Defense and Armed Forces: the End of the Nuclear Monarchy?

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The Vth Republic originated in the troubles of the Algerian War (1958 crisis) and the Defense policy of the Vth Republic is inaugurated by a divorce between political power and the Army (1961 putsch). With the leadership of General de Gaulle, Vth Republic gives birth to a Nuclear Monarchy, where the President benefits from a domaine réservé concerning defense and foreign policies thanks to the nuclear privilege of the President (Cohen 1986). Since 1958, France has been considered as the ideal type of strong state in defense and foreign affairs (Katzenstein 1976, Risse-Kapen 1991).

Thus the first point that should be highlighted is that there really is a defense model of the Vth Republic, a particular trajectory in national defense policy after 1958 that distinguished France from other European countries. The Gaullist legacy (Gordon 1993) took root progressively in France, to the point that it produced a “defense consensus” (Dobry 1986). The fundamental orientations remained particularly stable until the mid 1990s, notably under Francois Mitterrand. The French military model is built as such on political, diplomatic, strategic and industrial logics that are complementary and form a particularly coherent model.

- The primacy of executive power in what is the preserve -domaine réservé- of the President of the Republic, foreign policy and defense (Cohen 1994, Koenig-Archipugi 2003).
- Strict political control of the Armed forces with an uncontested subordination of the military to… the President. Vertical organization of the ministry of Defense with a formal (1982 decree), strategic (the three branches have nuclear weapons), budgetary and political equality of the three branches (Army, Air Force, Navy).
- Armed forces as an incarnation of national sovereignty: no integration in multinational forces, systematic national command structures, conscription. Defense
policy is based on the political principal of national independence and the strategic principle of autonomous decisions. It is guided above all by a political logic: defense policy in the service of the greatness of France and its rank in the world.

- On the military level, this policy rests on the implementation of a national nuclear deterrent strategy. The strategy and military tools are subordinated to the nuclear deterrent, cornerstone of French defense policy (Ruhe 1976, Yost 1985).

- An arms policy seeking autarchy through national production, in particular in the sectors considered decisive for strategic autonomy (Nuclear, Space, Aerospace). The system of arms production is based on administrative regulatory methods organized by the Délégation générale pour l’Armement (DGA) of the defense ministry. DGA is the integrator of the French military system (Kolodziej 1984, Hébert 1995).

- Since its withdrawal from the integrated military structure in 1966 France maintains a difficult relationship with NATO around the dialectic between national independence and Atlantic solidarity. Though interpretations diverge on the French attitude toward NATO and European defense, two elements of French policy can be distinguished, which can at times be complementary, and at others contradictory: the worry of rebalancing the Atlantic Alliance in favor of the Europeans, the will to create the most autonomous European defense possible within NATO (Bozo 1991, Menon 2000). If these axes converge a priori toward the creation of a European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance such as the European Security and Defense Identity, France favors European defense structures outside of NATO.

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**Defense and Armed Forces vis-à-vis the logics and dynamics of the Vth Republic**: On the one hand, Armed forces and Defense policy are exemplar of the logics and dynamics of the
Vth Republic: statism and economic dirigism, weakness of the Parliament, power of technocratic elite (*Ingénieurs de l’armement*). On the other hand, there is a dubious exceptionality of the national security policy in the French political system: priority of defense spending “sanctuarization” of the military budget; political consensus; very short decision-making processes around the President and a lack of interministerial negotiations; military offices (*cabinets militaires*) in the Elysée, Matignon and Hôtel de Brienne.

This model is confronted since the middle of the 1980s with numerous tensions and drivers for change that have entailed a profound transformation of the French armed forces and a paradigm shift of the defense policy.

- An exogenous shock with the end of the Cold War and the 1991 Gulf War (strategic revolution)
- Peace dividend and the financial crisis of the ministry of Defense
- Globalization of the arms market and production
- Technological progress (Revolution in military affairs)
- Decline of the mass Armed forces
- Internationalization of the use of force and multinationalization of Armed forces
- Developments of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP)

At the fiftieth anniversary of the Fifth Republic, with the creation of the “Balladur committee” in charge of proposing constitutional reform, we are at the ideal time to evaluate and discuss these changes. Indeed, President Sarkozy has proclaimed the end of the domaine reserve and his commitment to increase the power of the Parliament in Foreign and Defense
issues, notably concerning Foreign military interventions. Furthermore, President Sarkozy has appointed a committee in charge of writing a new White paper on national security (March 2008) that will give guidelines for the future Military Program Law (summer 2008) in charge of implementing a new Armed forces format.

Is the “domaine réservé” -meaning the presidential dominance and the weakness of the French Parliament- a myth? Is the Nuclear Monarchy still a relevant conception to speak of French defense policy-making? Is it the end of the Gaullist legacy? What are the main and profound changes affecting the formulation of the French security policy? What are the dimensions of the policy that have changed and what are the parameters that remains stable? Are the dynamics affecting Defense and Armed forces the same than those that have been affecting the French policy-making system at whole? What about the exceptionality of defense policy?

In the following I argue that strong transformations have affected French defense policy since 1958. Since 1991 France has accomplished in a decade or so what some may consider a revolution in its defense policy (Bureau 1997, Heisbourg 2003) by the biases of progressive adaptation (1991-1995) and of a large reform, decided on by President Chirac in 1996 (Irondelle 2003) which affected all at once nuclear strategy, military doctrine, the relationship with NATO, arms production, the organization of the armed forces, the transition to a professional army and the end of conscription. But the fundamental logic of the Vth Republic, formed by the basic features of the Nuclear Monarchy (Presidential dominance, Parliamentary marginalization, political consensus, depolitization of national security issues, civil-military relations) have remained particularly robust despite some inflexions. By contrast with this polity and politics levels, the policy or the sectoral level has been much more affected by significative changes. The chapter underlines that some of the most important institutions and
features of the Fifth Republic defense policy do not derive from the Constitution (Presidential dominance / the diarchy of the Constitution ; the “domaine réservé ; the nuclear basement of the Presidential dominance and the 1964 Decree ; the Personnal Chief of Staff of the Elysée). I argue that the Nuclear Monarchy is a political construction that has resulted from a conflict between the Executive power and the Parliament at the beginning of the sixties when the first two Military Program Laws were voted thanks to restrictive legislative procedures. The chapter focus on policy-making and institutional aspects of the French security policy and does not develop military and strategic dimensions.

The following chapter divides in four parts. A first section analyses the genesis and the institutionalisation of the domaine réservé. A second section studies the Gaullist legacy of French security policy. The third and fourth section evaluate the changes that have affected defense policy by contrasting the sound transformation of the meso level of policy making with the robustness of the political and institutional features of the Nuclear Monarchy.
Outline

1. The “hidden” logic of the Vth Republic: the domaine réservé.

2. The Gaullist legacy.
   a. A strategic paradigm (alliances, conscription and nuclear weapons)
   b. Chef-d’œuvre of the consensus on security policy.
   d. Civil-military relations : French military as la grande muette (silent partner and instrument of the executive)

3. A paradigm shift without troubles. The end of Defense exceptionalism in the Vth Republic?
   a. The reduction of the French Armed forces size and the end of conscription
   b. Priority shift : the end of nuclear primacy ; the decline of military spending.
   c. The end of statism? Privatization, “banalization” (all-volunteer armed forces and labour markets ; civilianisation of arms firms ; crisis of the DGA)
   d. New balance of power within the defense networks : the increasing power of civilian elites ; Bercy, the new pivotal player ; the Armed Forces Chief of Staff\(^1\) and the revolution of the 2005 decree.

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\(^1\) Chef d’état-major des Armées (CEMA)
4. The enduring relevance of the Nuclear Monarchy.
   a. The presidential dominance: test of cohabitations.
   b. The Parliament: still out of the game.
   c. The new consensus on defense (Europe, Foreign military interventions, New public management). Is defense policy definitively non political (persistence of the depolitization)?
   d. Tensions in civil-military relations?

5. Conclusion and research agenda.

References
