

Observation no: 54

Country-year: France 1938

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, but only Prime Minister Daladier, who only served for part of the period of interest. There were other leaders when France entered World War II who did not have military experience.

For example, French Prime Minister Leon Blum, who served from June 1936 to June 1937, and again from March 1938 to April 1938 was a career politician. Blum was the head of the socialist Popular Front, and was disliked by the military.

Prime Minister Camille Chautemps, who served from June 1937 through March 1938 (as well as February – March 1930 and November 1933-January 1934) was also a career politician.

As mentioned above, Prime Minister 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.³

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

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.

That said, the pluralism of the 1920s French military culture changed in response to the perception of an increasing threat from the Left and Communist Party infiltration of its ranks.⁴ It is likely that in this influenced decision-making about entry into the senior officer corps, even if it was not an official policy.

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

No.

Not officially, however, see answer 5.

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

No.

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.⁵ Here, the army began to shut out dissent and focus on its own internal preservation, it also became antagonistic toward the leftist-led state.⁶ Additionally, the army was characterized by its strong belief in a defensive doctrine, and generally shut out opposing views.⁷

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

⁴ Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Two Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997,) p. 83.

⁵ Kier, 86.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Kier, 72-73.

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.

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.”⁸

⁸ Ibid., 84.