded with the President suggesting that it might be best for Mr Hull and Prime Minister King to work out ‘a suggested arrangement’.⁸⁹

In keeping with this recommendation, Hull and King discussed St Pierre and Miquelon the following morning, on 27 December.⁹⁰ Both men agreed that something along the lines of what had been discussed at the White House the previous afternoon would be fine. They then discussed various ideas as to how the supervision of the wireless station might be effected as well as what to do with the governor, whom Prime Minister King insisted had to be removed.

Over the course of the next several days, Hull pressed an initial solution to the crisis that involved four essential points: (1) that the Free French forces should be withdrawn; (2) that the wireless should be put under Canadian control; (3) that a new governor agreeable to Vichy should be appointed; and (4) as he informed Lord Halifax, that ‘the solution be quick’.⁹¹

London responded to Hull’s proposed solution with ‘a blast from the Foreign Office’ that pointed out, for example, that there was no hope of the Free French withdrawing voluntarily, and that if they were to be compelled to withdraw, there might be bloodshed, which ‘would have a deplorable effect’. Moreover, the Foreign Office wanted to know ‘on what grounds the Free French would be asked to withdraw’, especially in light of the plebiscite that ran 90 per cent in favour of de Gaulle. The Foreign Office also noted that British public opinion was firmly behind de Gaulle and reiterated the view, expressed earlier by the Chiefs of Staff, that ‘control of the wireless by Canada with the Vichy Governor in occupation would not be enough’.⁹²

Hull remained unmoved by these arguments, and in a meeting with Ambassador Halifax he continued to insist that de Gaulle, by his actions, had violated international law; that, unchallenged, he would probably attempt to capture other French colonies in the New World; and that furthermore, should this incident lead to a break with Vichy, all that had been accomplished by Leahy in unoccupied France, and Murphy in French North Africa, including the 'valuable information that these Americans have obtained by keeping in touch with the Vichy Government', would be lost.⁹³ It was 'unthinkable', the Secretary continued,

that all of these benefits to the British and American governments should be junked and thrown overboard in order to gratify the desire of the de Gaulle leaders, who, in open violation of their pledge to the contrary, suddenly seized and occupied St. Pierre and Miquelon by force, thereby inflicting on Great Britain and the United States unimaginable injury to their military defensive situation in this hemisphere and in French Africa.⁹⁴

Hull went on to say that the use of force to evict Muselier had never been contemplated by the State Department,⁹⁵ and that should the Vichy French offer a 'suitable agreement', it would be 'entirely consistent' for de Gaulle to be thanked for his contribution to the safeguarding of the wireless station and for him to withdraw from the islands and 'move on to some other act of service to the allied Government!' Halifax agreed to put the matter once more before his government while he and Secretary Hull waited for the response to Hull's initial ideas from the authorities at Vichy.⁹⁶

Shortly thereafter, Hull received word that while the Vichy government appreciated the steps Washington was taking to restore the legitimate government in St Pierre, it was nonetheless obliged 'to take the position that the status quo ante must be restored' *before* the 'conditions in the [state] Department's telegram ... would be examined'. Furthermore, the French government 'could not comply' with the US request to withdraw the governor from the islands.⁹⁷

On the following day, the Vichy French Ambassador met with Secretary Hull to discuss his government's response. The ambassador indicated that Vichy had decided to leave any further discussion on the matter in the hands of Admiral Robert in Martinique. He then infuriated Hull by launching into 'a loud monologue about French sovereignty and about France being a great country and having to be treated accordingly'.⁹⁸ Unable to take any more, Hull cut the ambassador off by

retorting that the last thing he expected at this moment, when he was 'being subjected to every sort of abuse, even in this country', for trying to settle this affair in an amicable manner, was a 'stump speech about the greatness of the French nation!'⁹⁹ St Pierre and Miquelon, he continued, may be 'a small matter on the surface', but in the present situation 'it is a highly explosive question' which demands immediate settlement. The French government, therefore, must find a way to cooperate before 'reckless people and publicity seekers ... inflame the public everywhere and make the matter of greater difficulty and injury to all governments concerned'.¹⁰⁰

Hull was clearly beginning to resent being vilified in the press for his stand on St Pierre and Miquelon. Robert Sherwood notes, for example, that after years of dignified public service, the Secretary found it 'bewildering as well as infuriating' to become 'the target of the kind of insults and jibes to which many of his colleagues in the Administration had long since become accustomed'.¹⁰¹ But Hull's anxiety rose even further when he learned of Prime Minister Churchill's address to the Canadian Parliament on 30 December 1941. In that speech, Churchill heaped scorn upon the 'men of Vichy', who, he said, 'lie prostrate at the foot of the conqueror', while he praised de Gaulle, who he noted had refused to bow to Hitler and was 'being held in increasing respect by nine Frenchmen out of every ten throughout the once happy, smiling land of France'.¹⁰²

After this address, Sherwood writes that Hull's rage reached 'hurricane proportions',¹⁰³ and on the day following the speech, Hull fired off a memorandum to the President, reiterating the importance of the St Pierre incident and drawing the President's attention to a report from Leahy which quoted Darlan as indicating that Germany had already 'used the seizure of those Islands by de Gaulle as an argument for the entry of Axis troops into Africa in order that it may be protected against a similar invasion'.¹⁰⁴ Hull termed this 'just the beginning of ominous and serious developments' which would no doubt occur as a result of the affair. He then pointed out the fallacy of Churchill's contention that nine out of every ten Frenchmen supported de Gaulle,¹⁰⁵ and he warned the President of the consequences for North Africa 'if the fact goes out to the world that the British government was really behind this movement [to take St Pierre] and we abandon our own policies without serious protest'.¹⁰⁶

Hull then went to work on a formal proposal that he sent to Roosevelt in Hyde Park in early January.¹⁰⁷ The plan contained six points, which were drawn in part from various suggestions made previously by the

British and Canadians. It stated, first, that the islands 'are French and will remain French'; second, that the radio station would be subject to Allied supervision; third, that the islands 'shall be neutralized and de-militarized and shall be considered out of the war'; fourth, that the 'administrator shall be withdrawn for the period of the war' and that no new administrator shall be appointed for the same period, leaving the administration of the islands 'in the hands of the Consultative Council'; fifth, that all armed forces would be withdrawn; and sixth, that the Canadian and American governments would agree to continue providing economic assistance to the inhabitants of the islands.¹⁰⁸

Roosevelt responded to Hull's scheme by advising another meeting with Churchill, who subsequently accepted it on the condition that de Gaulle agreed.¹⁰⁹ Churchill then forwarded it to Eden at the Foreign Office, noting that the President had raised this issue 'as an urgent matter' that must be considered 'in connection with Super-Gymnast',¹¹⁰ which meant that he did 'not wish to break sharply with Vichy'. The Prime Minister also observed that the State Department officials were 'boring along on their old lines quite oblivious of the fact that the further they go against de Gaulle the worse they will fare in American opinion'. Nevertheless, Churchill was 'of the opinion that the ... proposal should be embodied in a communiqué representing the policy of the United States, Canadian and British governments'. It was, he said,

a reasonable compromise, and ... in the circumstances it is only prudent to accept and enforce it. This means that you [Eden] should tell de Gaulle that this is our settled policy, and that he must bow to it. He has put himself entirely in the wrong by his breach of faith. If he is to retain any measure of our recognition he must send orders to Muselier which the latter will obey. You should dwell on the many advantages gained by Free France and that many of the points agreed will be a bitter pill to Vichy, but however you dish it up he has got to take it.¹¹¹

Churchill closed by mentioning 'they are in a mood here to use force – i.e., the battleship *Arkansas* which the President mentioned – or starvation without stint',¹¹² and, adding that it was 'intolerable that the great movement of events should be obstructed' by this crisis and that he would 'certainly not intervene to save de Gaulle', he expressed the hope that all would be 'fixed' by the following day. 'By all means,' he concluded, 'consult the Cabinet if you will, but we will soon be flitting and I must settle this before I go.'¹¹³

Eden did in fact consult the Cabinet, which responded to Churchill's telegram by declaring that the formula suggested above 'would come as a bitter blow not only to General de Gaulle, but also to public opinion in this country, which would fail to understand how our previous support of the Free French movement was compatible with the enforcement of the present terms upon it',¹¹⁴ and that they would 'not appreciate going easy with Vichy'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the Cabinet felt that the State Department had overestimated Vichy's reaction. As such, they would not acquiesce to compelling de Gaulle to accept these terms but would agree to Eden 'trying persuasion'.¹¹⁶ They objected to the idea of the islands being governed by a Consultative Council, noting that it was 'not clear whether such a Council was in existence (in which case it might be of a Vichy complexion) or would have to be elected'.¹¹⁷ The Cabinet insisted on the latter and deferred speaking with de Gaulle until this matter was cleared up.¹¹⁸ Churchill spoke with Roosevelt at once, who agreed to amend point four of Hull's formula by altering the reference to the 'Consultative Council' to 'a Council freshly elected within ninety days'. Eden was then asked by the Prime Minister 'to seek at once to persuade de Gaulle to agree to the plan',¹¹⁹ with the additional warning that should de Gaulle not settle on these terms, the United States would immediately 'issue a statement which has been prepared [with Churchill's authorisation], and will enforce the arrangements outlined therein with whatever force is necessary'. Clearly, Churchill admonished, 'the business must be settled'.¹²⁰

On 14 January, Eden met with de Gaulle, who was as recalcitrant as ever. Unwilling to recognise 'the delicacy of Washington's relations with Vichy',¹²¹ de Gaulle refused to quit the islands and insisted on the retention of his own newly appointed Free French governor and a number of Free French marines, even after Muselier had left. De Gaulle also characterised the US attempt to alleviate the crisis as amounting to 'nothing less than an American effort to establish a "protectorate" over a government collaborating with Hitler', and he was completely unperturbed at the possibility of American intervention.¹²²

Following a second conversation with Eden, however, de Gaulle softened his position and accepted the terms of the Hull-Roosevelt-Churchill proposal, subject to three secret conditions: (1) that a small number of Free French marines would be retained in the islands; (2) 'that the Consultative Council would take orders from the Free French National Committee'; and (3) that the Free French administration should remain but should be merged in the Consultative Council.¹²³

Eden immediately telephoned these terms to the embassy in Washington. Churchill's reaction was not favourable. The Prime

Minister, in fact, lashed out at Eden for having 'failed lamentably', fearing, as he put it, that there would be an explosion in Washington as a result. Exasperated, Churchill himself drafted a new communiqué on the matter that he then presented to Roosevelt with the further suggestion that the whole matter be deferred until after the Prime Minister's return to London, whereupon he would take it upon himself to talk de Gaulle out of his reservations. On 22 January, Churchill met with de Gaulle and in a frank discussion insisted that the General 'had no right to take action in these unimportant territories without consideration for the Great Alliance'¹²⁴ and without which France could not be restored. Furthermore, since the President was unable to 'accept de Gaulle's secret clauses, which he felt he could never communicate to Vichy, the General had no choice but to endorse the present Anglo-American communiqué, which ... granted the Free French all save formal control in St. Pierre'.¹²⁵

De Gaulle, however, insisted that the tone of the communiqué ran directly counter to the Churchill–de Gaulle agreement of August 1940, which recognised de Gaulle's leadership of all Free Frenchmen who rallied to him in support of the Allies.¹²⁶ He was suspicious of the composition of the St Pierre Council, and even went so far as to seek assurances on French sovereignty, questioning whether under the proposed agreement the islands would indeed be able to remain part of France. At this, Churchill exploded, questioning de Gaulle's 'claim to monopolize France'¹²⁷ and asking the General if his demand that St Pierre and Miquelon remain a part of France referred to the 'France' crushed under the heel of Nazi occupation, to the 'powerful and considerable France of Vichy'¹²⁸ or to the 'comparatively small' Free French movement.¹²⁹ Then, as if to emphasise the diminutive stature that de Gaulle in fact had among his countrymen at that moment, Churchill pointed out that the agreement of August 1940 had been 'based on a hope, which had since proved false, that de Gaulle would be able to rally an impressive number of Frenchmen. As the agreement stood, it was entirely in de Gaulle's favor without corresponding benefit to His Majesty's Government'.¹³⁰ Having weathered this storm, and having been assured by Eden, who was present, that the acceptance of the communiqué would result in concessions that merely changed the appearance, but not the substance, of Free French control over the islands, de Gaulle gave in and agreed to drop his demand for the three secret clauses.¹³¹

Churchill sent word at once to Roosevelt in Washington, telling him that, after a 'severe conversation', de Gaulle had agreed to 'the communiqué, which I left with you'. He then noted that de Gaulle had asked for

time to consult Admiral Muselier, but that he expected to receive the final assent from the Free French the following day. Canada would be asked to agree as well.¹³² Finally, the Prime Minister said that he hoped 'the solution for which I have worked here will be satisfactory to Mr. Hull and the State Department', noting that it finally looked as if the two tiny islands could 'relapse into the obscurity from which they have more than once emerged since the Treaty of Utrecht'.¹³³

But there was one final problem. The communiqué which de Gaulle had agreed to was not the six-point proposal put forward by Hull. Rather, it was the communiqué issued by Churchill on the day of his departure. In many respects this document was quite similar to Hull's except that it did not call for the withdrawal of all armed forces, nor did it insist that the islands be 'neutralized and demilitarized' and 'considered out of the war'. This meant, of course, that the door was left open for de Gaulle to leave a detachment of marines on the islands. It also left open the question of Free French involvement in the government, which de Gaulle assumed he could continue to control.

Secretary Hull would never have agreed to such a proposal, but it appears that he had been effectively locked out of the White House discussions over St Pierre and Miquelon from the moment the British War Cabinet refused to accept his six-point draft communiqué *in toto* on 12 January. Aware by this point that this was indeed the case, Hull sent a message to Mackenzie King through Moffat that intimated at some of his frustration over the way the affair had been handled since the two of them had last discussed it with the President and Mr Churchill on 26 December.

At that meeting, the Secretary recalled, it was understood that he and Prime Minister King were to work out a solution to the problem, but 'in practice', he continued, 'Mr. Churchill kept taking the ball in his hands, insisting that he would clear the formula with Ottawa, and then apparently did nothing about it'.¹³⁴ Secretary Hull, therefore, was afraid that Prime Minister King 'would feel that he was being sidetracked' and he wondered 'if Mr. King would prefer any other method of proceeding than the one now being followed'.¹³⁵

The Prime Minister responded by indicating there were 'no hurt feelings' in Ottawa as to the manner in which the negotiations had proceeded.¹³⁶ Indeed, over the course of the next few days, it became more and more apparent that Ottawa was in fact more fully informed of the discussions going on between the White House and the Foreign Office than was the State Department. It was through the Department of External Affairs, for example, that the State Department first learned

of the British reservations regarding the composition of the Consultative Council in Hull's proposal.¹³⁷ It was also through the Department of External Affairs that Secretary Hull learned that Churchill, in his 12 January telegram to Eden, had mentioned the possibility that the Americans might send the *Arkansas* to evict the Free French from the islands, which came as a complete shock to Hull, who immediately sent instructions to Moffat to inform the Canadians that in all the discussions he had had with Roosevelt over this matter, 'the one thing the President had consistently opposed is any idea of sending armed ships to the islands'.¹³⁸

Roosevelt, in fact, gave Hull little or no information on the discussions that went on after 14 January. Secretary Hull, therefore, was unaware of Churchill's new communiqué, knew little or nothing of the discussion that had gone on with de Gaulle, and was not even informed when word arrived at the White House that de Gaulle had finally agreed to drop his objections and sign on to the proposed solution put forward by Churchill. Thus, when the Canadian government sent its final approval for the publication of the Churchill communiqué to the State Department on 28 January, Minister Wrong learned that Secretary Hull had not as yet seen the communiqué in question – five days after Churchill had sent it to the White House.¹³⁹

When he finally saw the document, Hull had no doubt that it would not be acceptable to the Vichy government, which as early as 5 January had given the Secretary an indication of the terms it might be willing to accept. These included approval of Canadian and American observers of the radio station, as well as the appointment of a new administrator, but only on the conditions that de Bournat be allowed to return to his post until a new administrator had been appointed; that all Free French forces withdraw; and that Canada issue a declaration noting respect for the 'territorial sovereignty of the Islands'.¹⁴⁰ Clearly, these terms would not be acceptable to either Churchill or de Gaulle, and on 2 February an exhausted Secretary Hull concluded in a memo to the President that, 'in view of the failure to achieve a general satisfactory settlement, ... and in view of the paramount importance of furthering unity and harmony in the ... cooperative war effort with Great Britain, Canada, and the other United Nations, I recommend that further negotiations or discussions of the matter be postponed for the period of the war'.¹⁴¹

* * *

With Secretary Hull's decision to drop all discussion of the islands, St Pierre and Miquelon soon drifted back into obscurity. The Free French

were quietly allowed to remain. The State Department, as a face-saving measure, announced on 13 February that it did not consider the Havana Convention as being applicable to the islands, thus tacitly acknowledging the Free French *fait accompli*. Two weeks later, Admiral Muselier departed, leaving behind a new administrator and a small detachment of Free French marines, who, with the help of local volunteers, were determined to defend the colony 'to the last man'.¹⁴²

For all intents and purposes, then, the St Pierre and Miquelon affair was over. But this did not mean that it was without consequences or significance. The most immediate tangible result of the affair, of course, was the subsequent resignation of Admiral Muselier as the commander of the Free French Naval Forces.¹⁴³ But the crisis was also significant and instructive in other ways. Among other things, the affair tells us a great deal about the character of Charles de Gaulle; the differences between British, Canadian and American policy towards Vichy and Free France; and the importance of Churchill and Roosevelt in the conduct of the war. It also provides a remarkable window on Canada's unique role in the conflict, and the difficulties involved in developing and maintaining a military alliance among the three powers that make up the North Atlantic Triangle, especially when an issue arises that has direct bearing on that geographical entity.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the St Pierre and Miquelon affair is the effect the incident had on the relationship between the Western Allies and Charles de Gaulle. For the British, there can be no doubt that the affair placed them in a difficult and embarrassing position vis-à-vis the United States at the very moment when they were undertaking the establishment of an active wartime alliance with that country. De Gaulle's timing, then, could not have been worse, particularly for Churchill, who would not soon forget it. Indeed, according to François Kersaudy, Churchill complained in the spring of 1942 of the General's 'breach of faith' in his seizure of St Pierre,¹⁴⁴ and there is no question that the affair contributed significantly to the deterioration of their relationship.¹⁴⁵ But this did not mean that Churchill or his government could simply write off de Gaulle. The Foreign Office remained convinced that de Gaulle, irascible or not, *was* Free France, and that without him the Free French movement would die. The British government judged this to be politically inexpedient, especially, as Henri Bybelezer notes, in the early months of 1942, when, 'at the height of Allied military disasters, the principle of French resistance was more important than its actual existence'.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, de Gaulle's actions did have a price. Churchill, for example, was for the moment much more reluctant to push the Free

French on the Americans and would raise little or no objection to the exclusion of Free France from the signing of the Declaration of the United Nations,¹⁴⁷ or to their exclusion from the Allied invasion of North Africa later that year.¹⁴⁸

As far as the Americans themselves were concerned, the St Pierre and Miquelon affair was of crucial significance in determining the US attitude 'toward both de Gaulle and the Free French'.¹⁴⁹ Its most immediate consequences, as noted, were the absolute exclusion of the Free French from even the knowledge of Super-Gymnast (later Operation Torch) and Secretary Hull's insistence that they not be allowed to sign the Declaration of the United Nations on 1 January 1942. But there were less tangible results as well. Indeed, the seizure of the islands seemed to confirm the worst fears about de Gaulle in both the State Department and the White House, where he was suspected of being an arbitrary and dictatorial character who could not be trusted to act in the best interest of either France or the Allies. As a result, US relations with Free France, which had been warming, however slowly, in the last half of 1941,¹⁵⁰ now turned quite cold, while the relationship with de Gaulle himself took on the acrimonious and even hostile characteristics that would plague it for the remainder of the war. In fact, Henry Stimson, Roosevelt's Secretary of War, notes in his memoirs that the 'very mention of de Gaulle was enough to produce an outburst of skillful Tennessee denunciation' from Secretary Hull, and that to the President, 'de Gaulle was a narrow-minded French zealot with too much ambition for his own good and some rather dubious views on democracy'.¹⁵¹ De Gaulle, as such, was more or less shunned by the US diplomatic community, which did not hesitate to run the risk of insulting the General in even the smallest of matters, such as the exclusion of any Free French representatives from the Memorial Day ceremonies in Washington on 30 May 1942.¹⁵²

Much more serious and indicative of the hostility which the Roosevelt administration held towards de Gaulle was the effort the Americans launched to replace him at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, best exemplified by Roosevelt's championing of General Henri Giraud as the leader of the French resistance.¹⁵³ De Gaulle's difficulties with the Americans only increased with their expanding role in the war, and there can be no doubt that any subsequent recognition or help he received from the US administration came not out of any attempt on the part of Roosevelt to improve his personal relations with de Gaulle, but rather out of sheer military and political necessity. Thus, it would seem reasonable to conclude that if de Gaulle's aim in seizing St Pierre and Miquelon was indeed to 'provoke complications between Washington

and Vichy which might lead to severance of diplomatic relations and thus facilitate recognition of his movement as the true French Government',¹⁵⁴ then he failed miserably to achieve his goal. The US–Vichy relationship was not seriously affected by de Gaulle's actions and in fact continued unabated until it fell apart, not out of any desire on the part of the United States to move closer to de Gaulle, but of its own accord following the German and French reaction to the Allied invasion of North Africa.

Equally instructive is what the crisis reveals about Allied relations with the Vichy government. It makes it clear, for example, that by December 1941 Great Britain had lost all hope of reaching a rapprochement with the Petain regime. As a result, all thought of appeasing Petain in order to secure promises of non-collaboration had vanished. British policy was thus centred on making Petain understand that any move towards closer collaboration with Germany would be undertaken at France's peril, and that in such circumstances Britain would not hesitate to retaliate with whatever military force it could muster. With Petain completely discredited in Britain, London could find little reason not to grant de Gaulle permission to take over St Pierre and Miquelon. Churchill's hesitation to give final sanction to the scheme, therefore, was not due to his concern over the possible reaction at Vichy, but rather due to his concern over the reaction of the United States, which might object to the move on the grounds that it was a violation of the no-transfer principle and a threat to their delicate relations with the Petain regime.

Accordingly, any cooperation Churchill afforded the Americans over Vichy stemmed not from his faith in the merits of their Vichy policy, but rather from his desire to strengthen the inchoate Anglo-American alliance, especially at this critical stage when the Americans had just entered the war. Moreover, Churchill was particularly sensitive to the feelings of Roosevelt, and, being in the White House when the crisis erupted, it is not surprising that the Prime Minister took his cues from the President in this matter. Thus, in the first few days of the crisis, when Roosevelt tended to treat the whole affair as a 'tempest in a teapot', Churchill remained somewhat ambivalent in his attitude towards de Gaulle, defending him at times, while at others offering to take him by the scruff of the neck to force some sense into him. But as the crisis continued, Roosevelt began to take the affair more seriously. It may have been that Hull's persistent warnings about the consequences of the Free French action were finally getting through to the President. Certainly, the report from Darlan indicating that the Germans were pressing him to grant concessions in North Africa as a result of the takeover was not something the President could take lightly, especially in view of his strong support for Super-Gymnast.

Sherwood notes that Roosevelt was also upset by Hull's threat to resign over the incident, writing that a 'major rupture' of this sort was something that Roosevelt was 'anxious to avoid at any cost'.¹⁵⁵ It may also have been that the President was simply losing patience over an incident involving 'two tiny islands' which, he noted, 'cannot be made an issue in the great effort to save the world'.¹⁵⁶ It was probably a combination of all these factors, but in any case, the more Roosevelt pressed Churchill to bring de Gaulle around to some sort of compromise, the more Churchill pressed the Foreign Office to do the same, even in the face of strong opposition from many members of his own Cabinet.

This brings us to another significant aspect of the St Pierre and Miquelon affair – its illustration of the considerable power each of the two leaders held within their respective governments, and the control that power gave them over the conduct of the war. For it is clear that by the middle of January, both men were in effect ignoring the advice of their chief advisers on foreign policy in this matter, preferring instead to work out their own personal solution to the problem. Eden's demand, for example, that Churchill put de Gaulle's three secret conditions before Roosevelt for approval was quickly discarded by the Prime Minister; rather, both leaders agreed that Churchill himself would endeavour to talk de Gaulle out of his reservations and that the basis for his talks with the Free French leader would rest on a communiqué written not by FDR's Secretary of State Cordell Hull, but rather by Churchill. Moreover, none of this was made known to Secretary Hull, who would soon find himself in the embarrassing position of having to learn about these developments through the agencies of the British and Canadian governments. The State Department, in fact, was so cut off from the White House that it soon began to query both the Canadian and the British embassies for information as to what was going on, leaving the Canadians with the strong impression that there was 'a serious lack of liaison between the White House and the State Department'.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, this may have contributed to the rapid denouement of the whole affair, since Secretary Hull, when confronted with the finished Churchill communiqué, quickly decided that it would be better to quietly accept the Free French *fait accompli* than to put such unacceptable terms before the Vichy government, which would no doubt find them insulting, further damaging US–Vichy relations.¹⁵⁸

Ironically, Hull's decision to drop his demand for a Free French withdrawal from the islands was not greeted all that warmly at the Foreign Office, where, after all the wrangling with de Gaulle, news of the Secretary's decision came as something of a shock. Furthermore, the Foreign Office did not give much credence to Hull's fears about

the potential impact of de Gaulle's move on the behaviour of the Vichy government and, in response to his anxieties, suggested that he counter any threat of concessions in North Africa as a result of the affair with a threat of his own – occupying Martinique and seizing all French assets within the grasp of the United States.¹⁵⁹ But Hull would not hear of such a suggestion, which ran counter not only to his policy towards France, but also to his policy towards the Latin American republics and his firm adherence to the policy of no transfer. Given these considerations, the State Department's objections to the Free French seizure of St Pierre and Miquelon – on the grounds that it was a violation of the principle of no transfer and of the terms of the Havana Conference – were no doubt genuine.

Canada, of course, was not party to the agreements reached between the United States and the American republics, but this did not mean that the United States was any less concerned over its defence, or over the possibility that Canada, too, might attempt to effect a change in the status of a territory in the New World. Indeed, the warnings Canada received from the State Department over Greenland and St Pierre and Miquelon illustrate this concern quite well. Still, Canada's position was unique. As a member of the British Commonwealth, it was frequently thought of by many officials within the state Department as being part of the 'Old World'. As such, Canadian control over St Pierre and Miquelon was seen by many within the department as unacceptable on the grounds that it was tantamount to turning the colony over to the British, which would be a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. When it did cooperate with the United States, however, Canada often found itself in the position of being a somewhat junior partner that was expected to follow the American lead, even to the detriment of British policy, as Secretary Hull's initial reaction to the Muselier coup clearly shows. For all intents and purposes, then, Canada was caught between the British and the Americans and frequently found itself being pulled in two directions at once.

This, of course, was the unique dilemma – or blessing, or curse – that Canada would often find itself in as the hinge of the North Atlantic Triangle, which brings us to the final example of how the crisis over St Pierre and Miquelon proved to be significant. For it amply illustrates the challenges that Mackenzie King and his government faced in trying to maintain good relations with the two larger powers in the midst of a world war. One of King's strategies for coping with this dilemma was to refrain from action until all three parties had agreed on a settled policy for Canada. At times this 'policy of inaction' frustrated his military chiefs,

who in the case of St Pierre and Miquelon were more willing to act in an independent fashion. But King had other reasons to move cautiously – reasons that all too often both the British and the Americans were slow to understand or recognise.

Here, of course, we must speak of Canada's unusual position as both an anglophone and a francophone nation, and the domestic and international implications of this fact. Because of it, Canada's relationship with France was far more complex than that of Great Britain or the United States. Indeed, it was directly tied not only to such critical issues as conscription and public support for the war, but also to Canadian unity itself. As a result, Mackenzie King had to tread very carefully when dealing with any issue that stood at the core of Franco-Canadian relations. It was primarily for this reason that he maintained relations with the Vichy government after the fall of France, opposed the British attack on Dakar in September 1940, agreed to send the Canadian diplomat Pierre Dupuy to Vichy as Churchill's envoy and refused to agree to a Canadian military operation to take over the wireless station on St Pierre in autumn 1941.

In some respects – and this is perhaps no fault of the Canadians – the net effect of Canada's unusual domestic and international position was to paralyse Canadian policy. The St Pierre and Miquelon affair is perhaps the classic example of this phenomenon. For nearly two years, the Canadian military pushed the government to do something about the islands, and for two years the Cabinet – caught between the demands of the British and the Americans, and always concerned about the potential domestic repercussions of any move that involved France – refused to act. And so it did nothing – nothing, that is, until the Cabinet arrived at a tentative plan (initially suggested by the Americans) for the takeover of the radio station on St Pierre. But the plan, in the end, was too heavy-handed for the Americans and too weak for the British, so the Cabinet drew back again to consider the merits of its proposal, unable to take action against two minute and undefended islands just miles from its shore, held by a potentially hostile power in the middle of a world war.

The crisis over St Pierre and Miquelon has much to teach us about the North Atlantic Triangle and about Mackenzie King's and Canada's unusual relationships with Great Britain and the United States. Furthermore, we should not underrate the impact it had at the time on all three governments. It was serious enough to damage de Gaulle's relations with the United States and Great Britain, it created a great deal of animosity between some of the key policymakers of

the war, and, had Secretary Hull had his way, it could have led to a serious breach between the Foreign Office and the State Department over the United States' Vichy policy and British support for de Gaulle. The affair also placed a great deal of strain on Anglo-American and Canadian-American relations. Indeed, Secretary Hull's public demand that Canada restore the status quo ante was resented at both the Department of External Affairs and the Foreign Office, and it is no doubt fortunate for all the parties involved that the incident and the differences it created – which were widely reported in the press – faded so quickly from public view.

From February 1942 onwards, the islands themselves were all but forgotten, and the people of St Pierre and Miquelon soon resumed their quiet and isolated existence. The majority of them, however, remained unquestionably loyal to de Gaulle and unwavering in their support for his efforts to avenge the humiliation France had suffered at the hands of the Nazis in spring 1940. In this sense, then, de Gaulle's victory over St Pierre and Miquelon may not have been entirely pyrrhic, for by war's end, no one questioned the right of the citizens of St Pierre and Miquelon to maintain their ties to their beloved France and to remain, as they have to this day, the last proud outpost of its once vast empire on the North American continent.

Note on contributor

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Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Notes

- 1 Winston Churchill made a similar observation in 1930 when he noted that Canada 'is a magnet exercising a double attraction, drawing both Great Britain and the United States towards herself and thus drawing them closer to each other'. Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 370–1.
- 2 On wartime US–Canadian defence cooperation see Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*; and Dziuban, *Military Relations*. On Canada's role in hosting the Quebec Conferences see Granatstein, 'Happily in the margins'.
- 3 Works on the St Pierre and Miquelon crisis include Anglin, *St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair*; Christian, *Divided Island*; Woolner, *Storm in the North Atlantic*; and Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy'.
- 4 During Prohibition, St Pierre became a virtual smuggler's paradise, where European wines and spirits were stored in vast quantities and then shipped illicitly to the United States and Canada. France also benefited from the huge tax revenues it collected from the islands' trade in this precious commodity. Rannie, *St. Pierre and Miquelon*, 72–7; *Maclean's*, 1 January 1941, 11.
- 5 Rannie, *St. Pierre and Miquelon*, 12; Christian, *Divided Island*, 1; *National Geographic*, December 1941, 743; Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 247.
- 6 Bercuson and Herwig, *One Christmas in Washington*, 146.
- 7 *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1940, Vol. 5, Secretary of State to Chiefs of Diplomatic Missions in the American Republics, 17 June 1940, 181.
- 8 *FRUS*, 1940, Vol. 5, Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 12 September 1940, 255.
- 9 *FRUS*, 1940, Vol. 5, Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 12 September 1940, 255.
- 10 *FRUS*, 1940, Vol. 5, Secretary of State to President Roosevelt, 12 September 1940, 255–6.
- 11 *FRUS*, 1940, Vol. 2, Chargé in France to Secretary of State, 7 October 1940; Memorandum of conversation by Under-Secretary of State Welles,

- 25 November 1940, 528–9. Under this agreement the US was also granted the right to send consular officers to Martinique and the other French holdings in the New World, including St Pierre and Miquelon.
- 12 In August 1940, Roosevelt also initiated talks with Mackenzie King aimed at linking Canadian and American security. These talks resulted in the signing of the Ogdensburg Agreement and the creation of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence to oversee the protection of North America from hostile powers. See, for example, Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 13–30. The economic maintenance of St Pierre included an understanding reached with Canada that allowed trade between the territory and the mainland to continue.
 - 13 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 319; Woolner, *Storm in the North Atlantic*, 7–8, 27–8.
 - 14 Woolner, *Storm in the North Atlantic*, 1–33. It also meant dealing with the occasional suggestion from London and/or the Free French that the Canadians consider a de Gaulle takeover of the islands. Woolner, *Storm in the North Atlantic*; and Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy', 816–17.
 - 15 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 276; *Documents on Canadian External Relations* (hereafter *DCER*), Vol. 8, document 664, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 15 July 1941, 829.
 - 16 Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 68.
 - 17 Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 142, 144.
 - 18 Roskill, *War at Sea*, 272–3, 376, 379–80, Appendix M 605; Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 114–15.
 - 19 Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, 68. Free French forces also took part in the Syrian operation.
 - 20 Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 117; Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 296.
 - 21 Conn and Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, 113–14; Marshall, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, 495–6.
 - 22 Under the Murphy–Weygand Pact, for example, the United States had agreed to supply Vichy North Africa with food and fuel in the hope that doing so would encourage General Weygand to maintain a degree of independence from Nazi-dominated Europe and resist possible German demands for the cession of bases in the region. It was even thought, in some British and American circles, that Weygand might eventually be persuaded to join the Allied cause, since he had repeatedly demonstrated strong opposition to direct French collaboration with Germany. Mattloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning*, 103.
 - 23 Dawson, *Canada in World Affairs*, 261–2.
 - 24 *DCER*, Vol. 8, Part II, document 450, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Under-Secretary of State, 29 September 1941, 619–20; see also Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy', 817.
 - 25 See note 22 above and Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy', 819–20.
 - 26 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 208–12.
 - 27 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 208–12.
 - 28 *DCER*, Vol. 8, document 661, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 8 July 1941, 827.
 - 29 *DCER*, Vol. 8, document 671, Commissioner R.C.M.P. to Under-Secretary for External Affairs, 4 August 1941, 836–7, and document 672, Memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 15 August 1941, 838–9. At roughly the same time, Canada received a query from de Gaulle about a possible Free French takeover of the islands. Mackenzie King was also quick to reject this proposal, for the same reasons. See Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy', 819–21.

- 30 Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy,' 819–21.
- 31 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Canadian Legation to the Department of State, 3 November 1941, 541.
- 32 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Canadian Legation to the Department of State, 3 November 1941, 541.
- 33 These messages were sent in the form of a telegram from Prime Minister King to Prime Minister Churchill, a copy of which was also sent to the State Department in Washington; both countries received this telegram on 5 December 1941. *DCER*, Vol. 8, document 684, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Cabinet War Committee, 29 November 1941, 856.
- 34 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Memorandum of Conversation with Canadian Minister, Hume Wrong, 8 December 1941, 543–4.
- 35 Villefosse, *Les Iles de la liberté*, 116.
- 36 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 184–5.
- 37 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 185; Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 252.
- 38 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 184; Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 247.
- 39 See note 29 and Woolner, *Storm in the North Atlantic*, 17.
- 40 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 486.
- 41 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 486.
- 42 *DCER*, Vol. 8, document 670, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 31 July 1941, 835–6, and document 675, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 21 October 1941, 844–5; Bybezezer, *British Policy*, 278.
- 43 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 490. De Gaulle, in his memo, says that, in any case, he had to go along with Muselier's request and warn the British in order to avoid the appearance of concealment now that the 'secret was thus out'. De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 185.
- 44 Bybezezer, *British Policy*, 279.
- 45 Foreign Office 371/31837 St. Pierre and Miquelon, Diary of Events, quoted from Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 170; Bybezezer, *British Policy*, footnote 4, COS (41) 419, page 8, 12 December 1941. The Foreign Office also indicated that they saw no reason to inform the Americans, who they believed would not 'raise any objections at such a late date about such a small matter'. Bybezezer, *British Policy*, footnote 4, Morton to Churchill, 19 December 1941; Sir. O. Sargent Minute, 14 December 1941, 210810/93/17.
- 46 Bybezezer, *British Policy*, 280, 377, 13 December 1941.
- 47 Foreign Office to Washington, tel. 6957, 15 December 1941, 210591/93/17, quoted from Bybezezer, *British Policy*, 280, footnote 3; Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 170. According to Bybezezer, Churchill may also have wavered in his support of the operation not only because of his concern over American and Vichy reaction generally, but also because of his hope to be able to obtain Roosevelt's support, at the upcoming Arcadia Conference, for the issuance of a joint communiqué, which he minuted to the Chief of Staff would be 'blessing or cursing to Petain in the names of Great Britain and the United States ... I do not think this prospect would be marred by a Free French descent upon Miquelon and St. Pierre. It would be more convenient if it happened after an Anglo-American ultimatum had been delivered and rejected (by Vichy), but if you feel that it is better to unmuzzle Muselier now, I am prepared to consent.' Churchill to Ismay, Minute D 313/1; 13 December 1941, Premier 3. 377, quoted from Bybezezer, *British Policy*, 280.
- 48 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Memorandum of Conversation, 16 December 1941, 548.
- 49 Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 171.

- 50 Strang Minute, 17 December 1941, Z10592/93/17; Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 281; Foreign Office 371/3183, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Diary of Events, quoted in Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 171.
- 51 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1309, Dominions Office to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 18 December 1941, 1642.
- 52 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1314, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 22 December 1941, 1645. De Gaulle, however, was not informed that the Canadians had in fact decided to postpone the operations. Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 304.
- 53 Telegram General de Gaulle to Muselier, 18 Decembre 1941. 'Nous avons, comme vous le demandiez, consulté les gouvernements britannique et américain. Nous savons, de source certaine, que les Canadiens ont l'intention de faire eux-mêmes la destruction du poste radio de Saint-Pierre. Dans ces conditions, je vous prescris de procéder au ralliement de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon par vos propres moyens et sans rien dire aux étrangers. Je prends l'entière responsabilité de cette opération, devenue indispensable pour conserver à la France ces possessions françaises'. De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 494.
- 54 Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 265.
- 55 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 281; *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1316, Foreign Secretary Eden to British Ambassador in Washington, 24 December 1941, 1647.
- 56 De Gaulle, *Mémoires*, 184.
- 57 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1339, Chargé d'Affaires Dupuy to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 29 December 1941, 1671.
- 58 Ira Wolfert, 'Free French seize St Pierre and Miquelon', *New York Times*, 25 December 1941, 7; Villefosse, *Les Iles de la liberté*, 136.
- 59 Wolfert, 'Free French seize St Pierre and Miquelon', 7.
- 60 But not without turning to the crowd of de Gaulle supporters assembled on the quay and shouting 'Vive Pétain' as he made his way up the gangplank of Muselier's ship. Villefosse, *Les Iles de la liberté*, 137.
- 61 Wolfert, 'Free French seize St Pierre and Miquelon', 1.
- 62 Wolfert was the lucky recipient of a tip about the operation from two St Pierrais who were in New York, and who suspected that Muselier's presence in Canada was the prelude to his moving on St Pierre. Thus informed, Wolfert set out at once to find Muselier, with whom he eventually met up in Halifax, whereupon Wolfert proceeded to bluff the Admiral into thinking he knew everything about the operation. Muselier 'arrested' the reporter – illegally but good naturedly – and placed him in the hold of one of his ships in order to keep him quiet, at least until Christmas Eve, when the Admiral notes 'Il (Wolfert) eut la satisfaction bien gagnée de transmettre à son journal la première nouvelle de la libération. Son renom de reporter est désormais nettement assuré.' Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 286; Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 949.
- 63 Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 281–2.
- 64 Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 281–2.
- 65 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1324, Memorandum by Minister in United States, 26 December 1941; Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 318–19. Ristelhueber had sent another cable a few hours earlier which informed the Petain government that Canada had said it would not allow the Free French to take possession of St Pierre. *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1326, 457.
- 66 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1324, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 26 December 1941, 1652–4.
- 67 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1324, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 26 December 1941, 1652–4.

- 68 Secretary Hull called this conference, which was held between 15 and 28 January 1942, in response to Pearl Harbor. He hoped to unify the foreign policies of the republics by calling upon them to break off relations with the Axis powers as one. Chile and Argentina, however, refused to sign the joint declaration, with the result that the former, in Hull's words, became 'a hotbed for Axis activities'. The question of St Pierre and Miquelon, however, was never raised at the conference. Hull, *Memoirs*, 1143–4, 1150.
- 69 See note 15 above and Dziuban, *Military Relations*, 158–60.
- 70 Canadian Minister Wrong makes numerous references to the anger expressed at the State Department over the Free French action, but he singles out Secretary Hull, who, he notes, issued his statement to the press on 25 December in a 'White Heat'. *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1344, 3 January 1942, 1676.
- 71 Both the Canadian and American governments had been informed of Muselier's intention to hold a plebiscite by their consuls in St Pierre. News of the plebiscite was also reported in the press.
- 72 Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, 365.
- 73 Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, 365–6.
- 74 Churchill had arrived in Washington on 22 December to attend this conference, which he had called on his own initiative following Pearl Harbor.
- 75 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1325, Memorandum by L. B. Pearson, 26 December 1941, 1655.
- 76 There were in fact many top officials in both External Affairs and the State Department who first heard of the affair over the radio or read it in the press.
- 77 *FRUS*, 1941, Vol. 2, Secretary of State to Admiral Leahy, 25 December 1941, 551; *New York Times*, 26 December 1941, 1. Copies of this statement were sent to both Admiral Leahy in France and Admiral Robert in Martinique.
- 78 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 482.
- 79 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1325, L. B. Pearson, 26 December 1941, 1655–6.
- 80 Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, 367.
- 81 Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, 367.
- 82 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1325, L. B. Pearson, 26 December 1941, 1655. It should be noted that King decided not to issue this statement to the press but to deliver it only to the State Department. Moffat, *The Moffat Papers*, 370. However, King did tell a group of reporters that evening that there had been no prior agreement between Muselier and Canada and that Canada had no prior knowledge of the operation. When asked what Canada was prepared to do to restore the status quo, King offered no comment. *New York Times*, 26 December 1941, 10.
- 83 *FRUS*, 1941, Vol. 2, 1943, British Ambassador Halifax to Prime Minister Churchill, 25 December 1941, 380.
- 84 CAB (Cabinet record) 65/25, 136(41) 5, 26 December 1941.
- 85 Hull, *Memoirs*, 1131; Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 320; *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1329, Memorandum by Hume Wrong, 26 December 1941, 1660–1.
- 86 Churchill, *Grand Alliance*, 667.
- 87 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 321.
- 88 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 321.
- 89 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 322.
- 90 Pickersgill, *Mackenzie King Record*, 322; *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1329, Memorandum by Hume Wrong, 26 December 1941, 1661.
- 91 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1334, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 29 December 1941, 1667–8, and document 1335, Memorandum by L. B. Pearson, 29 December 1941, 1668–9.
- 92 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1335, Memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 29 December 1941, 1668.

- 93 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, memorandum of conversation Hull and Halifax, 29 December 1941, 562.
- 94 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, memorandum of conversation Hull and Halifax, 29 December 1941, 562.
- 95 On the same day, the State Department received a communication from the US Consul in St Pierre that indicated Muselier's determination, in view of the results of the plebiscite, to defend the islands 'against any attacks by the Vichy, British or American fleets'. The Admiral also indicated his tremendous disappointment with de Gaulle, whose actions, he was convinced, were taken not only in direct contradiction to the wishes of the Allies, but also without the express approval of the Free French National Committee in London. As such, the Admiral thought it important for the department to understand that he himself was 'not a gangster' but had carried out the order because of his conviction that his failure to do so would necessitate his resignation as Commander of the Free French Naval Forces. This, he concluded, would no doubt result in their disintegration since the force was largely held together 'because of his personal following'. *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Consul in St. Pierre to Secretary of State, 29 December 1941, 556–7.
- 96 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Secretary of State, 29 December 1941, 563.
- 97 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Leahy to Hull, 29 December 1941, 565.
- 98 He also mentioned in the same conversation that de Bournat had just been given the 'Cross of Honour' for his service to France. Hull, *Memoirs*, 1131–2.
- 99 Hull, *Memoirs*, 1131–2.
- 100 *FRUS, 1941*, Vol. 2, Conversation between French Ambassador and Secretary of State, 30 December 1941, 565.
- 101 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 483.
- 102 Churchill, *The Complete Speeches*, 6544–5.
- 103 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 483.
- 104 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 484–5; *FRUS*, Conference at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Secretary of State to President, 31 December 1941, 381–2.
- 105 Hull insisted that, although (according to the State Department) 95 per cent of the French populace was anti-Hitler, more than 95 per cent of this number 'are not Gaullists and would not follow him'. *FRUS*, Conference at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Secretary of State to President, 31 December 1941, 382.
- 106 Sherwood writes that Secretary Hull remained suspicious of British involvement in the takeover of St Pierre and Miquelon throughout the crisis. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 486.
- 107 This proposal differed considerably from the initial terms sent to Vichy on 5 January and included suggestions that the islands be neutralised for the period of the war.
- 108 *FRUS*, Conferences at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1942, 399.
- 109 Hull, *Memoirs*, 1136.
- 110 Super-Gymnast was the code name for the Allied plan to invade North Africa, later called Torch, which was discussed at length at the Arcadia Conference. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 460. It should be noted that in its original form, the plan assumed that the Vichy French in North Africa would offer no resistance or might even be induced to 'invite' the Allies in. It was with this in mind that the President and Mr Churchill decided, early in the discussions at Arcadia, to build on Robert Murphy's earlier mission to North Africa in the hope of enticing General Weygand to support just such an Allied operation. Weygand,

- when approached, however, refused to cooperate and insisted on informing Marshall Petain of the American advances. Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 102–3; Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 209–11.
- 111 *FRUS*, Conferences at Washington, 1941–42, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1942, 399–400.
- 112 The Canadians were shocked when they learned of the *Arkansas* proposal, and Prime Minister King sent a message at once to President Roosevelt imploring him not to take any such action. *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1356, Minutes of Cabinet War Committee, 14 January 1942, 1688, and document 1358, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 15 January 1942, 1690.
- 113 *FRUS*, Conferences at Washington, 1941–42, and Casablanca, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill to Eden, 12 January 1942, 399–400.
- 114 CAB 65/25, 4(42) 4, 12 January 1942.
- 115 *FRUS*, Vol. 2, Conferences at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Atlee to Prime Minister Churchill, 12 January 1942, 400.
- 116 *FRUS*, Vol. 2, Conferences at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943, Atlee to Prime Minister Churchill, 12 January 1942, 400.
- 117 CAB 65/25, 4(42) 4, 12 January 1942.
- 118 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1353, Under-Secretary of State to Prime Minister, 13 January 1942, 1656.
- 119 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1355, Memorandum by Minister in the United States, 14 January 1942, 1687.
- 120 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1357, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 15 January 1942, 1689; CAB 65/25, 5(42) 1, 14 January 1942, Prime Minister Churchill to Foreign Secretary Eden. In the same communication, Churchill also mentioned the possibility that in the ‘prepared statement’ Roosevelt might announce the appointment of a US trustee for the islands.
- 121 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 291.
- 122 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 291.
- 123 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1360, British High Commissioner to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 24 January 1942, 1691–2.
- 124 Foreign Office 371/3/873; Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 178.
- 125 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 294.
- 126 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 291.
- 127 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 295.
- 128 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 295, footnote 1, note of conversation between Prime Minister and General de Gaulle, 22 January 1942, Z766/3/17.
- 129 Foreign Office 371/3173, note of conversation between General de Gaulle and the Prime Minister, 22 January 1942, quoted from Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 178.
- 130 Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 178.
- 131 Barker, *Churchill and Eden*, 53; Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 178–9.
- 132 Churchill had been informed by this point of Prime Minister King’s decision to give his assent to any proposal that the United States and the British had agreed to.
- 133 *FRUS*, 1942, Vol. 2, 668. II, 1942, Churchill to Roosevelt, 22 January 1942.
- 134 Hull indicates that he was so frustrated over Churchill’s conduct in this affair, and over Roosevelt’s refusal to pressure Churchill into clarifying ‘the relations between Great Britain and the United States with regard to de Gaulle and Vichy’, that he seriously considered resigning from office and even pencilled out a note of resignation to the President. Hull, *Memoirs*, 1137.

- 135 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, memorandum of phone conversation between Moffat and Dunn, 14 January 1942, 663–4.
- 136 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, memorandum of phone conversation between Moffat and Dunn, 14 January 1942, 663–4.
- 137 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, memorandum of phone conversation between Moffat and Dunn, 14 January 1942, 663–4; *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1356, Minutes of War Cabinet Committee, 14 January 1942, 1688.
- 138 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, memorandum of phone conversation Moffat, 15 January 1942, 667–8. A few hours later Secretary Hull had second thoughts about delivering this message to the Canadian government and telephoned Moffat to tell him to not deliver the message.
- 139 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1364, Memorandum by Minister in the United States to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 28 January 1942, 1697.
- 140 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, 660.
- 141 *FRUS, 1942*, Vol. 2, 2 February 1942, 669. II, 1942, Leahy to Hull, 6 January 1942, Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- 142 Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 316.
- 143 For more on Muselier's resignation see footnote 88 above; Thomas, 'Deferring to Vichy', 809–35; and Muselier, *De Gaulle contre le Gaullisme*, 329–58.
- 144 Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 184.
- 145 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 294.
- 146 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 325.
- 147 This document, which was signed by 23 nations on 1 January 1942, set forth the Allied principles for fighting the Axis.
- 148 Churchill, it should be noted, had in any case been reluctant to inform the Free French of the planned North African invasion because of their tendency to leak information, but as Kersaudy notes, even if he had decided to involve them at some point, he would have been overruled by Roosevelt, who 'had disliked de Gaulle from the start, ... distrusted him since Dakar, and hated him since St. Pierre and Miquelon'. Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 214.
- 149 Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 212.
- 150 Bybelezer notes that under René Plevén's tenure relations between the Free French and the Americans had begun to improve in the latter half of 1941. In September, for example, the State Department approved of Free France establishing a standing Free French delegation in Washington. In October, the State Department recognised the de facto legitimacy of Free French authority in the colonies they controlled, and in late November, Roosevelt himself declared that 'Free French territory was vital to the defense of the U. S. and, hence, liable for lend-lease aid'. Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 303; and Washington telegram 5297, 20 November 1941, Z9870/4445/17, quoted from Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 303.
- 151 Stimson, *On Active Service*, 546.
- 152 De Gaulle reacted angrily to this and quipped to Churchill a week later that 'for the Americans, the Frenchmen of Bir Hakeim are not belligerents'. Kersaudy, *Churchill and De Gaulle*, 189. For more on the antipathy held for de Gaulle within the State Department and his *persona non grata* status see Conn and Fairchild, *Framework for Hemisphere Defense*, 163.
- 153 General Giraud was hand-picked by Roosevelt to assist the Allies in the Torch operation, where it was hoped he would be able to secure Vichy French North African cooperation.
- 154 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1339, Memorandum by Chargé d'Affaires for France, Belgium and the Netherlands (Dupuy), 29 December 1941, 1671.

- 155 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 488. In fact, Sherwood writes that initially Roosevelt was amused by all the fuss the incident created and even seemed to derive 'a certain amount of mischievous pleasure from the spectacle of his esteemed old friend, the Secretary of State learning at last how it felt to be the target of widespread criticism'. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 488.
- 156 Churchill minute to Roosevelt, 14, I, 1942, quoted from Barker, *Churchill and Eden*, 53. Roosevelt pencilled these comments in the margins of this minute.
- 157 *DCER*, Vol. 9, document 1363, Minister in the United States to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 27 January 1942, 695.
- 158 Hull also wanted to avoid a revival of the issue in the press.
- 159 Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 299; Strang memorandum on St. Pierre and Miquelon, Z1259/3/17, 5 February 1942, quoted from Bybelezer, *British Policy*, 299; CAB 65/25, 17(42) 3, 6 February 1942.

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