

**Observation no: 212**

**Country-year: France 1998**

**1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?**

No.

**2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?**

Yes.

In 1799, General Napoleon Bonaparte came to power as the First Consul, effectively ending the French Revolution.<sup>1</sup> In 1851, Bonaparte's nephew, Louis Napoleon, dissolved the assembly of France's Second Republic and reclaimed power by military force.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the following two events have been coded both as coups and not as coups. While they did not qualify as coups in the most recent dataset by Powells and Thyne,<sup>3</sup> historical information about these incidents is included below since the literature is divided on the issue. In May 1958 the French Fourth Republic fell after losing support from the army in Algeria.<sup>4</sup> The incident was inspired by the army's ultimatum not to abandon Algeria. The French military plan to take control of the government allowed de Gaulle, a French general who was well-respected by the military, to return to politics. The military ultimately called off their planned coup when de Gaulle returned to government. The so-called "May Crisis," resulted in a complete institutional break from the Fourth Republic in France and rewriting of the constitution to design a regime with a strong role for the President.<sup>5</sup> While this

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information, Robert Asprey, *The Rise Of Napoleon Bonaparte*, (NY, NY: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *December 2, 1851: Contemporary Writing on the Coup d'Etat of Louis Napoleon*, ed. John B. Halsted, (Doubleday & Company Inc./Mass Market Paperback, 1972); Karl Marx. (1851-2). *The Eighteenth Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte*. (Translated By D.D.L.) (e-book). (Montana): Kessinger Publishers, (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Powell, Jonathan M., and Clayton L. Thyne (2011). "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 48(2): 249-259.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this "coup," see Nicholas, Atkin, *The Fifth French Republic European History in Perspective Series*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> There is some dispute over whether or not the May Crisis was a military coup. Although de Gaulle came to power with the support of the military, the new constitution was put to a vote in 1958 and gained 79.2% support. However, despite the fact that many civilian politicians supported de Gaulle, François Mitterrand famously later denounced the change of power in a 1964 essay as a "permanent coup d'état" when he challenged De Gaulle in the presidential election. See "Le coup

does not qualify as a coup according to Powell and Thyne's definition,<sup>6</sup> it has been coded as a successful coup by previous authors.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, on April 21, 1961, four generals in Algeria led a coup attempt known as the Putsch d'Alger in an attempt to replace President Charles de Gaulle with a military junta in response his pronouncement of the beginning of decolonization.<sup>8</sup> The attempt was suppressed within four days. Again, while this not coded as a coup by Powell and Thyne, it has been coded as an unsuccessful coup attempt by previous authors.<sup>9</sup>

### **3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?**

Yes. President Jacques Chirac served in the French military from 1954 through 1957 as a conscripted junior army officer.<sup>10</sup> He spent a year in Algeria in 1956 but was injured. After 1957, Jacques returned to college and decided to pursue a career in civil service after graduation.

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who served as Prime Minister of France from 1997 to 2002, was a second lieutenant in the Tank Corps in Germany at the end of the Algerian conflict.<sup>11</sup>

---

d'Etat permanent , Préface de la réédition par Georges Saunier , par Jean-Michel GUIEU le 21 décembre 2010," *Le coup d'Etat permanent – Institut Francois Mitterand*, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.mitterrand.org/Le-coup-d-Etat-permanent-465.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Powell and Thyne define a *coup d'etat* as, "overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting head of state using unconstitutional means...there is no minimal death threshold for defining a coup. A coup attempt is defined as successful if the coup perpetrators seize and hold power for at least seven days." (Powell & Thyne 2011:252).

<sup>7</sup> The event was coded as a successful coup by Ferguson, Finer and Taylor & Jodice. See, Ferguson, Gregor. 1987. *Coup d'etat: A Practical Manual*. Arms and Armour Press; Finer, Samuel. E. 1988. *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*. 2nd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Taylor, Charles Lewis and David A. Jodice. 1983. *The World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators* . New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>8</sup> George Armstrong. Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis 1947-1962*. Cambridge: MIT press, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> As in the 1958 case, the event was coded as an unsuccessful coup attempt by Ferguson, Finer, and Taylor & Jodice.

<sup>10</sup> Allen Allberg, *Modern World Leaders: Jacques Chirac*, (NY, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2007), p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Jospin, Lionel – France in the United States/ Embassy of France in Washington, <http://ambafrance-us.org/spip.php?article628>

**4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?**

No.

**5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?**

No.

**6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?**

No.

**7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?**

No.

That said, the army underwent a major reform process in 1996 when Chirac reconfigured and downsized the French military.<sup>12</sup> Among various changes, conscription was abandoned and army transitioned to an all-volunteer force. France in the 1990s fits into the model of what has been called a "postmodern military" by Moskos, Williams and Segal, in which the military, "undergoes a loosening of the ties with the nation-state, becomes multipurpose in mission, moves toward a smaller volunteer force, is increasingly androgynous in makeup and ethos, and has greater permeability with civilian society."<sup>13</sup> The French army in the 1990s increasingly saw the rise of "solder-scholars" replacing the old "citizen-soldier" ideal.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Tiersky, "French Military Reforms and Strategy," National Defense University Strategic Forum, Institute for National Strategic Studies, Number 94, November 1996, accessed December 14, 2014, [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCIQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dtic.mil%2Fcgi-bin%2FGetTRDoc%3FLocation%3DU2%26doc%3DGetTRDoc.pdf%26AD%3DADA394167&ei=jTSTVliCJI7b7AaJ3YDwDg&usg=AFQjCNGf95aAMG\\_sXBrbYfiKo3tdsq34oQ&bvm=bv.82001339,d.ZGU](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCIQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dtic.mil%2Fcgi-bin%2FGetTRDoc%3FLocation%3DU2%26doc%3DGetTRDoc.pdf%26AD%3DADA394167&ei=jTSTVliCJI7b7AaJ3YDwDg&usg=AFQjCNGf95aAMG_sXBrbYfiKo3tdsq34oQ&bvm=bv.82001339,d.ZGU) . Also see

<sup>13</sup> See *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*, Ed. Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams, David R. Segal, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-60.

**8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?**

No.

**9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?**

No.

**10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?**

No.

**11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?**

No.

**12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?**

No.

**13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?**

Yes. Several reforms during the Algerian War after De Gaulle took over, from 1958-1962, reshaped the civil-military experience in France and subordinated the military to civilians. These included the creation of parallel chains of command, and the creation of the ministerial delegation for armament, for example.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the National Defense and Armed Forces Committee oversees laws and national defense decisions.<sup>16</sup> The committee can make decisions regarding the size, organization, financing of force. It also has some oversight ability.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the

---

<sup>15</sup> Marc Ronald DeVore, "Armed Forces, States and Threats: Civil-Military Institutions and Military Power in Modern Democracies," Thesis (Ph. D.)--Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dept. of Political Science, 2009, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> See, "DCAF Backgrounder - Parliamentary Committees on Defence and Security," Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, March 2006.

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see, "LA COMMISSION DE LA DÉFENSE ET DES FORCES ARMÉES," Assemblée Nationale, accessed December 22, 2014, [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/commissions/59046\\_tab.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/commissions/59046_tab.asp).

President is the Chief of the Army, with the Minister of Defense reporting directly to him.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> “Le rôle du ministère de la defense,” (French), Ministère de la Défense, 2014-02-24, accessed December 22, 2014, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/portail-defense/ministere/le-role-du-ministere-de-la-defense>.