

The Impact of France's Abandonment of Gaullism on Its National Defense Policy

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Abstract: France has long regarded Gaullism as its national policy, and it has a strong independent color in politics, military and economy. In the early 2000s, French President Nicolas Sarkozy abandoned the Gaullist policy. A few years later, President Macron has shown signs of a return to Gaullism with wobbly attitude. This paper will analyze the impact of France's abandonment of de Gaullism on its national defense policy at the beginning of the 21st century from the perspective of changes in France's domestic and world situations, and discuss the international impact of this policy change. Studying this issue is conducive to making a certain degree of prediction and judgment on France's recent strategic layout of China and Russia in the context of the current international situation. This paper will use the literature survey method to find information on French policy changes, and use the data collection method to count the French military spending in the past few decades and visualize it for phased analysis of its defense policy. In addition, the conclusion part of this paper creatively links the change of French defense policy with world multi-polarization, and analyzes its impact on world multi-polarization and domestic military industry. The changes in the defense policy of France, an important European power, during a critical period in its history can also provide some constructive inspiration for China.

Keywords: Gaullism, national defense policy

1. Introduction

As a national policy that France has implemented for a long time, Gaullism has obvious traces on France in terms of politics, military and even ideology [1]. According to Serge Bernstein, Gaullism is "a peculiarly French phenomenon, without doubt the quintessential French political phenomenon of the 20th century" [2]. The abandonment of this policy in France means that there will be significant policy changes in the above areas, which will also have varying degrees of impact on the French state apparatus. Although the young French President Emmanuel Macron has called himself a heir to de Gaullism, this is up for debate. French scholar Julian pointed out that there are still huge obstacles to the realization of de Gaullism in Europe, and at least six problems need to be solved [3]. With Macron came to power, the situation and attitude of French government turned out to be got more murky. On the one hand, he does have more autonomy than previous presidents, showing a tendency to return to Gaullism. On the other hand, he is still unable to escape the shackles of the existing political environment. So his wavering attitude can also feel elusive when projected on specific French policy.

This article examines the shift in French military policy while also examining the relevant implications of this policy in the international community, and assessing the possibility of a return to French policy under President Macron. The study of this issue is beneficial to understand France's national defense policy and national defense strength in the new era.

After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, China pays more attention to the military strategic deployment of Russia and the United States while ignoring the corresponding actions of European countries. This article can also serve as a supplement to the military policy analysis of France, an important European country.

2. Influence

2.1. Relationship of France between US and NATO

One of the most notable changes in defense policy after France's abandonment of Gaullism was the dramatic increase in its military reliance on the United States. From 1949 to 1966, according to Figure 1, French military spending has not grown significantly because France is in the midst of rebuilding its country after World War II. From 1966 to 1991, France adhered to the principles of Gaullism, and its military expenditure increased significantly. During this time. Unlike other U.S. allies whose weapons and equipment are highly dependent on the U.S., France has an independent and complete military-industrial system, which is why France's military spending grew rapidly during this period. The Mirage 2000 independently developed by France completed its maiden flight in 1978, the Rafale fighter jet completed its maiden flight in 1986, and the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle was successfully launched in 1994 [4-5]. In addition, the French Horizon-class destroyer began development work in 1991. France declared in 1959 that the French Mediterranean Fleet was no longer under NATO command. In 1962, France successfully tested the first atomic bomb despite American opposition. In 1966, France even quitted NATO's military agency, and France urged the United States to move NATO's headquarters from Paris to Brussels, Belgium. It can be seen that France's defense industry construction during the Charles de Gaulle period was fruitful, and its foreign policy also had a distinctly independent color (even during the Cold War).

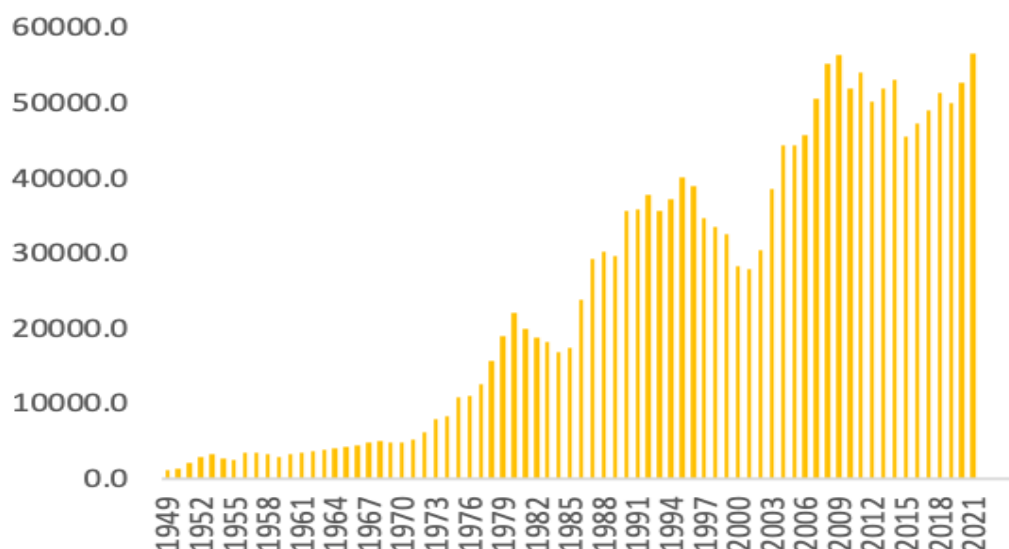


Figure 1: Military cost of France (million US dollars) [6]

2.2. A Stronger Role for France within the EU

The second impact is that France can play a greater role in the military level of European integration, and France's defense policy also reflects the principle of balance.

Since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, NATO's mission has shifted from defending the Soviet Union and its servant states to securing the suppression of Russia and the fight against terrorism on a European scale. Due to its huge national strength, although the United States can exert great influence in Europe, it is not a European country itself. The axis of the whole of Europe has always been France and Germany. Abandoning Gaullism, France can achieve a better-coordinated defense with Germany and even all European partners at the defense level, preventing terrorist attacks on Europe and Russia's infiltration and aggression on Europe. To a certain extent, France is more like re-establishing its proper position in Europe as a military power, and the French army is also more conducive to executing a balanced strategy in Europe. After the UK left the EU, France became the only country in the EU with nuclear weapons. It also means. In Europe across the NATO system, France's influence will be greater. For France, Reintegrating into the military level of the European family at this time is more conducive to expanding French influence. For example, after Russia launched a war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, France immediately reacted, announcing a large amount of military equipment to Ukraine. Caesar self-propelled guns donated by France helped Ukraine resist Russian aggression.

France's abandonment of Gaullism could also make France's defense policy more flexible. For example, France has never declared a no-first-use nuclear weapon, which enhances France's nuclear deterrent capability. In addition, it is also more conducive to France to increase the defense budget for various reasons. French President Emmanuel Macron claimed in June that France is now in a time of war economy and that Europe needs a stronger defense industry. Since Macron came to power in 2017, France's military spending has resumed a trend of rapid growth. In 2022, the French military expenditure reached 410 billion euros, and it is planned to reach 50 billion euros in 2025. The abandonment of Gaullism meant that France needed to regularly participate in the military activities of other countries, which leads to the need for more factories to produce weapons. According to Le Monde, France's General Directorate of Armaments is considering a draft law that would allow the requisition of civilian equipment and civilian factories to manufacture weapons, which also reflects the flexible side [7].

2.3. The Franco-German Axis, the Delicate Relationship between China and Russia

France's abandonment of Gaullism would also be more conducive to a Franco-German axis that simultaneously dominates the European order within the EU: Germany is responsible for the economic order, while France can play its role militarily. France's defense policy can also be paid enough attention to maintain a balance within Europe, take over the British power in the European military level and ensure the maximization of French interests. On the one hand, France, as an ally of the United States in the military, can get a lot of aid from the United States. On the other hand, France can also maintain its position as the most powerful military presence in Europe.

After France abandoned Gaullism, it was also more conducive to the streamlining of the French army. In 2008, France released a white paper on national defense and security, announcing that the French army would decrease 54,000 people, but it would increase the cost of intelligence collection and improve the military's ability to deliver and combat. The reform is the largest since 1994. After the end of World War II, countries generally began to reduce the size of the military, especially after the end of the Cold War. The size of the armies of various countries has been further reduced. After the reform, although the total number of troops was reduced, it is more conducive to improving the combat capability of the army especially overseas delivery capabilities. Under the military reforms

led by Sarkozy, France has a global military projection capability second only to the United States, and even surpasses Russia and China. France's strong military projection capabilities help maintain its status as a great power and maintain its influence in the former colonies. In addition, a strong military projection capability is also conducive to the rapid restoration of a relatively stable state in the region, which can deter terrorists and insurgents. Sarkozy's reforms have effects in improving the efficiency of military spending.

2.4. Controversial Return Phenomenon

The current French President Emmanuel Macron has claimed to be a de Gaullist on several public occasions, which inevitably makes people think that de Gaullism is showing signs of returning in France. In an interview with *The Economist* in 2019, Macron pointed out that NATO was "brain-dead" and called on Europe to think about its own strategy, otherwise it would "not be in control of its own destiny" [8].

His ruling philosophy was also named by scholars as Macro-Gaullism but this is more like using de Gaulle's name to gain more votes for himself. His own performance is far from Gaullism: in 2021, Australia cancelled a French submarine order of up to 90 billion Australian dollars. This was left unheeded, only to have a phone call with the President of the United States 8 days later, tacitly acknowledging this reality. (This behavior is quite similar to the 2015 acquisition of Alstom's Department of Energy by the U.S. General Electric Company, and the French Minister of Economy who betrayed Alstom is now French President Macron.) In addition, French scholar Julian also criticized Macron's idea to be "nonsense" and pointed out that Macron confused France's strategic mission with his own political mission, the reintroduction of Gaullism is only for political unity within France [9].

3. Discussion

Each country's assessment of the French policy shift is different. This situation is not necessarily in Chinese or Russian favor. China's ideology of national development has similarities with Gaullism. The Chinese official statement: China has always pursued the principle of independence. Regarding all international affairs, Chinese government proceeds from the fundamental interests of the Chinese people and the people of the world, decides Chinese own positions and policies according to the merits of the matter, and does not succumb to any external pressure [10].

Gaullism puts French national interests above all factors (including ideology), and does not submit to the remote control of the United States, which socialist China would like to see. A divided and disunited West makes the existence of France under de Gaulle a destabilizing factor within Europe: this means that there is no hostile basis for the unification of the red regime in the Western world, which is beneficial for China and France to overcome ideological prejudice and cooperation at a higher level.

For Russia, a France outside NATO and not participating in U.S.-led military operations would be much safer than a nuclear-armed France inside NATO. After Russia invaded Ukraine, France followed the United States and gave Ukraine a large number of weapons (including Caesar self-propelled artillery and Milan anti-tank missiles), putting pressure on the Russian army [11].

Both China and Russia are powerful regional powers: China's growing political and military power has led the United States to see it as a potential superpower, and Russia has maintained a large armed force despite the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the opposition of the United States, France has always maintained relatively friendly relations with these two countries in the years of pursuing Gaullism. For example, in 1964, at the height of the Cold War, France recognized the sole legitimacy of the People's Republic of China and established diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level with

Beijing. France was the first major Western country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China; in 1971, France voted in favor of the People's Republic of China in restoring its legitimate seat in the United Nations at the 26th UN General Assembly [12]. In the early 2000s, France began to take a fresh look at China-Russia relations after abandoning Gaullism. Following the United States, the French Navy has repeatedly sent warships to patrol the South China Sea to safeguard the principle of freedom of navigation after 2020. This activity is considered by the People's Republic of China as a provocation to China's sovereignty.

4. Conclusion

In short, the impact of France's abandonment of Gaullism on its national defense policy is multifaceted and highly uncertain. This activity will help France strengthen its status as a major military power in Europe, further consolidate the Franco-German axis, and strengthen military ties with the United States, but it also strikes at the global trend of multi-polarization and weakens France's relatively independent position within Western countries. In addition, France's independence in the military industry has also declined. In the face of Russia's powerful expansion, France, which has lost its strongman domination of the political arena, has to choose to sacrifice part of its independence before another superpower. In a pluralistic and multipolar international society, sacrificing some of its military-industrial capabilities in exchange for closer cooperation with its allies is at least not the worst option for France.

For China, France is not as independent from European military affairs as in the time of Charles de Gaulle, nor as obedient to the United States as it was in the time of Sarkozy, but in a contradictory attitude, which is compared with the colonial empire by France. Determined by the weakening power of the period and Russia's expanding ambitions, China should also take this into account when dealing with France and take corresponding measures.

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