

Observation no: 83

Country-year: 1939

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.¹ In 1851, Bonaparte's nephew, Louis Napoleon, dissolved the assembly of France's Second Republic and reclaimed power by military force.²

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

Yes. This observation will discuss the leaders during both the Third Republic and the Vichy Regime.³

Prime Minister (PM) Edward Daladier, who served from April 1938 to March 1940 (As well as January – October 1933 and January –February 1934), entered World War I as an army sergeant and was demobilized as a captain with the awards of Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honor.⁴ Daladier was succeeded by Paul Reynaud, who served as PM from March 21, 1940 through June 16, 1940. French President

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

² *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).

³ Note: the information in this observation applies largely to the Vichy regime, which came to power in the summer of 1940, rather than the Third Republic in power throughout 1939. This is a slight departure from our coding rule, which focuses on civil-military relations in the year prior to armed conflict. However, it makes sense to code this case focusing on the Vichy regime inaugurated in 1940 since it was the regime responsible for fighting the Franco-Thai War, which began in October of the same year.

⁴ "Daladier, Signer of Munich Pact, Dies at 86," *New York Times, Obituary*, October 12, 1970, accessed May 2, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0618.html>.

Albert François Lebrun, who served from May 1932 to July 1940, was a career politician. Lebrun was merely a figurehead in French politics.

PM Reynaud was succeeded by Marshal Philippe Pétain, who served as Prime Minister from March 21, 1940 through July 11, 1940 and served as Chief of State of the Vichy-based regime from July 11, 1940 through August 19, 1944 during the German occupation of France. Pétain had significant military experience during World War One, including as a commander in chief of the French army in 1916 during World War One.⁵ Pétain was appointed and served as Minister of War from 1934 until 1935. After a number of other political positions, an armistice with Germany in July, 1940 divided France into an occupied north and west and an unoccupied south under the control of Pétain with the government headed at Vichy. Although the French government administered the entire territory, the policies were authoritarian, racist, and largely influenced by German war values.

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

Yes. One of the first acts of the Vichy regime under Pétain was to take measures against the “ ‘undesirables’: Jews, metèques (immigrants), Freemasons, Communists... Gypsies, homosexuals, and, in a general way, any left-wing activist.”⁶ The new French state immediately began to use the pre-existing internment camps for these groups. For example, the September 21, 1940 Statute on Jews. A Nazi ordinance forced Jews in the “occupied zone” to register with police. One author describes the Vichy regime as pursuing an authoritarian, racist, “national revolution.”⁷ Prior to the inauguration of the Vichy regime, in July of 1940, the military officer corps did not discriminate by ethnicity or sect.

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

Yes. As mentioned in answer 4, leftists and communists were persecuted under the Vichy regime. As such, it is unlikely that they were allowed senior military posts. The Vichy regime was discriminatory on both an ethnic and ideological grounds. Prior to the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940, however, there were no strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps.

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

⁵ “Phillipe Pétain (1856-1951),” *BBC History*, accessed August 28, 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/petain_philippe.shtml.

⁶ “The French Vichy Regime,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed July 24, 2014 at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/VichyRegime.html>.

⁷ Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1*, (NY, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

No, not officially. During the Vichy regime, however, requirements were ostensibly based on support of the Axis powers and not being a communist. Prior to the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940, no.

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

Yes. That said, Kier describes the French army as increasingly doctrinally dogmatic in the 1930s in response to perception that it was under attack by the Left.⁸ Here, the army began to shut out dissent and focus on its own internal preservation, it also became antagonistic toward the leftist-led state.⁹ Additionally, the army was characterized by its strong belief in a defensive doctrine, and generally shut out opposing views.¹⁰

After the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940, the government of Marshal Petain enacted policies that mirrored those of the Third Reich, in that they were aimed at the revival of a “French race.” They were also anti-communist.

Prior to the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940, however, military training did not involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination.

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

Yes, the Vichy regime repressed ideological and political currents that were not in favor of the Axis powers.

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

Yes. The military did not govern the country prior to July 1940 but did after the Vichy regime took over.

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

⁸ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Two Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997,) p. 86.

⁹ *Ibid.*, For example, Kier explains that whereas the military journals of the early 1920s were characterized by lively debate, military journals of the late 1920s and 1930s were characterized by a military endorsement of the official republican institutional position and scant coverage of polarizing issues, such as the Spanish Civil War.

¹⁰ Kier, 72-73.

Yes, after the Vichy regime took over, this function was informally filled by the supporting Nazi regime. That said, Hitler spent a minimal amount on the occupation of France and relied largely on the French to govern the territory they still controlled.¹¹

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

No.¹²

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?

No. After the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940, civilian leaders were effectively cut out of governance. Due to the post-1940 continuity in some leaders, such as Pétain, it is important to note that forums for civil-military information exchange existed prior to the inauguration of the Vichy regime in July 1940. Institutions for military consultation such as the Superior Council of War and the Permanent Committee of National Defense existed, but their relations deteriorated after the polarization of French politics in the 1930s, particularly after riots in 1934 and the rise of leftist politics in 1936. Kier writes that after 1936 these institutions “met rarely, and their advice was sought infrequently.”¹³

¹¹ Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1*, (NY, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹² Very little information was available on this topic with respect to the Vichy regime, but there was no evidence to suggest there was an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 84.