

# JOFFRE AND THE FRENCH MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1917

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## INTRODUCTION

In April 1917, just after the American declaration of war on Germany, the French dispatched a high-level mission to the United States with the aim of developing a plan for American intervention in the war. Joseph Joffre (1852-1931), former commander-in-chief of the French army, was a member of that mission, and his task was to reach an agreement with the American war department on the nature of future French-American military cooperation. By that time, Joffre had recognized that as French manpower reserves diminished, it was doubtful whether France could win the war. And so, he thought that “L’arrivée de contingents américains est devenue maintenant indispensable.”<sup>1</sup>

The memorandum of understanding that Joffre developed with Newton Baker (1871-1937), the American Secretary of War, and Tasker Bliss (1853-1930), the U.S. Army assistant Chief of Staff, proposed that an independent American army would eventually be deployed in France. This was actually counter to the wishes of many French politicians and army leaders (and the British) who simply wanted to insert Americans directly into French (and British) units—the so-called “amalgamation” option.

French accounts of the French mission to the United States, such as those of René Viviani (1863-1925), the deputy prime minister; André Tardieu (1876-1945), delegate and future prime minister; Paul Painlevé (1863-1933), the minister of war; Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934), the French president, all generally ignored the role of Joffre in the French mission for political or personal reasons. Joffre himself, in his memoirs, spoke little of his work on the mission. Members of the French delegation, such as Émile Hovelague (1865-1936), inspector-general of public instruction, and Lieutenant-Colonel Édouard-Jean Réquin (1879 – 1953), army staff, acclaimed Joffre’s importance in negotiating the memorandum of understanding, as did all the Americans involved: Baker, Robert Lansing (1864-1928), the Secretary of State; James Gerard (1867-1951) former American ambassador to Germany, and John Pershing (1860-1948), commander of the American Expeditionary Force.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Fabry, *Joffre et son destin* (Paris: Charles Lavauzelle, 1931), 234.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Lesouëf, “La Mission du Maréchal Joffre aux États-Unis (avril - mai 1917).” (2005) [https://www.institut-strategie.fr/ihcc\\_eu1gm\\_Lesouëf.html](https://www.institut-strategie.fr/ihcc_eu1gm_Lesouëf.html). Lesouëf notes the point of Joffre being banned from mention in the French press at the time of the French mission to the United States. “Cet épisode de la carrière du maréchal est peu connu en France. Sur le moment même, la censure interdit à la presse française d'en parler.”



## BACKGROUND TO THE FRENCH MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES

In December 1916, after a cabinet shakeup by French Prime Minister Aristide Briand (1862-1932), a sweeping change also occurred in the French military high command. Joffre was removed as commander-in-chief of the French armies (Commandant en chef des armées du nord et du nord-est) and replaced with Robert Nivelle (1856-1924). Almost at the same time, Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929) was removed from command of the French armies in the north and ordered to Italy to command French units there. Franchet d'Espèrey (1856-1942) replaced Foch as commander of the armies of the north. Foch temporarily became interim commander of armies of east (Groupe d'armées de l'Est) until General Edouard de Castelnau (1851-1944) returned from a visit to Russia. Joffre was awarded the rank of marshal and the ceremonial title of “général en chef des armées françaises”<sup>3</sup> with the role of “conseiller technique auprès du gouvernement.” These were far-reaching moves after two years of war.

It would not be an understatement to say that Joffre was blind-sided by his removal from command of the French armies. At Briand's request, Joffre met him for lunch and after discussing the military situation on the front and in Greece, Joffre recalled that “à ma grande surprise ... une réforme profonde du haut commandement [was proposed] .... Je serais chargé de *la direction de la guerre*.” But while elevated to the rank of marshal, Joffre found out that he would no longer be in direct command of the armées françaises du Nord-Est. “Ces propositions étaient pour moi une révélation.”<sup>4</sup> Joffre felt that he served at the orders of the government, and so he agreed with his removal from direct command of the French armies despite his reservations.<sup>5</sup>

As Joffre found out more about the new position, “j'éprouvai une impression pénible, ... le gouvernement n'avait pas joué franc-jeu avec moi.”<sup>6</sup> The new position was intended to be purely consultative. Briand laid it out for Joffre, and as Joffre understood it, the government was looking to remove him from all command positions and to “ne laisser subsister qu'une façade destinée à donner satisfaction à l'armée, au pays et à nos alliés.”<sup>7</sup>

This “promotion” effectively removed Joffre from active involvement with the French army and according to one French politician, “La crise du commandement se trouvait

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<sup>3</sup> That was a “titre honorifique.”

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917* (Paris: Plon, 1932), 2: 406-07.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2: 410, “j'étais aux ordres du gouvernement, j'accepterais la mesure qu'on me proposait.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2: 414.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2: 416 and 2: 433; Joffre submitted his resignation from the new position on 26 December.

ainsi résolue.”<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, none of this appeared in the French press, which was ordered not to mention Joffre.<sup>9</sup>

There were several issues driving the change of command.

1. A general unease with the high French casualties in 1916 that resulted from the battles of Verdun and the Somme.
2. A growing awareness of French manpower shortages, “la crise des effectifs,” as the war dragged on.
3. Mounting frustration by politicians with Joffre who kept an extremely tight control over his command of the French army and who opposed the involvement of French politicians in military decisions. As noted by Nivelle, “Joffre était le directeur de la guerre, l’influence du gouvernement se faisait peu sentir.”<sup>10</sup> French politicians had grown increasingly frustrated by their lack of access to French soldiers and by the inability to have any say in army operations.
4. Briand’s cabinet restructuring, which included a new minister of war, Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), who had only just returned from Morocco and who was not a great admirer of Joffre.<sup>11</sup>
5. France had not yet won the war after two years of bitter fighting, and a victorious conclusion to the war was nowhere in sight at the end of 1916.

Another cabinet upheaval occurred in March 1917 when Lyautey resigned as minister of war. Alexandre Ribot (1842-1923) became the new prime minister with Paul Painlevé (1863-1933) as the minister of war. With that, the political stage was set in France for the American entry into the war, which came in April 1917, but it remained to be seen exactly what form that American intervention would take.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Painlevé, *Comment j’ai nommé Foch et Pétain; la politique de guerre de 1917, le commandement unique interallié* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1924), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Sorrie, “Censorship of the Press in France 1917-1918” (Ph. D dissertation, London School of Economics, 2014), 69, citing BDIC F rés 0270 AVIS (an order issued from Director of the Press Bureau, 4 Dec.1916).

<sup>10</sup> David Dutton, “The Fall of General Joffre: An Episode in the Politico-Military Struggle in Wartime France.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1 (June 1978), 338.

<sup>11</sup> Dutton, *ibid.*, ably described Briand’s cabinet maneuverings in an attempt to save his government.



## EVENTS BEFORE THE DISPATCH OF THE FRENCH MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES

**24 March 1917** Painlevé, the French Minister of War, telegraphed the French military attaché (Colonel Paul Vignal) in Washington about “la possibilité d’envoi en France de contingents volontaires ... il ne saurait être question, quant à présent, de mettre sur pied un nombre considérable de grandes unités dont l’organisation serait longue et dont l’outillage absorberait les ressources industrielles dont les Alliés ont besoin.” In light of growing manpower shortages in the French army (la crise des effectifs) the French government was exploring the possibility of the United States sending small units of volunteers, maybe a grand total of 500,000, that could be inserted, or amalgamated, directly into units in the French army.<sup>12</sup> This question of the “amalgamation” of American men into either French or British units would continue to pop up right until the very end of the war.

**26 March 1917** The British cabinet agreed to send a British mission to the US, headed by Lord Arthur Balfour (1848-1930), the foreign secretary. The choice of Balfour, a very senior and respected member of the government, was an indication that the British considered this a very important attempt to acquire further American support for the British war effort. The mission would include technical experts from the Bank of England, the admiralty, the army and other organizations to work out specific details of further Anglo-US collaboration.

**1 April 1917** Ribot, the French prime minister, summoned Joffre to his office and explained the intent to send him, along with René Viviani (1863-1925), the deputy prime minister, in a mission to America. Ribot provided no specific goals or instructions for the mission, but Joffre agreed to go thinking that he could do something that might be good for the French war effort. As he later recalled, “mon premier mouvement fut de refuser,” but when he was told about the upcoming British mission, he decided that he was ready to go as quickly as needed and that he might be able to achieve some benefit for France.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 237-38: “Il est désirable d’envoyer, dans un court délai, petites unités, compagnies ou bataillons de volontaires, aussi nombreuses que possible.” See also Robert Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States, April-May 1917.” *The Journal of Military History*, 66 (April 2002), 416.

<sup>13</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 447-48; Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 413-14.

Thus, the stage was set for two competing missions from France and England to set out for the United States with the aim of working out the scope of future American involvement in the war effort.

**2 April 1917** President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) addressed a joint session of Congress with a request for an immediate declaration of war against Germany and the Central Powers. It has been suggested that at the time, the American government never thought an army would actually have to be sent abroad and that the American contribution would only involve money and materials.<sup>14</sup>

**3 April 1917** Disagreement arose in France over the upcoming “Nivelle Offensive” planned by Nivelle, the commander-in-chief. Ribot and Painlevé, with the support of Phillippe Pétain (1856-1951), who was, at that time, chief of the general staff (chef d'état-major general), contemplated stopping the scheduled offensive because of projected losses which France could ill afford in light of manpower shortages (“la crise des effectifs”).

The involvement of the French government in deciding whether the offensive should proceed or not indicated how much the relationship between the French military high command and the French civilian government had changed since the removal of Joffre as commander in chief. The publicity surrounding these “discussions” meant that the upcoming offensive was no longer a secret and allowed the Germans to be completely prepared to meet the attack when it occurred.

**4 April 1917** Painlevé formally proposed to the French cabinet that a mission be sent to the U.S. Although Ribot himself wanted to go, it was decided to send Viviani (to handle political discussions) and Joffre (to work out military issues).

**5 April 1917** Jean Jules Jusserand (1855-1932), the French ambassador to the United States, informed Lansing, the American Secretary of State, that the French wished to send a mission to the United States.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917: A Reassessment.” *French Historical Studies*, 35 (Fall 2012), 642. As noted above, both Painlevé and Nivelle felt that the US should send small units, companies or battalions of volunteers to amalgamate into the French army. See also, Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 416.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 414.

**5-6 April 1917** In France, the Press Bureau sent out an order to all newspapers: “Do not allow mention of the mission to the United States.”<sup>16</sup> That was not an unusual order as the French government throughout the war tried to restrict war information from being published.

**6 April 1917** Two days after the U.S. Senate (4 April) voted 82 to 6 to declare war against Germany, the U.S. House of Representatives endorsed the declaration of war by a vote of 373 to 50. America had formally entered World War I. But what kind of war was America getting into? How exactly would the US participate, especially given the small size of the US army? President Wilson had already requested an increase in the size of the army and the introduction of universal conscription. But this was uncharted waters for the US army.

**6 April 1917** Sir Cecil Rice (1859-1918), the ambassador of the United Kingdom to the United States, told Lansing that British wanted to send mission, headed by Lord Balfour, to the United States. Lansing persuaded Wilson to hear the arguments and information from both the British and French delegations. Surprisingly, there was no coordination between the French and British groups – remember that the French and British had already been wartime allies for over two years. Initially, the Americans viewed the British mission as the most important because of Balfour, the number of men in the mission and the inclusion of many technical experts.<sup>17</sup>

**9 April 1917** As part of the Nivelle offensive, the English opened an attack near the city of Arras in northern France. Nivelle stated that it was a complete success, which was far from being true.

**13 April 1917** Colonel James A. Logan Jr. (1879-1930), the head of the American military mission in Paris, informed the American war department of an amalgamation scheme being promoted by Nivelle who had met Logan and stressed that time was of the essence in bringing US troops to France and inserting them directly into French units.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sorrie, “Censorship of the Press in France 1917-1918,” 103-04, citing BDIC F res 0270 C, 5-6 Apr 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 639-40.

<sup>18</sup> Major James A. Logan had been in Paris since 1914 as head of an American observer mission. He convinced Painlevé that the Americans would not consent to any form of amalgamation, and so the war minister's final position favored the dispatch of an American division, with the headquarters and infantry regiments, to France as an example of what could be done. This was communicated in a telegram to the French military attaché in Washington on 14 April 1917. See, Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to

Meanwhile, Painlevé sent a note to Joffre about the upcoming mission to America. As the note did not contain any explicit instructions,<sup>19</sup> Joffre viewed the note as giving him carte blanche to determine the future form of cooperation between the US and France.

Le Gouvernement a jugé nécessaire, dans les circonstances actuelles, l'envoi en Amérique d'une de nos plus hautes personnalités militaires, afin de déterminer sans retard et dans leurs grandes lignes les directives de la coopération des forces américaines avec les armées alliées.

Le Gouvernement estime que personne ne saurait être plus qualifié que vous, ni posséder plus d'autorité pour remplir, auprès du Gouvernement américaine, cette si importante et si délicate mission; il m'a chargé de vous communiquer sa décision, dont je suis heureux de nous faire part.

Que la vainqueur de la Marne vienne apporter aux nouveaux soldats de la Liberté le fruit de sa glorieuse expérience, ce sera pour la Grande Nation américaine une marque inappréciable d'amitié et d'estime.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Maréchal, l'assurance de ma haute considération.

Signé: Paul Painlevé

**14 April 1917** The British mission, headed by Balfour, left for the U.S. The British also favored an amalgamation scheme with the integration of American soldiers directly into British units.

Joffre visited Poincaré before his departure and received his marshal's baton.

The French press was finally allowed to mention the upcoming mission but not to include the names of the participants. In addition, the press was ordered to only publish the official communiqué of the mission.<sup>20</sup> It was clear that the government did not want mention of the fact that Joffre was included in the mission.

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the United States, April-May 1917," 643-44.

<sup>19</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 236-37; Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 448.

<sup>20</sup> Sorrie, "Censorship of the Press in France 1917-1918," 104, citing BDIC F res 0270 CG, 14 Apr 1917; On 14 and 17 April 1917 the Press Bureau ordered the French media to publish only the official news release of the Viviani-Joffre Mission and specifically prohibited papers from publishing the "17 names of those on board the French mission to the US"; Sorrie, *ibid.*, 167. On 17 April it was explained at the Press Bureau that "the Mission to the United States cannot be jeopardised by the official release of the names on the council. No commentary is allowed, nor are details of the voyage, the name of the vessel, the place of departure, etc."

## THE FRENCH MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES

**15 April 1917** The French delegation left Paris by train and that evening left Brest with two American journalists on board.<sup>21</sup> The French sailed on the auxiliary cruiser Lorraine II which had been a passenger liner before the war.<sup>22</sup>

The mission had departed rather hastily for America with no fixed game plan. There had not been any discussions between French politicians, military leaders or members of the mission to sketch out the actual aims of the mission.

When they were on board the Lorraine II, Joffre worked in his cabin most of the time and directed Lieutenant-colonel Jean Fabry (1876-1968), his chief of staff, to develop a plan for an independent American army:<sup>23</sup>

“Nous devons indiquer à l’Amérique, en nous aidant de l’expérience de la guerre, les procédés d’organisation d’une armée qui soit bien à elle, rechercher les moyens de la transporter en France, et promettre formellement au Gouvernement américain que, toujours et partout, il trouvera la récompense de son effort dans le respect de l’autonomie de son armée. Elle deviendra, sur les fronts alliés, l’égale de l’armée française et de l’armée britannique. Son chef jouira des mêmes prérogatives que le général Nivelles et le Maréchal Douglas Haig.”

Joffre was aware of Nivelles’s proposal to “amalgamate” American soldiers directly into French units, but he did not think that the US would agree to anything less than an independent army operating on the Western Front.<sup>24</sup> Joffre later explained his rationale.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John Eisenhower, “Genesis of the AEF: Retired French Marshal ‘Papa’ Joffre Helped Shape the American Expeditionary Force in World War I.” *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 13 (Summer 2001), 9; The two American journalists on board were Elmer Roberts of the Associated Press and Lincoln Eyre of the New York World; Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 449; [François de Tesson]. *Notes d’un témoin: Les grands jours de France en Amérique: mission Viviani-Joffre (avril-mai 1917)* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1917), 46.

<sup>22</sup> For more information about the ship, see <https://www.postnavalemilitaire.com/t3525-lorraine-ii-1914-1917> or <http://www.genealexix.fr/genealogie/paquebot-lorraine.php>.

<sup>23</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 239-40.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 417. Joffre believed each country should have its own national army if one was going to demand wartime sacrifice, and he was prepared to offer his help to get America to raise its army and transport it to France as fast as possible. Joffre felt this even before he left France. See Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 239.

<sup>25</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 450.

“Jamais un grand peuple ayant conscience de sa dignité, et l’Amérique moins qu’un autre, ne pourrait admettre qu’on incorporât ses citoyens, en parents pauvres, dans les rangs d’une autre armée que la leur, sous un drapeau étranger.

Il leur fallait créer de toutes pièces une armée dont notre expérience nous permettrait de leur tracer le desin; il faudrait transporter en France les unités de cette armée aussitôt qu’elles seraient prêtes, leur y faire poursuivre l’instruction des cadres et des troupes avec l’aide d’officiers français, et leur confier aussitôt que possible, sous le commandement d’un chef américain.”

The members of the special mission included.<sup>26</sup>

- Joseph Joffre (1852-1931), marshal of France and former commander-in-chief of French forces  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Joffre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Joffre)  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Joffre](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Joffre)
- René Viviani (1863-1925), vice-president of the French council of ministers, minister of justice, former prime minister  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René\\_Viviani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/René_Viviani)  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9\\_Viviani](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Viviani)
- Paul Chocheprat (1855-1928), senior vice-admiral and representative of the French navy  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Chocheprat](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Chocheprat)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Chocheprat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Chocheprat)
- George E. Simon, lieutenant-commander and aide to Admiral Chocheprat
- Marquis de Chambrun (Pierre de Chambrun, 1865-1954), député and later sénateur de la Lozère, a descendant of La Fayette  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_de\\_Chambrun](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_de_Chambrun)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_de\\_Chambrun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_de_Chambrun)
- Émile Hovelaque (1865-1936), inspector-general of public instruction (Inspecteur Général de l'Instruction Publique), translator on the mission  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Émile\\_Hovelaque](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Émile_Hovelaque)
- Joseph Simon, inspector of the ministry of finance. He later remained in the US as chief of the French Financial Agency and the French High Commission in New York and Washington, DC.

Joffre's staff consisted of these five officers.<sup>27</sup>

- Lieutenant-colonel Jean Fabry (1876-1968), chief of staff of Joffre's personal office  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Fabry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Fabry)  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Fabry](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Fabry)
- Lieutenant François de Tesson (1883-1944), aide-de-camp  
[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/François\\_de\\_Tesson](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/François_de_Tesson)
- Lieutenant-colonel Rémond, artillery officer and representative from the French army general staff

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<sup>26</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 448.

- Surgeon-major Lucien Dreyfus (1877-?), personal physician to Joffre and advisor on military hygiene. He was in charge of the French army's medical service and had been close to Joffre since the start of the war.
- Lieutenant-colonel Édouard-Jean Réquin (1879 – 1953), member French army general staff  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Édouard\\_Réquin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Édouard_Réquin)



**16 April 1917** The “Nivelle Offensive” began as French armies attacked along the Chemin des Dames on the western front. There had been political controversy about the attack before it even began,<sup>28</sup> but the failure of the attack led to even more recriminations and a search for a scapegoat (Nivelle) as mutinies erupted in the French ranks during the ensuing summer months. Joffre received news of the French setback during the voyage to America. “L’échec rapide lui fut communiqué par la radio du Lorraine avant même son arrivée aux États-Unis,”<sup>29</sup> and the failure of the Nivelle Offensive convinced him that the war was going to last a long time and that there was sufficient time for a US army to be raised, train and then take its place on the front line. “Nous aurions pu finir la guerre sans le secours des États-Unis mais désormais l’arrivée des contingents américains est devenue indispensable.”<sup>30</sup>

**17 April 1917** During the voyage, Joffre sketched out to de Fabry his general view of the mission.<sup>31</sup>

First, “Admettre le principe fondamental que les Etats-Unis étaient capables d’organiser une grande armée, que tel était leur intérêt et leur désir, et qu’ils prendraient les mesures de tout ordre nécessaires pour le réaliser.”

Second, “Obtenir que l’armée américaine vint combattre à côté de l’armée française. Il est possible d’obtenir l’envoi immédiat d’un corps expéditionnaire; il sera nécessaire de faire admettre le principe de l’envoi successif des grandes unités de l’armée américaine, au fur et à mesure que leur organisation et les possibilités de transport le permettront.”

Then it was up to his staff to put these ideas into writing. Joffre worked with the staff and commented on the draft as the document developed.

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<sup>28</sup> Political-military conflicts arose surrounding what operational control General Nivelle actually was entitled to and to whom he reported. There were also repeated leaks of information regarding the upcoming offensive. By March 1917, Lyautey was trying to undermine Nivelle’s authority, but when he left office, Painlevé became minister of war again in the new Ribot government, and Painlevé also questioned whether the offensive should proceed. See Painlevé’s discussion of events in Painlevé, *Comment j’ai nommé Foch et Pétain*, 45-54. Painlevé claimed that all army group commanders were opposed to the offensive, and on 6 April an extraordinary conseil de guerre was held about the offensive. It was decided to proceed with the proviso that it would be called off if there was no immediate success.

<sup>29</sup> Pierre Lesouëf, “La mission du Maréchal Joffre aux Etats-Unis (avril-mai 1917)” in *Les Etats-Unis dans la Première Guerre mondiale, 1917-1918*. Edited by Claude Carlier and Guy Pedroncini (Paris, 1992), 30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 243-44; Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 645. As Joffre’s staff went to work, “Joffre indicated two principles to follow: the United States should create its own army, and France would help in this task by using its three years’ experience of war.”

**21 April 1917** The British mission arrived in the United States.

**22 April 1917** Initial British discussions led by General G.T.M. Bridges (1871-1939), military liaison, were unproductive.<sup>32</sup> The British wanted American soldiers to fill up depleted British units (amalgamation).<sup>33</sup>

In general, in seeking cooperation with the United States in the war effort, the British had the advantage of a common, English language and the pre-war experience of J.P. Morgan's (1837-1913) financial dealings with England. In addition, Balfour got along very well with Wilson.

Overall, there was a lot of confusion in both the French and British camps on the issue of the future US involvement in the war. Many did not want to see a US army in Europe; some wanted just American weaponry, aid and credits. Other wanted the amalgamation of Americans into French and British units, but "President Woodrow Wilson was determined to send an AEF to Europe."<sup>34</sup> Wilson wanted to influence the eventual peace conference at the end of the war, and he needed an army in Europe to be able to do that. In addition, information had already begun to be leaked to Wilson that the manpower shortage for Britain and France was real.<sup>35</sup>

**24 April 1917** The Lorraine II arrived at Hampton Roads in Virginia and anchored off Fort Monroe in the morning. The French delegation was met by

- Jean Jules Jusserand (1855-1932), French ambassador to Washington
- General Paul Vignal, French military attaché to Washington
- Commander Bernard A. de Blanpré, French naval attaché to Washington
- Spencer Cosby (1867-1962), formerly the U.S. military attaché in Paris and the assigned American translator for Joffre
- Major-General Hugh L. Scott (1853-1934), chief of staff of the US Army
- Admiral Henry T. Mayo (1856-1937), commander in chief of the US Atlantic Fleet

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<sup>32</sup> Bridges sent a letter to major general Joseph E. Kuhn, who was the president of American war college, suggesting that American soldiers be used to fill up the ranks in depleted British units. This was the British idea of "amalgamation." Eisenhower, "Genesis of the AEF," 12.

<sup>33</sup> As noted earlier, that word (amalgamation) was used over and over again in the relationship between France, England and the United States during the war.

<sup>34</sup> David M. Esposito, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 19 (Winter 1989): 131.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

- Rear Admiral Harry M. P. Huse (1858-1942), US navy department
- Breckinridge Long (1881-1958), third assistant US secretary of state
- Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945), the assistant US secretary of the navy

That evening they sailed up the Chesapeake Bay on the Mayflower, the presidential yacht.<sup>36</sup>

**25 April 1917** Everyone in Washington was waiting to see if Congress would vote for conscription which Wilson had proposed. Remember that as of this date, the US Army numbered just 135,000 men, but the US population was 120 million! That meant that there was potentially a lot of manpower available for the allied war effort. If conscription was enacted, there would certainly be an increase in the number of Americans available to fight in the war. The resulting question for the French and British delegations was to work out the details of how to employ that American manpower. Should it be simply companies of American infantryman incorporated directly into English or French battalions (amalgamation), or would the US send larger units, like divisions, to be incorporated into English or French armies, or would the US send an army under the command of an American general?

The French delegation slowly sailed pass Mount Vernon in the morning and then reached the city by noon. Welcomed by Lansing and the British mission, which had already reached Washington, everyone proceeded in a triumphal procession, greeted by enthusiastic crowds, along Pennsylvania Avenue.

The French, while in Washington, stayed with Henry White (1850-1927), a prominent diplomat and former ambassador to Rome and Paris, at the White-Meyer house, 1624 Crescent Place.

**26 April 1917** This was a day of official visits with the first being aa visit to the White House Blue Room. Afterwards, the French went their separate ways. For example, Viviani and Chambrun met with vice president Thomas Marshal (1854-1925); Chocheprat went to the US Navy Department; and Joffre met with representatives from the US War Department.

Joffre gave Baker a copy of the plan that he had sketched out during the voyage.<sup>37</sup> General Scott, chief of staff, and Baker liked the basics of the plan and the recognition

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<sup>36</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 451: "J'ai conservé de ce premier contact officiel avec l'Amérique les meilleurs souvenirs et on verra que cette favorable impression alla chaque jour en s'accroissant."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 453-54; See also <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/d61>.

of America's primary role in the war effort. It was proposed to continue the conversation the next day at the War College, which was then located at Washington Barracks (now Fort McNair) in Washington.

That night there was an official state dinner at the White House.

During the French stay in America, it was Viviani who gave the official statements to the press, and Viviani who handled the public speaking opportunities. He gave over twenty major addresses while in America; Joffre only spoke three very short times (in French) at Mount Vernon, in St. Louis and in Boston. Yet it was Joffre who received the hero's welcome and aroused bitterness on the part of Viviani. "The accolades heaped upon Joffre by the American people had the unforeseen consequence of adding to the natural friction between the French civil and military representatives of the delegation."<sup>38</sup>

**27-28 April 1917** Joffre was at the US Army War College to meet with Baker, Scott, Bliss, and General Joseph Kuhn (1864-1935), president of the War College. They intended to work out a plan for military cooperation. In general, the French were taken aback at the ignorance of Americans about the requirements of modern war and trench war developments in Europe.

Discussion began on the basis of the memorandum that Joffre and his staff had developed during the voyage to the US.

See the document (Memorandum from the French Special Mission, 27 April 1917) in the appendix.

"With a view to showing the American flag on the French front as soon as possible," the memorandum proposed the immediate dispatch of an American division to be trained and equipped by the French and then deployed in the French sector of the Western front. That would be followed by the organization, instruction and eventual deployment of an American army. The city of La Pallice near La Rochelle would serve as the debarkation port and permanent base in France for American soldiers.

A two-hour discussion followed the general points of the French memorandum.

"The three things to be done to secure military cooperation are these:

- (a) The prompt dispatch of one division;
- (b) Commencing simultaneously the organization and training of a large army;
- (c) Formation and dispatching promptly special services (railroad troops, automobiles, etc.)"

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<sup>38</sup> Bruce, "America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States," 420.

It was imperative that “the very first thing is to send a division at once. No matter how small the transport facilities, the sooner we get troops fighting alongside France the quicker we will get results.”

It was also affirmed by Joffre that the American army should function as an independent army under American command.

“Asked whether the American Army should be kept together, the Marshal stated emphatically it should, that it was bad to divide an army.”

The key to these initial discussions was that from the very beginning the assumption was that an independent American army would be deployed on the western front and that it would be deployed in the French sector.

The Americans also agreed with Joffre that it was an important symbol of cooperation for a token division to be sent to France for initial training and then deployment to a quiet part of the front.

See the document (Paraphrase of the Report of a Confidential Conference between Marshal Joffre and General Scott, Chief of Staff, at the Army War College, 27 April 1917) in the appendix.

Eventually, the Joffre proposal was adopted in its entirety, and the Americans seemed pleased that they did not have to make a choice between the Balfour and French missions.<sup>39</sup>

**28 April 1917** The vote on conscription was passed overwhelmingly by the US Congress. The presence of Joffre most likely helped the final push to approve conscription. While staying with Henry White in DC, Joffre attended dinner parties at which he was able to meet with opponents of conscription. His aid in getting conscription passed was important.<sup>40</sup> It was clear that Joffre had supported the idea of conscription, as it was necessary if there was going to be a large American army in France.

But the creation of an American army remained a big “if” at the time. Remember that “The army and war department were so utterly unprepared for war in 1917.” For example, the 1916 size of the US army was only about 108,000. “At the very moment

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<sup>39</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 453-54. Joffre does not go into detail on some of these discussions.

<sup>40</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 407. Bruce noted the importance of Joffre in swaying American support for the war. Joffre may even be partly credited with the surprisingly high votes in the Senate and House for the approval of conscription. *Ibid.*, page 423; Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 649; Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 251.

when war appeared inevitable, the US Army was in no condition to operate in force overseas.” Nothing like an expeditionary force existed in the Army's war plans, programs or organizational repertoire. Nothing like fielding an overseas army had ever been done in the US, and force projection overseas was not a serious element in the Army's standard operating procedures.<sup>41</sup>

The French government, however, was not overly enthusiastic about the idea of an American army. In general, Painlevé was in favor of an American division in France ASAP, but he also ordered Joffre to press the Americans about amalgamation of American men directly into French army units.<sup>42</sup>

**29 April 1917** In the morning Joffre met with about sixty journalists in the Henry White House for about forty-five minutes. Then, at about one o'clock, a large group of dignitaries, including Balfour, Viviani, Lansing and Franklin Roosevelt boarded the *Mayflower* to go to Mount Vernon. There, Viviani spoke, as did Balfour, and then Joffre gave one of his few public speeches:

“Dans l'armée française nous vénérons le nom et la mémoire de Washington. Je salue respectueusement ce grand soldat et je dépose sur sa tombe la palme que nous offrons à nos soldats morts pour la patrie.”<sup>43</sup>

It was about that time that Émile Hovelaque, serving as the translator for the French mission, “undertook to educate Col. House about the perilous military situation on the Western Front during a drive through Rock Creek Park. He explained in vivid terms the grim condition of the Allied forces on the Western Front, and was the first foreign official to convey the urgent French need for reinforcement.”<sup>44</sup> Later, House saw Joffre at the Marshal's request, and Joffre confirmed the translator's statements and advocated for sending an American division to France as soon as possible to signal the US commitment to the war effort.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Esposito, “Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF,” 128-30. “At the very moment when war appeared inevitable, the US Army was in no condition to operate in force overseas.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, citing French War Minister to the General, Military Attaché at Washington, April 14, 1917, WCD 10050-7, Box 152.

<sup>43</sup> *Notes d'un témoin: Les grands jours de France en Amérique*, 115-16.

<sup>44</sup> Esposito, “Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF,” 134, citing an entry in the House Diary, date April 30, 1917, House Papers.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 423.

**30 April 1917** On this day, meetings took place between Wilson and Viviani and between Joffre and Baker while work continued at the War College. Wilson appeared receptive to Viviani's plea for further cooperation.

**1 May 1917** Joffre and Viviani spoke to the U.S. Senate.

**2 May 1917** Joffre, Viviani and Hovelague met with Wilson at lunch. Then later, at four o'clock, Wilson received Joffre in the green room of the White House with Colonel Cosby acting as the interpreter. (Cosby later typed up a record of the conversation.)

See the document (Joffre Wilson Meeting Report, 2 May 1917) in the appendix.

The president expressed the view that the Joffre plan would be acceptable to the U.S., but he worried about its execution and the technical details of transport and supply. Joffre began by reiterating the request for a U.S. division to be deployed as fast as possible as an important morale booster for the French. "afin que le drapeau américain flottât dans le plus bref délai possible côte à côte avec les étendards alliés."<sup>46</sup> He also suggested that American troops land directly in France instead of first stopping over in England because that would entail a complicated double embarkation.<sup>47</sup> That would also keep England further "out-of-the-loop" with regard to use of American soldiers. To Wilson's question about the lack of artillery in the US to equip a division and subsequently an army, Joffre replied that "La France peut fournir tout ce dont vous avez besoin." Given Joffre's experiences in the first months of the war with trying to find competent French commanders—he was rebuked for firing so many generals--Joffre advised Wilson to pick a commander and his generals based on ability and not simply seniority. To get around seniority laws, as Joffre did, one could call promotions "temporary."

While Joffre was on a tour across the United States, his staff would continue to work with the American War College to develop further plans. It was also hoped that an American commander and his staff could be sent to France as soon as possible to begin training. Throughout the conversation with the president, Joffre did not say anything about the idea of amalgamation. From the very beginning of the mission, Joffre had acted unilaterally on this point and did not press the amalgamation option.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 456; Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 254.

<sup>47</sup> Esposito, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF," 134-35, citing Wilson to Baker, May 3, 1917, Baker Papers. "On May 2 Wilson offered Joffre an early shipment of a small AEF (as in the French program) to bolster Allied morale."

<sup>48</sup> Greenhalgh, "The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917," 646.

The Joffre-Wilson interview ended with the president stating that “J’espère que cela que pourra se faire... Nous souhaitons vous donner tout l’appui possible et aussitôt que possible.”<sup>49</sup>

**3 May 1917** Joffre and Viviani went to the House of Representatives. This was their last public appearance in D.C.<sup>50</sup>

The French mission then left for Chicago on a tour to rally public support for the war. The tour included stops in Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Saint Louis, Columbus, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York.

While Joffre was on tour, Réquin and Rémond, from Joffre’s personal staff, “remained in Washington for talks with their counterparts in the U.S. military” about practical details. “They discussed the complete organization of an infantry division—equipment, officers, and the ancillary services (medical, veterinary, engineering, etc.).”<sup>51</sup>

**4 May 1917** The French delegation visited Chicago, a city with a large German population and a city whose mayor, Big Bill Thompson (1869-1944), opposed the French mission. Massive crowds turned out to greet Joffre who, although he rarely spoke, was an important symbol of the French war effort.

**5 May 1917** Joffre was warmly greeted at the Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Chicago, and then a parade in Chicago. Then the delegation left for Kansas City.

That same day Lansing met with Balfour and the British mission, which had not been received as warmly as the French Mission. The British continued to insist that 500,000 American men, not trained soldiers, be shipped to Britain for training and then insertion directly into British army units. When that got nowhere, the British argued that any future US army should be deployed in the British sector (because of the common language) and not the French sector of the front.

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<sup>49</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 260.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 426.

<sup>51</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 647.



**6 May 1917** Kansas City was the next stop on the tour, which then proceeded to Saint Louis.

**7 May 1917** A parade and speeches took place while in St. Louis. The French also stopped briefly in Springfield, Illinois to pay respects at the tomb of Abraham Lincoln.

**8 May 1917** The next stops on the tour were Indianapolis and Columbus.

That day Baker wrote Wilson to update him on plans for sending the first unit of the future American Expeditionary Force (AEF) to France. Major General John Pershing (1860-1948) had been summoned to Washington, informed of the upcoming mission, and directed to select aides to accompany him to France. American soldiers would be armed with French rifles and artillery. Baker also noted that the US should be prepared to send a second division to France as soon as possible. "Wilson approved Baker's program by telephone on May 8, but ever the conscious historian, he sent written confirmation two days later."<sup>52</sup>

**9 May 1917** In New York, after just five hours in Philadelphia, Joffre received a copy of the War College work.

**10 May 1917** In New York, the French stayed at the Henry Clay Frick House at Fifth Avenue and 70<sup>th</sup>-71<sup>st</sup> Streets.

**11 May 1917** A review of the corps of cadets (six hundred men) at West Point was followed by an evening banquet at the Hotel Astoria with the British mission.

**12 May 1917** Lieutenant-Colonel Jean Fabry returned to DC to set up Joffre's last interview.<sup>53</sup> Joffre himself went to Boston while Viviani travelled to Ottawa.

**13 May 1917** Joffre visited Montreal to huge crowds while Viviani went to Boston.

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<sup>52</sup> Esposito, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF," 135, citing Baker to Wilson, May 8, 1917, and Wilson to Baker, May 10, 1917, Baker Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Fabry was called the "Blue Devil of France" and had commanded the 23<sup>rd</sup> battalion of chasseurs à pied in the war. Despite losing a leg and being badly wounded, he refused to retire from service.

**14 May 1914** On this Monday, a meeting between Joffre, Baker, Kuhn and Scott resulted in a final plan of cooperation between the American and French governments. The text of that agreement was essentially the same as had been sketched out by Joffre during the voyage to America. It was not signed by both parties, but the proposal was read aloud, and Baker and Joffre approved each paragraph. It was hoped that the first American division could reach France in time to take part in the Independence Day (4 July) and Bastille Day (14 July) celebrations.

At the end of the meeting, Joffre had the opportunity to meet Pershing who had been designated as the future commander of the American army. Joffre said to him, “Il va commander bientôt à des millions de soldats américains, dites-lui, je vous prie, qu’il peut compter sur moi en toute occasions.”<sup>54</sup>

Pershing later recalled that he had arrived in Washington on May 10<sup>th</sup> and met with Scott. Pershing was under the impression that he would command a division in France but then found out that he would be commander-in-chief. Pershing wrote that his meeting with Joffre took place during his farewell call on the secretary of war, and that Joffre “spoke of the serious situation in France and expressed the hope of seeing American troops on the Western Front very soon.”<sup>55</sup>

Later, Joffre summed up the final meetings as follows in his mission report.<sup>56</sup>

“Le 14 mai, à 14 heures, dans le cabinet de M. Baker, j’avais, avec le Ministre de la guerre, le general Scott et le general Kuhn, une dernière conférence. Un programme définitif était mis en discussion et approuvé par le Ministre de la guerre. Je vais l’examiner, mais il faut noter dès à présent l’heureux changement survenu chez le Ministre et ses chefs de service. J’avais devant moi des hommes éclairés sur toutes les questions et résolus à aboutir. Les mesures déjà prises et les précisions qui m’étaient données me confirmaient dans cette idée que le Président Wilson avait donné des ordres pour que le plan que je lui proposé soit réalisé. Je dirai plus loin dans quelles conditions il pourra l’être, mais on ne peut que se féliciter de la bonne volonté mise par le Gouvernement américain à l’étudier et de l’esprit de décision avec lequel il s’y est rallié. En quinze jours, le Gouvernement américain, qui n’avait à mon arrivée aucun programme et qui se trouvait hésitant en face du problème qui lui était posé, a pris les plus graves solutions. C’est d’un heureux augure pour l’avenir.”

“La conférence avait pour but de faire préciser nettement les intentions du Gouvernement américain.”

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<sup>54</sup> Joffre, *Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917*, 2: 463.

<sup>55</sup> John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1931), 1: 34.

<sup>56</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 261-62.

“A cet effet, une note avait été établie pour servir de base à la discussion. M. Baker, le general Bliss et le general Kuhn avaient en mains la traduction littérale de la note.”

“Elle a été approuvée entièrement par le Ministre dans la forme exacte ou elle figure ici (annexe II). J’ai averti M. Baker que je la communiquerais sous cette forme au Gouvernement français. Elle constitue dans une sorte de convention que le Gouvernement américain s’est engagé à exécuter.”

That night, the French were back on board the Lorraine II, and they departed New York harbor at about 2200.



## EVENTS AFTER THE RETURN OF THE FRENCH MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES

**15 May 1917** During the French mission's return voyage, the French Council of Ministers decided on some major military leadership changes. Phillipe Pétain (1856-1951) replaced Nivelle as commander-in-chief of the French army, and Ferdinand Foch (1851-1929) became chief of the army staff.<sup>57</sup>

**18 May 1917** Pershing received his official orders designating him as the commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).<sup>58</sup>

**20 May 1917** While in route to France, Joffre informed Painlevé of the details of the agreement and insisted in his belief that an American army will be in the field by 1918 as long as France helped out. According to Joffre, "The country and the government merit our complete confidence. We have no Allies who are such friends. There is no sacrifice we should refuse to make in order to have their army join ours on the French front."<sup>59</sup>

See the document (Joffre Excerpt of Report to French Government, 20 May 1917) in the appendix.

In an effort to buttress the weakening morale of the French army, Joffre assured the French government that there would be "no serious difficulty" in transporting an American expeditionary unit to France in time for the 14 July parade in Paris.

Joffre also averred that with respect to the formation "d'une grande armée américaine, il ne fait pas de doute qu'elle réussira complètement." And that it would be "une erreur de ne pas croire qu'en 1918, elle peut être fortement et sérieusement organisée."

Further, the American enthusiasm and support for the French meant that an American army should be deployed in the French sector since the Americans want to play a role "tout particulièrement avec la France."

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<sup>57</sup> Raymond Poincaré, *Au Service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs* (France, 1926). Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917* (1932), 138.

<sup>58</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1977) 2:690.

<sup>59</sup> Esposito, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF," 135, citing Joffre to Painlevé, May 20, 1917.

Finally, Joffre urged the French government to overcome its doubts that an American army (not an amalgamation of American men into French units) would play a major role in the war. “Le pays et le gouvernement meritent notre entière confiance, nous n'avons pas d'alliés qui soient autant nos amis. Il n'est pas de sacrifice que nous ne devions consentir pour amener leur armée aux côtés de la nôtre sur le front français.”

As kind of a reward for Joffre's work, Painlevé named him “inspector General of American troops.” But was everyone in France really happy with the agreement to deploy an American army in France?<sup>60</sup>

In France, the Press Bureau ordered that all news mentioning the eventual installation of an American army headquarters in Paris be prohibited.<sup>61</sup> Recall that earlier any news about the French mission to the United States (or its departure from or return to France) had also been censored.<sup>62</sup>

**24 May 1917** Joffre met individually with Poincaré and Painlevé and strangely exchanged rather little information about the mission. Joffre, who was “tres heureux de son voyage,” expected to be charged with a position to help with services for the arriving American divisions.<sup>63</sup> But when Viviani gave an account of the mission to the Chamber of Deputies, he managed to avoid even mentioning Joffre's name.<sup>64</sup>

It was immediately made clear that the French government was not very enthusiastic of Joffre's prominence in negotiating the agreement and in his relationship with the Americans. Many in the French government would have preferred for Joffre to slip back into the shadows.

That same day the US received a six-page memorandum from Balfour and the British mission containing the summary of the Anglo-American discussions.

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<sup>60</sup> Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 436-37.

<sup>61</sup> Sorrie, “Censorship of the Press in France 1917-1918,” 168, citing BDIC F rés 0270 CG 17 May 1917, SHD 5N 334, 17 May 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., citing BDIC F rés 0270 CG 17 May 1917, SHD 5N 334, 17 May 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 146; Joffre was shunted aside once back in France. Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 654. “On his return home he was received coldly and briefly by both President Poincaré and Painlevé”; See also *ibid.*,” 648. Joffre told his chief of staff “that he was returning to France with an army and, for himself, a provision of contentment.”

<sup>64</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 657, citing *Journal officiel. Débats, Chambre des députés, June 14, 1917*, 1412-13.

See the document (Balfour Memorandum, 24 May 1917) in the appendix:

The memorandum covered areas such as the purchase of military equipment, naval cooperation, merchant shipping, etc., but the key issue was the form of America's future military contribution to the war effort. Assuming that an American army could not be fielded in Europe until the spring of 1918, the British suggested that "recruits could be sent out for training in France or in England so that a really important addition could be made to the fighting man-power of the Allies in the course of the present year and before the winter season hampers military operations." This was a polite way of asking if American troops could be trained and eventually amalgamated into British units. The issue of how to train and deploy American soldiers continued to be an issue up until almost the last days of the war.

**25 May 1917** "Acting Chief of Staff Major General Tasker Bliss wrote to Baker to detail his misgivings about the entire project."<sup>65</sup> That must have been quite a surprising note since the French agreement seemed to have had near unanimous support in America.

**26 May 1917** Pershing received his formal orders from the War Department. The key phrase in the letter of instructions from Baker was that "the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved."<sup>66</sup> This was later confirmed by Wilson who averred that "the fundamental idea should be preserved that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct part of the combined forces."

See the document (Pershing Orders, 26 May 1917) in the appendix.

These orders gave Pershing full power to command all US troops in Europe and to himself determine the nature of any cooperation with the other allied armies. "The decision as to when your command, or any of its parts, is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full discretion in determining the manner of cooperation." Thus, from the very beginning of the AEF, the president, the secretary of war and Pershing all envisioned that the AEF would act as an independent command in accord with the idea that had been proposed by Joffre in his initial French memorandum. For the remainder of the war, Pershing had to constantly battle the French and British to maintain that independence of command.

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<sup>65</sup> Esposito, "Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF," 135.

<sup>66</sup> Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing*, 2: 694-95; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 1: 38.

**30 May 1917** The first reports of mutinies and unrest among French army units reached Paris around this time.<sup>67</sup>

**31 May 1917** Pétain visited Joffre to declare that he was ready to do everything to ensure the success of the agreement with the Americans. Pétain's views on the agreement would change repeatedly in the ensuing year and an half.

**1 June 1917** Foch came to see Joffre who complained that he had heard nothing about what the government was doing with his report and claimed that he was in an uncertain position with regard to General Pershing.<sup>68</sup>

**2 June 1917** Further notice of troops refusing to leave the trenches reached the French government. In the days ensuing, these incidents dominated the government's attention.<sup>69</sup>

**3 June 1917** Joffre received a letter, dated 1 June, appointing him Inspecteur Général des Troupes Américaines, but that position was then later withdrawn because the appointment might lead to command "confusion."

See the document (Painlevé Letter to Joffre, 3 June 1917) in the appendix.

In the letter, Painlevé thanked Joffre for his work with the Americans. He then asked Joffre to continue as a kind of "inspection" intermediary with the Americans because of "L'autorité morale qui s'attache à votre personne et à votre haute situation, ainsi que votre grande expérience de la guerre actuelle, vous permettront, d'accord avec le haut commandement américain, de donner aux troupes de nos allies tous conseils et directives qui leur seront nécessaires pour se préparer moralement et matériellement aux efforts qu'elles sont appelées à fournir."

But Joffre never really had an opportunity to work as the envisioned inspector of American troops. In addition, just days after this letter was sent, the French government, because of "la crise des effectifs" in light of the mutinies, again brought up the idea of integrating small American units or volunteers directly into French units.

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<sup>67</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 147.

<sup>68</sup> Greenhalgh, "The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917," 655.

<sup>69</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 153.



**6 June 1917** André Tardieu (commissaire général aux Affaires de guerre franco-américaines à Washington) sent a note to the US government, “N’y a-t-il pas lieu, en plus de l’accord du 14 mai, d’envisager d’autres forms de collaboration militaire?” It seemed that Tardieu was looking to create a channel of American volunteers that could be amalgamated directly into French units. In addition to contacting the US government, Tardieu also sought out the opinions of Foch and Pétain in support of this idea.

**11 June 1917** Joffre intervened to uphold the agreed-upon American accord. Meeting in Paris, Joffre, Pétain, Foch and Weygand conferred. Pétain initially balked at the training and equipping that the French would have to provide the Americans, and he did not think that it was wise to wait for an American army. He favored amalgamation, but Joffre said that was unacceptable and that if the French went back on the deal, the US would help the British and not the French. They all agreed to abide by the 14 May agreement providing for the autonomy of the American army. That was then transmitted to Tardieu and the French government.<sup>70</sup> “Pétain se convaincu et confirma par écrit, le 14 juin, son accord complete sur la manière de voir du marechal Joffre en ce qui conceme le principe de l'autonomie de l'armée américaine en France, ce qui fut transmis à Tardieu par le gouvernement.”<sup>71</sup>

This would not be the last time that the 14 May agreement for an autonomous U.S. army would be challenged. Joffre repeatedly reminded the French government of the agreement and insisted that the government honor the agreement and not meddle in the independence of Pershing.<sup>72</sup>

**13 June 1917** Pershing and his staff landed in France.<sup>73</sup> About two weeks later, the 1<sup>st</sup> US Infantry division began disembarking at Saint Nazaire, and a parade followed in Paris as part of July 4<sup>th</sup> festivities. This “rapid dispatch of American troops to France was a significant achievement for the Viviani-Joffre mission.”<sup>74</sup> The actual plans for the transport of the division had only been approved on 24 May. Meanwhile, ensuing plans for the transport of up to 120,000 men per month beginning 1 August were being

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<sup>70</sup> Lesouëf, “La Mission du Maréchal Joffre aux États-Unis (avril - mai 1917)”

<sup>71</sup> Lesouëf, “La mission du Maréchal Joffre aux Etats-Unis (avril-mai 1917)” in *Les Etats-Unis dans la Première Guerre mondiale, 1917-1918*, 33-34.

<sup>72</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 241. “Il ne peut pas faire doute qu’il a été le véritable créateur de l’armée américaine.” Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 1: 33, “I was decidedly against our becoming a recruiting agency for either the French or British.”

<sup>73</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L’année trouble, 1917*, 164.

<sup>74</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 649.

formulated.<sup>75</sup> Yet, even as Pershing and his aides “were boarding the *Baltic* for the trip to France, General Bliss continued to act as if there were no Franco-American protocol governing the rapid transportation of soldiers to France.”<sup>76</sup> It was also only that day that the French Press Bureau allowed Pershing’s arrival to be announced in the media.<sup>77</sup>

**18 June 1917** After the meeting with Foch and Pétain, Joffre wrote to the minister of war insisting that the American agreement be followed.<sup>78</sup>

See the document (Joffre Note to French Government, 18 June 1917) in the appendix.

Tardieu, whose job in Washington was to coordinate the American war effort with that of the French, had said that he had the impression that for the American government the 14 May agreement did not have “le caractère d’un engagement positif.” Joffre objected and repeated that it was a convention that “le Gouvernement américain s’est engagé à exécuter.” Both sides had agreed on the autonomy of the American army, and “il faut craindre d’en compromettre le succès.”

The issue about the autonomy of the American army in France, it seemed, had again been resolved in favor of Joffre’s plan agreed on 14 May

**20 June 1917** Tardieu recognized that after the discussions between Joffre, Foch and Pétain, the government recognized the full autonomy of the American army in France. “Il convenait de laisser à l’armée américaine en France son autonomie entière.”<sup>79</sup>

**3 September 1917** The question of “la crise des effectifs” in France again was raised as Pétain “trouve le général Pershing inexpérimenté et difficile à manier.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Esposito, “Woodrow Wilson and the Origins of the AEF,” 136.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Sorrie, “Censorship of the Press in France 1917-1918,” 169, citing BDIC F rés 0270 C, 12 Jun. 1917.

<sup>78</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 287-89.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L’année trouble, 1917*, 266.

**18 October 1917** Poincaré noted in his memoirs that on this day Hovelaque spoke with him about the behavior of Viviani on the America trip.<sup>81</sup>

**October 1917** That month Joffre met with Foch and offered his complete support for Foch becoming overall commander of the allied armies, but Foch felt that the British would only accept Joffre as commander-in-chief. Foch later traveled to London to see if he could get support for creating the post of commander-in-chief of all the allied armies in France.

Meanwhile, Joffre visited Pershing at Chaumont and then the 1<sup>st</sup> US infantry division at Gondrecourt. Over three days of talks, he agreed on the necessity of American army autonomy and noted that that was something that Baker continued to support.<sup>82</sup> See the laudatory comments made by Pershing and Baker for Joffre's support of the fledgling American army in the document (Baker Letter to Joffre September 1917) in the appendix. The autonomy of the American army was soon to be questioned again.

**14-16 November 1917** Another in a series of French ministerial crises occurred, and as a result, Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929) became premier.<sup>83</sup> Within a week or so, Clemenceau had firmly grabbed the reins of power and no longer sought out advice from Poincaré or others in his cabinet. In succeeding days, weeks and months, Poincaré would hear nothing from Clemenceau as to events or policy decisions.<sup>84</sup>

Joffre did not have the greatest relationship with Clemenceau, and whatever relationship he did have would be put to the test in the following month.

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<sup>81</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 319. Hovelaque "me rapporte des scènes inénarrables faites par Viviani en Amérique dans son voyage avec Joffre, où Hovelacque était interprète. Viviani avait constamment des crises de nerfs. Il éclatait en fureur et jetait, à tort et à travers, des mots violents, souvent orduriers. Un jour, parce qu'un programme annonçait un discours de Joffre et que lui, Viviani, voulait parler seul; un autre jour, parce qu'il n'était pas à la place qui lui convenait ou parce que Wilson lui faisait trop attendre une entrevue." Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 266.

<sup>82</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 289-91.

<sup>83</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 366-77.

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Poincaré, *Au Service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs* (France, 1926). Volume X, *Victoire et armistice, 1918* (1932), 10; On 11 January 1918, Poincaré remarked that few ministerial councils were held anymore and that Clemenceau seemed to largely work one-on-one with individual ministers or by himself.

**December 1917** With Clemenceau in power the question of “amalgamation” arose again. This was probably the most important month for the existence of an autonomous American army in Europe. There were several issues that arose in regard to the deployment of the American army.

One such issue was Pétain’s belief that because of the Russian Revolution, there was the danger of an imminent transfer of German troops to the western front. Because of that, the French would need more manpower. Pétain believed that the “l’amalgame des américains; ce sera difficile mais c’est indispensable.” Pershing, of course, opposed any amalgamation of American units and raised the issue with Wilson and the other heads of state. Joffre intervened vigorously to support Pershing and in doing so he aroused the anger of Clemenceau who eventually forbade Joffre from any further interference in state or military affairs, but there was no amalgamation of American men into the French army.<sup>85</sup>

**2 December 1917** Lloyd-George again put forward a proposal to mix American soldiers directly into the British army at a company or even battalion level since US army was not yet ready to take the field. This was basically a revival of the ideas from the earlier Balfour mission. Pershing opposed this and “told Mr. House that Mr. Lloyd George’s plan would not do at all.”<sup>86</sup>

**10 December 1917**, Joffre wrote out a note on the issue of the American army and allied command. (See below.)<sup>87</sup>

Another issue that month was Clemenceau’s distrust of Pershing’s abilities, and he actually initiated conversations with Colonel House to obtain expanded French control of the American army.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Lesouëf, “La Mission du Maréchal Joffre aux États-Unis (avril - mai 1917)”; Pétain made strong representations about the question of amalgamating American manpower into Allied units in the winter of 1917-18. The problem of autonomy again arose under Clemenceau. Pershing met with Joffre about how to proceed. Joffre personally intervened in support of Pershing. Although Clemenceau loathed Joffre, he respected Joffre when it came to dealing with the Americans. The premier backed off, not wanting to disturb US-French relations. See Bruce, “America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States,” 438.

<sup>86</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 255-56.

<sup>87</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 342-51.

<sup>88</sup> Yves-Henri Nouailhat, review of *Le temps des Américains. Le concours américain à la France en 1917-1918*, by André Kaspi, in *Revue d’Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine Année 27* (1980): 526. “Dès le 3 décembre 1917, Clemenceau parle à House de la nécessité de « l’amalgame ». « La politique française, note André Kaspi, vise à obtenir le contrôle du Corps expéditionnaire.”

A final issue was that Clemenceau, on taking power, weakened the activity in the direction of a unified allied command under Foch and Pétain.<sup>89</sup>

**22 December 1917** Joffre was warned about a telegram from Jusserand, in Washington, to the French government, and he decided to write a note to Clemenceau.

See the document (Joffre to Clemenceau, 24 December 1917) in the appendix:

The telegram claimed that President Wilson, in the face of an upcoming German offensive, was willing to agree to the demand of England and France for the immediate amalgamation of American forces with those of France and England, preferably at the regiment or company level. This was in direct contravention of the French-American agreement negotiated in May 1917. Joffre immediately composed his note to Clemenceau saying how bad any amalgamation was from a political and military point of view and that what Jusserand was reporting was in complete opposition to the agreement worked out by him with the Americans. It was imperative that “l’armée américaine en France conservât son autonomie et que toutes ses unités demeurent constamment sous le contrôle du commandant en chef américain.” Anything other than an independent American army “serait profondément regrettable par les conséquences qu’il peut avoir sur la valeur de la coopération de la France et de l’Amérique, non seulement pendant la guerre, mais aussi après la guerre.” This was the last letter that he would write to the French government about the American army as it infuriated Clemenceau.<sup>90</sup>

**25 December 1917** de Fabry met with Clemenceau, read Joffre’s note and explained the rationale. Clemenceau remarked, “Ah! Non, fit-il, il me cause en ce moment assez d’ennuis avec son autonomie de l’armée américaine.” This was the moment when Poincaré told Joffre to not get involved in military or political matters.

**26 December 1917** The conflict between Pétain and Pershing came to a head as the latter refused any amalgamation of US soldiers into French units. Clemenceau thought he had an agreement worked out with Colonel House, but then Pershing found out and asked for the support of Joffre who wrote the previously-mentioned note to Clemenceau. That was the long letter dated 24 December. Poincaré recounted later

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<sup>89</sup> Painlevé, *Comment j’ai nommé Foch et Pétain*, 226-32.

<sup>90</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 271-272, citing a cable from Baker. “Both English and French are pressing upon the President their desires to have your forces amalgamated with theirs by regiments and companies.”

that Clemenceau stated that Joffre should not encourage Pershing to oppose Pétain, "Mais il n'aurait pas dû encourager Pershing dans son opposition à Pétain."<sup>91</sup>

Poincaré agreed to see Joffre. In addition, Clemenceau asked that Pershing be removed from head of the US army and insisted that a letter be sent from Poincaré to Wilson about the amalgamation of American soldiers in French units.

At 6:30 PM that day, the comité de guerre met, and Clemenceau explained Pétain's difficulties with Pershing. Pétain explained that because of the lack of horses and artillery for the Americans, they will not be useful before 1919, and so the immediate solution was to place American soldiers in French units. Pétain's solution was to take American regiments and develop them within French divisions. Supposedly, Haig had also spoken to Pershing about integrating regiments in English divisions. Pétain insisted that this was simply a process of temporary instruction and would be provisional until the Americans were ready for their own autonomy. Clemenceau proposed, and the committee supported, that Poincaré write to Wilson.<sup>92</sup>

**27 December 1917** Since Clemenceau did not want to deal with Joffre, Poincaré responded to Joffre's letter, which had provoked a storm of protest in the comité de guerre. Poincaré met Joffre at 2.30 in the afternoon and later recounted that Joffre arrived for the meeting a little disturbed. Joffre confirmed that he had not seen Pershing in two months, that he had done nothing to encourage Pershing's opposition to Pétain, but that Pershing had long known Joffre's opinion that he had developed back in America. Joffre continued to believe that it was dangerous to not let the American army enjoy its autonomy because that would dampen American enthusiasm for the war. Joffre also found that Pétain had a tendency to want to absorb the American army permanently and not just for temporary training. Joffre promised to not play Pershing against Pétain.

Poincaré sent a draft of the proposed Wilson letter (very long, two pages) to Clemenceau in which Poincaré noted the lack of artillery and horses and the need for combat experience for American soldiers. In essence, he proposed a kind of apprenticeship in which American regiments would be "en-divisioned" in French divisions. Further, Poincaré claimed that Wilson had already agreed to this, but there had been "Some difficulties" between the general in chief of the French armies and general Pershing.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume IX, *L'année trouble, 1917*, 432. As Poincaré recounted, Clemenceau felt that he had "tout arrangé avec House. Mais House a commis la maladresse de parler à Pershing. Cela a tout gâté." *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 436-38.

**2 January 1918** Pershing again discussed with the British the issue of individual American battalions serving in British brigades and also questioned the amount of available British shipping to bring American soldiers to Europe.<sup>94</sup>

**3 January 1918** Poincaré “avait mission de demander au Maréchal de ne plus intervenir dans l’affaire en cours.”<sup>95</sup>

Wilson refused to oppose Pershing on the matter of the autonomy of the AEF. Baker and Bliss insisted that Pershing be informed of the intervention of the French government which led to an exchange of letters between Pershing and Clemenceau.

**8 January 1918** In a letter from this date, President Wilson stated that the issue of the future use of American troops should be discussed in the Supreme War Council with General Bliss as the US representative. It was a very evasive presidential statement. Basically, Wilson refused to oppose Pershing on the matter of the autonomy of the US army.<sup>96</sup>

See the document (Wilson Letter to Poincaré, 8 January 1918) in the appendix:

Wilson stated that even if the future use of American soldiers was discussed in the Supreme War Council, the president would not necessarily commit to following the determination of the council, “The judgement of the Council with regard to it [the use of American troops] will, I need hardly assure you, be conclusively influential with the government of the United States.” In other words, even if the council chose to advocate the direct amalgamation of American troops in French units, the US was not going to commit to that.

**26 January 1918** An informal visit to Joffre “confirm[ed] [Pershing’s] objection to amalgamation” in either the French or British armies. Joffre pointed out that the British had never directly incorporated Canadians, Australians, Indians, etc. into British units.<sup>97</sup>

The issue of amalgamation seemed to have been resolved again in favor of not doing anything.

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<sup>94</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 268-269. At just about the same time both Pétain and Clemenceau wanted American regiments in French divisions.

<sup>95</sup> Fabry, *Joffre et son destin*, 294.

<sup>96</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 26-27.

<sup>97</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 305.

**24 March 1918** In the midst of the German spring offensive (Operation Michael), Poincaré, in reflecting on Pétain's pessimism, remarked, "Où est le beau sang-froid de Joffre!"<sup>98</sup>

**25 March 1918** Pershing went to meet Pétain and promised that "any of our divisions that could be of service were at his disposal, but with the qualifying remark that of course we should look forward eventually to their assembly under their own commander."<sup>99</sup>

**26 March 1918** At the Doullens conference, the French and British agreed that Foch would now coordinate the actions of all the armies in the battle to save Amiens. Joffre supported that appointment of Foch as the single commander, and he met with Poincaré and advised him to support the appointment of Foch.<sup>100</sup>

**27 March 1918** There were renewed requests from the British for American troops. The Italians were also now asking for American troops.

**28 March 1918** Pershing, without prompting, met Foch and offered American troops to stem the German offensive, "tout ce que nous avons et vôtre, pour en disposer comme vous le voudrez." General Bliss also agreed with Pershing's offer, and, as a result, the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> infantry division was stationed in front of Montdidier.<sup>101</sup> As Pershing later recalled the origin of that famous quote about his willingness to offer all American support in the hour of crisis, "After Doullens conference, I motored to Clermont on the

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<sup>98</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 85.

<sup>99</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 356-57.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., on 28 March, the news that Pershing had offered to move American troops to the threatened sectors reached Poincaré, who had called Joffre to come meet with him. Joffre warned of the danger if Amiens fell and also of his concerns about Pétain. Joffre advised Poincaré to put Foch in command of Pétain.

<sup>101</sup> *Les deux batailles de la Marne* (Paris: Payot, 1929), 116. During Operation Michael, Pershing and Bliss offered whatever American aid needed, Bliss was quoted in the Marshal Foch memoirs. Ferdinand F. Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre de 1914-1918* (Paris, Librairie Pion, 1931), 2: 33. "Nous sommes ici pour nous faire tuer, qu'attendez-vous pour user de nous?"; See also, Pershing's offer of US help in the face of the German offensive. "Infanterie, artillerie, aviation, tout ce que nous avons est à vous. Disposez-en comme il vous plaira." (Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing*, 2: 876 quoting Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 364-65. This was at the same time that the English government again tried to get American troops inserted into British units.



28<sup>th</sup> to see Foch and reaffirm commitment to supplying troops. [The quote was] written up in much better French than I used.”<sup>102</sup>

**14 April 1918** England accepted the appointment of Foch as commander in chief of all allied troops.<sup>103</sup>

**2 May 1918** At the Supreme War Council meeting, discussion of shipping men and machine gun units from the United States to Europe resumed. Pershing felt that the French and British simply wanted men for their armies. Clemenceau clearly “wanted smaller American units to be put in French divisions.”<sup>104</sup>

As Clemenceau later recounted, “je ne cessais de harceler le commandant allié pour le prier d’envoyer au combat, dans nos rangs, les premiers régiments américains jugés suffisamment instruits, en vue de nous soulager, au plus pressant d’une crise d’effectifs comme nos armées n’en avaient encore jamais connu.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite the pressure from Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Orlando, Pershing “said that the war could not, in my opinion, be saved by feeding untrained American recruits into the Allied armies.”<sup>106</sup>

**20 May 1918** Pershing visited Pétain to bring up the subject of gathering the American divisions into an army, but Pétain still wanted American battalions assigned to French divisions.<sup>107</sup>

**31 May 1918** Preparations for abandoning Paris were put in place as the Germans advanced during their spring offensive.<sup>108</sup> Poincaré remarked bitterly that Clemenceau

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<sup>102</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 364.

<sup>103</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 120.

<sup>104</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 26.

<sup>105</sup> Georges Clemenceau, *Grandeurs et Misères d'une Victoire* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1930), 47.

<sup>106</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 28.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 54.

<sup>108</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 203.

had assumed almost dictatorial powers.<sup>109</sup> “Et ni Conseil des ministres, ni Comité de guerre. Ni les ministres, ni moi, nous ne savons rien. Clemenceau se conduit en véritable dictateur.”<sup>110</sup>

**7 June 1918** Foch said that the American support against the German offensive exceeded all of his hopes. There were already five U.S. divisions at the front, and these were divisions of 25,000 men, which were much larger and stronger than French divisions. Plus, the Americans were fighting well.

Poincaré went to meet Pétain, who confirmed that his rapport with Pershing was excellent and that the Americans were fighting well.<sup>111</sup> Note that during the repeated attempts to get more American manpower to France in June 1918, “Clemenceau half-joked to Poincaré that there was no point in using Joffre because his 1917 promise of American autonomy was causing so many problems.”<sup>112</sup>

**10 July 1918** Pershing visited Foch to demand the fastest possible formation of an American army given the rapid increase in the number of US troops present in France.<sup>113</sup>

**24 July 1918** As a result of a high command meeting, the US army was given the task of an eastward attack in the region of the Woëvre, which lies on the right bank of the Meuse River and which forms part of Lorraine plateau. (Pershing did not want to have the Americans sent to Italy).

**17 August 1918** Pershing was given formal attack orders for what would later become known as the St. Mihiel offensive, but the original orders would later be modified and scaled back as some US divisions were still serving for Haig and the British army.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See Poincaré’s diary entry for 23 April, “La légende de Clemenceau est un force nationale.” Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 137.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>112</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 656; see also, Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 159.

<sup>113</sup> Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la guerre de 1914-1918*, 2: 131.

<sup>114</sup> Remember that not all US soldiers served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Army. Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la guerre de 1914-1918*, 2: 194-95.

Even as the 1<sup>st</sup> US army was being created at this time, Lloyd-George was still trying to get more US divisions retained for use by the British.

Late that month, Foch attempted to split up the American army and change the previously-agreed-upon focus on the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient. Pétain proposed first reducing the salient and then immediately afterwards moving the AEF to the northwest to take part in the Meuse Argonne campaign

**5 October 1918** Rumors reached Paris that Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were seeking an armistice based on Wilson's fourteen points.<sup>115</sup>

**21 October 1918** Clemenceau wrote Foch and expressed his displeasure with the lack of progress of the American army in the Meuse-Argonne campaign and demanded that Pershing be removed from command.<sup>116</sup>

**31 October 1918** News spread that the Ottoman Empire had signed an armistice, and that one with Austria imminent (signed 3 November).<sup>117</sup>

**11 November 1918** On this Monday, the Armistice that ended the war was signed and went into effect at 11 AM Paris time.<sup>118</sup>

**13 November 1918** Pershing visited Joffre at L'École de guerre and presented him with the U.S. Distinguished Service Medal. "It gave me the greatest pleasure to make this presentation."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Clemenceau spoke of the Alsace boundaries of 1792 not those of 1870. Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 377-78.

<sup>116</sup> Foch recognized the difficulties faced by the US army. Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre de 1914-1918*, 2: 251-52.

<sup>117</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 398-400.

<sup>118</sup> Foch felt that war should have continued until the German army completely capitulated. Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 413.

<sup>119</sup> Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2: 396.

**14 December 1918** President Wilson arrived in Paris.<sup>120</sup>

**19 December 1918** At one o'clock in the afternoon, a reception for Joffre was held at L'Académie française with Poincaré and Wilson in attendance.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, Volume X, *Victoire et armistice*, 1918, 436.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 454-55.

## CONCLUSION

After Joffre's removal from the post of commander in chief of the French armies in December 1916, it looked like his active participation in the war effort was over. But he would go on to play a further important part in bringing about the victory of the allies in World War I. His inclusion in the French mission to the United States in May 1917 was decisive in defining the future role to be played by a US army in France.

When Joffre set sail on the *Lorraine II*, the American army was miniscule, numbering just about 125,00 men with maybe another 180,00 in national guard units. That paled in comparison with the armies engaged on the western front in Europe (French - 2.8 million, British - 1.7 million, Italians - 2 million, Germans - 2.5 million). Yet, by the time of the armistice in November 1918, the American Expeditionary Force in France numbered over 1.9 million men.<sup>122</sup> That was an impressive achievement, and it might not have happened were it not for the efforts of Joffre.

When the United States entered the war in April 1917, many in the French and British military hierarchy and civilian governments felt that there was no way that an American army could be created and equipped in time to play an important role on the battlefield, and as a result the best thing was for the Americans to just send men to England and France to be directly inserted in French and British units (amalgamation). Few thought that the Americans could rapidly field an army in less than a year, "En général, on ne croit pas à l'aptitude de l'armée de Terre américaine à former rapidement une grande armée nationale et l'opinion ne retient que sa totale impréparation actuelle."<sup>123</sup>

Joffre felt differently and opposed the idea of amalgamation. Upon his arrival in America, he proposed that an independent American army should be created, trained and deployed into the front lines in the French sector of the front. As Joffre explained, "Jamais un grand peuple ayant conscience de sa dignité, et l'Amérique moins qu'un autre, ne pourrait admettre qu'on incorporât ses citoyens, en parents pauvres, dans les rangs d'une autre armée que la leur, sous un drapeau étranger."<sup>124</sup> This idea of an independent American army fighting alongside the armies of France and England aligned perfectly with president Wilson's desire to play a role in the postwar settlement, and for Wilson to do play that role, he would need an army that had played a major part in the defeat of Germany.

Joffre's promise of autonomy for the American army was expressed in Pershing's instructions. "The underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.ctevans.net/WorldWar1/Data/Visuals/Armistice.html>

<sup>123</sup> Lesouëf, "La mission du Maréchal Joffre aux Etats-Unis (avril-mai 1917)" in *Les Etats-Unis dans la Première Guerre mondiale, 1917-1918*, 28.

<sup>124</sup> Op. cit.

States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved.”<sup>125</sup> Those instructions were similar to those given to the British commander in chief at the start of the war in August 1914.<sup>126</sup> “In this connection I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an entirely independent one, and that you will in no case come in any sense under the orders of any allied General.”<sup>127</sup>

And so, it should not have been surprising that the United States would field its own army under its own control; what is rather surprising was the continued demands through 1918 from the British and French for an amalgamation of American men into their units or for some kind of merging of American units into the French and British armies with no “American” army on the Western Front. Those demands were proven to be completely unrealistic. When it came to the employment of American manpower in the allied war effort, it was Joffre who was the realistic one. What was the better option, the amalgamation of a couple of hundred thousand men into the British or French armies or the deployment of a multimillion-man army on the Western Front (to counter the transfer of German troops from the Eastern to the Western front in 1918)?

As part of the French mission, Joffre also served as an important public relations figure to rally American support for the upcoming war effort. On the public relations tour of America that was part of the mission, Joffre was absolutely an important symbol of French resistance against the Germans. Joffre was received with standing applause everywhere he went (even in Chicago which had a strong pro-German population) as he built American support for the war. That support for the war meant support for conscription and the drafting of millions of men to serve overseas.

And when it came to military matters and the French mission, Joffre and his staff helped the US War Department realize the enormity of the task that faced the US army with its entrance into the war. Though the French military men on the mission were surprised by the complete unpreparedness of the American high command for the war, Joffre and his staff worked to educate the Americans in just a few days. They began the process of setting up a structure that would send millions of men to France.

Once the US-French agreement was reached and approved on 14 May, it was repeatedly challenged by both British and French military men and politicians. But every

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<sup>125</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> Greenhalgh, “The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917,” 653-54.

<sup>127</sup> Field Marshall Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916) to General Sir John French (1852-1925), “Instructions handed to Field Marshal Sir John French shortly before his departure for France with the BEF, August 1914: Accessed at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1030009261>

time questions arose about amalgamation, or about the independence of the AEF or about changing any terms of the agreement, Joffre was there to remind everyone of the importance of the American army and the importance of honoring and upholding the agreement that had been reached. Though somewhat diminished after his removal from command, Joffre's moral authority was still important and something on which Pershing or Foch could count on numerous occasions. As much as certain French politicians, including Clemenceau, disliked Joffre, they had to acknowledge his relationship with the Americans was important, and that the Americans were important to winning the war.

In about a year and a half from April 1917 to November 1918, the United States mobilized over five million men for the war, and over two million were shipped to France to fight. That was an impressive undertaking, and Joffre had the foresight to understand what the United States was capable of achieving when he took part in the French mission in May 1917. That American army had a substantial impact on the battlefield and tipped the scales of war in favor of the allies. "Sans le concours américain, la France en particulier, l'Entente en général, n'aurait pas pu remporter la victoire sur l'Allemagne."<sup>128</sup>

Polemicists, scholars and historians have had different assessments of the importance of the French mission, Joffre's role in the mission and Joffre's subsequent role in supporting the autonomy of the AEF in France. Some have counted the mission as something more than a failure and something less than a success.<sup>129</sup> Others have asserted that Joffre and the mission "had made a great contribution to eventual allied victory."<sup>130</sup> Another recent historian concluded, that "D'après les documents d'archives, l'importance du rôle de Joffre n'est pas douteuse."<sup>131</sup> It is kind of interesting that in Joffre's own memoirs, he says very little about this work with the Americans, yet it might have just been his most important contribution to the allied victory.

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<sup>128</sup> Kaspi, André. "Le temps des Américains. Le concours américain à la France en 1917-1918" [compte-rendu] *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine Année* (1980): 526.

<sup>129</sup> Greenhalgh, "The Viviani-Joffre Mission to the United States, April-May 1917," 658.

<sup>130</sup> Eisenhower, "Genesis of the AEF," 12.

<sup>131</sup> Lesouëf, "La Mission du Maréchal Joffre aux États-Unis (avril - mai 1917)."





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## **APPENDIX: LIST OF PDF DOCUMENTS**

### **Memorandum from the French Special Mission, 27 April 1917**

French Memorandum.pdf

Source: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War, Volume I, pp 44-45

[https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/pg\\_44](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/pg_44)

[https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/pg\\_45](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/pg_45)

Also, at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/d61>

### **Paraphrase of the Report of a Confidential Conference between Marshal Joffre and General Scott, Chief of Staff, at the Army War College, 27 April 1917**

War College Report.pdf

Source: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War, Volume I

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/d60>

### **Joffre Wilson Meeting Report, 2 May 1917**

Joffre Wilson Meeting Report.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 253-60

### **Joffre Excerpt of Report to French Government, 20 May 1917**

Joffre Excerpt of Report to French Government.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 278-80

### **Balfour Memorandum, 24 May 1917**

Balfour Memorandum.pdf

Source: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 2, The World War, Volume I, Document 96

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1917Supp02v01/d96>

### **Pershing Orders, 26 May 1917**

Pershing Orders.pdf

Source: Vandiver, Frank E. Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing. 2 vols. College Station: Texas A & M University press, 1977, pp. 694-95

### **Painlevé Letter to Joffre, 3 June 1917**

Painlevé Letter to Joffre.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 285-86

### **Joffre Note to French Government, 18 June 1917**

Joffre Note to French Government.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 287-89

**Baker Letter to Joffre September 1917**

Baker Letter to Joffre.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 290-91

**Joffre to Clemenceau, 24 December 1917.** There are two versions of this letter. The Fabry version is not the complete letter.

Joffre to Clemenceau from Poincaré.pdf

Source: Poincaré, Raymond. Au Service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs (France, 1926). IX, L'année trouble, 1917. (1932), pp. 430-432

Joffre to Clemenceau from Fabry.pdf

Source: Fabry, Jean. Joffre et son destin. Paris, 1934, pp. 292-93

**Wilson Letter to Poincaré, 8 January 1918**

Wilson Letter to Poincaré.pdf

Source: Poincaré, Raymond. Au Service de la France: Neuf années de souvenirs (France, 1926). X, Victoire et armistice, 1918. (1932), pp. 26-27