MENTAL MAGINOT LINES: ANTI-REPUBLICANISM, GENDER, AND VOTING

RIGHTS IN THE POLITICS OF THE FRENCH ARMY, 1871-1940

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Abstract

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This dissertation uses voting rights, gender, military doctrine, and military identity to study the evolution of the French Army’s relationship to the Republican state from 1971 until 1940. Drawing on papers from the Archives Nationales and the Service Historique de l’Armée de Terre, the dissertation argues that French military leaders responded to pressure to weaken their control over their soldiers’ lives and transition to a militia-style army by redefining military identity in opposition to the Third Republic and civilian society.

During the 1920s, military intellectuals reacted against the social and political changes caused by the Great War by trying to separate the army from the rest of French society. This manifested itself in the generals’ opposition to giving soldiers the right to vote, their unexpected integration of women into the Army as civilian employees, and military doctrines focused on controlling French soldiers and civilians. The process of separation began with bataille conduite (Methodical Battle) theorists’ focus on exercising political control over conscripts and escalated in the mid-1920s to include plans to use
civil employees, including women, clandestinely to maintain a larger army than
authorized by law. The situation deteriorated in the early-1930s, leading to a crisis of
civil-military relations in December 1933, when France’s generals directly attacked the
government, and escaped without being punished, shattering the Third Republic’s system
of civil-military consultation and conciliation.

The army attempted to use women, veterans, and African men as defenses against
demands for political and social equality for and among soldiers. Studying the process
whereby military leaders tried to integrate these groups revealed a rapidly growing
separation between the army and political society that manifested itself in a fear of the
electoral system and undermined civilian control over the armed forces. Attention to
gender and doctrine revealed that over the 1920s, army leaders increasingly defined
military identity in opposition to democracy and the Republican political regime. This
evolution created the preconditions necessary for Marshal Philippe Pétain and General
Maixime Weygand to challenge the Third Republic’s legitimacy during the German
conquest of France in 1940.
To my wife Suzanne
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INTRODUCTION
DEBATING THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The Fall of France has energized historical and political debates since 1940, but historians have not been able to agree on how or why it happened. Some argued that France fell because of deep divisions within the French population, and others blamed the vagaries of war. Although historians, generals, and politicians have conceptualized the Fall of France as a single event, it really consisted of two separate defeats: the military defeat of the French Army by the German Army and the political defeat of the Republic’s civilian leaders by France’s top generals. The defeats were separate, sequential, but overlapping events. Neither defeat was preordained, nor the natural result of the other, although the two defeats shared some common causes. This dissertation focuses on the political defeat and uses a study of civil-military politics in interwar France to explore why the military elite felt justified in challenging the Republic’s civilian leaders during the military defeat.

This dissertation draws heavily from previously unused sources in the French Army Archive in the Château Vincennes. These sources, contained in a Supplement to the N series, cover the 1919-1940 period, but were unavailable to scholars for decades after the N Series, covering 1871-1940, was opened. The Supplement contains papers
captured by the Germans in 1940 and the Soviets in 1945. The papers remained in Russia until Boris Yeltsin returned them over the course of the late-1990s. The Supplement contains a treasure trove of military records from the level of the General Staff down to individual units, in many cases there are more papers in an office’s Series N Supplement file than are in the original Series N. Although the Series N Supplement has been open for several years, its rudimentary index and eclectic organization have dissuaded most scholars from using it and have obscured the value of its contents.

Although the Series N Supplement provides the dissertation’s backbone, it also makes extensive use of the original Series N and studies the military reform movement through the police and political surveillance files in the Archives Nationales’s F/7 Series.

In addition to archival sources, the first chapter uses early-twentieth-century legal manuals to reexamine several pre-Great War legal controversies concerning the political rights of soldiers and the relative powers of the parliament versus armed forces. Access to new archival sources allows this dissertation to reevaluate and find new significance in episodes studied by other historians of France. Chapter III draws heavily on interwar newspaper accounts and uses pro-reform tracts to supplement archival sources and balance the bias inherent in government surveillance records.

Building on unresolved tensions from the pre-Great War era, the development of civil-military relations in the 1920s and early 1930s produced a military establishment that was isolated and generally suspicious of the Republic. After the end of the Great War, army doctrines and personnel policies defined professionalism and institutional loyalty in opposition to the Third Republic’s values and institutions and exacerbated the military’s pre-Great War separation from the Republic. This dysfunctional civil-military
relationship had its roots in the early Third Republic, but developed in the 1920s in ways that progressively undermined the military’s loyalty to the political regime, establishing a crucial context for the events of 1940, when France’s senior generals chose to take advantage of the military defeat to depose the Republican government.

Previous historians have focused on either politicians or generals as culprits in explaining the Fall of France and the emergence of the authoritarian Vichy Regime. Some scholars have seen 1940 as flowing from the political and social conflicts of the 1930s, when fascist leagues and supporters of the Popular Front took up hostile positions that divided and weakened France. Without discounting the value of this previous work, this dissertation argues that the Republic fell because of civil-military conflicts, not because of any popular movement or public divisions. The crisis of civil-military relations during the 1920s and 1930s was based on long-standing tensions that reemerged after the Great War and worsened when the generals and politicians chose not to try to bridge the gap between the Army and the Republic.

Immediately after the defeat, the historian, resistance leader, and veteran of the defeated army Marc Bloch blamed German material superiority, unimaginative French generals, and political divisions for France’s defeat. ¹ Subsequently, historians have separated these explanations, but the debate remains fixed around themes Bloch laid down during the war.

¹ Marc Bloch, L’étrange défaite; témoignage écrit en 1940 suivi de écrits clandestins, 1942-1944 (Paris : A. Michel, 1957). Marc Bloch was a noted medieval historian who escaped capture during the defeat and became a major resistance leader. Bloch was a devoted Gaullist, which shows through in parts of his book, and was eventually executed after being captured by the Gestapo in 1944.
In the 1970s, Robert Young led a revisionist camp of historians who challenged Bloch’s claim that political divisions within the Third Republic led to the Fall of France. In a long and distinguished career, Young demolished the myth that the French Third Republic limped into the Second World War locked in an internal conflict and collapsed under the weight of factional extremism. In his book *In Command of France*, Young argued that although the Popular Front’s 1936 electoral victory was accompanied by bitter internal divisions, between early 1938 and the September 1939 declaration of war on Germany, an anti-German consensus emerged in French politics.²

Recently, Julian Jackson has expanded on Young’s position, arguing that although Frenchmen were not enthusiastic about the war, most men and women in France believed war was inevitable and expected to win. Rather than blame internal divisions, Jackson has argued that the Allies lost the Battle of France because Britain failed to provide effective military aid, French commanders made crucial mistakes, and because of Germany’s superior demographic and economic potential.³

All the major contemporary scholars reject Bloch’s belief that Germany overwhelmed France by sheer numbers of mechanized forces. Postwar scholarship has shown that Bloch’s anecdotal evidence vastly overestimated the degree of German mechanization and that the French Army was better equipped that Bloch had thought. Young, Jackson, and Earnst May have argued that the French Army entered the 1940 campaign approximately as well equipped as the German Army. Other scholars,

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including Robert Doughty, Eugenia Kiesling, and Martin Alexander, have also dismissed German material superiority as the cause of the French Army’s defeat in the 1940 campaign.  

Robert Doughty’s 1985 book *Seeds of Disaster* remains the best demonstration of the failures of French military planning and doctrine between the world wars. Doughty identified major flaws in French Army doctrine and organization that inhibited an effective response to German expansionism in the 1930s, but stays silent on the military’s usurpation of political power.  

Eugenia Kiesling offered a rare defense of the French military elite in her book *Arming Against Hitler*. Kiesling argued that although the French Army proved organizationally and operationally flawed in 1940, its doctrine and organization were reasonable attempts to learn from the Great War and to organize the army within limits imposed on the army’s resources by the civilian government.

Whereas Doughty emphasized that France’s military leaders failed to develop an integrated armored doctrine and striking forces, Kiesling argued the French generals created stronger armored forces than historians had given them credit for and that their doctrinal failure were only obvious in retrospect. In her view, the French attempt to solve the problems exposed by the Great War with carefully coordinated infantry and artillery attacks was as reasonable as the decentralized armor-centric strategy ultimately used by the Germans in 1940. Through its study of the civil-military negotiations that led to the

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major military laws in 1922, 1927, and 1928, this dissertation argues that Kiesling’s
division between political and military elites was too rigid by showing that the military
elite was deeply involved in shaping political decisions about security policy between the
wars. It also argues that politicians shaped the military’s doctrinal and strategic choices.
Recognizing and accounting for the overlapping of military and civilian spheres
highlights the centrality of civil-military relations in the politics of interwar France.

Two French historians have used biography to study the intersection of the
military and political elite in interwar France. In dueling biographies Philip Bankwitz
and Martin Alexander studied Generals Maxime Weygand and Maurice Gamelin.
Without excusing Weygand’s 1940 insubordination, Bankwitz depicted him as an
intelligent and cultured leader who fought against the constraints the political elite placed
on him, but failed to see that his confrontational tactics were accelerating the
disintegration of the civil-military relations and undermining the civilian government’s
authority.7

Responding to Bankwitz, Alexander emphasized the material progress made
under Gamelin’s watch and argued that, unlike Weygand, Gamelin understood the
fragility of the late-Third Republic. Alexander argued that Gamelin’s fellow generals
mistook his attempt to buttress the Republican government’s failing authority by working
with civilian leaders instead of confronting them as mere opportunism. Martin pointed
the way forward for the field by showing the crucial linkage between politics and national
defense. By linking civil-military relations and the construction of military identity in the

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7 Philip Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France (Cambridge
1920s, this dissertation illuminates the origins of the civil-military sickness that Alexander argued culminated in Petain’s destruction of the Republic.\(^8\)

Julian Jackson has tried to reverse this cautious trend toward studying the intersection of politics and national defense by subsuming the collapse of the political regime into the military defeat. Jackson has argued that France was militarily defeated because of the superiority of its German enemy and a lack of effective aid rendered by Britain. He specifically rejected claims that the German conquest of 1940 represented a failure of the Third Republic or of its political class.\(^9\)

Although the military defeat has preoccupied recent historians, such as Jackson and May, this dissertation returns politics and the political defeat of the Third Republic in June of 1940 to the center of the story of the Fall of France. It argued that the Republic fell because its military and political leaders both failed in their duties during the military defeat of 1940. Faced with the crisis of defeat, military leaders asserted the separation from civilian authority they had defended throughout the 1920s and 1930s by refusing to obey direct orders from the duly constituted civilian government and civilian leaders abdicated rather than trying to force their generals to obey them. France’s generals did not seize power in a coup, as they would do in 1957 and attempt to do in 1961, instead they put the civilian government under enough pressure that the civilians had to choose between actively asserting their authority by firing the generals and surrendering to them. The civilians followed the pattern established in the civil-military conflicts of the 1920s and early 1930s by refusing to confront the generals. Unlike in previous conflicts, the

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\(^8\) Alexander, Republic in Danger, 401.

\(^9\) Julian Jackson, The Fall of France,
worsening military crisis prevented civilian leaders from temporizing and Paul Reynaud was faced with a choice between submitting to the military or imposing his will upon them. Rather than attempt to fight the generals and the Germans at the same time, Reynaud resigned and the President of the Republic appointed Marshal Pétain to succeed him.

The dissertation studies how and why the military elite evolved to the point that it rejected the civilian government’s authority. Understanding the origins of the 1940 betrayal requires drawing on methodological tools from political, military, intellectual, and gender history. In particular, attentiveness to gender highlights the failure of the Third Republic’s system of civil-military relations during the 1920s and the process of by which the military elite separated its institution from the government and society it was pledged to protect.

The historiography of gender in interwar France is both rich and deep, but has shied away from studying the military and has not been integrated into military history. Any discussion of the role of gender in interwar French politics or culture must begin with Mary Louise Robert’s Civilization without Sexes. This dissertation builds on Roberts’s central contention that, “by debating issues of gender identity, the French came to terms with a postwar world that threatened to become unrecognizable to them.”10 It builds on her central position by using the construction of gender to reveal the key elements of military identity and explore how and why military identity evolved to become increasingly hostile to the Republican political system during the 1920s and the 1930s.

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Margaret and Patrice Higonnet laid out the dominant theory for explaining how war affects the construction of gender. Through their Double Helix theory, they argued that wars have not produced lasting gains for women. Although women appeared to make gains by moving into jobs previously occupied by men, the men were themselves “stepping-up” into the hyper-masculine world of the wartime army. Because the relative gendered hierarchy of power and employment survived the war, any apparent gains women made in wartime disappeared at the end of the war when the soldiers returned to civilian life and pushed women back down to maintain the relative hierarchy.11

Existing scholarship supports the Higonnet’s arguments for interwar France. Margaret Darrow has chronicled the role of women in wartime France and she has dealt specifically with women working for the army. In *French Women and the First World War*, Darrow studied the experiences of women hired to work as civilian employees of the Army during the Great War. Relying on wartime documents, she determined that their experience supported the Double Helix theory and that the army fired all but a rump of a few hundred typists and stenographers during the demobilization.12

By drawing on previously unavailable documents from the interwar era, this dissertation challenges the Higonnet’s and Roberts’s belief that demobilization purged women from the French armed forces. New records reveal that although demobilization did initially reduce the number of women in the Army, personnel shortages associated with demobilization led officers to make new hires and created an enduring beachhead of

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thousands of women working inside the army. Because of the hiring process and the army’s employment policies, during the 1920s officers accepted women as professionals and assimilated them into the French military elite’s conception of military identity.

By studying the ways the military elite constructed the gendered and racial identity of the French Army in opposition to anti-militarist class-based political movements, this dissertation reveals that the French Army’s relationship to the civilian government was badly dysfunctional and a major factor in the Third Republic’s collapse. As a result, the dissertation offers a novel defense of the decadence school’s core argument that internal divisions brought down the Third Republic, but does so without challenging the school’s opponent’s central thesis that the German military victory was not a result of political weaknesses or division among the French political elite.

The political element of Bloch’s book evolved into a position championed by Guy Chapman, Serge Bernstein, and Eugen Weber who argued that polarization and weak governments undermined France’s defense preparations and sapped the morale of average Frenchmen, leaving the army inadequately prepared for the war and politicians unprepared to defend Republican institutions. Another version of the decadence thesis sidesteps the question of military defeat and argues that Vichy grew out of a strong French fascist tradition embodied by a combination of the veterans’ leagues, Action Française, the Parti Social Français, and other rightwing organizations. This group,


who called themselves revisionists, argued that France developed an indigenous fascist tradition that became politically and intellectually significant enough in the 1930s to undermine the Republic. Other scholars, many supporting versions of the immunity thesis, have challenged the revisionists and argued that because of a combination of republicanism and political and social inertia, French fascism was never more than a marginal force.

The Republic fell because of an internal struggle between the civilian government and the military elite, not because of a fascist or traditionalist electoral victory, coup, or revolution. The bitter debate over French fascism and the character of the Vichy regime is important in its own right, but confuses the issue of studying the fall of the Third Republic. Whether Vichy was fascist, quasi-fascist, or neo-traditionalist is important to understanding what Vichy officials and supporters did during the Occupation, but the evolution of Pétain’s regime after it came to power does not tell historians why the Third Republic fell.

Irvine was right when we wrote that, “the immediate cause of Vichy was the crushing defeat of 1940,” but that is only part of the story. The politicians did not cause the military defeat, but their loss of control over the armed forces during the 1920s and 1930s allowed the military defeat to become the basis of an overlapping political crisis that Pétain and Weygand exploited to defeat the Republican government. The Republic

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fell because of unresolved civil-military conflicts that political and military leaders had repeatedly chosen not to resolve during the interwar era.

This dissertation is organized chronologically, though particular themes emerge in different periods. The first chapter focuses on the history of political rights and the military between 1871 and 1914, providing a general overview of the period and serving as a pre-history of the interwar era’s civil-military conflicts. The chapter argues that during the 1870s and 1880s the leaders of the early-Third Republic intentionally excluded the military from the political regime in order to protect the army from subversion, and Republican government from military influence. The resulting system of civilian control of the military represented an extreme version of Samuel Huntington’s objective control model of civil-military relations. Despite their best efforts to seal the military and political sphere off from each other, military and political leaders learned to use the mechanisms of segregation to bring the military into political conflicts.

Chapter II focuses on the French military elite’s reaction to the Great War. It explores the ways the military elite tried to reorganize the army in the wake of the war, including the development of the bataille conduite (Methodical Battle) doctrine and military commanders’ struggles to preserve and enhance their institutional autonomy. The chapter argues that although the Great War changed the military elite’s

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18 Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations* (Vintage Books: New York, 1957), 83-4. Huntington divided systems of maintaining civilian control over the military into two groups, objective and subjective control. Subjective control tried to control the military by making it as like the civilian world as possible. Objective control tried to insure the military’s loyalty by dividing the armed forces from civilian society and engaging officers in a culture of professional competence that kept them focused on mastering the art of war. Objective control accepts civil-military differences and seeks to use them to maintain an effective, but subordinate army, while subjective control tries to maintain the army’s loyalty to the regime by obliterating the differences.
understanding of how to fight wars, it reinforced the elite’s core assumptions about the untrustworthiness of French citizen-soldiers. The survival of the military elite’s distrust of citizen-soldiers underpinned its attempts to forge a new peacetime army. It was also the starting point from which military intellectuals developed *bataille conduite*, the post-war army doctrine that emphasized defense, coordination, and careful control of the conscripted *poilu* and which played a major role in the military defeat.\(^\text{19}\)

Chapter III departs from the traditional framework of military politics to study the civilian reformers who wanted to impose changes against the military elite’s will. This chapter explores the internal relations and proposals of a constellation of reformists spread throughout the spectrum of the French Left that sought to remake the French Army into a Republican institution. The reformists never formed a single organization and their competition with each other fueled the movement’s momentum as much as their fear and distrust of the military elite. The chapter argues that the Socialist Party’s obsession with internal unity and competition with the Communist Party for votes on the extreme-Left led Léon Blum to enforce a doctrinaire revision of Jean Jaurès’s 1910 proposal for a militia army, *L’Armée Nouvelle*, as the party’s defense policy. Socialist intransigence made it impossible for the Left to negotiate a common army reform bill and meant that the Center-Left Radical-Socialists ultimately needed to find allies on the right to pass any reform package. In addition, the mechanics of the Left’s fragmentation provide an insight into the interwar French Left’s instability.

Chapter IV explores the military elite’s response to the military reform movement and the changes in the construction of military identity that occurred in response to the civil-military conflicts of the 1920s. By studying the army from both a political and a

\(^{19}\) Doughty, *Seeds of Disaster*, 5-16; May, *Strange Victory*, 6-10. 198-220.
cultural perspective, the chapter exposes previously unrecognized changes in the construction of military identity. It highlights the intersection of gender, race, and professionalism in defining the officer corps’s self-image and relationship with the Republican political system.

Chapter IV’s discovery that women played an important role in the day-to-day functioning of the interwar French Army, and that the military elite planned to use women as part of a broader plan to defend military professionalism challenges the historiography of women in interwar France. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet’s Double Helix model predicts that women’s wartime gains should not have survived the demobilization, but new evidence in the chapter shows that they did. In fact, the demobilization became the mechanism for integrating women into the military family by giving them a claim to professionalism. Chapter IV’s attention to race and gender reveals that military leaders interpreted the military reform debate as an attempt to turn the army into a recruiting ground for the class-based Left and responded by trying to use French women and colonized men to protect the army against the threat of internationalism and working-class identity.

The final chapter challenges Robert Doughty’s claim that the seminal 1927/28 Army Laws provided stability inside the army and argues that the early 1930s saw incessant civil-military conflicts over army organization that contributed to two major civil-military crisis, the second one of which destroyed the Third Republic. 20 The chapter traces the implementation of the 1927/28 Laws and shows that the bitter debates surrounding disarmament and the années creuses described by Philip Bankwitz were an

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20 Doughty, The Seeds of Disorder, 130-5; Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand 3-8. 201-7.
extension of the military reform debate of the 1920s. The crises of the early 1930s culminated in December 1933 when General Maxime Weygand orchestrated the ritual humiliation of Minister of War Edouard Daladier before the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* in an attempt to derail the government’s plan to impose further defense cuts.

Weygand’s reaction to continuing reformist pressure in the early 1930s broke the system of civil-military conciliation that had led to the 1927/28 military laws by convincing important segments of the political elite to ignore military leaders. Left alone by their political overseers, France’s generals slid deeper into opposition to the regime and because the politicians chose not to use the organs of civil-military consultation, France’s politicians became increasingly ignorant of the true depth of the military elite’s fears.

The conclusion draws connections between Weygand’s campaign against Daladier in 1933 and the civil-military crisis of 1940 when Weygand informed Premier Paul Reynaud that he would refuse to obey an order to carry on the fight against Nazi Germany from abroad. Weygand’s second act of disobedience gave Marshal Pétain an opening to challenge Reynaud for political power. Reynaud’s failure to assert his authority over General Weygand and Marshal Pétain led to his government’s collapse and handed political power to France’s most senior soldier, who quickly moved to abolish the Republic in July of 1940. Reynaud’s rapid collapse in the Face of military opposition was a result of the political elite’s progressive loss of control over the military during the interwar era.

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CHAPTER I

CREATING THE GRANDE MUETTE: THE ARMY AND POLITICS IN THE EARLY THIRD REPUBLIC

With the benefit of hindsight, the roots of the crisis of 1940 are visible in the civil-military relations of the early-Third Republic. Despite the regular political upheavals that characterized French history between the French Revolution and the outbreak of the Second World War, the only time the French Army intervened in politics to force a change of regime between the French Revolution and 1939 was General Napoleon Bonaparte’s 18 Brumaire Year VIII (9 November 1799) coup d’état against the Directory. From Bonaparte’s accession until the birth of the Third Republic, no French regime lasted more than twenty years, but no head of state was overthrown in a military coup. Even in December 1851, when Prince Louis-Napoleon launched his coup, the army obeyed orders from the President, rather than acting on its own initiative. Despite one hundred and forty years of loyalty amid political turmoil, in 1940 military leaders usurped power from France’s elected civilian politicians and founded the Vichy Regime. The military usurpation of 1940 was the culmination of twenty years of intensifying civil-
military conflicts rooted in the Third Republic’s early leaders’ decision to keep the soldiers and the army outside the pale of Republic’s political system.

The Third Republic’s peculiar flaw was its failure to integrate its army into its political system. Despite gaining broad societal acceptance, and achieving political dominance during the 1870s, the republicans never managed to capture the French officer corps. This failure to Republicanize the Army led to a growing divide between the military and political elites that culminated in General Maxime Weygand and senior members of the military elite refusing to obey orders from the civilian government in June of 1940. The military elite’s rebellion allowed Marshal Philippe Pétain to usurp governmental authority from civilian politicians, and ultimately to replace the democratic Third Republic with the authoritarian, some would say fascist, Vichy Regime.

The early Third Republic’s military and political elites struggled with how to organize the army and its proper relationship to the political system. The military and civilian elites feared that too much contact between their worlds would undermine both spheres, because the obedience and hierarchy of the military would clash with the free discourse and respect for the individual of the republican political system. The republican civilian elite, which achieved dominance in the late-1870s, feared that including the military in the political system would encourage another coup such as the 1799 coup that brought Napoleon Bonaparte to power, or the 1851 presidential coup that opened the way for Prince Louis-Napoleon to create the Second Empire. Conservative
Republicans, monarchists, and Bonapartists feared that allowing politicking inside the army would encourage another Commune.\(^{22}\)

Both the republican political elite and the military elite agreed that they needed to keep politics and the army separate. General Louis Trochu, a dissident military reformer under the Second Empire and leading member of the Government of National Defense, played a leading role in rebuilding the young Third Republic’s Army. Trochu summed up the case for separation when he said that, “The ideal constitution is that which creates an army whose instincts, beliefs, and habits make up a corporation distinct from the rest of the population.”\(^{23}\) The Third Republic’s early attempts to implement Trochu’s advice created a duality of civil-military authority that helped to cause the very civil-military conflicts that separation was intended to prevent.

In the 1870s, French leaders sought to strike a balance between maintaining military effectiveness and preserving the state from military control by implementing a version of what Samuel Huntington has called objective control. Objective control seeks to create an effective military force that is obedient to civilian authority by carving out an independent sphere of action for soldiers, and directing them to dedicate their energies to developing technical expertise within and only within that sphere.\(^{24}\)


\(^{23}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{24}\) Louis Trochu, quoted in Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations* (Vintage Books: New York, 1957), 82-5. Huntington believed that there were many types of subjective control, but only one type of objective control. He would probably have described the French model as subjective control, because it failed to keep the military out of politics, but I term it a form of objective control because it sought to control the military through creating separate spheres rather than the civilianization that is the core of subjective control.
Huntington argued that objective control would protect the military from harmful political influence, and by channeling soldiers into a semi-autonomous professional sphere, it would keep them safely away from politics. He contrasted objective control with subjective control, which sought to maintain military obedience to civilian authority by making the military reflect, as exactly as possible, the values, traditions, habits, and institutions of civilian society. Huntington feared that subjective control would lead to the politicization of army commands and bring the specter of partisan military force into civilian politics while simultaneously undermining the competence of the armed forces by preventing the formation of military specialists.25

Throughout the Third Republic’s life, French leaders relied on a form of segregated objective control to maintain civilian control over the armed forces. Unlike Huntington’s vision of pure objective control, that separated soldiers from politics in their professional lives by a rigorous focus on their vocation, the French model sought to prevent the military from controlling the political system and politicians from corrupting the military, by banishing military personnel as individuals from the democratic political system.

Civilian and military elites repeatedly tested the system of segregated objective control. The military elite’s refusal to exonerate the wrongfully convicted Captain Alfred Dreyfus in the 1890s provoked a crisis of civil-military relations that nearly destroyed the segregated objective control model. In the wake of the civilians victory over the generals, Emile Combes’s Minister of War, General Louis André, spied on officers in an attempt to Republicanize the army by purging anti-Republican officers. The

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25 Ibid.
Dreyfusards’ attempt to replace objective control with a form of subjective control failed when the parliamentary opposition learned that of André’s internal espionage and religious discrimination, sparking the Affair of the Dossiers. The Third Republic’s system of segregated objective control survived throughout the 1871-1914 period, but produced repeated clashes between military and civilian authorities, and between rival political factions.

This chapter reinterprets the history of the early Third Republic (1871-1918) in light of the events of the interwar era. This chapter is not a comprehensive history of politics or the army in the early Third Republic, let alone a history of France from 1871-1914. The chapter uses early-twentieth-century legal manuals, debates in the Chamber of Deputies, and records from the French Army’s archive to supplement the work of political and military historians to provide a historical narrative centered on the army’s relationship to the civilian political system between 1871 and 1914. This synthesis argues that regular conflicts between civil and military power politicized the army before the Great War and set a pattern of civil-military interaction that led to the series of escalating crisis in the interwar era that eventually brought down the Third Republic. Ironically, the mechanisms political and military leaders designed to keep politics out of the army and the army out of politics often caused or exacerbated civil-military conflicts.

The Disenfranchised Elite: The Republic’s Army and the Ballot Box

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The framework for the army’s legal relationship to the political system emerged early in the Third Republic. Soon after the founding of the regime, legislation progressively excluded soldiers from all the organs and mechanisms of democratic expression, except for the cabinet. In 1872, the monarchist-dominated National Assembly passed the Third Republic’s first major Army Law, which stripped soldiers of the right to vote.27 By excluding soldiers, who were all men and almost all of voting age, the National Assembly added them to a list of people deemed unable to exercise universal suffrage responsibly, a list that included minors, convicted criminals, foreign residents of France, and women.28

The Republic’s leaders believed women and minor men lacked the maturity, independence, and faculties of reason required to vote responsibly, and criminals had forfeited their political rights through anti-social behavior, but soldiers and sailors were different. A military man was an otherwise qualified voter, whom parliamentarians judged to be too dangerous to be allowed to exercise the basic right of his citizenship because of his profession.29 The 1872 Law specifically prohibited voting by anyone on active duty in the military. This included career officers and non-commissioned officers,

27 *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Lois et Decrets*, 27 July 1872, p 893.


29 Eugène Pierre, *Traité de Droit Politique Électoral et Parlementaire Supplément* Fifth Edition (Paris: Libraires-Imprimeries Réunies, 1924), 343. A soldier or sailor who had a sufficiently long leave, usually interpreted as between one and six months, could regain his right to vote for the duration of his leave. Pierre was a leading expert on political law and new editions of his manual continued to be published until the end of the Third Republic. His interpretations strongly supported parliamentary supremacy over the executive, the armed forces, and even popular sovereignty. His legal philosophy assumed the Republic to be an absolute, that neither a parliamentary majority, nor a plebiscite had the power to abolish the Republic and replace it with another form of government.
conscripts, and even recalled reservists.\textsuperscript{30} If an election took place during a period of reserve training, or during a mobilization, the reservists lost the right to vote or stand for office.\textsuperscript{31} The military elite and the Ministry of War claimed to be sensitive to the potential conflicts this provision created between civil and military power and promised to avoid scheduling reserve convocations during elections.\textsuperscript{32}

The 1875 Army Law continued the progressive exclusion of the military from the mechanisms of politics begun in 1872. The 1875 Law banned all active-duty soldiers from serving in the Chamber of Deputies, excluding soldiers from the emerging Republic’s primary center-of-gravity.\textsuperscript{33} The Republic removed soldiers’ last electoral rights in April of 1884, when legislation removed their eligibility for the Senate. After 1884, the only remaining outlet through which soldiers could participate in politics was by serving as a minister.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{JO Lois et Decrés}, 1884, 893.

\textsuperscript{32} Pierre, \textit{Traité de Droit Politique Électoral et Parlementaire Supplément}, 373.

\textsuperscript{33} Denying soldiers the right to run for the Chamber was a logical extension of the previous decision to deny them the right to vote for deputies. Denying soldiers the right to run for political offices has been a much more common way to protect civilian politics from military control than disenfranchising the armed forces, though some countries have allowed the military to do both, and a few have allotted seats to military-only constituencies.

\textsuperscript{34} Fabienne Bock, \textit{Un parlementarisme de Guerre, 1914-1919} (Paris: Belin, 2002), 22; Maurice Larkin, \textit{France since the Popular Front: Government and People, 1936-1996} Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 52; Major Matt Parsons “Army Encourages Soldiers to Fulfill Civic duty; Rules Govern Political Activity” \textit{Triad On-Line} 10 March 2000,\texttt{http://www.mccoy.army.mil/vtriad_online/03102000/military\%20political\%20activities.htm}. Although it may seem strange that politicians excluded soldiers from the Chamber and Senate in order to insulate the Republic from military force, but still allowed them to wield executive power, it is not an unusual situation. In the United States today, military personnel cannot stand for elective office or serve as Secretary of Defense, but they can hold executive positions outside of their service. For example, Air Force General Michael Hayden currently heads the civilian Central Intelligence Agency. Although there are some similarities between the French Third Republic and the United States, unlike French soldiers under the Third Republic, American soldiers have the right to vote and possess political literature.
The Third Republic’s legislators drafted the 1872, 1875, and 1884 Laws’ bans on political rights for military personnel in terms so absolute that they insured a future conflict between civil and military power. As the number of laws governing the military’s relationship to politics grew, the Ministry of War was increasingly required to interpret how different laws interacted. During the 1880s, administrative actions tightened the *cordon sanitaire* protecting the army from politics and politics from the army. The Ministry’s regulations became controversial when the deputies realized that, under the Ministry’s interpretation of existing law, mobilization would mean that any deputy who still had reserve obligations would be inducted into the army and lose his seat in the Chamber of Deputies, even if the mobilization did not lead to war.

The wall separating the Army and politics risked crippling the Chamber of Deputies by purging its membership and making a mockery of popular sovereignty. A mobilization-related purge of the Chamber could have overturned a government if it had the confidence of the full chamber, but not of a majority of non-mobilized deputies. Deputies were forced to decide whether and how to apply the law and to balance two different applications of political equality. One position applied equality by making politicians live under the laws they imposed on others, the other position preserved equality by insuring political representation for all Frenchmen and the equal weight of

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Under the Third Republic, women fell into a similar legal situation as soldiers. Although denied the suffrage, women were eligible for executive appointments and Léon Blum appointed women to his first Popular Front government in 1936.
every voter’s expressed suffrage by preventing mobilization from removing millions of voters’ political representation.

Both the republican political elite and the military elite agreed that politics and the army needed to be separated, but the results were more than many politicians could accept. The question of political rights and the military boiled over in 1887 when comte Louis-Edmond-Marie de Martimprey, a monarchist deputy representing the Nord, asked General Georges Ernest Jean-Marie Boulanger, then minister of War in the Goblet cabinet, to clarify the legal state of parliamentarians in regard to mobilization. General Boulanger responded that under the 1875 Law senators who were still in the reserves were required to rejoin their unit, but could retain their mandates because they enjoyed immunity from resignation under Article 5 of the Law of 9 December 1884. He said deputies were also subject to mobilization, but unlike the senators, they had no exemption from the 1875 Law and would lose their mandates under Article 7 of the law if mobilized. Boulanger’s response touched off a debate about the proper relationship between the political and military authority and the hierarchy of national duties.35

The comte de Martimprey strongly objected to the minister’s response and appealed to the President of the Chamber, Charles Floquet. Floquet charged the Chamber’s Secretary General, Eugène Pierre, to explore the question. Pierre, a specialist in parliamentary law who published an authoritative manual on political law that was still

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35 “Nos Orateurs,” Nouvelles de Lyon, 12 July 1887; Pierre, Traité de Droit Politique Électoral et Parlementaire Supplément, 373; Patrick de Martimprey ed., “Louis-Edmond-Marie de Martimprey” Généalogie 1311-13. The comte de Martimprey, son of comte Edmond-Charles de Martimprey who served with distinction in the Crimean War and as a military governor in Algeria, came from a family with a long military tradition. Born in 1849, he had just entered the army when the Franco-Prussian war began and participated in the fighting around Metz. After the war, he fought against the Paris Commune and later in the Tunisian campaign, where he was made a Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur before resigning from the army. In the 1885 Legislative Elections won a seat in the Nord and served one term before being defeated in 1889.
in use at the end of the Third Republic, clashed with Boulanger and defended the autonomous power of the Chamber of Deputies. He supported the comte de Martimprey, arguing that “the obligations incumbent on a deputy as a member of the legislative power take precedence over those incumbent on him as a subordinate of the Minister of War.”

In effect, Pierre argued that because the legislative function was central to the Republic, the legislature was superior to the Ministry of War and its members could not be subject to military commands. Pierre argued that Boulanger’s position clashed with a century of legal interpretation which, since the Revolution of 1789, had interpreted laws with the understanding that, “in the interests of public order, no deputy can be removed from his seat without the authorization of the chamber.”

In March 1887, Boulanger and the President of the Chamber reached a compromise. They agreed that during a mobilization, the Chamber would grant long-term leaves of absence to members wishing to return to the colors. This would allow them to serve without having to resign because they would not be active officeholders during their mobilization. They could serve and later return to office, but could not vote or debate while they remained on active duty. The agreement papered-over the differences between the two sides, but was never enshrined in law, and so remained subject to change or reinterpretation without notice.

The March 1887 agreement created a legal fiction that during their military service deputies were not holding their offices and so did not need to resign them.

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37 *Ibid*.

38 *Ibid*. 

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deal’s supporters believed it established the supremacy of civilian power over the military by allowing the Chamber to retain its members, if they wished to avoid mobilization, and guaranteeing that a crisis would not lead to the overturning of election results.

Despite its virtues, the Boulanger Compromise had serious flaws. The informal agreement did not resolve the core legal conflict. The suggested leave policy sought to avoid the clear text and consequences of French law. The legislature had passed the relevant military laws and could have amended them to codify the Boulanger Compromise, but deputies preferred to avoid the politically embarrassing act of voting themselves exemptions from military service. Between 1887 and 1890, at least eight bills sought to establish a clear legal position for deputies in the event of mobilization, but the only one that passed, the 1889 Three Year Service Law, undermined the Boulanger Compromise without the Chamber admitting that it had done so.39

In addition, the Boulanger Compromise was silent on the problem of differential majorities. Although members would not have to resign upon mobilization, they would be unable to exercise their mandates while under arms. It remained possible for a government supported by a majority of elected deputies to fall if a majority of non-mobilized deputies opposed it. It also meant that if a government fell after mobilization, only those deputies not serving in the military could vote on the new government, thus disenfranchising all of the voters whose deputies accepted mobilization.

Rather than dealing with the comte de Martimprey’s concerns, the 1889 Military Law contained a provision which, when combined with the 1875 and 1884 Laws, undermined the Boulanger Compromise and could have purged the Chamber of Deputies.

39 Ibid., 375.
The 1875 and 1884 Army Laws made it clear that soldiers could not hold elective office, and that any military service triggered the political disabilities. The 1889 Law clarified that, “in case of mobilization, nobody may prevail upon the function or employment he occupies in order to remove from himself the obligation of the [conscript] class to which he belongs. Only title holders of functions and jobs designated on tables A, B, and C are authorized not to rejoin [their units] immediately.”40 The tables listed various civilian government employees deemed vital to the functioning of the state and society, but did not include elected officials. Thus in the event of war, the 1889 Law could have purged any deputy recalled to his reserve unit. The 1872, 1875, 1884, and 1889 Army Laws created and reinforced a system of segregated objective control that threatened the integrity of the Third Republic’s core institution. Although intended to protect the Republic by keeping the military out of politics, the system threatened the integrity of the Republic’s most important democratic institution.

*L’Affaire Mirman*: The Muttering Mute

In 1893, lingering concerns over the relationship of military and political authority resulted in another divisive battle in the Chamber of Deputies. The 1893 election saw the monarchist Right’s vote total cut in half, and it returned only fifty-four deputies. The election marked the arrival of the socialists, who elected forty-seven deputies.41 After the 1893 election, monarchist deputies took advantage of lingering

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uncertainties about the relationship between military and civilian power to assert their continued political importance by attacking the socialists. The monarchists challenged the validity of the election of the new socialist deputy from Reims, Léon Mirman. Millin de Grandmaison officially challenged Mirman’s election, claiming he had not completed his military service. Grandmaison established that Mirman had not served as a conscript because he had received a deferment from military service to continue his advanced university studies. The deferment required him to complete a set term of service to the nation by working as a professor. The terms of Mirman’s deferment required him to work as a professor until 28 January 1895. His election ended his service before the end of his obligation and opened him to attack.42

Grandmaison’s challenge to Mirman’s election required a Chamber debate on his eligibility. After an acrimonious initial debate, the heavily republican Chamber agreed to seat him on 9 December 1893. However, Mirman’s victory proved short-lived, as on 16 December the Chamber began a new investigation to determine how to reconcile Mirman’s obligations under the military laws with the constitutional laws’ protection of his mandate.43

The Mirman Affair began as a clash between rival factions in the Chamber, but became a clash between civilian and military authority when military leaders intervened to support the monarchists. In January 1894, General Mercier, the Minister of War who played such an important role in the Dreyfus Affair, intervened in the dispute. Mercier denied that the Chamber could overrule legislation without passing a new law and


interpreted the relevant laws to require Mirman’s induction with the next conscript class. Speaking for the socialists, Jean Jaurès complained that the military should not have the power to override the will of universal suffrage by removing a deputy from office. Reasserting Pierre’s 1887 position, he argued that because the Chamber was the center of French political authority it was supreme over any other arm of the state.

Mercier’s position reflected the letter of French law. In 1893, the Chamber had adopted a modification of the 1889 Military Law that specified, “no one may enter into state administration or may be invested with publicly elected functions if he has not satisfied the obligations of the present law [The 1889 Three Year Service Law].” Mirman’s election had prevented him from completing his required service, voiding the deferment; as a result, the text of the 1889 Law required the Chamber to invalidate his election.

Conservatives argued that because Mirman had violated his exemption, he had not completed his military service and was ineligible for elected office. Despite this, the local prefect had allowed him to stand, and his allies argued that political supremacy required that parliament be immune from demands made by the unelected, and often anti-Republican, military elite. Jaurès defended Mirman by celebrating universal suffrage and accusing Mercier of insulting it by placing military obligations above the ballot box. He accused Grandmaison, Mercier, and Mirman’s other opponents of attempting a coup d’état.

44 Ibid., 30-1.
45 JO Debats, (Paris: 1894), 356.
46 JO Lois et décrets, loi du 14 août 1893, 4297.
47 Bock, Un parliamentarisme de Guerre, 32.
While Jaurès exalted universal suffrage, others harkened to French history to justify defending Mirman against induction. The Radical Gustave Rivet invoked the French Revolution and the original levée en masse to justify exempting Mirman from his military obligations. Rivet declared that “if I affirm in the name of the democratic tradition, in the name of the immortal Convention which saved the country, that the place of deputies, in time of war, is not in the regiment, but here, is not the question resolved in peacetime?”\textsuperscript{48}

Grandmaison’s maneuver destroyed the Boulanger Compromise, but though it may have been an insult and a political stunt, it was not a coup d’état. In October 1894, the Chamber voted to enforce the Ministry of War’s order that Mirman must report for duty with the next conscript class, but Instead of forcing Mirman to resign, the Chamber suspended him until he completed his military service.\textsuperscript{49} The government won the vote on its induction order 307 to 215. The Deputy-soldier served one year and then returned to the Chamber when the Army placed him on leave for the remaining two years of his service.\textsuperscript{50} Mirman’s forcible induction violated the Boulanger Compromise by asserting the Army’s authority to impose service on a deputy. Despite making a major concession to military power, the Chamber did assert the resilience of its members’ electoral mandates by suspending Mirman instead of declaring him ineligible and thus protected core of the principle at stake in the Martimprey Affair. By preserving Mirman’s

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Pierre, Traité de Droit Politique Électoral et Parlementaire Supplément, 375.

\textsuperscript{50} Bock, Un parlementarisme de Guerre, 32. The vote clearly split the Republicans, some 250 of whom voted with the monarchists. The combined forces of the Opportunists and Radicals held 472 seats, the socialists 49, and the monarchists 56.
mandate, the Chamber conserved some of its claim to independence from the executive. The Mirman Affair’s shifted the balance of power between the Chamber and the military toward the military, but left the relationship between the Chamber and the armed forces confused and politically charged.

The controversy over Mirman’s eligibility showed that rival political factions could use the separation of politics and military for political gain. Conservative factions exploited the ban on soldiers serving in parliament to force an opponent into the military and out of the Chamber of Deputies. By forcing a socialist deputy to leave the chamber, Grandmaison won a minor parliamentary advantage for the Right, but more importantly, he sowed division in Republican ranks and won a propaganda victory for his declining political movement. The threat to Mirman forced the socialists to try to stop his induction and gave the Right the chance to question the Left’s patriotism and commitment to national defense. It also put the socialists in a position where they had to argue against the equal application of French law to protect one of their own politicians, which undermined their claims to embody the ideal of equality.

The Mirman Affair involved a conflict between executive and legislative power as well as civil and military power, but no individual or institution was in a position to arbitrate the dispute. The Chamber was the highest authority on the validity of its members’ elections, and so had the power and responsibility to rule a contested election valid or invalid. Because the Chamber represented the supreme authority over its own members’ elections, French courts lacked the jurisdictional authority to rule on the validity of Mirman’s elections. However, without passing new legislation, the Chamber could not prevent the government from using its police powers to enforce the Ministry’s
interpretation of French law by arresting or forcibly inducting Mirman into the armed forces.  

The chamber could simply have voted its preferred position and ignored any protests from the Ministry of War, but that would have been politically dangerous. The deputies would have had to face the voters having voted to give themselves a special exemption from military service. It would have been a politically difficult act for most deputies, but defeat by the chamber would also have embarrassed the government and probably have forced it to resign. On the other hand, the government could simply have asserted its duty to implement French law and ordered Mirman’s induction regardless of the Chamber’s preference.

The 1894 Mirman Affair showed that politicians were willing and able to manipulate the separation of the Army from politics for political gain, and that the military elite was willing to violate the principle of separation in order to make its own political points. The military elite, through General Mercier, intervened in support of Grandmaison’s attacks in order to affirm its own privileges and damage a political faction its members disliked. Mercier and conservative politicians skillfully used the text of laws designed to insulate political institutions from the Army, to inflict a political defeat on the

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51 Léon Duguit, *Traité de Droit Constitutionnel Tome IV: L’Organisation politique de la France* 2nd Edition (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1924), 247-50, 255-6. If a deputy’s election was contested, he could still sit, debate, vote, and receive pay until the full chamber voted to either validate or invalidate his election. The major limit on a contested deputy’s powers was that he could not introduce bills, but he could propose amendments; Raymond Huard *Le suffrage universel en France, 1848-1946* (London: Aubier, 1991), 309. When the new chamber met all the men that local electoral authorities had declared elected met in Paris, regardless of any election challenges. First all uncontested elections were validated, to allow the chamber to begin operation and contested elections were typically referred to committees before the full chamber voted to validate or invalidate the election. It could take months, or even years before the chamber acted on a challenge and the entire process was influenced by politics. In this regard, the Third Republic’s constitutional conventions followed those of the American Constitution of 1787 that granted the House of Representatives and the Senate exclusive jurisdiction over their members’ elections. Article I, Section 5 begins, “Each House shall be the Judge of the Election, Returns and Qualifications of its own Members . . .” *Constitution of the United States of America*, Article I, Section 5.
socialists. The socialists countered by claiming that a recently passed law was irrelevant if it clashed with the principle of the freedom of the Chamber of Deputies and their own factional interests. Both the military and political elite were blatantly manipulating the foundational laws governing civil-military relations even before the military elite’s attempt to defend the fraudulent conviction of Captain Alfred Dreyfus threw both the political and military systems into chaos. Although Grandmaison’s position was legally strong, the army’s intervention in an internal Chamber matter to help an anti-Republican political faction provided an ominous prelude to the Dreyfus Affair.

The problem of mobilized deputies resurfaced after the Dreyfus Affair when the Chamber debated the 1905 Two Year Service Law. The Right linked the problem of mobilization with the overall question of how to organize the regime in wartime. The Chamber considered many different plans, including adding supplemental deputies to replace those lost to the war and creating a war committee comprising the presidents of the Chamber and Senate, the Premier, senior ministers, the President of the Republic, and military leaders with a consultative role. This committee would have had the sole power to propose laws to the diminished parliament.52

The Chamber debated many proposals, but despite decades of work never produced legislation giving the Republican regime a firm legal basis in wartime. Despite calls to abolish or amend the 1875 Law to allow mobilized deputies to retain their mandate under arms or to refuse mobilization in order to preserve their mandates, the

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Chamber failed to agree on any plan to clarify how the Republic would function in wartime.53

*L’Affaire Devèze*

The Mirman Affair was not an isolated incident; there were other instances when a political faction tried to use the military laws against its political opponents. In the Mirman Affair, the Right used the exclusionary laws against the Left, but the Left was just as willing to use the exclusionary laws against its own enemies. In 1910, the newly unified Socialist Party contested Marius Devète’s declared victory in the Alès *circonscription*. Devète, an independent socialist who refused to join the unified party, had defeated the Socialist Party’s official candidate, a Radical, and a moderate Republican, to return to the chamber. Parliamentary Socialists challenged Devève’s election alleging that he, like Mirman in 1894, still owed military service. Devève had received a reduction in service to one year because he was a student at a religious seminary, but because he did not join an order the Socialists argued that he should have to return to the colors and serve out another year and before he was eligible to run for office or to hold his seat. The Socialists launched their attack despite having raised no objection to his previous electoral victory.54

The Devève Affair caused the Socialists and the Right to exchange the positions they held in the Mirman Affair. Despite Jaurès’s earlier claim that invalidating an election because a deputy owed military service was tantamount to a *coup d’état*, he and

53 Ibid., 232-35.

his allies tried to use the military laws to exact political revenge against Devèze by stripping him of his seat. The Socialists’ attack sent a message to dissident socialists that they had to join the new party and respect its discipline or expect the new party to target them.\(^55\)

The Devèze Affair established a precedent for the Socialist Party using defense policy debates as a way to reinforce party discipline. In the Devèze Affair, the Socialists prioritized party discipline over their preferred relationship between military and civil power. During the military reform debates in the 1920s, Léon Blum would follow Jaurès’s precedent of valuing party discipline over policy by subordinating military reform and democratization to party discipline and unity by refusing to compromise with centrist and moderate-Leftist allies.

The conservatives proved just as willing to flip their positions as the Socialists. In the Mirman Affair, the Right had defended the rule of law against republican exceptionalism, but during the Devèze Affair, they ignored the text of the same laws they had defended so loudly during the Mirman Affair, and voted to validate Devèze’s election. In the final vote the Right provided the bulk of the Devèze’s support in the 205-98 (294 abstentions) vote to validate Devèze’s election. Devèze, an “independent socialist” received the votes of such aristocratic luminaries as the Prince de Tarante, the duc de Blacas, and the comte de Halgouet.\(^56\)

\(^{55}\) *Ibid.* The Socialists’ attacks against Devèze shares some similarities with the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) decision to run “assassin” candidates against LDP Diet members who voted against Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s Postal Privatization Bill during the 2005 Japanese General Election.

\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*
The Chamber was unable to resolve the conflict between civil and military authority that its own legislation had created. The problems were solvable, but the deputies were unwilling to risk an electoral backlash by voting themselves special exemptions, and unwilling to live with the clear text of its own laws. Instead, it made do with ad hoc agreements and instructions from the Minister of War meant to reduce the effects or delay the application of French law. The Right used republican laws as a weapon against the Left, while the Left countered with the undemocratic notion that some people were above the law. The result was a twenty-year deadlock in civil-military relations that coexisted with forty-years of institutionalized chaos in the organization of the French Army. Despite repeated crises, the Third Republic was unable to reconcile the conflicts created by its model of segregated objective control of its armed forces.

The Martimprey, Mirman, and Devèze Affairs show that rather than removing the army from politics, the attempt to enforce a strict separation of the military from the political regime became a source of civil-military conflict. Both the Right and Left showed they were willing and able to use the laws excluding soldiers from the political system as weapons against their political opponents, often dragging the military into the political fight. This gave the military elite the ability to help its political allies by periodically intervening in the disputes, as the army did in the Mirman Affair, or remaining aloof from the dispute, as the military elite did in the Devèze Affair. Thus, rather than depoliticizing the military, separation provided the military elite new avenues for political intervention.
Instability as Policy: Politics and the (Dis)Organization of the French Army

The Mirman and Devèze Affairs showed that the political elite’s confused relationship with its own military affected French politics, but it also affected French military organization. The memory of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1851 coup combined with the memory of the *levée en masse* to entrench a preference for militia forces and enduring hostility to a praetorian professional army among many Republicans. Republican mistrust of professional forces manifested itself in a refusal to sanction a unified command structure or the creation of an effective general staff until the eve of the Great War.

Republican political leaders feared concentrating too much power in any individual’s hands. A general who commanded the entire army could have used his position to usurp governmental authority himself, or to support another’s claims, as Weygand did for Pétain in 1940. By keeping the army’s leadership divided political elites made it difficult for army leaders to organize a *coup* against the regime. The monarchist bent of many army officers reinforced the Republicans’ hostility to a unified command structure and concern the army could turn against the regime.

In *Pyrrhic Victory*, Robert Doughty has shown that despite the clear superiority of German military organization in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, French leaders took decades to create a general staff. The government did not allow the creation of even a skeletal peacetime army headquarters until the 1888-91 reforms. Even then, the Minister of War who carried out most of the reforms, Charles de Freycinet did not give army commanders actual command of the soldiers and units theoretically subordinate to
them. Freycinet was the Third Republic’s first civilian Minister of War, which eased parliamentary approval of his reforms. Freycinet’s status as a civilian help him get the reforms passed, but it made it harder for him to provide professional leadership to the army than it had been for his military predecessors. The lack of a general-minister left the top of the military hierarchy vacant and prompted a consolidation of the command structure by granting the Minister’s Chief of Staff more power.57

From 1871 until 1911, the French army theoretically functioned under the command of the Minister of War. Rather than appointing a general officer to command the army, the government appointed two generals: one to be Chief of the Minister’s Staff and a second to act as commander in the event of war. Dividing the functions of senior peacetime general from wartime commander made the military seemed less of a threat to political leaders uneasy about the officer corps continuing attachment to the monarchy and the Catholic Church.58 Because many of the nineteenth-century Ministers of War were themselves generals, the army usually had three men with a claim to be head of the army; one general with a political claim to lead (the Minister), one with an bureaucratic claim (the Chief of the Minister’s Staff), and the designated wartime commander. In addition, through the Minister of War, the entire cabinet could assert it collective political influence over the command structure.

The Third Republic’s allocation of overlapping and uncertain authority to several different leaders kept the Army dependent on the government for leadership.59 The


governments usually failed to provide strong leadership because they were frequently short-lived and distracted by internal divisions. As a result, the minister’s authority was frequently weak and nobody was in day-to-day control of the army. The lack of strong senior leadership caused decades of organizational drift, encouraging officers to look to themselves for unofficial leadership.

Rather than a true general staff that could debate reforms, draft plans, and implement changes, the Third Republic created a purely consultative organ, the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* (Superior War Council). The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* consisted of selected senior officers, including the heads of departments, and after they were organized, the designated commanders of field armies. Although the President of the Republic was officially the president of the council, the Minister of War often presided in his stead. The council’s vice-president was the *généralissime*, the general designated to become the commanding general in the event of war.\(^{60}\)

While the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* provided a useful forum in which the military and political elite could discuss the intersection of diplomacy, military strategy, and economic policy, it also created a duality within the army’s organization. Because all of the men with a claim to lead the army were members, the council sometimes provided a forum for consensus building, but if senior leaders were unwilling to cooperate the overlapping authority to several different leaders and organizations to prevent any one individual or faction from creating a powerbase that was strong enough to challenge his leadership. As a result of the Fuhrer’s tactics, he was the only person able to arbitrate between the competing factions, all of whom were kept dependent on his will and favor to survive and carry out their policy initiatives. This system is very similar to what the early-Third Republic adopted for the French Army. By creating three leaders with overlapping authority, the political leaders effectively hamstrung the army’s ability to act as a coordinated institution under normal circumstances. This divided army was dependent on the government to provide the leadership for any substantial change in the status quo, but because the government was regularly overthrown, it was difficult to carry out longterm plans and government policy was frequently reversed in the middle of making important military reforms.

\(^{60}\) Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, 8.
council could deadlock and degenerate into personal infighting. If the généralissime, the Minister of War, and the Minister’s Chief of Staff failed to reach a consensus, the council lacked the power to adjudicate the disputes. Only the government as a whole could settle the conflict, and then usually by firings or forced resignations, which governments feared could lead to political problems. The minister could order his staff to impose changes against the council’s advice or against the généralissime’s will, but most ministers found it hard to impose major changes on the army if its designated wartime commander had formally rejected them and predicted they would lead to the needless deaths of French soldiers.

The general staff’s direct subordination to the Minister of War created problems when the minister could not exercise leadership. Because ministers’ terms in office were often short, the general staff frequently could not carry out long-term programs because of conflicting orders coming from short-term ministers. Even after Charles de Freycinet forced through reforms that enhanced the general staff’s independence in 1890, it remained a relatively weak body and still did not have the authority to command the army. As tension with Germany mounted in the 1890s and early 1900s, the French Army remained internally divided and cursed with too many leaders with too little authority.61

The Great Reform: A Unified Command Structure

The French Army lacked a clear and unified command system until the eve of the Great War. As Franco-German tensions rose before 1914, politicians became more interested in the French Army’s preparations for war and some convinced themselves that

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61 Ibid., 7.
the army’s command structure was inadequate to the task of waging modern war. In June 1911, the Minister of War responded to a senator’s question about the French Army’s command system by telling the Senate that the government, through the Minister of War, controlled military planning as well as wartime strategy and operations. General François Gorian’s response accurately described the existing reality, but it outraged many senators and deputies. They reacted against the apparent lack of a functioning military command system and the duality of authority created by separating the general-in-chief designate from the general staff and voted to overturn the government.62

The new government appointed a new Minister of War, Adolphe Messimy, who came into office with a perceived mandate to sort out the military command system. Shortly after Messimy’s appointment, the German gunboat Panther arrived in Agadir harbor in Morocco, sparking the Second Moroccan Crisis and threatening to ignite a European war. The combination of the Senate’s previous concerns about the army’s command structure and the heightened danger of war gave Messimy unprecedented freedom of action to attempt a major reform of the French Army’s command system by making changes that would have destroyed the careers of previous ministers.

When Messimy tried to implement his reforms, he clashed with the supreme commander-designate, General Victor Michel over strategy and organization. General Michel wanted to reorganize the French army and expand the role of reservists in front-line units to allow the army to defend the entire eastern frontier against German invasion. Messimy objected to Michel’s defensive mentality, and allied himself with a group of mid-level officers, such as Lt. Colonel Louis Loyeau de Grandmaison, who advocated

62 Ibid., 8; JO Débats Senat (30 Juin 1911), 2540-1.
offensive warfare, resulting in a bitter power struggle within the military hierarchy and among the members of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*.63

By the end of the 1911, Messimy and his military allies successfully forced Michel to retire as supreme commander-designate. Messimy wanted to replace Michel with General Joseph Gallieni, but political opposition to Gallieni forced him to search for other candidates. He eventually settled on General Joseph Joffre, a strong supporter of Grandmaison’s offensive doctrines and a man known for his moderate Republican sympathies.64

Armed with his mandate from the Senate’s overthrow of the previous ministry, Messimy gave Joffre the authority that French political leaders had denied all of the Third Republic’s previous military leaders, command over the French Army. On 28 July 1911 Messimy appointed Joffre, who was already Vice-president of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* and thus Supreme Commander-designate, chief of the General Staff. On the same day, Messimy issued a decree placing the General Staff “completely and without reserve under Joffre’s direction.” In the space of less than two months, Adolphe Messimy created a unified command structure.65 Messimy’s reform represented the first major change in the Republic’s broken relationship with its Army between the consolidation of the regime in the late 1870s and the Great War. It also illustrates what determined leaders could achieve under the Third Republic.


Although military historians continue to debate whether Messimy chose the right man to lead the French Army, the unified command proved crucial in the early days of the Great War. Joffre’s influence ensured the ascendency of the offensive à outrance school and affected the tactics used by French officers in the Battle of the Frontiers. Because of his new authority as both Chief of Staff and Supreme Commander-designate, Joffre was able to select and prepare the cadre of talented officers on whom he would relied in early days of Great War. By pre-selecting men to fill key positions, Joffre was able to prepare them for their coming duties in ways that had been impossible before the creation of the unified command. During the war itself, Joffre’s unhindered right of command allowed him to first launch the bloody and failed offensive into Lorraine, but then to organize the Army’s retreat while he was preparing the counter-attack that became the Battle of the Marne.

Building the Army: Equality, Conscription, and Reservists

The Republicans’ fear of the military elite, which kept the Army’s command structure divided, led to decades of debate about how to raise the manpower to fill the army’s ranks. Military and civilian leaders spent decades debating the proper term of conscript service and debating what role to assign reservists in the next war. The military elite’s mistrust of civilians-in-arms led army leaders to discount the value of reservists

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66 Raymond Recouly, Joffre (New York: Appleton, 1931); Horne, The French Army and Politics; Doughty, Pyrrhic Victory; John Keegan, The First World War (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Gaston Duffour, Joffre et la guerre de mouvement, 1914 (Paris: Payot, 1937); Marius Daille, Joffre et la guerre d’usure, 1915-1916 (Paris: Payot, 1936); Andrew Clayton, Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914-1918 (London: Cassel, 2003). In 1931, Raymond Recouly praised Joffre as a genius whose conduct of the 1914 campaign paved the way for Foch’s victories in 1918, but later historians have taken a more qualified approach to Joffre. Most historians have praised Joffre for his calm in the face of the German attack and his ability to organize the Battle of the Marne, but criticized him for launching the bloody and failed offensives into Alsace and Lorraine that left the French Army defending the wrong part of the front when the Germans unexpectedly invaded Belgium.
and the Republican Left’s fear of a professional, or “praetorian,” military led many political leaders to fight against large professional cadres. In the early 1870s, military and political leaders realized that the peacetime army was too small for great power war and would have to rely on reservists in wartime. However, divisions between the military and political elites, and their incompatible fears prevented them from cooperating enough to translate the Nation-in-Arms into a full-fledged reality.

France’s revolutionary history shaped the military elite’s negative assumptions about reservists. During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 the main French reserve force, the *Gardes Mobiles*, performed poorly and the generals believed the war had proven reservists political unreliability. The *Gardes Mobiles* were ill trained, poorly led by their reserve officers, badly equipped, and though sometimes motivated, frequently disobeyed orders. During the mobilization, Marshal François Canrobert complained bitterly that his reservists refused to obey orders, lacked training, and were infiltrated with revolutionaries who were more interested in marching on Paris than fighting the Prussians. When the *Gardes Mobiles* were finally deployed, military commanders tried to disperse them to fortress garrisons as far from Paris or the main battlefronts at possible. Most of the military elite assumed that the performance of the *Gardes*

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67 Geogrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003), 46-7. When mobilized in 1870 the *Gardes Mobiles* could muster only 90,000 men, compared to 400,000 active service troops. They were equipped with obsolete rifles and hamstrung by regulations laid down by the Legislative Body designed to prevent them being used to aid “Napoleonic militarism.” They arrived too late to assist the Imperial Army in the battles along the eastern frontier and were ineffective afterwards.

68 SHAT L b4 Armée du Rhin. Letter August 1870, Marshal Canrobert to Marshal Leboeuf.

69 SHAT L b4 Armée du Rhin. Letter August 1870 Napoleon III to Minister of War.
Mobiles in 1870-1 had revealed intrinsic weakness in French reserve soldiers, rather than being a product of poor training and leadership.

The conservative lawmakers of the National Assembly who reluctantly organized the Third Republic shared the military elite’s distrust of civilians-in-arms, and feared that revolutionaries in the populace and inside the armed forces could unleash a new Commune. In the 1872 Army Organization Law, lawmakers tried to reconcile their competing beliefs that France needed a professional Army to guard against a new Commune, with their belief that France needed universal male military service to provide enough men to defeat a German invasion. In an attempt to have both a professional and a mass army the National Assembly split each year’s conscript class into two groups; some men served five years while most served only one year.\textsuperscript{70} Because of the division of the conscript class into long and short service contingents, many of the men in the peacetime combat forces would be long-service troops and a large proportion of reservists would be politically suspect short service conscripts.

The Law of 1875 followed the 1872 Law and attempted to remedy the weaknesses the war had exposed in the reserve system. The new law prioritized controlling reservists over using them to maximize the army’s combat manpower. Under the Law of 1875, a one-hundred-man peacetime infantry company would have grown to two hundred fifty men in wartime.\textsuperscript{71} This system allowed professional officers, non-commissioned officers, and five-year conscripts to exercise direct control over the


\textsuperscript{71} Bieuville, “Quelle place pour les reserves,” 2.
presumably unreliable civilians-in-arms by integrating the reservists directly into pre-existing active duty units.

The military elite’s focus on political control created serious flaws in the 1875 system. The 1875 system allowed close supervision of reservists, but at the price of weakening unit cohesion and sacrificing flexibility, problems that would repeatedly reappear in the Third Republic’s Army. Wartime units did train together in peacetime and the reservists would have been strangers to each other and to their units.\(^{72}\)

The military elite built the cumbersome and deeply flawed 1875 system on the assumption that soldiers needed years of training and conditioning to be both combat effective and politically reliable in the midst of a domestic of battlefield crisis. They believed revolutionary appeals easily swayed civilians-in-arms because they were unprepared for the military life, while long-service regulars would internalize military obedience, making them less likely to join a rebellion. Military leaders hoped to prevent a repeat of the Paris Commune by carefully controlling and supervising their potentially unstable citizens-in-arms, even if that limited the wartime army’s flexibility.

The 1872 and 1875 Laws set the foundations of the Third Republic’s Army, but proved controversial after the Republicans took power from the monarchists in the late 1870s. A combination of political unease with the inequalities within the 1872/75 system and concerns within the military elite that the French Army needed more manpower, new reform plans gathered momentum in the early-1880s. War Plan VI, adopted by the Ministry of War in 1883, brought the army closer to the Republican ideal of citizens defending the Republic. Plan VI envisioned creating large units of reserve soldiers that

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
would fight as separate units, but which would remain dependent on the active army for artillery, logistics, and other support services.\textsuperscript{73}

Having begun a process of changing the reserve system, the military or political elite found it difficult to stop additional reforms and restore stability to the system. During the next thirty years, the political and military leaders modified the reserve system every two to three years. Although not all of the reforms moved in the same direction, overall the reforms did move closer to the Nation in Arms by placing more and more responsibility for fighting the next war onto reserve soldiers.\textsuperscript{74}

By the late 1880’s, the military and political elites recognized it was politically impossible to maintain the gross inequalities of service created by the 1872 Army Organization Law. Between 1876 and 1889 there had been many proposals to modify the 1872 Law, but pressure began to mount rapidly after 1886 when General Boulanger proposed an egalitarian reform of the conscription system as part of his populist platform. In 1889, the reformist minister of war, Charles de Freycinet, in cooperation with senior generals, brought forward the 1889 Recruitment Law. The 1889 Law established three years of service for most Frenchmen bringing the Republic’s army more in tune with the Third Republic’s egalitarian principles by equalizing the term of service for most citizens.\textsuperscript{75}

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\textsuperscript{73} SHAT 7 N 142 Supplement. “Note au sujet des divisions de Réserve jusqu’en 1914.” Plan VI called for the reserves to form three new corps of two divisions. Each division would have four infantry regiments.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.; Weygand, \textit{Armée Francaise}, 261-313.

\textsuperscript{75} SHAT 7 N 142 Supplement. “Note au sujet des divisions de Réserve jusqu’en 1914.”; Weygand, \textit{L’Armée Française}, 302-3.
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The 1889 Three Year Service Law reduced, but did not eliminate, the inequalities of obligation among French conscripts. Young men training to be teachers, for a religious ministry, studying at selected schools, and holding or studying for some specialized degrees served only one year. These reductions reduced political opposition from powerful interest groups, but at the cost of retaining an inequality that allowed the well educated, often sons of middle or upper-class families, to escape much of their military service.\footnote{Ibid., 304.}

The 1889 Three Year Service Law created a backlash within the military elite. Some French commanders feared that the 1889 Law’s reduction in longer-service veterans created by ending the five-year service requirement would undermine discipline within the Army. In 1892, the government began a major reorganization of the reserves, and military pressure succeeded in convincing the government to back a bill that reversed the drift toward independent reserve units that had begun in the mid-1880s. The Law of 1892 abandoned independent reserve units and reverted to placing reserve formations inside of active-duty units. Unlike the Law of 1875, which inserted individual reservists into active units at the lowest level, the 1892 Law created small reserve units and attached them to existing regular units. The legislation’s authors designed the new system to preserve the integrity and \textit{élan} of the standing army, while keeping reserve units under the command of regular officers.\footnote{Bieuville, “Quelle place pour les reserves,” 5. The 1892 Law added one or two battalions to each of a division’s four regular infantry regiment (which typically had three or four battalions). In effect, the new law doubled an infantry division’s combat strength by expanding the size of the regiment, which was the basic combat unit of the French Army.}
The 1892 Law proved controversial amongst both military conservatives and progressives. Conservatives believed the law did not go far enough. They worried that there were not enough seasoned officers and non-commissioned officers to control new reserve formations and advocated returning to something similar to the 1875 system that assigned reservists to active units as individual reinforcements. Progressives called for larger numbers of independent reserve formations. They believed that only by maximizing the number of reservists in combat could France hope to match German military power.\(^{78}\)

During the 1890s the French ministers of war and senior generals, though distracted by the Dreyfus Affair and a major reorganization of the artillery, adopted several changes to the reserve system. New elections in 1893 and the lack of a clear chain of military authority that could arbitrate disputes and build consensus soon destroyed the 1892 Law’s new military system. In 1893, the ministry returned to the 1883-1891 system of creating large independent reserve units, but left them dependent on active forces for their support services, heavy weapons, and some command functions.\(^{79}\)

The cumulative effect of the 1890s reforms were to make reserve units better able to function independently and participate in offensive operations, thus bringing the military closer to the principle of the Nations in Arms. Reserve divisions were given new logistics, communications, and command units. In addition, the reserves accidentally benefited from the government’s decision to invest heavily in new artillery for the regular

\(^{78}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{79}\) SHAT 7 N 142 Supplement. “Note au sujet des divisions de Réserve jusqu’en 1914” Plan XII.
army. When the government replaced the standing army’s artillery, the reserves received the surplus equipment, allowing the formation of new reserve artillery units.\textsuperscript{80}

Although many of the individual reforms of the 1880s and 1890s were beneficial, the speed with which new plans superseded old plans diluted the effect of any individual arrangement. The reserve system was reformed so often that it spent most of the late-nineteenth century in a state of flux. The constant reforms inhibited the creation of stable officer and non-commissioned officer cadres, and meant that men would go into combat fighting beside total strangers.

The Turn-of-the-Century Crisis: Dreyfus, Déroulède, and the Dossiers

The Dreyfus Affair shattered the \textit{entente} between the military elite and the Republic’s political leaders just like it shattered the \textit{ralliement} movement that had seen French Catholics reconciling to the Republic in the early-1890s. The military elite’s blatant anti-Republicanism during the Dreyfus Affair undermined public and parliamentary support for the French Army and led to new and stronger demands to weaken the power of professional officers. The weakening of the military elite’s political

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.} These changes to the reserve system came at a time when France’s geopolitical position was greatly improved because of the Franco-Russian Alliance, which opened up the possibility of offensive action against Germany. The greater ability of reserve units to fight independently would make it easier to use them to invade Germany in concert with the Russians. At the same time, the French Army was developing new artillery, including the famed 75mm field gun, which increased the firepower of smaller units. The new artillery pieces allowed older weapons to be given to reserve units, allowing them to have organic fire support at a minimal cost to the treasury.
clout had several ramifications, including the “Affair of the Dossiers” and the 1905 Two Year Service Law.\(^\text{81}\)

During the Dreyfus Affair, both the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards pulled the army into politics. The Dreyfusards had to politicize the army in order to raise Captain Alfred Dreyfus’s case in a political arena to pressure the army and government into overturning the Captain’s fraudulent conviction for espionage. Led by Paul Déroulède, the nationalist Right tried to use the passions engendered by the affair to entice the army into overthrowing the Republic.\(^\text{82}\)

Déroulède hoped that the emotion of President Félix Faure’s funeral would combine with the Army’s growing frustration with politicians’ criticisms to create a revolutionary moment. He made subtle contacts with the Army, but did not get any clear indication the Army would support or oppose his coup. Nevertheless, he hoped that he could tempt General de Pellieux, Major Hubert Joseph Henry’s former commander, to lead a military overthrow of the government. On 10 June 1898, the day of Faure’s funeral, Déroulède sprang from the crowd in front of the Elysée Palace ready to call on Pelliuex to storm the palace, only to find that general de Pelliuex had left the procession early to avoid any plot Déroulède might hatch.\(^\text{83}\)

\(^\text{81}\) Jean Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus* (New York: George Braziller, 1986); Eric Cahn, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics* (London: Longman, 1996); Christopher Forths, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004). The story of the framing of Captain Alfred Dreyfus for espionage by officers of the Army’s Counter-Intelligence office and the bitter political and press battles which eventually uncovered his innocence and forced a series of retrials has been told many times. The details of “the Affair” and its broad political, social, and intellectual effects are outside the scope of this work. Forths’s book represents a refreshing new turn in the historiography of the Dreyfus Affair. By applying the rich literature of gender studies to the Affair he was able to find new significance in an exhaustively studied event.

\(^\text{82}\) Larkin, *Church and State after the Dreyfus Affair*, 70-79.

\(^\text{83}\) Ibid.
The failure of Déroulède’s coup showed that although there were problems in civil-military relations, the Army remained at least passively loyal to the regime. Enough soldiers were angry with the government for Déroulède to believe that he could raise the army action against the regime, but the failure of the army leaders to hatch their own plots or support Déroulède’s showed that it was not a real danger to the Republican regime. Despite the Army’s refusal to move against the regime, its insistence on upholding Captain Dreyfus’s wrongful conviction in the face of growing political pressure convinced many Republicans that it was a threat, to either the Republic or its values, triggering a reaction the pushed the Army further away from the Republic.

In the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, the French Left looked for ways to root out the officer corps’s anti-semitism and authoritarianism. Some Republican politicians had long feared the officer corps and advocated Republicanizing it, but had been unable to do so because of the military’s prestige and the strength of moderate republican factions. Because of public hostility to the defeated anti-Dreyfusards, radical Republicans, especially socialists and Radicals felt able to reshape the French army. Minister of War General Louis André tried to tame the officer corps by promoting Republican officers and freezing anti-Dreyfusard and/or anti-Republican officers in their grade. André’s strategy was to conduct a secret slow-motion purge of the officer corps. One of the officers who was to be frozen in grade for signing anti-Dreyfusard petitions, contributing to a fund for Major Henry’s widow, and religiosity was Captain Maxime Weygand. In the 1930s, Weygand would play a central role in the politics of the French Army, and helped Pétain to bring down the civilian government in June 1940.84

84 Horne, The French Army and Politics, 25-7. Like many millions of Frenchmen, Weygand went to his grave believing Dreyfus was guilty.
André’s political purge exploded into a controversy of its own, dubbed the Affair of the Dossiers, when nationalist politicians discovered his plans. André’s plan would have been controversial regardless of how he did it, but he made the situation more explosive by using the Grand Orient Lodge of Freemasons to help him gather information on officers to help him decide whom to purge. Before André could favor republican officers for promotion, he had to know who they were. He was able to identify many officers who had made public pronouncements during the Dreyfus Affair or whose names were in published contributor lists for funds for those accused of crimes, or for Major Henry’s widow, but that only identified a minority of monarchists, Bonapartists, Catholics, and weak supporters of the Republic.

André used governmental and private organizations to help him identify potential enemies of the Republic by spying on the officer corps. Initially, he used the Sureté Général to spy on the Army, but soon resorted to using the Free Masons to spy on officers’ political opinions and religious practices. André and his fellow Free Masons did not limit themselves to spying on soldiers; they also collected files on whether officers sent their children to public or religious schools, and recorded officers’ wives religious practice.85

André was not content to use civilians to spy on officers; he also pressured officers to inform on each other. André’s espionage turned officers against fellow officers, and encouraged subordinates to inform on their superiors. The military historian Alistair Horne has argued that André’s attempt to cherry pick officers for promotion distorted the career paths of French officers, Republicans and anti-Republicans alike by

85 Larkin., Church and State after the Dreyfus Affair, 138-42.
making political patronage more important than professional accomplishment. He claimed that it undermined military education and preparedness, as well as increased political influence over promotions. André used the information his military, police, and Masonic networks provided him to place officers on one of two lists: the Carthage list of Catholic, monarchist, anti-Republican or overly anti-Dreyfusard officers he intended to freeze out of the army and the Corinth list of Republican, secular, and Dreyfusard officers he intended to promote rapidly.\(^86\)

Despite trying to keep his activities secret, nationalist politicians soon discovered André’s scheme. The revelation that the Minister of War was using a secret society to spy on the Army, and was using the religious practices of officers and their families to decide whom to promote, undermined the Dreyfusards’ credibility in dealing with the Army. The most damaging part of André’s efforts was his use of officers to spy on other officers. By having subordinates spy on their superiors and colleagues, including rivals for promotions and appointments, André risked destroying the army’s cohesion.\(^87\)

André’s tried to use his card file to Republicanize the Army by identifying Republicans to promote, and monarchists, Bonapartists, and practicing Catholics to be purged. He was reacting against the failure of segregated objective control revealed by the military elite’s subversion of the military justice system and its embrace of anti-semitism. André wanted to shift from the system of segregated objective control created in the 1870s to a form of subjective control. By trying to change the political culture of


\(^87\) *Ibid*. 

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the Army to make it a reflection of French society, André hoped to protect the Republic against military usurpation.

Regardless of his intentions, André’s tactics backfired. By acting secretly, he gave the military elite and their political defenders ammunition to use against him. The use of the Free Masons, a controversial secret society, made what André could have presented as an urgently needed reform look like an attempt to turn the Army into a political patronage organization, which is how the historian Alistair Horne has interpreted his actions.\(^88\) André’s use of spies, both civilians and officers, to report on the political leanings of soldiers raised the specter of the army becoming a political prize to be fought over by domestic political factions, or worse an actively partisan domestic political actor, the very thing that André and Combes claimed they wanted to avoid.

The Dossiers Affair revealed the Republicans’ hypocrisy at an inconvenient time. André was caught applying a religious test that discriminated against French citizens based on their religious affiliation and practice at the same time the Combes government was justifying its decision to separate Church and State on the grounds that religion was a private matter best kept out of state functions and decision making processes.\(^89\) The government was thus in the awkward position of arguing for laïcité while defending state discrimination against men based on their and their family’s religiosity.

André’s attempt to reformulate civil-military relations through conspiratorial means brought down the Combes government in early 1905.\(^90\) Despite Combes’s fall, the

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\(^90\) Sowerwine, France Since 1870, 85.
damage was done; the combination of the military elite’s actions in the Dreyfus Affair, and Leftwing politicians’ actions in the Dossiers Affair politicized the army. Before it fell, the Combes government strengthened the power of the Minister of War over the Army, by undoing some of Freycinet’s reforms. The Combes-André reforms gave the minister more power to control promotions, but at the cost of further dividing command authority, and creating a strong promotion bias in favor of officers who worked in administrative offices in Paris. The new path to promotion for ambitious officers was administration, so that the politicians could notice their talents, while peacetime duty in combat units left officers to languish in the provinces far from that chance to catch the minister’s eye.\textsuperscript{91}

The collapse of public and political confidence in the military elite undermined the 1889 Army Recruitment Law. The fall of the Combes government ended the Dossiers Affair, but did not end the attack on military power. Combes successor, Maurice Rouvier was another anti-Dreyfusard and worked to weaken military power in other ways. Rouvier’s government abandoned André’s spying program, but sought to weaken the power of Army chiefs and bring the Army more into line with the principle of equality, by passing the Two Year Service Law in 1905. The Two Year Service Law established absolute equality of service; The 72,000 men privileged under the 1889 Service Law lost their exemptions and all physically able young men were required to serve as common soldiers. Even Polytechniciens, Saint Cryiens, and students at the Grandes Écoles served one year in the ranks before serving out their terms, one year for students at the Grandes Écoles and longer for the professional officers at the military

\textsuperscript{91} Horné, \textit{The French Army and Politics}, 25-7.
academies, starting as *sous-lieutenants* (second lieutenants). The law’s supporters hoped that by making officers serve time in the ranks they would be closer to the people, and thus more Republican. The theory did not work in practice, it failed to Republicanize the officer corps and it undermined the training of reserve officers. In practice the future officers spent their year in the ranks halfway between the enlisted ranks and the officers and were not assimilated by the mass of peasant and worker soldiers. Rather than spending two years learning to be good junior officers, an educated conscript spent a year as an enlisted man, and then most of his remaining time learning the basics of being an officer and left military service with little experience commanding troops.\(^9^2\)

The politicization of military disputes did not end with the Dreyfus Affair, or the Two Year Service Law. In 1910 General Victor Michel, the Chief of the General Staff and wartime commander-in-chief designate, or *généralissime*, tried to reorganize the French Army and rewrite its battle plans in response to the growing danger of war with Germany. Although he did not know the details of the Schlieffen Plan, General Michel’s analysis of the European geography and the military balance between Germany and France convinced him that Germany would attack France through Belgium. He proposed a defensive strategy aimed at creating as many units as possible to cover the entire French frontier from the English Channel to the Swiss border in order to stop that initial German invasion.

General Michel distrusted the ability of civilians-in-arms to maintain the level of coordination he believed modern war required, and tried to implement a reform similar to the *bataille conduite* school’s ideas in the 1920s. He wanted to reorganize the reserves to

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emphasize coordination and control rather than élan. To maximize coordination Michel sought a fuller fusion of active and reserve by grouping reserve and active regiments together to create demi-brigades within the standing infantry divisions. The demi-brigades would be under the command of the colonel commanding the active regiment, in effect doubling the peacetime strength of combat units. Although similar to the 1875 system, the Michel demi-brigades would have had greater flexibility because of their division into smaller units capable of functioning separately on the battlefield.

Michel’s plan sparked a battle between him and a coalition on the Minister of War and a group of younger, more offensive-minded military theorists. The prominent theorist Lt. Colonel Louis Loyseau de Grandmaison, the prime force behind the shock variant of the offensive à outrance school, condemned General Michel. Grandmaison clashed with Michel over his attempt to fuse the active and reserve troops and his assumption that coordination was more important than offensive spirit. Lt. Colonel Grandmaison was able to challenge General Michel, a man far above him in the military hierarchy, because of the confusion in the chain of command created by the tripartite division of military authority and because of political influence over the chain of command. Protected by Minister of War Adolphe Messimy, Grandmaison and others argued that Michel was defeatist, and that tying active and reserve units inside the demi-brigades would weaken unit cohesion and sap the active units of the élan necessary to wage the offensive à outrance.

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93 Bieuville, “Quelle place pour les réserves”; SHAT 7 N 142 Supplement. “Note au sujet des divisions de Réserve jusqu’en 1914.”

94 Bieuville, “Quelle place pour les reserves,” 10. Grandmaison also worried that the demi-brigades would require too much artillery to be concentrated at low levels of command, reducing the ability of corps and divisional commanders to control the battlefield.
The battle over the reserves destroyed General Michel’s career. Grandmaison’s criticism and Messimy’s machinations, which included orchestrating a media campaign, isolated Michel. The government reacted against Michel’s scheme, and the furor it caused among more aggressive officers and politicians, by supporting calls from within the military elite to remove the General. Heavy pressure from politicians, officers, and the press combined with his inability to restore discipline by forcing his junior officers into line, compelled General Michel to resign. Messimy replaced Michel with another Republican general, Joseph Joffre, and appointed him both Chief of the General Staff, and généralissime. Joffre abandoned Michel’s defensive strategy in favor of an invasion of Germany.95

Messimy’s victory over Michel revealed both the strength of civilian control over the armed forces, and the corrosive effect of politicizing the military hierarchy. The mere fact that the minister could force the designated wartime commander to resign showed that the civilians were still in control of the army, but Messimy’s methods were dangerous. By allying with junior officers against their superiors, Messimy subverted the chain-of-command and the basis of his own authority over the armed forces. In the short term, Grandmaison was a useful tool for Messimy, who was able to attack Michel without fully committing himself to the endeavor, but by creating the precedent that subordinates could defy their superiors if they thought they were right, it helped lay the basis for the generals to defy later civilian ministers.

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Conclusion

The military and political elites of the early Third Republic spent forty years trying and failing to establish a satisfactory relationship between the Army and the Republic. The constant contention consolidated the military and political elites’ prejudices against each other. The political elite’s fear of the army entering politics matched the military elite’s fear of civilian politics entering the army. Motivated by memories of the Army’s role in ending the Second Republic and crushing the Paris Commune the political elite sought to insulate the institutions of Republican governance from military influence. The political elite tried to create segregated preserves of military power in order to protect areas presumed to be more vital from military influence. The political elite thus denied soldiers the right to vote and to hold office, while allowing the military elite broad authority to run the army, often appointing military officers to the service ministries.

During the pre-Great War period, the military elite and their political allies successfully strengthened the separation of the military from the civilian political system, but the Third Republic’s segregated objective control model failed to keep the military separate from partisan politics. The Martimprey, Mirman, Dreyfus, Dossiers, Devéze, and Michel Affairs combined to show that political leaders from across the political spectrum and military leaders were all willing to use the laws designed to separate the Army from politics for political advantage.

The defeat of the military elite in the Dreyfus Affair, and the Dreyfusards’ subsequent defeat in the Dossiers Affair showed that the system did work well enough to
prevent either sphere from dominating the other. Even though the system was deeply flawed, the military remained under the, more or less firm, control of the Republican state, and although civilian politicians did exert undo command influence, they never reduced the military to a patronage system and did not attempt to use it against their political opponents.

The pre-Great War struggles over where to draw the line dividing military and civil power and military organization did not end with the Great War. Instead, the contentious pre-war debates served to set the stage for new battles in the 1920s that challenged the relationship of the military to civilian authority and the relationship of the Army to the society it defended. The legacy of the pre-war period shaped the attitudes and positions of both the military elite and the left-of-center elements that became the military reform movement, providing an essential base upon which to build an understanding of the crucial years of the 1920s.
CHAPTER II

FROM ÉLAN TO BATAILLE CONDUITE: THE MILITARY ELITE, ARMY DOCTRINE, AND THE POLITICS OF CONTROL

After four years of struggle and sacrifice, during which 1,700,000 of its soldiers died, the French Army emerged victorious from the Great War. The bloodletting shattered the pre-war Army and discredited the offensive à outrance school that had dominated the pre-1914 Army. By 1918, most of the surviving French military intellectuals had reversed their prewar positions and argued that the war had established the dominance of material over élan. The army’s leaders feared both the human carnage of another war and its potential political effects. They blamed the war for the two Russian Revolutions and feared that it had opened the door to a new wave of revolutionary fervor inside of France.

Military intellectuals rejected their prewar tactical and strategic doctrines, but used some prewar assumptions to explain what had happened during the war, in the process further engraining those assumptions in their worldview. Even as they rejected the offensive doctrines that had dominated pre-1914 military thought, they reinforced the mistrust of civilians-in-arms that had been latent among the military establishment since

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the founding of the Third Republic and the 1871 Paris Commune. Before 1914, the military elite’s mistrust of the civilian population manifested itself in Grandmaison’s obsession with training naturally passive civilians to attack vigorously as part of the offensive à outrance. After the war, military leaders continued to mistrust their reservists, but did so for different reasons. By 1918, military leaders believed that professional soldiers had to supervise civilians in arms to keep them from taking needless risks and getting themselves killed. Over the 1920s, the military elite generalized this tactical doctrine into an operation and strategic doctrine that taught that discipline and control won wars. The military elite’s focus on control eventually led it to prioritize political power over military resources, reinforcing the civilian government’s loss of control over the armed forces.

Over the course of the early 1920s, this new school of military thought, bataille conduite or Methodical Battle, became the basis of French strategic thought. Bataille conduite grew out of the experience of the Great War and especially Marshal Philippe Pétain and General Eugène Debeney’s 1918 counter-offensives that drove the German Army out of France.\textsuperscript{97} Bataille conduite began as an attempt to apply the lessons of the Great War to break the defense-dominated stalemate with coordinated combined arms attacks. However, over time, military intellectuals drifted away from a commitment to offensive warfare and developed an increasingly defensive strategic and operational outlook. The military elite’s fear that casualties would lead to civil and military unrest further reinforced bataille conduite’s defensive tendencies and strengthened the generals’ determination to control the army’s conscripts.

The early 1920s were a period of relative civil-military peace punctuated by conflicts over the length of conscript service and army organization. During this time, the military elite debated its responses to civilian reform plans, and developed its emerging doctrinal consensus under the umbrella of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (Superior War Council). Because of the council’s central role in the army’s response to its conflicts with civilian leaders and activists in the early 1920s, it emerged as the Army’s primary conduit for negotiating with civilian political leaders. Through the council, the military elite agreed to progressive reductions of conscript service from a notional three years in 1919 to eighteen-months in 1923 while fighting to enhance the army’s institutional autonomy.

This chapter covers the military elite’s reaction to the Great War of 1914-1918 and military intellectuals’ efforts to study the war as a guide for rebuilding the French Army. The first section explores the immediate postwar years and probes the origins of bataille conduite. The second section argues that bataille conduite’s defensive drift grew out of an increasing emphasis on control. Military intellectuals, including high-ranking leaders like Colonel Duffour and younger officers like Captain Charles de Gaulle, fed the focus on control and the defensive strategies, eventually leading to the Maginot Line and the failed battlefield doctrines of the Second World War. Civilian leaders assimilated the military intellectuals’ ideas, simplified them, and took them to extremes by imagining wars without offensives fought from prepared defensive positions against which the enemy would break like ocean waves against the shore.
The second section uses Charles de Gaulle, who is usually thought of as a counter-cultural military thinker, to show the power that the belief in control had within the French Army. Reexamining de Gaulle’s early writings reveals the process by which military intellectuals devalued the offensive as part of their focus on continuous fronts, morale, and their own authority. In the 1920s, de Gaulle shared *bataille conduite* thinkers’ fear that civilian society had become decadent, hostile to authority, and a breeding ground for subversive ideologies. His writings exposed his overriding concern with maintaining control over unreliable conscripts and reservists. Although de Gaulle eventually broke with the *bataille conduite* school in the 1930s when he proposed transitioning to an offensive armored and professional force, during the 1920s he was a generally orthodox thinker whose writings helped to reinforce both the military elite’s focus on control and the intellectual foundations of the Maginot Line.

Finally, the chapter turns to the military elite’s efforts to reorganize the post-Great War French Army. The reorganization affected both administrative and combat organization. Military and political leaders recreated and reformed the major instruments of civil-military cooperation, the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* and the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*, and worked with and against political leaders to control the size and force structure of the postwar army. Although the military elite sought to combine the largest possible force with the most thorough control over its soldiers, when faced with trade-offs the post-Great War military elite regularly chose to value control over force structure, setting a precedent for the major civil-military compromises of 1927-28 that defined the interwar Army and its relationship to civilian authority.
Building the Theory: Intellectual foundations of the Interwar Army

Over the course of the 1920s, French officers sought to devise solutions to the next war’s problems from the experiences of the Great War. The interwar French Army’s dominant doctrine, *bataille conduite*, grew out of the intersection of the military elite’s acceptance that the defense was tactically and operationally dominant with a belief that coordination was the most important ingredient to winning battles in modern war. The French military elite emerged from the Great War shaken by the bloodletting it had experienced and determined to prepare for the next war with Germany by learning the Great War’s lessons. Military leaders believed the Great War had validated the concept of the Nation-in-Arms and revealed the dominance of material over *élan*. In the aftermath of the war, the French military elite tried to uncover what combinations of tactics, technology, and organization had worked and to explain why.

Despite believing that the experience of the Great War showed that its prewar ideas were tragically flawed, the French military elite did not make a clean break with its past. Instead, the French military elite’s prewar assumptions and theories evolved based on the wartime experience of its surviving members. Although the military elite rejected its prewar doctrines, it clung to many of the pre-war assumptions that governed the military’s relationship with the French people and the civilian state. This was especially true for the military elite’s discomfort with civilians-in-arms.

Although military leaders believed that war required specialist knowledge, they also accepted that modern war demanded the human resources that only total national
mobilization could provide, and thus accepted the principle of the Nation-in-Arms. Military intellectuals spent the early 1920s trying to combine modern war’s demand for technical skill with its insatiable need for manpower. Their solution was to embed a large professional cadre inside of a conscript army. Military leaders hoped that if the professional cadre had enough authority, it could control the under-trained conscripts at the beginning of the war and manage the war’s crucial technical dimensions until the conscripts had learned to become technicians themselves.

The French military elite based its postwar plans on combining the principle of the Nation-in-Arms with its belief that the army and its soldiers should be separate from the political system. Military leaders wanted to maintain a force that was large and obedient enough to fight a major war or to crush a popular rebellion or Leftwing coup attempt. To that end, they generals believed that the army should be composed of disenfranchised conscripts who would serve for at least two years. The military elite also believed that the Great War had shown that modern war required specialized expertise in planning, tactics, weapons, and support services. Senior leaders and theorists believed that soldiers needed to learn specialist skills in peacetime in order for the army to fight effectively at the beginning of the next major war.

In a 1921 speech to the École de Guerre General Paul Maistre explained the lessons he learned from the Great War to the school’s class of mid-career officers. General Maistre was a respected senior officer whose lecture would have been a major occasion in the school’s program. In 1921, he was the Inspector General of Infantry, giving him supervisory power over infantry training and a seat on the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. During 1918, Maistre commanded the Central Army Group and won the
Second Battle of the Marne in July, a victory that saved Paris for the second time in the war and broke the last great German offensive of the war.\textsuperscript{98}

Drawing on his wartime experiences, General Maistre told the student-officers that only expertly coordinated and controlled attacks could break the natural stalemate that resulted from modern military technology. He argued that despite the difficulties in conducting successful attacks, officers had to find ways to seize the initiative through offensive actions because the principles that governed warfare were immutable.\textsuperscript{99}

Maistre’s analysis of the Great War epitomized the military elite’s focus on coordination and control. He argued that integrating men and weapons in operations that unfolded to carefully designed timetables was the only way to overcome the advantages that technology gave the defense.\textsuperscript{100} In his speech, General Maistre spoke for many when he argued that artillery, machine guns, and wire had created an advantage for the defensive so great that only a perfect attack could succeed. A successful attack required the careful integration of artillery, armor, and infantry elements to concentrate their killing power in space and time. He envisioned curtains of artillery fire neutralizing the enemy and opening small windows of opportunity for the infantry, with armored support, to advance close enough to devastate the enemy infantry with rifle fire before they could recover from the artillery barrage.\textsuperscript{101} In effect, he envisioned a combined arms version of

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 377, 385-9, 465.


\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.; John Keagan, The First World War (New York, Vintage, 1998), 22-3. John Keagan would disagree with General Maistre’s opinion of the balance of technological forces during the Great War. Keagan argued that the offensive had a firepower advantage, but that the state of communication and observation technology was too primitive to operationalize that advantage.

Ferdinand Foch’s prewar feu variant of the offensive à outrance, but with coordinated artillery fire becoming equally as important as massed rifle fire and coordination by senior commanders replacing the élan and personal courage of infantrymen. Both Maistre and Foch held to the primacy of the offensive and particularly the war winning power of offensive rifle fire.102 Drawing on his experience in the Great War, Maistre explained that, “on the field of battle movement is only possible if it is prepared by fire . . . on the field of battle fire is all-powerful.”103

General Maistre hoped that the defense’s technological advantage could be reduced, or even neutralized, by the invention of new offensive weapons, but was not optimistic about that happening quickly. France ended the Great War with the world’s largest tank force and Maistre believed that the French Army should continue to develop this new weapon. He argued that in the next war tanks should operate in concert with new types of armored vehicles. He argued the army should develop all-terrain armored vehicles capable of carrying infantrymen crossed No Man’s Land and disgorging them when they reached the enemy’s lines. These vehicles would then continue with the infantrymen and provide direct fire support as they conducted their joint assault. He imagined that the vehicle would have to be heavily armored, well armed, and tracked to allow for all-terrain movement.104


104 Ibid. General Maistre’s imaginary vehicle closely resembles the contemporary American Army’s Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle.
Many politicians, journalists, and other opinion makers accepted, but simplified the military elite’s ideas. Pierre Cot, the deputy from Cherbourg, was one politician who assimilated the high command’s lectures about the killing power of fire. Cot repeatedly argued against relying on vulnerable field forces and urged the government to construct fortified artillery and machinegun positions during peacetime throughout northeastern France for use in the next war. Simplifying and distorting General Maistre’s ideas, Cot argued that France could win the next war by magnifying the killing power of the already dominant defensive instruments of the Great War, machineguns, artillery pieces, and fortifications, while minimizing casualties by remaining on the defensive and bleeding the Germans white. \(^{105}\)

Although some politicians, like Cot, believed the next war could be fought on the cheap, most military leaders expected that the next war would be long and bloody. The military elite’s recognition of the killing power of modern weapons and the destabilizing effect casualties had on the French Army in 1917, led many members of the military elite to fear that the next war could lead to a revolution unless military leaders closely monitored and controlled the reservists to minimize casualties. \(^{106}\)

Despite the crucial role reserves and rapidly trained conscripts played in the Great War, much of the military elite continued to distrust them. Instead of allaying the military elite’s distrust of recalled civilians, the Great War only changed how military

\(^{105}\) SHAT 5 N 15 Supplement. Dossier 1. Speech by Pierre Cot.; *JO Chambre Débats* (10 Dec 1929) p.4235. Pierre Cot was one of a group of post-Great War Radical politicians known as “Young Radicals.” Cot favored a political alliance with the Socialists and became a vocal anti-fascist in the 1930s, leading him to vote against the Munich Agreements. By the late 1930s, Cot allied with the Communists and continued to work closely with them into the 1960s. Peter Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54.

leaders expressed and dealt with that mistrust. Before the Great War theorists like Lt. Colonel Louis Loyseau de Grandmaison, who died in battle during 1914, argued that the army needed to professionalize conscripts to instill the proper offensive spirit in them to allow them to press home attacks. Instead of worrying about building offensive spirit, post-war theorists worried about disciplining and coordinating attacking conscripts.\textsuperscript{107} The key to victory in Maistre’s theory was seamless integration of artillery and infantry attacks over time. Soldiers needed the expertise to coordinate precisely the actions of dozens of units and the discipline to stick exactly to the plan even under fire.\textsuperscript{108}

Although influenced by prewar ideas, General Maistre sought both to apply the lessons of the Great War and to project the next war’s lessons. He wanted to reorganize the army to concentrate more firepower in infantry-dominated combined arms units. In 1922, Maistre submitted a report to the \textit{Conseil Supérieure de la Guerre} calling for increased infantry armament. He wanted to emphasize automatic rifles over the bolt-action rifles that were the basic infantry weapon of the French Army as a partial substitute for heavy machineguns. The resulting units could be broken down into small squads able to move around the battlefield rapidly, but still able to deploy significant firepower because of their automatic rifles. He argued that if properly coordinated and controlled by well-trained officers and non-commissioned officers, the combination of increased infantry firepower and speed allied with close artillery support by heavy guns

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in the rear and armored vehicles moving with the infantry would provide victory, both offensively and defensively.\textsuperscript{109}

Maistre’s proposals were part of a larger effort to restore mobility to the battlefield. Maistre received support from many senior leaders, including General Rageneau, the deputy Chief of Staff. General Rageneau oversaw the creation of an experimental tank tactics commission at the Army’s testing facility near Chalôns-sur-Marne. Authorized by a decree signed my André Maginot, then Minister of War, the commission studied the optimal tactics and equipment for offensive armored warfare.\textsuperscript{110}

Maistre and Rageneau’s ideas represented the center of French military thought. The 1921 rewriting of French military regulations, the \textit{Provisional Instructions on the Tactical Employment of Large Units}, emphasized precise coordination of units over space and time as the only way to launch a successful offensive given the killing power of the defense.\textsuperscript{111} These regulations, referred to as “the Bible” by French officers, were written under the supervision of Marshal Philippe Pétain, the hero of Verdun and eventual creator of the Vichy Regime in 1940. Pétain’s prestige strengthened the document’s authority and helped it remain the basis of French doctrine and military thought throughout the interwar period.\textsuperscript{112}

In the early 1920s, French military thinkers emphasized control and coordination as a way to enable a successful offensive, or counter-offensive, but in the middle of the

\textsuperscript{109} SHAT 1 N 13 Supplement. Dossier 1. No 27/IGI 28 March 1922.

\textsuperscript{110} SHAT 9 N 358 Supplement Dossier 3. No 11-1/11 19 September 1923.


1920s, French thinkers became increasingly pessimistic. French theorists increasingly emphasized controlling their troops and pushed the offensive stage of operations backwards in time until it became a *coup de grace* rather than the central instrument of modern war.

In his 1925 lecture “Method of Command and Conduct of Operations” Colonel Duffour, a leading doctrinal thinker in interwar France, argued coordination was central to modern war. Specifically he advocated fighting the next war as a single operation with different phases, coordinated in space and time. Duffour used the principle of coordination over time to justify standing on the defensive for months or even years, without admitting he was giving up on the offensive. Drawing on the experience of the Great War, Duffour argued that maintaining the continuous front should be a commander’s highest priority. A commander should deny the enemy the chance to maneuver by maintaining a continuous front and refrain from major attacks to conserve his forces while wearing down the enemy until its army had been so weakened by attrition or low morale that a decisive offensive became possible.113

Colonel Duffour’s lecture was symptomatic of the French military elite’s efforts to learn from the Great War. Duffour and his fellow military intellectuals recognized that the Great War had produced horrific casualties for all sides, but also believed it had heralded in a new age of warfare and that future wars would be fought in much the same conditions. As a result, they tried to find lessons in the war to explain why some campaigns succeeded and others failed. One part of that process was the belief that over the course of the war the French Army learned how to fight modern war and that the

victory of 1918 was a result of successfully learning how to cope with the war’s new challenges. Thus, most military intellectuals argued that if the French Army had fought the entire war the way it fought in 1918, the loss of human life would have been smaller and the allies would have won the war much more quickly.114

Colonel Duffour supported his theory with repeated references to the Great War. He showed his essentially defensive mentality by condemning the German general staff for risking a British breakthrough in 1916 by diverting its reserves away from France during the Battle of the Somme to conquer Romania. He also praised Foch for using his reserves to maintain the continuous front during the German offensives in the spring of 1918, instead of counterattacking. Duffour explicitly rejected the importance of maintaining the initiative and substituted coordination as the central tenant of his doctrine. Instead of believing victory went to the boldest or best-armed force, he believed victory went to the most coordinated and patient army.115

Duffour’s obsession with control was part of the army hierarchy’s growing focus on political and military control. Duffour built on the foundations of other military theorists, such as General Adolphe Taufflieb. In 1920, General Taufflieb, the newly-elected senator from Bas-Rhin in Alsace, preached the importance of hierarchical leadership when he wrote in his proposed army reorganization law that “the value of a unit depends solely on its leaders. The best troops, badly led, can only expect failure, while with good leadership good results will follow from mediocre troops.”116

114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
Like Maistre, Taufflieb’s focus on control was rooted in his wartime experience. While commanding the 170th Division in May of 1917, General Taufflieb personally experienced the 1917 Army Mutiny. He witnessed the 17th Infantry Regiment mutiny against its officers at Soissons. He reported hearing shots fired, including one that passed near his head. Mutineers cried “La Paix,” “À bas la guerre,” and “À Paris!” Taufflieb reacted to the mutiny by speculating that he could have the five worst offenders in every company executed and was one of the senior officers least likely to reduce mutineers’ sentences.\textsuperscript{117} Although only a minority of officers personally experienced the mutiny, the 1917 mutinies shook the entire officer corps and were a major reason why interwar officers feared that conscripts were unreliable.

Charles de Gaulle: A Methodical Intellectual

The military elite’s obsession with control was not limited to senior leaders like Maistre, Duffour, and Taufflieb. Despite his post-1940 reputation as a visionary theorist, Charles de Gaulle’s writings in the 1920s reveal him to have been a supporter of \textit{bataille conduite}.\textsuperscript{118} De Gaulle eventually broke with \textit{bataille conduite}’s supporters as in the late-1920s and early 1930s, but during the 1920s, he was a qualified supporter of the dominant doctrinal school. Captain de Gaulle argued that modern war required strong

\begin{footnotes}
\item[117] Rolland, \textit{La Grève des Tranchées}, 184-5, 379, 408.
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central leadership in order to maintain control over troops whose loyalty and reliability was suspect. De Gaulle, like Duffour, helped to expand the dominance of the defense from the tactical and operational levels of war, which General Maistre had recognized in the early 1920s, to the strategic level of war.\footnote{Based on concepts developed by the German and Soviet Armies, many modern scholars of the military and military officers divide military operations into the Strategic, Operational, and Tactical Levels of War. The Strategic Level deals with the most general national objectives, the Operation Level deals with very large to medium sized units and focuses on how to fight battles and campaigns, and the Tactical Level focuses on relatively small units fighting engagements with individual enemy soldiers or small groups of the enemy. For examples, the decision to destroy the Nazi Regime by landing an Army in France and marching into Germany was a Strategic decision. General Eisenhower’s plan to land allied units in Normandy and push inland functioned at the Operational level, while the soldiers who landed on Omaha beach and fought their way off the beaches to clear the surrounding terrain fought at the Tactical Level of War.}

During the 1920s, de Gaulle stressed the importance of control and urged fellow officers to adopt a defensive mentality. He justified these positions with examples drawn from the Great War and from earlier French and German military history. Like other orthodox French military intellectuals, de Gaulle expressed his belief that the increased firepower available to armies made effective offensive action very difficult, and usually very bloody. He also feared that modern war, and the casualties that went along with it, sapped the patriotic will of soldiers and civilians alike, making them susceptible to revolutionary appeals. He attributed this tendency toward disorder to both the experience of modern war, and a generalized societal decay.\footnote{Charles de Gaulle, \textit{Le fil de l’épée} (Paris: PLON, 1996).}

In his 1923 study \textit{Discorde chez l’ennemi}, written for students at the Saint Cyr military academy, de Gaulle made the case that any army doctrine had to make achieving battlefield coordination its central objective. He argued that modern doctrine should teach officers to conserve their human and material resources by employing them in carefully ordered sequences that would compensate for the crushing advantages of the
defense in modern war. He advocated a powerful centralized command authority with the power to achieve coordination by compelling lower echelons to obey its orders.\footnote{Charles de Gaulle, \textit{La discorde chez ennemi} (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1944).}

Captain de Gaulle used his analysis of the battles of Königgrätz (1866), Sedan (1870), and the First Battle of the Marne (1914), to present the case of centralization. He presented his case for strict hierarchical obedience by attacking the Prussian/German tradition of decentralized command. He argued that the Prussian system was dangerous because it left the overall commander ignorant of the location and intentions of his forces and without the ability to organize a centralized response to changing circumstances.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 8, 15-16, 24-5. Although de Gaulle mistrusted the German Army’s tradition of command autonomy and decentralized decision-making, other historians have credited that independence with allowing the German Army’s early offensives to succeed during the Second World War and to recover from the major allied offensives later in war. John Keegan, \textit{The Second World War} (New York: Viking, 1989).; Alan Clark, \textit{Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1981-45} (New York: William Morrow, 1965). While praising German flexibility, both Keegan and Clark also show that the chaotic organization of the Nazi regime combined with the tradition of independence among German generals to cause serious operation military problems, including the duel between von Manstein and Kleist that complicated the army’s attempt to stabilize the Eastern Front in January of 1943. Geoffrey Megargee has argued that the German Army’s command system was badly deficient and systematically failed in strategic planning and key support services, in part because of its refusal to look at the big picture. Geoffrey Megargee, \textit{Inside Hitler’s High Command} (Lawrence KA: University of Kansas, 2000). Ernest May disagrees with Megargee, arguing that the German General Staff proved flexible and that command independence gave the German Army a decisive competitive advantage against the French Army that tried to fight a \textit{bataille conduite}. Ernest May, \textit{Strange Victory: Hitler’s Conquest of France} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 452.}

De Gaulle accepted that the tradition of command independence did sometimes give the Prussian Army a momentary advantage, but argued that it caused the Prussians consistently to run unnecessary risks. Despite Prussia’s victories under Helmut von Moltke, de Gaulle severely criticized the Prussian commander’s leadership during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. De Gaulle argued that von Moltke gave subordinates too much freedom and nearly lost battles as a result of not knowing what was happening on the battlefield and being unable to respond
to changing circumstances or force subordinates to obey his orders. De Gaulle believed that the Prussian Army had been lucky to win the decisive battle of Königgrätz in 1866 against the Austrians. One general’s guess at what was happening proved right and the superior weapons and training of the Prussian military did the rest.123

De Gaulle recognized that at Königgrätz individual initiative had saved the Prussians from an Austrian surprise attack, but argued that at the battle of Gravelotte-St. Privat in 1870 Prussian commanders’ independence almost destroyed the army and lost the war. Where other historians have focused on the French commander Marshal François Achilles Bazaine’s lethargy and the lack of initiative by his subordinate commanders, de Gaulle condemned the Prussian generals for disobeying the orders given to them by the Commander-in-Chief, General Helmut von Moltke.124 Similarly, de Gaulle blamed Imperial German generals’ independence for the German Army’s defeat at the 1914 Battle of the Marne, noting in particular General Alexander von Kluck’s decision to chase the French Sixth Army south, which opened a gap in German lines and allowed General Joseph Joffre to launch his decisive counter attack.125 By linking the Battle of the Marne with Gravelotte-St. Privat de Gaulle was able to use the French victory in the Great War to wipe away the stain of defeat left over from 1870.

De Gaulle’s criticisms of the Prusso-German command system in 1866, 1870, and 1914 focused on a lack of coordination and central control at the operational level, but he

123 De Gaulle, La discorde., 2-24.


125 De Gaulle, La discorde, 15-24.
also applied his critique to the strategic level of war. Through studying the Austro-German attempt to cooperate, de Gaulle argued the case for centralizing military authority at the highest possible level.

De Gaulle concluded that modern war required all available military resources to be concentrated in the hands of a single officer who had full control of his forces. De Gaulle cited several Austro-German failures, including the October 1914 Austro-German offensive in Poland, as proof that uncoordinated plans and the lack of a central commander controlling all the principle units would doom an attack. In contrast, de Gaulle credited the victories won by German and Austro-Hungarian troops later in the year to the joint planning carried out by the German commander, General Paul von Hindenburg, and the Austrian commander, Marshal Franz Conrad von Höttendorf.  

De Gaulle warned that dissension within a command at the strategic level could be just as dangerous as dissension between operational level commands. Taking General Erich von Falkenhayn’s tenure as Chief of the German General Staff as an example, de Gaulle argued that infighting between levels of command, pettiness by commanders, and concern for prestige crippled the war effort. Because of his personal arrogance and vendettas against allies and subordinates, General von Falkenhayn inhibited the coordination of the war effort between Germany and its Austro-Hungarian ally. De Gaulle argued that by keeping the Austro-Hungarian government and high command in the dark about his war plans and acting to sabotage Austro-Hungarian initiatives for his own benefit, he helped squander the Hapsburg Empire’s resources in uncoordinated and thus indecisive campaigns. The string of defeats and mounting losses undermined the

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126 Ibid., 89-91, 95-7, 99-104.
loyalty of the Dual Monarchy’s citizens and destroyed its soldiers’ morale, opening the way for the Hapsburg state’s disintegration in 1918.127

Although de Gaulle argued for unity within the military, he also defended civilian supremacy over the military. In Discorde’s second chapter, he accepted the principle of the Nation-in-Arms and defended military centralism, but argued that the civilian and military hierarchies had to remain separate. De Gaulle argued that the German military elite’s intrusions into politics, and eventually effective seizure of political power, led to the unnatural subordination of political interests to military interests. He condemned Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz for his campaign to unseat the Imperial Chancellor, Theobald von Bethman-Hollweg. He believed that Tirpitz’s campaign to replace Bethmann-Hollweg with a chancellor who would order unrestricted submarine warfare represented an inappropriate intrusion of military leaders into the political sphere. By interfering in politics, Tirpitz destabilized the political system in order to simplify the navy’s operations and tactical problems, but in the process complicated Germany’s strategic problems by bringing the United States into the war. De Gaulle condemns him for shortsightedly subordinating operational to strategic aims and for trespassing into the civilian government’s rightful areas of responsibility.128

In his 1931 book Le fil de l’épée, de Gaulle returned to the theme of civil-military relations. In Le fil de l’épée de Gaulle tried to explain what he believed was the inherent tension between military and civilian leaders. He used sweeping generalizations and stereotypes to argue that the tension between military and civilian leaders was a product

127 Ibid., 145-8.
128 Ibid., 22-5, 69-76.
of their need to cultivate different character traits to rise in their respective professions. Specifically, de Gaulle thought that military men tended to value simple and direct solutions, while political leaders were more skilled at conciliation, nuance, and devising complex solutions. Because of these differing mentalities and skills, civilian and military leaders often clashed about how to solve strategic problems because each group mistrusted the other’s group culture.\textsuperscript{129}

Although supporting a strict separation between military and civilian power, De Gaulle rejected drawing bright lines to separate military and civilian spheres because he thought the appropriate balance between civil and military power shifted according to the circumstance. Drawing from France’s experience in the Great War, de Gaulle argued that civil-military relations required constant rebalancing, both when conflict broke out, and during the war. With almost Cartesian logic, he argued that as the war progressed from initial maneuver battles to stabilization and eventually to a decisive stage, military and political leaders needed to rebalance civil-military relations at each stage. In the initial period of maneuver, the authority of the commanding general should take precedence since the results of the battle were crucial to the survival of the state, but after the frontlines stabilized, the government should reassert its control by taking the lead in organizing the home front for war and setting strategic objectives for the generals. Then, later in the war if either army restored mobility to the battlefield, military commanders would need more authority to allow them to use all available resources to win the war.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{129} De Gaulle, \textit{Le fil de l’épée}, 125-35.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Ibid.}, 138-9.
De Gaulle’s vision of wartime civil military relations idealized the French experience in the Great War. Rather than recognize that French military and civilian leaders spent much of the war at each other’s throats fighting for power, de Gaulle sanitized the results of contingent power struggles into a series of rational transfers of authority. De Gaulle’s idealization of the transfer of power between civil and military actors allowed him to accept a fluid situational rebalancing of power without any clear guidelines about how the balance should work. By not laying out rules for civil-military relations, de Gaulle maximized the army’s potential independence, but also failed to give clear guidance to soldiers or politicians on the proper delineation of military and civilian power.

One interesting aspect of his discourse was his assumption that the next war would follow the same general lines as the Great War. He assumed that the defense was dominant and that the state of technology made it almost inevitable that a war between great powers would become a war of attrition. This assumption colored de Gaulle’s view of civil-military relations and his ideas about military doctrine. Many military intellectuals shared de Gaulle’s assumption that future wars would play out roughly according to the model of the Great War.

Although best known for his writings advocating a professional army based on offensive armored forces, earlier in his career de Gaulle’s writings help justify building the Maginot Line. In “Role Historique des Places Françaises,” published in the Revue Militaire during 1925, and used within the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre as evidence in favor of what became the Maginot Line, de Gaulle argued that fortifications had been, and remained, central to France’s security. He praised Louis XIV and his successors for
building belts of fortifications both on and behind the frontiers.\textsuperscript{131} In the article, he credited the royal government’s fortifications with saving France in 1792-93 and argued that if Napoleon I had properly maintained the barrier fortresses during his reign, he might have defeated the allied invasion of 1814.\textsuperscript{132}

Although allegedly a historical piece, de Gaulle’s 1925 article provided public support for the military elite’s plan to fortify France’s eastern frontiers. This movement eventually led to the Maginot Line. By supporting calls to build new fortifications, de Gaulle embraced the defensive mentality of Duffour and his mentor Marshal Pétain. De Gaulle must have known that, because of the tight limits on the military budget, funding a major fortification belt would slow the development of new offensive weapons like tanks and aircraft.

By the early 1930s, de Gaulle began to react against the military elite’s increasingly defensive mentality. De Gaulle’s shift is evident in \textit{Le fil de l'épée}, though he had not yet fully broken with the dominant military doctrine. In the chapter titled “Of Doctrine” de Gaulle complained about the French Army’s tendency to turn a set of ideas into an all-encompassing doctrine: “The military mind, once convinced that this was the one infallible method of achieving victory, moved from one abstraction to another. Once again, it had forgotten all about the realities of war, and was busy transforming an absolute metaphysics of action into a hard and fast doctrine.”\textsuperscript{133} De Gaulle expressed his concern that, despite the lessons of the Great War, there were already “signs of the


\textsuperscript{133} De Gaulle, \textit{Le fil de l’épée}, 114.
growth and spread of a seductive theory that, built on the solid foundation of firepower, looks as though it may, once again end in abstract deductions and exclusive conclusions.”

He finished with an appeal to the military elite “to resist the age-old allurements of the *a priori*, the absolute, the dogmatic” and to “acquire a taste for the concrete, a sense of proportion, and an eye for realities . . . [which] alone can give that vision to audacity, that freedom to maneuver which can make action fruitful.”

Although by 1932 de Gaulle was reacting against the dogmatism of the supporters of *bataille conduite*, that did not mean that he had discarded the military elite’s mistrust of French civilians and civilians-in-arms. He worried that citizen-soldiers were unsuited to modern war and would only succeed if senior leaders imposed direct control on their subordinates’ actions. De Gaulle embraced *bataille conduite* enthusiasts’ fear that cultural and political changes over the previous several decades had undermined military authority and that the military elite needed to assert its wartime authority to hold the army together.

De Gaulle attributed the weakening of military authority to a general moral decay in French life, a common concern for Frenchmen in the 1920s and 1930s. He wrote, “These are hard times for authority. Current custom attacks it and legislation tends to weaken it. In the home and in the factory, in the State and in the street, it arouses impatience and criticism rather than confidence and obedience.”

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formulation revealed his concern that gender- and class-based claims for political and social equality were undermining the basis of France’s social order and military power.

The combination of working-class political and economic activism and feminists’ claims to social and political equality against the authority of their husbands and fathers clearly worried Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle attributed these challenges to a moral decline related to the corruption in the republican regime and its culture. He claimed that, “this decay of public authority has followed hard on the heels of a decline in the moral standards, both in society and in politics, from what they were in an older Europe . . . Our contemporaries, by reason of their shifting loyalties, have lost the sense of deference and no longer wish to observe the rules of conduct which were ounce firmly established.”

Charles de Gaulle constructed military identity as exclusively male, hierarchical, and natural. By citing the weakening of paternal authority as part of his explanation for why officers’ authority was under threat, de Gaulle suggested that officers had authority over conscripts for the same reason fathers had authority over their wives and children, the obligation of the manly to protect the weak. By constructing officers as male heads of families, he justified enlisted men’s subordination to the officer corps by presenting officers as protectors of their men. In the process, he placed conscripts in the same category as women and children, implicitly questioning their manliness, and because manliness was an accepted part of being a soldier, he questioned their fitness to be soldiers.

The mental world of the French military elite, which was also an intellectual elite, affected the way it tried to reorganize the army. Class- and gender-based anxieties played important roles in the physical and intellectual rebuilding of the French military. During the 1920s, the military elite learned to use French society’s construction of racial and gender roles to insulate the army from political change and class-based militancy. French generals reluctantly accepted a larger role for women in the army and experimented with expanding the numbers and role of colonial soldiers as part of an attempt to substitute politically disenfranchised groups for working class white men who had political rights and defenders in the Chamber of Deputies.139

From Theory into Practice

Almost as soon as the victory celebrations ended in 1918, the French military elite began the difficult work of rebuilding its victorious, but shattered organization. In the process of rebuilding the army, military leaders tried to assimilate to the war’s political, economic, and cultural effects in order to design an army for the next war. In cooperation and competition with France’s political leaders, the military elite adapted the army to the lessons of the Great War and struggled to protect the Army’s resources from civilians who wanted to reduce the army’s claims on society. French military leaders tried to design a national strategy to win the next war with Germany by centralizing command and control functions at the highest possible level, strengthening their control over their soldiers to prevent mutinies, and jealously guarding the army’s human and financial

resources. Many civilians believed that the victory and Germany’s collapse meant that France no longer needed a large army. The military elite interpreted the end of the war differently. Military leaders argued that the Great War had shown that France would need the largest possible number of trained men at the beginning of the next war.

Despite their continued preference for long-service conscripts, the military elite recognized that there were both military and political reasons to abolish the Three Year Service Law. In the wake of the war, political leaders were nearly unanimous that maintaining three years service was politically impossible. George Clemenceau and his chief military aide General Jean Mordacq concluded in early 1919 that the term of conscript service would eventually have to fall to one year.\footnote{Doughty, \textit{Seeds of Disaster}, 19.} Although not ready to accept Clemenceau and Mordacq’s analysis, military leaders accepted that the Three Year Service law was politically untenable in the wake of the war.

Military leaders accepted the 1913 Law’s repeal as both a political and a practical necessity given the massive losses suffered by career officers and non-commissioned officers during the war.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 18.} Militarily it would have been difficult to find enough officers and non-commissioned officers to provide the leadership for an army built on three years of universal military service. Three years of universal male service would have produced a conscript force of approximately seven hundred fifty thousand men, a force larger than the pre-war Army that had not yet fully implemented the 1913 Three Year Service Law. Thus to maintain three classes under arms in 1920 would have required more professional officers and non-commissioned officers than the 1914 army possessed, but wartime
losses had severely depleted the army’s professional cadre, which was recovering very slowly. By 1922, the professional component contained 31,613 officers of all grades, some 4,402 fewer professional officers than before the war.\textsuperscript{142} The combination of political hostility to the Three Years Service Law, and the difficulties the Army would have faced trying to find enough officers to control so large a force, forced the military elite to accept a reduction in service to two years.\textsuperscript{143}

Although the military elite accepted the need to revise the Three Year Service Law, its leaders feared that the 1920 Two Year Law could be the beginning of deeper cuts, instead of being a permanent basis for supplying the army with new soldiers. A general staff memorandum circulated before a \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre} meeting warned that, without vigilance, the Two Year Service Law of 1920 could become the first step toward reducing conscript service to eighteen months or even to one year.\textsuperscript{144} On 22 June 1920, Marshal Pétain wrote to the Minister of War and warned against reducing the term of service beneath two years by saying that “to aggravate further an already unsatisfactory state of affairs, by maintaining only one class or a class and a half under the colors, would constitute an error the consequences of which would be incalculable.”\textsuperscript{145}

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\textsuperscript{142} SHAT 7 N 127 Supplement. Dossier 1. “Tablaeu comporif des Effectifs Legaux d’officiers tells qu’ils resultant des previsions de l’esquisse de 7 Jan 1922.”


\textsuperscript{144} SHAT 1 N 10 Supplement. CSG Dossier 2. “Conditions d’application du projet de loi de Recrutement. 28 July 1920.

\textsuperscript{145} SHAT 1 N 10 Supplement. CSG Dossier 2 22 Juin 1920. Pétain. “Letter à Ministre de Guerre.”
In 1923, exactly as the general staff had predicted in 1920, a new Army Law reduced the term of service to eighteen months.\textsuperscript{146} Although military leaders initially resisted the 1923 Law, they ultimately accepted it because the government’s insistence that a additional reduction in the term of service was politically necessary. They accepted the Eighteen Month Law, but fought to avoid any broader reform of the army, its culture, or command system.

Even as the French generals were negotiating the reduction in military service, Marshal Pétain was leading his fellow generals in an attempt to codify the autonomy the army command had exercised during the war. After a long debate, the military elite overcame opposition from some civilian leaders to confirm their enhanced independence. Political and military leaders agreed to rebuild prewar institutions and made a series of compromises that preserved the army’s prewar authority, and accepted an enhanced role of the military elite in controlling the French Army.

Shortly after the war ended, the military elite secured the reestablishment of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. The council’s interwar incarnation was a slightly more powerful institution than it had been before 1914. Legislation granted it enhanced authority to advise on policy questions and to study national defense. Before the Great War, the council had the right to be ‘compulsorily consulted’ and offer advice on the organization and training of the army, the adoption and modification of weapons, mobilization and concentration plans. To these prerogatives the government added the right to advise on the defensive organization of the frontiers. The reorganized Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre consisted of the commander-in-chief designate (généralissime) as

\textsuperscript{146} JO Lois et Décrets (5 April 1923) 3410-23.
vice-president, the chief of the general staff, the officers designated to command armies and army groups in wartime, and all living Marshals of France. The presence of the Great War’s victorious generals on the council enhanced its prestige and thus effectiveness in negotiations with the government. The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* was the principle independent body charged with advising the French government on military questions.

The military elite also had a voice on the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*. The *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale* advised the government on defense matters, but unlike the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*, it was clearly a political body. In 1920, the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale* consisted of the President of the Republic, the Premier, ministers with direct defense responsibilities, and several non-voting members. The non-voting members included the President of the council’s research committee, the Vice-Presidents of both the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* and the *Conseil Supérieur de la Marine* (Superior Naval Council) and the chiefs of the army and navy staffs. General Maxime Weygand would later mock the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale*, whose ministerial membership steadily expanded in the 1920s until it consisted of the entire cabinet, as the government giving itself advice.

The two councils fulfilled different functions. The government could use the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale* as a policymaking body to elaborate its positions on security issues, but because only members of the government could vote on

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it, the council could not function as a political shield in the same way as the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*. Thus, although the *Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale* was more administratively powerful because its decisions represented government policy, political leaders still worked hard to win the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*’s endorsement of their defense policies and hesitated to force through military laws against the explicit advice of the country’s senior soldiers.

Despite the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*’s postwar strengthening, it retained major weaknesses. Although it had the right to be consulted on major policy questions, its decisions remained advisory, both inside and outside of the army. Obviously, it would have been inappropriate for a military body to dictate policy to the elected government, but by denying the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* the authority to enforce its doctrinal and organizational decisions within the army, the government gave it an uncomfortable combination of responsibility without power.

Despite its lack of official authority, the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* influenced political debates about the military by granting or denying political leaders its endorsement. It quickly became the most important channel for consultation between the army and the elected government. The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*’s advice had the appearance of objectivity because all of its voting members were soldiers and not political appointees. The council’s sanction could be a valuable political shield for any government seeking to push through potentially controversial legislation, and conversely the council’s censure would give the parliamentary opposition a major weapon against the government’s plans.
The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* could influence political debates and damage a government with negative advice, but the council remained weak in the face of a government determined to push through its proposals. The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* and its members were keenly aware of their weakness and preferred to avoid an open breach with the government. Although it could force reforms on the army, the government also tried to avoid parliamentary fights over defense policy in the face of clear military opposition. The combination of the military elite’s inability to veto defense policy and the politicians fear that civil-military conflicts could undermine the government’s political position, led both sides to prefer negotiations to confrontation during the 1920s.

Although all the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*’s members were high-ranking officers, during a crisis, it deferred to its most prestigious members. In the 1920s, the council usually followed Marshal Pétain, who was then Commander-in-Chief designate, and in the early 1930s, it followed Pétain’s successor General Weygand. By deferring to Pétain or Weygand the other generals could build on the *généralissime*’s considerable personal prestige by giving him credit for the council’s position and using their voices to support his, maximizing the force of the military elite’s positions.\(^\text{150}\)

If the generals stood together, they could sometimes use their advice to overturn government policy. In 1923, military leaders used a meeting of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* during the 1920s and first half of the 1930s the *généralissime* was always an officer of tremendous personal prestige. Marshal Pétain’s prestige derived from his successful defense of Verdun in 1916 and his leadership of the French Army in the final year of the Great War. Maxime Weygand did not have as much prestige as the marshal, but as allied chief-of-staff in 1918, he organized the defeat of the last German offensives and the successful counter-attack. Contemporaries also credited Weygand with saving central Europe from Communism by winning the Battle of Warsaw in the Russo-Polish War, although he always denied responsibility for the victory and instead credited the Polish commander Marshal Josef Pilsudski.

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la Défense Nationale to appeal against the government’s proposed command arrangements. During the 29 June 1923 council meeting a united front by the military elite successfully persuaded the majority of the council to support the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre’s advice that the commanders-in-chief be given broad autonomy in wartime.  

During the meeting, several ministers argued that wartime commanders should serve under the orders of the Minister of War as they had before Adolphe Messimy’s reforms. They praised the Ministry of War’s proposed text that read, “The Commanders-in-Chief of the land and naval forces have overall control of military operations which they will exercise after the directives which are addressed to them by the Ministers of War and the Navy in conformity with the directives of the government.” This text would have accorded significant autonomy to military commanders, but kept them under the orders of the Minister of War.

Speaking for the military elite, Marshal Pétain argued against granting the Minister of War the right to issue orders to the military commanders in wartime. Throwing his prestige into the balance, Pétain challenged the proposed text, claiming it did not give military leaders enough control over their forces and that it would be easier to coordinate civilian and military policies if the high command functioned under the government as a whole rather than under the authority of a single minister. The marshal proposed to drop the original text’s reference to the Ministers of War and the Navy and instead won approval for a text that read, “The Commanders-in-Chief of the land and

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152 Ibid.
naval forces have overall control of military operations which they will exercise according to the directives of the government.\textsuperscript{153}

By changing the military’s chain of command to make the supreme commander directly subordinate to the government rather than to the Ministry of War, the government accepted that the military elite’s belief that victory could best be attained by a powerful central command with broad powers to control what French soldiers did on the battlefield. This did not mean that the political elite intended to abdicate control of the war effort, or the wartime state to the military elite, but it was a major step in that direction. By weakening the power of the Minister of War over the military command, the Poincaré government expanded the généralissime’s wartime influence and exempted the military from the normal system of governmental control over state employees.

The \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale}’s debate occurred amidst an ongoing international crisis. In January of 1923, French troops had occupied Germany’s Ruhr Valley in retaliation for the German government defaulting on the reparations payments arising out of the treaties ending the Great War. The occupation dragged on throughout 1923 and some leaders feared it bring extremists to power in Berlin and lead to renewed fighting. The pressure of the ongoing crisis created a heightened fear of war and helped Marshal Pétain pressure the government into granting him wartime autonomy.

In theory, making the généralissime responsible to the government as a whole made it easier for the nation’s military and political leaders to collaborate in organizing France’s wartime defense and fitted well with the Nation in Arms’ concept of a unified military-civilian war effort. The effect, however, was to undermine the government’s

\textsuperscript{153} SHAT 2 N 5. Dossier 3. CSDN. No 290 (23 Juin 1923).; SHAT 2 N 5. Doissier 3 CSDN #6A No 6949”Projet du Loi.”
ability to control the military chiefs. By freeing the commander-in-chief from the Minister of War’s oversight and replacing the minister with the cabinet as a collective, the government made it more difficult for anyone to control the military elite during wartime and allowed the military commanders to interact with a large and distracted collective instead of a single informed minister. War demands that commanders make rapid decisions, and military leaders are often able to control the flow of timely information from the battlefront to politicians. By requiring the cabinet as a whole to supervise the high command, the military elite gained much more independence than if it faced a strong Minister of War determined to impose his will. By expanding the army’s wartime Marshal Pétain weakened civilian control of army.

The military elite’s campaigns to maintain the army’s conscript manpower and to establish its wartime independence were pieces in a larger effort to prepare to win the next war with Germany. Like Duffour and de Gaulle, many French military theorists associated with bataille conduite thought they could foresee the broad outlines of the next war. They assumed the war would begin with a German invasion that the French Army would try to stop as far from France’s heartland as possible, followed by a long defensive struggle. French theorists assumed that the war of attrition would end with France and her allies launching a massive offensive against a weakened German army. France’s military leaders intended to force the Germans into a long battle of attrition that French forces would win by fighting carefully coordinated defensive battles while a blockade strangled Germany; French planners hoped to fight a more defensive and less bloody
version of the Great War and assumed the Germans would have to play along with
them.154

They seemed unconcerned that the army was planning to fight a war of attrition
against a numerically and economically superior foe. The plan to fight a long war of
attrition against Germany had several flaws that French leaders, both military and
political glossed over. The French war plan envisioned relying on superior economic
resources to sustain France against Germany, but even after the retrocession of Alsace
and the occupied part of Lorraine, French economic potential was inferior to that of
Germany, and France lacked a true alliance with any other Great Power. The November
1917 Bolshevik Revolution had ended the Franco-Russian Alliance and the US Senate’s
rejection of the Treaty of Versailles had nullified the Anglo-American security
guarantees within the treaty.155

Military sources give no indication that French leaders believed that the Soviet
Union would take up Tsarist Russia’s role as an Eastern Front against the Germans.
French leaders hoped that Poland and Czechoslovakia might form an Eastern Front, but
France’s long-term war strategy did not specify what contribution they would make to the
next war. Nor did the French plans explain the contradiction between defending France’s
allies against invasion and the plan to stand on the defensive against Germany.

Commandment et conduite des opérations.”

155 Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict
from 1500 to 2000 (New York: Random House, 1987), 228, 303-310, 310-320. Although Britain and
France had a larger combined economy and population than Germany, Germans significantly outclassed
the French and during the Great War, had fought Britain and France from a position of strength.
Although the French political and military elites both anticipated and planned for a long war, there were divisions between and among France’s elites over how best to prepare for this outcome. During the early 1920s, the main area of friction between the military elite and the government was army organization. The conflict had two main points, battles over how many men the army would have, and how to organize those men. Although the military elite wanted the largest possible force, members of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre were ultimately willing to make compromises on the length of conscript service, and thus on the number of men under arms, in order to protect army organization from major changes.

At the end of the war, the military elite recognized that France had been unprepared at the beginning of the Great War and hoped to prevent finding itself in the same position again. The military elite hoped a combination of a strong regular component, more frequent reserve training, and especially increased central coordination would ameliorate the problems the Great War had revealed in the reserve system. The key to the new system was creating a strong centralized command structure that would allow professional officers to control the reservists. France’s generals hoped that if reserve units did not have to operate independently and could rely on regular units for support, they could retain their cohesion, and if they did begin to crumble, they could be quickly relieved with fresh formations. By pushing command and control functions up the chain-of-command, lower-ranking officers could concentrate on training their reservists and getting them to perform the tasks decided on my higher levels of command.156

The military elite’s plans to impose greater centralized control over the army clashed with initiatives from political leaders interested in reducing the military’s budget. Several political leaders, mainly but not exclusively on the Left, wanted to save money by eliminating peacetime corps commands. Corps grouped several divisions, the basic units of combat, into larger masses of that would fight under a common commander and were the highest level of unit that existed in the peacetime army. The Ministry of War, which was under pressure to cut costs to balance the budget and help defend the Franc, believed that abolishing a level of command would eliminate a layer of bureaucracy, cut the number of civilian employees, and reduce the number of facilities the army had to pay to maintain. Leftist leaders, fearful of giving too much authority to potentially anti-Republican generals, wanted to limit the generals’ institutional power by keeping the peacetime hierarchy as flat as possible.

Corps commanders defended their jobs by invoking the principles behind *bataille conduite*. The generals argued that their commands were necessary to coordinate the war effort. They claimed that after mobilization, the army had to use the same structure it had in peacetime. Solicited for their opinions by Minister of War André Maginot in 1922, corps commanders defended peacetime corps level command by citing administrative, mobilization, and combat command reasons. On 13 November 1922, General La Capelle, commanding the I Corps, responded to the minister’s inquiry by citing the administrative convenience of the corps, and by predicting that abolishing peacetime corps would cost French lives.\footnote{SHAT 5 N 12 Supplement. Response to the Minister of War from General La Capelle (13 Nov 1922).}
La Capelle warned of dire consequences for efficient administration if this coordinating level of command disappeared because only corps could reconcile conflicting jurisdictions at the divisional and military region level. He also warned that eliminating peacetime corps would cost lives on the battlefield. Arguing that wartime cohesion was a product of peacetime organization and preparation, La Capelle held that only units linked together “organically” before the war could effectively coordinate their actions in the early days of the next war. He argued that:

In the next war, given the nature of the terrain on which we will have to fight, I am persuaded that the importance of the army corps will remain vital and that it must retain the command authority to permit it to receive and provide leadership to important reinforcements, isolated divisions or divisional troops, and to assure their judicious employment in battle.158

General Vuillement, the commander of the IV Corp, concurred with General La Capelle’s sentiments and added that the number of mobilized corps needed to be equal to the number of peacetime corps for the Army to manage a quick transition from peace to war footing.159

General La Capelle’s memo revealed his deep concern with maintaining control of the civilians-in-arms produced by short-service conscription. The general doubted the ability of conscripts to fight effectively and officers to coordinate them in improvised large units. He pleaded that “with the reduction of service [anticipated to be eighteen months], the future army – the Nation in Arms – by necessity little trained and

158 Ibid.
159 SHAT 5 N 12 Supplement. Response to the Minister of War from General Vuillemet (14 Nov 1922).
experienced, will have need of senior leadership ready to carry the heavy burdens and responsibilities at the outbreak of hostilities.”

The arguments the generals used to defend corps-level organization revealed their concern with coordination. Although it is hardly surprising that corps commanders did not want their jobs abolished, especially given that there was no plan to create new positions of equivalent prestige, their justifications for their opposition are still important. Most of the corps commanders justified the continued relevance of peacetime corps by arguing that civilians-in-arms needed close supervision to be safe and effective in combat and that it would be easier to maintain control over conscripts and to coordinate combat operations at the beginning of the war if wartime commanders had experience commanding their units in peacetime.

The battle to maintain control over the army’s personnel and culture was not limited to unwelcome reforms pushed by civilian ministers. During the early 1920s, the French Army was grappling with how to deal with its female employees. The army had hired its first female civil employees during the Great War and when the demobilization process caused new manpower shortages, the post-Great War Army again turned to women to supplement its soldiers. The Army had hired its first female civil employees in 1916 under the 1916 Regime and most officers assumed that as soon as the war ended the army could fire them all. Instead, women survived the war, and the

160 SHAT 5 N 12 Supplement. Response to the Minister of War from General La Capelle (13 Nov 1922).

161 SHAT 5 N 12 Supplement. Responses to the Minister of War. Nov 1923.


163 Ibid.
process of demobilization spurred the army to hire more women to make good losses caused by the demobilization of soldiers assigned to administrative tasks.\textsuperscript{164}

Many senior officers and civilian functionaries opposed keeping wartime female employees after the war. With little dissent, the army initially chose to rid itself of its female employees and some generals and senior functionaries called for the rapid remasculinization of the French Army.\textsuperscript{165} The 1919 Piquet Report strongly condemned the existing policy of hiring women, whom he described as female laborers, and called for them to be fired as part of the demobilization process.\textsuperscript{166} The presence of so many women inside a traditionally male institution caused some observers to fear that women would erode the professionalism of the officer corps and create spheres within the army where officers did not exercise strict control of the institution and its members.\textsuperscript{167}

Although ideologically hostile to female employees, the military elite were nevertheless willing to use civil employees to compensate for the reduction in the number of conscripts under arms. In the early-1920s, French political and military leaders endorsed a growing civilian role within the Army. On 11 December 1920, the Conseil

\textsuperscript{164} SHAT 8 N 36 Supplement. Dossier 1. Num 464 29 August 1919. “Rapport relative à la main d’oeuvre feminine (Régime de 1916)”

\textsuperscript{165} Margaret Darrow, \textit{French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front} (New York: Berg, 2000), 261-63. Darrow describes the wartime hiring of women by the army and the Ministry of War and briefly treats their dismissal, starting in 1917. However, when she wrote her study she only had access to the SHAT’s Series N papers, and not the Series N Supplement that contained evidence that the attempt to purge women from the military at the end of the war failed. Chapter IV looks at these questions in greater detail and argues that the demobilization marked a shift in the way the military constructed gender, opening new opportunities to women inside the army.

\textsuperscript{166} SHAT 8 N 36 Supplement. Dossier 1. Num 464 29 August 1919. “Rapport relative à la main d’oeuvre feminine (Régime de 1916).”

\textsuperscript{167} Chapter IV deals with the implications of this on the construction of gender and provides much greater detail.
Supérieur de la Guerre pronounced in favor of increasing the numbers and roles of civilian employees within the Army as part of a broader plan. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre advised the government that, by 1923, when it anticipated a reduction in conscript service to eighteen months, the Army would need to increase the number of career soldiers, colonial soldiers, and civilian employees to maintain its combat readiness.\textsuperscript{168} Despite the negative reaction of many officers and senior male civilian employees who feared that the women were a dangerous influence, women survived the attempted purge of the early 1920s and were available to play a role in the military elite’s plan to compensate for its loss of conscripts.\textsuperscript{169}

Conclusion

The French military elite emerged victorious from the Great War, but it faced difficult challenges to the physical and intellectual rebuilding of the French Army. Physically the French Army required massive rebuilding. The war had killed off many of the prewar army’s junior officers and enlisted men and the victory rendered its recruitment system untenable. In order to fulfill its mission of defending France the military elite needed to secure, train, arm, and organize new recruits for the post-Great War army and organize them to win the next war.

The military elite worked with the governments of the 1920-1924 Horizon Blue Chamber to rebuild the French Army’s foundations. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre was reestablished with an expanded field of competence, a Two Year Service Law was

\textsuperscript{168} SHAT 1 N 1 Supplement Dossier 3 CSG “Procès-Verbal Séance du 11 Decembre 1920” 11 December 1920.

\textsuperscript{169} Darrow, French Women and the First World War, 229-268.
passed that enabled the Army to maintain a size the military elite was comfortable with, at least for a time, and eventually the term of service was stabilized at eighteen months. New weapons were developed and studied, theorists refined tactics, and army leaders sought ways to combine weapons and tactics to prevent another war leading to the same level of casualties the French Army suffered between 1914 and 1918.

The physical reconstruction of the French Army was important, but so was its intellectual rebuilding. The war exposed prewar army doctrine’s many flaws. Even though the belief that victory came through an unbending offensive spirit had deep roots in nineteenth-century French military thought, the bloodletting of the Great War ended the military elite’s emphasis on an offensive mentality. The horrific losses of the war forced a fundamental reassessment of the assumed superiority of moral over the material factors. Postwar theorists asserted the importance of material factors and coordination, while focusing on protecting the fragile morale of both soldiers and civilians.

The failure of élan left a gap in the military elite’s understanding of how to win battles. Because of the heavy losses of 1914 and 1915, military theorists abandoned their passion for élan and replaced it with the cold logic of coordination, which became the central analytical tool the military elite applied to the major questions of how to rebuild the French Army. It was the central concept animating French doctrinal and strategic thinking in the wake of the war.

Coordination was a response to the experience of the Great War, but its roots lay outside of the war as well. The focus on coordination proceeded from the assumption that civilians-in-arms were more likely than professional troops to suffer unnecessary casualties. The military elite did not believe that the weaknesses of civilians-in-arms
were mainly a result of a poorly organized reserve system that provided little real training for reserve soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers. Instead, the military elite believed that the French culture’s emphasis on individualism and egalitarianism denigrated authority and made conscripts and reservists politically and militarily dangerous.

The belief that civilians-in-arms were dangerous because they lacked the skill for intricately coordinated operations was a new version of the military elite’s old fear of civilians-in-arms. In the early years of the Third Republic, the military elite had feared civilians-in-arms and had sought to keep them under the watchful eyes of reliable officers to make sure they did not run in the face of danger or become a revolutionary mob. The war revived the military elite’s fear of civilians-in-arms, but that fear expressed itself in a new way. After the war, the military elite feared that mobilized civilians were too precipitous, given to premature attacks that caused needless casualties and sapped conscripts’ morale and loyalty. Despite the differences in how the fear of civilians-in-arms was expressed, the assumption was the same, civilians-in-arms were untrustworthy intruders who needed to be closely controlled to make them safe for the Army.

Both the pre- and postwar versions of the military elite’s fear reflected a deep mistrust in French society and the belief that military culture needed to sanitize French civilian culture in order to save the nation from its foreign enemies. Later in the 1920s and in the 1930s, the military elite would first try to insulate the army from society, and then it would begin to construct an alternate version of French society. In June of 1940, the military elite tried to save France from its civilian society by forcing the civilian government to make peace rather than risk a new revolution. In July 1940, Marshal
Pétain tried to use military’s alternate society, which grew out of the military elite’s fear of France’s civilian world, as a model with which to rebuild France when he pushed the rump National Assembly to effectively abolish the Third Republic by voting him the power to rewrite the Republic’s fundamental laws by decree.
CHAPTER III

REPUBLICANIZING THE ARMY:
ANTI-MILITARISM, THE RIF WAR, AND THE FAILURE OF ARMY REFORM

During the 1920s, civilian reformers on the French Left tried to Republicanize the army by making the military look and function more like the civilian world. Although the military reform movement was not a cohesive entity, most of its members shared a desire to create a popular military force that would protect the French Republic against foreign invasions without risking military usurpation of political power. Reformists struggled to prioritize the danger of foreign invasion verses the danger that anti-Republican or reactionary elements inside the army would undermine the Republic. Reformers tried to reduce the military’s ability to wage aggressive wars or threaten the Republic by changing the army’s force structure and its legal relationship to politics and civilian society. Many reformers advocated narrowing or eliminating peacetime military law, subordinating the use of the army to the League of Nations, reducing the term of military service, granting political rights to soldiers, and transitioning to a militia system.

The military reform movement included ideologically motivated Socialist and Communist factions allied to political pressure groups, such as the League of the Rights of Man, and factions within the Center-Left Radical Party. Initially, hostility to the established military system and competition among the reformist factions propelled the
movement. However, tensions within the coalition related to defense and economic policies and to tactics eventually undermined relations between the Radical Party and its Socialists allies. The collapse of the alliance prompted the Radicals to look for new allies on the Right shattering the reform movement and defeated the reformists’ attempt to Republicanize the French Army by destroying the competitive chain that had been pulling the Radicals toward accepting greater reforms.

The reformers advocated a diverse and often conflicting mix of initiatives to lighten the burden of military service on young Frenchmen, change the way the French Army was organized, and Republicanize the military by applying a form of what Samuel Huntington called subjective control. Most of the plans sought to limit the officer corps’ authority, freedom, and prestige in order to make the military more closely resemble civilian society.

The groups engaged in military reform campaigns had different visions of the future of the French military, and they used different tactics to advocate their goals. The Socialists and the Radicals both stayed within the bounds of French law, but the Socialists combined parliamentary action with legal popular agitation to build public support for military reform and to channel that support into votes for the Socialist Party, while the Radicals focused their energies inside the Chamber of Deputies. In clear violation of French law, the Communist Party tried to spread its propaganda to members of the armed forces and to build a covert party network inside the Army. After the beginning of the 1925-26 Rif War between the French forces occupying Morocco and a coalition of tribes in the Rif Valley led by Abd el-Krim, Communists activists and

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political leaders tried to use the colonial war as a weapon against the French military and the bourgeois state.

Although initially reluctant to fully commit to a political struggle against the colonial war, by the late summer and fall of 1925 French Communist leaders bowed to a combination of pressure from Moscow, Jacques Doriot, and the party’s youth groups to begin a major campaign in favor of the Rif rebels. Communist leaders called on soldiers to rebel against their officers, attempted a general strike, and propagandized against the war.171

Ultimately, Communist radicalism failed, but it exerted strong pressure on the Socialists. Léon Blum’s concern to protect the Socialists’ left flank against the Communists led him to mortgage the party’s defense policies to the interests of party unity by cementing prewar thought as the core of his party’s policy. Blum’s doctrinaire stance made it impossible to reach a compromise policy with the Radicals on defense reform. The inability of the Radicals and Socialists to agree on a reform plan prevented any plan from passing as long as their alliance held and prolonged the reform debate until the Cartel des Gauches collapsed amid mutual recriminations and the chance to attempt a thorough Republicanization of the Army slipped away.

This chapter studies the ideas, internal dynamics, and collapse of the military reform movement during the 1920s. The first section of the chapter studies the Socialists’ initial attempts to react to the Great War. Drawing on books, speeches, Archives Nationales police files, and proposed legislation, it argues that the Socialists used the Great War to justify their own prewar ideas, as articulated by Jean Jaurès in

L’Armée Nouvelle. Socialist Party leaders, including Albert Thomas who had supported the war and served as a minister, argued that the Great War had been a mistake and blamed it on elite militarism. In addition, they argued that the military elite was responsible for France’s losses in the war and credited the Republic and the Nation in Arms with winning the war for the generals.

Drawing on Jaurès’s vision of a national militia, the Socialists advocated abolishing the professional army in favor of militia force trained through an ultra-short-term universal male service. Led by Pierre Renaudel and Albert Thomas, the Socialists tried to create an armed force that would be culturally republican and strong enough to defeat an invasion, but too weak to wage an offensive war. Socialist leaders wanted to combine the Jacobin nationalism of the levée en masse with the internationalism of the labor movement and the League of Nations to create a military force capable of defending France but still compatible with a pacifist international order.

The next section treats attacks against the military justice system. Communists and many Socialists urged the government to abolish the peacetime distinction between military and civilian law by subjecting the military to civilian law. The campaign to unify military and civilian law sought to undermine the separation of the army from the civilian political state and integrate civilian life into the military. Drawing on the Dreyfusard tradition, Radicals, Socialists, and Communists all attacked military justice as arbitrary, unjust, and based on anti-Republican ideals and prejudices. Through speeches, bills, protests, articles, and books reformers supported weakening the lines that divided the military from civilian life. They believed that the military elite’s prejudices perverted military justice and some of the reformers wanted to increase politicians’ control over the
army’s internal functioning to allow them to Republicanize an institution they deeply mistrusted. The Communists also hoped that replacing military law with civilian law would make it easier to spread propaganda and organize cells inside the armed forces.

The third section examines attempts to extend the suffrage to soldiers. The section compares and contrasts the Radical, Socialist, and Communist positions and explores the three factions’ motivations. It argues that the Radicals were reluctant to tamper with the suffrage because it was part of the fundamental structure of the Republic and that the Socialists favored extending the suffrage on the grounds of fairness and equality. Although the Communists supported extending the suffrage, it was primarily a tactic to open the military to political propaganda and recruiting.

The fourth section focuses on the political effects of the 1925-26 Rif War. Abd el-Krim’s anti-colonial rebellion in Morocco’s Rif Valley sparked a domestic conflict inside of France that exacerbated political divisions within the French Left that contributed to its inability to reach a common position on military reform. The Socialists officially supported the Radical-dominated Cartel de Gauches despite the war, but remained ideological hostile to the war and French colonialism. After an internal debate, the French Communists came out against the war and campaigned for a French withdrawal using illegal tactics that many in France, and the whole of the military elite, believed were seditious.

The Return of L’Armée Nouvelle: The Militia and Internationalism

At the end of the war, leading politicians on the French Left pushed for political, organizational and doctrinal changes in the French Army. The French Left’s efforts to
Republicanize the postwar army were rooted in prewar thought and suffered from some of the same problems that colored the military elite’s plans to rebuild the army, namely a narrow and ideologically partisan view of French history. The Left and the Right both used debates over army organization as a forum to refight old ideological battles.

Whereas the conservative military elite feared that the French people were dangerously unstable, Leftist politicians, writers, and activists feared professional soldiers for their role in the Dreyfus Affair, their continuing attachment to Roman Catholicism, and their perceived hostility to the Republic. Starting from their preexisting ideological commitments, Leftist thinkers projected prewar ideas into the postwar era with minor concessions to changes caused by the war. Although the Radicals and their non-Marxist allies remained committed to a reformed version of the prewar army, the Socialists and Communists called for a new army built according to the model Jean Jaurès had set out in *L’Armée Nouvelle*.  

Would-be civilian military reformers, especially Socialists, experimented with ways to meld the new League of Nations to the Republican tradition of the Nation in Arms. During the early 1920s, the reformers debated their plans and presented them to the Chamber of Deputies at a time when they had little chance of passing. Before the Left’s victory in the 1924 elections, the conservative *Bloc National* dominated the *Chambre Bleu Horizon* and blocked the Left’s reform plans.  

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173 Benjamin F. Martin, *France and the Après Guerre 1918-1924: Illusions and Disillusionment* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1999), 52-3. The 16 November 1919 elections were a triumph for French conservatives. The conservative *Bloc National* won 380 of the 616 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and could expect the support of 57 additional independent conservatives and monarchists. So many of the newly elected deputies were veterans that the Chamber was dubbed the *Chambre Bleu Horizon* for the Horizon Blue colored coats worn by the French Army.
proposals were as much attempts to stake out ideological territory, as they were efforts to change French defense policy. The fusion of ideas that emerged favored prewar ideas drawn heavily from the revolutionary tradition of the *levée en masse*, as updated by Jean Jaurès, with some additional modifications to tie Jaurès to the League of Nations and accommodate the need to maintain an army of occupation in the Rhineland.  

In August of 1919, a group of Socialist deputies, led by Pierre Renaudel and Albert Thomas, presented a proposed law “relative to a first adaptation of the French military to the Covenant of the League of Nations.”  

Renaudel and Thomas advocated a militia system and dismissed the value of a professional army. The bill’s preamble credited the Republic for the victory in the Great War and blamed France’s wartime defeats on the military elite’s over aggressiveness and mistrust of reservists. The bill’s authors argued that, “It can be affirmed today, without fear of being contradicted, that if the nation had listened to the voices - for the most part of non-technicians- that counseled a defensive military organization on the militia model, that is to say if it had prepared the methodical utilization of all its reserves, France would have victoriously resisted the blows of the enemy, instead of suffering the disaster of Charleroi.”  

By blaming the military elite for the early defeats, the Socialists were able to claim that if they had been in power the war would have ended quickly and at a fraction of the cost in human life.

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176 *Ibid.*, 2. In this case, the bill’s authors used the Battle of Charleroi as shorthand for the Battles of the Frontiers in August and September of 1914 that preceded the great French victory at the Battle of the Marne.
Based on their analysis of the Great War, the Socialists argued that France needed a new military organization that would provide a large wartime army to defend France against invasion, but be incapable of attacking another country. They rejected both France’s prewar model of a standing conscript army and the Anglo-American model of a professional army. The reformists argued that standing armies, whether professional or conscript, were too small for modern war, and dangerous to the peace, because the experience of the Great War had shown that “conscription [was] evidently able to furnish an army of aggression.”\(^{177}\) Having rejected conscript and professional armies, the Socialists appealed for the standing army to change into a militia, arguing:

> The interest of France commands her to reduce to the maximum the costs that press on her, so that she is able to heal her wounds, rebuild her economy, and put herself back to work. Her duty commands her more imperiously still not to maintain a regime of militarism that will be in contradiction with the disposition – if still timid- of the Covenant of the League of Nations.\(^{178}\)

Having rejected both the professional and conscript army models, Renaudel, Thomas, and their fellow sponsors advocated Jaurès’s prewar model of a militia army. In *L’Armée Nouvelle*, Jaurès attempted to provide for universal male military training without a having a standing army by drafting young men into a military training program that would prepare them for decades of service in a national militia without serving in standing units. Jaurès argued that a militia army provided the manpower necessary to defend the country, but without creating the temptation to use the military to solve

\(^{177}\) *Ibid.*, 5. The “army of aggression” was the German Army. The pre-Great War German Army was based on universal military service and organized similarly to the French Army with a professional cadre providing leadership to a large reserve force.

political problems through warfare. In 1916, Pierre Renaudel, Jaurès’s successor as editor of *L’Humanité*, wrote the preface to an English translation of *L’Armée Nouvelle*, in which he argued that Jaurès had designed a socialist military system that would reconcile the needs of national defense with the needs of international peace.

Renaudel and his colleagues argued that the best way to achieve a partial demilitarization would be to replace the army with a national militia. They proposed transforming the standing army into a militia by banning voluntary enlistments and reducing the term of conscript service to eight months, including three months of training and five months of active duty.

Although *L’Armée Nouvelle*, inspired Renaudel and Thomas’s 1919 proposal, they updated Jaurès by arguing that the nation’s military organization should be complimentary to the principles and structures of the League of Nations. Building on Jaurès’s Republican pacifism and support for arbitration, they wrote the League of Nations into his vision of a Republican militia. They argued that although the League

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180 Under Jaurès, *Humanité* was the flagship socialist newspaper in France. After Jaurès’s assassination in July 1914, his colleague Pierre Renaudel took over as editor. After the end of the war and in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution the Socialist Party split at the Congress of Tours in 1920. The majority of party delegates voted to become a Communist Party. Because they had a voting majority the Communists gained legal control over Socialist Party funds, the party headquarters, and the party’s newspaper, *Humanité*. A minority of delegates, but a majority of Socialist deputies and party voters, broke with the party and reformed the Socialist Party under Léon Blum’s leadership.


182 *Ibid.*, 8-9. The law provided eight months of military service. The first three spent in training and the remaining five spent on active duty. During the five months of active duty, soldiers were allowed thirty days of leave. The conscripts were to be called up in two equal groups, one in April (discharged in November) and one in October (discharged in May). This would lead to one contingent manning active units from January to May and another group of recruits would man units from July to November.
was flawed, Socialists should support its values and encourage its commitment to disarmament. They doubted that total disarmament was possible yet, but hoped that by embracing the principle of voluntary partial disarmament, France would encourage countries to follow suit. The bill’s Socialist authors expressed their “hope that the will of the people will press against the hesitant action of governments. We hope, when all is said and done, that socialism will bring nearer the hour when general disarmament will permit humanity to organize the labor and leisure of men in the fraternity of reconciled peoples.”

The law’s authors acknowledged that eight months of service was a transitional measure “calculated in reason of the charges and difficulties which are the immediate result of the war.” During their five months of active duty, the militia-conscripts would screen the frontiers and provide the manpower to maintain the army of occupation in the Rhineland called for in the Treaty of Versailles. They argued that after the peace treaty was implemented and the transition to peacetime was complete, the term of service could be reduced to as little as four months by eliminating the planned period of active service at the end of training, thus completing the transition to a pure militia force.

The Socialist’s August 1919 proposal contained one major omission and a glaring flaw. The proposal did not fully account for how to train conscripts to become good non-commissioned officers or officers, and left France without any trained combat force during the months of June and December. This gap resulted from the conscripts spending only five months in combat units. Even with dividing the contingent into two groups,

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184 Ibid., 7-8.
each year’s contingent could provide standing units for only ten months, leaving two months with no trained combat force. The bill’s authors planned to recall reservists for exercises during the resulting gap periods to maintain France’s defenses.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9. The April contingent would be on active service from July-November and the October contingent from January-May. Assuming that the one month of leave that the bill gave soldiers while on active duty with their units were spaced evenly throughout the period of active duty, about eighty percent of the active duty men or 100,000 men would be available at any given time.}

By leaving two small gaps, that could have been filled by extending the term of service to nine months or dividing the yearly contingent into three or more groups, the bill’s authors provided a mechanism to accustom the French public to the idea of relying on the militia for defense. The authors did not address the political implications of holding annual reserve convocations during December. The dead of winter would have been a difficult time for reserve convocations both because poor weather would have hampered any training function that the convocation might have served, and because mobilizing sons, husbands and fathers during Christmas and Hanukkah would have been politically controversial.

In 1920, parliamentary Socialists returned to the subject of military reform with a proposal from Joseph Paul-Boncour, Albert Thomas, Vincent Auriol, and Alexandre Varenne. The 1920 proposal reiterated the 1919 programs basic points, but refined the reserve system to facilitate a more rapid mobilization. The 1920 plan retained the 1919 plan’s proposed eight months of service, but created new hybrid units to answer professional criticisms that the Socialist plan provided too small of an initial defense force.\footnote{SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. 5 February 1920. “Proposition de loi reorganization de l’armée et durée de service militaires.”} The hybrid units would function as a \textit{couverture} force, providing time for the militia to form the wartime army. The plan assigned the most recently released classes of
reservists to the hybrid units. The units had a base contingent of active-duty conscripts and retained the weapons and uniforms of their allotted reservists, allowing the reservists to go straight from their homes to their units.\textsuperscript{187}

The 1920 plan repeated the 1919 plan’s call for the internationalization of French defense policy. Thomas and his co-sponsors argued that France was in a unique position to strengthen the League of Nations by facilitating Franco-German reconciliation. They hoped that disarmament would strengthen the League of Nations and pave the way for a lasting Franco-German rapprochement. Thomas also argued that undermining the standing army would protect the Republic against the poison of professional military anti-Republicanism.\textsuperscript{188}

The French Socialists’ support for universal military service clashed with the positions of Socialist parties in other countries. The bill’s Socialist authors tried to explain the conflict between their position and the positions taken by Socialists in Britain and the United States. They falsely claimed that America and Britain deployed most of their professional soldiers and sailors to areas outside of the homeland where they were less of a threat to democratic institutions than a professional army would be for France. They argued that because France faced a greater threat, it would have to station a larger professional force inside of the homeland and thus face a greater danger of military usurpation of civilian power than did the United States or Britain.\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 8. Because the proposal retained eight months of service for two months every year units would have only their skeleton of professional officers and non-commissioned officers with no combat troops.

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 5. The characterization of the British and American militaries was inaccurate. Much of the British and American armies were regularly stationed at home, and a large part of both navies were stationed in home waters at any given time. Given that the French Army struggled to reach 125,000
By proposing to reconstruct the French Army as a means to the end of strengthening the League of Nations, the Socialists sought to shift the way Frenchmen and women thought about national defense. They were trying to replace the Jacobin nationalist tradition that prioritized defending France against foreigners, with a new internationalism that valued building a community of peoples across boarders. They hoped this shift would encourage the League of Nations to develop into an effective instrument to provide security under law and arbitration to France and foreign countries alike.

Thomas’s attempt to use French defense policy as a tool to spread internationalism fit into his larger campaign to prevent another war. During and after the war, he argued that the foundation of future peace depended on spreading internationalist ideals. In his May 1917 address to the Petrograd Soviet, Thomas, then the French Minister of Armaments and special emissary to Russia, predicted that future wars could be prevented if governments and peoples embraced strong international institutions in place of prewar national chauvinism. He argued that any peace between the Allies and Germany would only be secure when the German people’s politics and behavior caught up to their enlightened moral and philosophical ideals.\(^\text{190}\) He reiterated this message in the preface of J. Tchernoff’s 1919 book *Les Nations et la Société des Nations dans la Politique moderne*. In Tchernoff’s book, Thomas argued that embracing the League of Nations could provide more security than territorial annexations and carefully calculated professional soldiers and officers the professional contingent in the French military was never very large, and some of them would have been stationed in colonial territories as well.

\(^\text{190}\) Bibliotheque Nationale Français (BNF) LB57-15949. Albert Thomas, *Discours prononcé par Albert Thomas, ministre de l’armement et des fabrications de guerre, devant le comité du Conseil des ouvriers et soldats de Pétrograd, le 12 mai 1917.*
strategic deployments because only concerted international action could eliminate the causes of conflict between nations and prevent the rise of militaristic leaders.\textsuperscript{191}

Albert Thomas repeated and expanded on his socialist and internationalist ideas about universal peace through international solidarity in his 1924 book \textit{Justice Sociale et Paix Universelle}. In \textit{Justice Sociale et Paix Universelle}, Thomas argued that no one country could provide for its own security. Only universal reform could prevent the return of the conditions that caused “war psychosis,” the phenomenon he blamed for causing and sustaining the Great War. Thomas believed that governments caused wars by attempting to distract public attention from domestic problems by blaming them on outside influences, and thus only broad international social and economic reforms could solve a country’s true security needs.\textsuperscript{192}

Using arguments that foreshadowed contemporary debates about common fiscal and labor policies in the European Union and debates about globalization, Thomas argued that laws governing wages, labor conditions, and union rights needed to be international to prevent predatory competition. He feared that if some states enacted progressive reforms, while others maintained inhuman working conditions the resulting unemployment in the reformist countries would enflame national jealousies, and the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Albert Thomas, \textit{Justice Sociale et Paix Universelle: Reflections sur un texte} (Paris: Publications du Groupement Universitaire pour la Société des Nations, 1924), 1-7. During the Cold War western progressives revived this argument. They argued that broad based reforms in the Third World were the only way to prevent Asian, African, and Central American peoples from blaming capitalism for their problems and turning to Communism. More recently, this argument has been used by the “neo-conservatives,” who claimed that Islamic terrorism was a result of Muslims and Muslim governments blaming outside forces, like the United States and Israel, for their domestic problems. The neo-conservatives have used this position to argue for military interventions in the Middle East as means to spread democracy and social and economic reforms.
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predatory powers’ governments would blame their peoples’ sufferings on other countries, leading to national competition and war hysteria.\textsuperscript{193}

Immediately after the war, the conservative \textit{Bloc National} majority in the Chamber stalled major military reforms, but the Left’s victory in the 1924 elections reopened the debate. The \textit{Cartel des Gauches}, an alliance of built around the Radical and Socialists Parties dominated the new Chamber. The Socialists pledged to support the Radicals, but refused to join the cabinet and the Radicals’ buttressed their cabinet by including smaller Center-Left factions, including Paul Painlevé’s Republican Socialists.\textsuperscript{194}

The political changes opened new opportunities for the Socialists, but they proved unwilling to make concessions to moderate Leftist groups in order to create a united front on military reform. The Radicals were not committed to moving to a militia army, but they were open to negotiations with the Socialists on most policy questions. Instead of horse trading with the Radicals, or indicating flexibility, the Socialists reiterated their 1919 position early in the next legislature when they presented their 1925 bill.

The 1925 bill repeated the 1919 and 1920 bills’ call for a militia army based on eight months of service. The militia continued to be drawn from universal male military service and encompassed a state run pre-military physical training program. The lack of movement by the Socialists, despite the changed political environment, showed that

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid.}

Blum and the party leadership valued ideological purity and political positioning more than they valued progress.\textsuperscript{195}

The Socialists’ consistent support for international institutions, on the Left as well as the Right of the party, showed that at the end of the Great War, most Socialists believed that internationalism was the best hope to preserve the peace. Although internationalism helped hold Socialist defense policies together, it could also prove divisive. Support for internationalism clashed with Léon Blum’s official policy of anti-ministerialism that banned Socialists from serving in non-Socialist governments and tension threatened party unity. Blum’s bar on Socialists accepting ministerial appointments clashed with the party’s support for internationalism and the League of Nations when the Radical Premier Edouard Herriot named the Socialist Joseph Paul-Boncour to France’s delegation to the League of Nations in 1925.\textsuperscript{196}

Herriot’s offer to Paul-Boncour created an internal crisis in the Socialist Party. Blum’s anti-ministerialism was a carefully developed tactic designed to maintain internal party cohesion and to help the Socialists compete against the Communists by avoiding the painful compromises with moderate political groups that a coalition government

\textsuperscript{195} SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement.

\textsuperscript{196} Jean Lacouture, \textit{Léon Blum}, trans. George Holoch, (Holmes & Meier: New York, 1982), 195-96, 197-99. Lacouture explores Blum’s attempt to navigate between the his party’s left wing that opposed compromises with moderate Leftist parties, and the right or reformist wing, lead first by Pierre Renaudel and Paul-Boncour and later by the future fascist Marcel Déat, which supported entering into coalitions with the Radicals; Joel Colton, \textit{Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics} (New York: Knoff, 1966), 69-88. Colton describes Blum’s repeated attempts to find a compromise between an increasingly impatient “reformist” wing that wanted to join with other Leftist parties and factions to implement the Socialist program piece-meal and the intransigent militants who refused any compromise that might weaken the revolutionary character of the party. Colton argues that anti-ministerialism was the key element in provoking the defection of the Socialists’s reformist wing, including Renaudel, in 1933.
would have required.\textsuperscript{197} Accepting the appointment offered the Socialist a chance to help strengthen the League of Nations, a major goal of the party’s peace policy. The party voted to allow Paul-Boncour to take the position and to retain the prohibition against Socialists serving in a bourgeois government. The Socialist Party allowed Paul-Boncour to take the appointment because the party’s internationalism overcame fears that the appointment would encourage internal divisions.\textsuperscript{198}

Exempting the League of Nations from its anti-ministerial policy showed the importance of internationalism to the Socialist Party, but the difficulty of getting Paul-Boncour’s appointment approved by the party illustrated that the Socialist Party’s reluctance to compromise was a roadblock for its reform plans. Even after the Socialist Party voted to allow Paul-Boncour to take his appointment, party leaders continued to try to limit his participation in government policy. The National Council of the Socialist Party cautioned Paul-Boncour that he “must above all be accountable for his mandate to the Socialist International and that is to say, he must give preference to its instructions.”\textsuperscript{199} If taken seriously, this admonition would have destroyed any hope of Paul-Boncour being an effective French delegate at the League by undermining his ability to act for the French government.

Another reason that Paul-Boncour’s appointment was controversial was that Socialist defense policy had previously functioned as a source of party unity. By relying

\textsuperscript{197} William Louge, \textit{Léon Blum: The Formative years, 1872-1914} (De Kalb IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1973), 85. Louge argues that Blum’s overriding concern was unity because he became a Socialist at a time when achieving unity was the primary issue facing the movement. Louge describes how Millerand’s participation in the Waldeck-Rousseau ministry help cause an intra-socialist split, and suggests that Blum’s memories of the early 1900s influenced his policies in the interwar era.

\textsuperscript{198} AN F 7 13080. Report on “Conseil National SFIO”. 3 November 1926.

\textsuperscript{199} AN F 7 13080 “Séance Conseil National SFIO”. 3 November 1926.
heavily on Jean Jaurès’s writings, Socialist leaders from different wings of the party were able to rally around a single policy. After the Communist-Socialist split at the 1920 Congress of Tours, the Socialists’ leaders feared more defections from the party’s left flank to the Communists and tried to hold onto their leftwing by advocating policies popular with activists.200

The debate around Paul-Boncour’s appointment exposed a weakness in Socialist policy that would cost the party its best defense thinkers in the early 1930s. Because of Blum’s concern for unity, the party was stuck with a prewar defense policy that could not easily adapt to changing circumstances. Blum’s doctrinaire reliance on prewar thought kept the party’s defense policy firmly on the Left, but it also foreclosed room for maneuver or innovation. As a result, the Socialists lost their three most serious defense intellectuals. The venerable Albert Thomas backed away from domestic politics during the early 1920s, and both Pierre Renaudel and Joseph Paul-Boncour left the party in the early 1930s in disputes over ministerialism and national defense policy. The Socialists’ reliance on L’Armée Nouvelle prevented them from making compromises on defense issues with the Center-Left, and forced the Radicals to rely on centrist and rightwing votes to pass any major army bill, making a mockery of the Cartel des Gauches.

The Attack on Military Justice

Different factions within the French Left focused their attention of different aspects of the status quo. While the Socialists advocated a shift to an internationalist foreign and defense policy, the Communists, although supporting their own version of internationalism, focused their energies on attacking the military elite and the separation of

between civilian and military life. Throughout the 1920s, the Communist Party, with periodic help from non-Communist groups, challenged the special legal status of the armed forces and the existence of military law.

The French Communist Party’s history of confronting the French armed forces and challenging the legitimacy of government policy began in 1919, before the Communist Party emerged from the 1920 Congress of Tours, when pro-Communist sailors serving in the French Black Sea Fleet launched a rebellion to stop French aid to General Anton Denikin’s anti-Communist White Russian Army. The leader of the rebellion, a seaman named André Marty, became a leading member of the Communist Party and campaigned against the French officer corps and political system throughout the interwar era. Following the rebellion, *conseils de guerre*, French military courts, convicted Marty and the other mutineers of crimes and sentenced many of them to prison terms.201

Communist leaders and activists tried to build on the Black Sea Mutiny by using Marty as a symbol of resistance against capitalist militarism.202 During the early 1920s, Leftist leaders and journalists challenged the separation of the army from civilian society by attacking the military justice system. They claimed that the *conseils de guerre* were stacked against the accused, handed down excessively harsh sentences, and undermined

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201 André Marty, *La Révolte de la Mer Noire* 4th ed. (Editions Sociales: Paris, 1949), 514-552. Marty described the trials of the mutineers aboard various French warships. He condemned the authorities for charging men for expressing their political ideals and following their consciences in refusing to support the “counter-revolutionary” forces or to participate in a conspiracy against the Soviet Union. He attacked the justice system as corrupt and claimed the trials’ results were predetermined. His entire case, however, rested on the assumption that supporting the Whites was an immoral act and that individual soldiers and sailors should be free to countermand policy decisions taken by elected leaders if they were contrary to the class interests of the proletariat.

202 AN F 7 13190. “Paix a l’URSS et AMNISTIE”
Republican traditions because of the incompetence and biases of the officers who served on them. The battle to free the mutineers was one of the only issues on which the Communists and Socialists were able to work together in the early 1920s.

The use of conseils de guerre, or military courts martial, during the Paris Commune and the Dreyfus Affair entrenched opposition to the military justice system among many socialists and the left wing of the Radical Party. During and after the 1871 Paris Commune, the government used conseils de guerre to try communards, many of whom received long prison sentences and were exiled to New Caledonia. During the Dreyfus Affair, conseils de guerre sustained Captain Dreyfus’s wrongful conviction in the face of mounting evidence, creating the belief that they were mere tools of the officer corps. The Commune and the Dreyfus Affair convinced many Frenchmen that the army and its separate legal system were dangerous to the Republic and created customary lines of attack against the French military elite that were available for the more radical elements of the French Left after the Great War.

The experience of the Great War only strengthened many Leftists’ hostility toward the military justice system. The war brought millions of men under military law and placed the military justice system under tremendous stress, which combined to create examples of injustices, both real and imagined. During the war, conseils de guerre conducted trials to punish treason, cowardice, incompetence, disobedience, as well as

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203 Ibid.; AN F 7 13088 “Congres Departmental de la Ligue des Droits de l’Homme” Commissariat Spécial des Chemin de Fer, Vichy, 16 Juin 1926; AN F 7 13190 Election posters and pamphlets, including “LES CRIMES des CONSEILS DE GUERRE.”


“anti-national,” “defeatist,” and “pacifist” propaganda within the armed forces. Some on the Left objected to the use of military courts, and especially the crimes with which soldiers were charged. They condemned the entire military justice system as repressive and reflexively anti-Republican.  

Reformers often charged the military justice system with capriciousness. They argued that the conseils de guerre were capricious because their judges were incompetent and so made poor decisions based on inadequate reasoning and a limited understanding of the law. Others claimed that the conseils de guerre were capricious because they favored officers and professionals over reservists and conscripts.

In his 1925 book, Les Crimes des Conseils de Guerre, the socialists R.G. Réau presented several examples of officers’ prejudices controlling the verdicts of conseils de guerre. Réau used a young officer who served in the 98th Infantry Regiment, sous-lieutenant Chapelant as an example of a victim of professional officers’ capriciousness. When a strong German force attacked his machinegun section near Loges wood on 7 October 1914 Chapelant’s men suffered heavy casualties and the Germans took several men prisoner. The relief force found Chapelant wounded outside of his defense perimeter and his commanding officer ordered his arrest.

Chapelant’s defenders, including some of his surviving men, claimed he suffered his wound while risking his life to reconnoiter the battlefield in an attempt to save his men. Réau and others hailed him as a heroic officer, but his commanding officer, Lt.

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207 AN F 7 13088 Ministère de l’Interieur, Commissariat Spécial des Chemin de fer, Vichy, 16 Juin 1926.

Colonel Didier disagreed and charged him with abandoning his men and trying to defect to the Germans. \(^{209}\) Despite what Réau believed was overwhelming evidence of Chapelant’s innocence, the \textit{conseil de guerre} believed Lt. Colonel Didier’s testimony and condemned Chapelant to death. A firing squad executed him the next morning. \(^{210}\)

Réau argued that Chapelant was punished for violating Didier’s conception of military honor and not for a real violation of military law. He argued that Didier assumed that Chapelant must have been a coward or a defector because he was not with his men. The \textit{conseil de guerre} convicted him, despite the testimony of some of his men, because the judges preferred the word of a career officer to that of a reserve officer or recalled conscripts. Réau complained that the verdict was a function of class power and an unwritten military honor code instead of Republican law. He was contemptuous of Didier’s adhesion to a military honor code and derided him for offering Chapelant the use of his revolver to commit suicide. Réau regarded Didier’s actions as leftovers from an aristocratic anti-Republican tradition and an attempt to cover up a perversion of justice. \(^{211}\)

Réau presented several other examples where he believed a \textit{conseil de guerre} had wrongly decided cases. The common thread connecting his examples was that detached career officers assigned to non-combat roles disregarded the evidence and testimony of reservists to side with their fellow career officers. \(^{212}\) In effect, Réau divided the military

\(^{209}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 97-100.

\(^{210}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 133, 135-9.

\(^{211}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 132.

\(^{212}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 144. In the case of the “four corporals” Réau emphasizes that they were tried by a panel that included only a single combat officer and the panel condemned them despite what he claims was clear evidence of their innocence. He points out that when the corporal’s unit refused a suicidal attack order, the general commanding the division (the 60th) ordered his artillery to bombard his own men as punishment, happily the colonel commanding the artillery refused the order as immoral.
into an oppressed laboring class of fighting conscripts and a managerial class of career officers who left the suffering and dying to others while basking in the power and glory of the war.

Réau’s examples recreated the Marxist struggle between labor and the bourgeoisie in the context of the armed forces. He replaced the factory worker with the conscript, and the oppressive boss getting rich of the sweat of the workers with the reactionary career officers who hid behind the lines and reaped promotions and decorations at the price of conscripts’ lives. By recasting the war in factory terms, he sought to tear down the respect and deference the military claimed and destroy the wall separating the army from civilian society. Pulling the military into the Marxist paradigm directly challenged the legitimacy of trying to separate the military from civilian life and politics.

Réau was a Socialist, but the Communists were also active in the fight against the military justice system. During the mid- and late-1920s, the Communist Party repeatedly agitated against the military justice system. The Communists’ frequent run-ins with the military and civilian criminal justice systems amplified their attacks on the military justice system and civilian laws that banned actions deemed to be subversive to good order and discipline in the army.

During the 1920s, the French Communist Party published three niche newspapers aimed at using conscription as a tool to spread Communist ideas to young French men. The party focused each newspaper on a different group of conscripts: activists distributed *Le Conscrit* to young men during the conscription process, *La Caserne* focused on serving conscripts, and activists gave *Le Libéré* to conscripts as they were being released
from service. Although the three papers often overlapped and repeated content, editors tried to tailor the papers’ messages to their target audiences.  

The Communist troika of papers claimed that living conditions for conscripts were bad, that food was substandard, and that fatiguing exercises weakened conscripts’ health. The papers trumpeted examples of “courageous” conscripts protesting against their officers and the conditions of military life as examples for others to follow. In the midst of the Rif War, the 5 September 1925 issue of *La Caserne* reported that sailors stationed in Paris had protested against the poor quality of their food and were facing a *conseil de guerre*. The paper’s editors condemned the injustice of prosecuting French citizens for protesting against their “oppression” and urged other conscripts to stand up for themselves.  

The 20 May 1925 issue of *La Caserne* accused Foreign Legion officers of abusing their men and using the military justice system to suppress opposition to their brutality. The paper claimed dozens of legionaries were in jail for complaining about poor food or harsh and unfair treatment by their officers. The editors used this example to show that the French military functioned as a brutal and anti-Republican institution. They claimed it ignored the fundamental rights of soldiers and used military law to prevent them from expressing legitimate grievances.

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213 AN F 7 13099. Police List of known anti-militarist journals. Police records indicate that *Caserne* published 14,000 copies per issue in 1927. Military and police records throughout the 1920s and 1930s indicate that the Communist papers were regularly found inside army bases.

214 AN F 7 13174. *Le Caserne* passim; AN F 7 13099.


Military and civil authorities tried to stop Communist propaganda aimed at soldiers. Civilian law banned the distribution of material that advocated soldiers disobeying orders, and military law prohibited the possession or distribution of any form of propaganda deemed anti-military or which military leaders believed advocated disobedience of orders. Both the military and civilian authorities repeatedly prosecuted men for possessing and distributing the three Communist newspapers.²¹⁷

Communist propaganda aimed to puncture the military’s mystique by showing that army life was just civilian life with a different set of taskmasters. By repeating the criticism of factory bosses and aiming them at the military elite Communist propagandists undermined the military elite’s claim that the army functioned differently from the civilian world. The Communists also hoped that weakening or destroying the authority of the conseils de guerre would allow them to propagandize inside the armed forces and to form functioning party cells inside the military.

Not all agitation against the military justice system aimed at eliminating it. Some members of the Left tried to find a compromise that would maintain a separate military justice system, but reform it to bring in more in line with the norms of the civilian criminal justice system. One such plan, debated in the senate during 1927 and 1928, would have transformed the conseils de guerre into military tribunals headed by a civilian judge and advised by specialist officers. The Minister of War would appoint the officer-advisors and during peacetime, the court would only have powers over strictly

²¹⁷ AN F 7 13099 Letter from Military Intelligence (2e Bureau) 24 Mai 1927. “Etat des sanctions prises contre des militaires qui sont livres à des faits d’excitation à la désobéissance ou de propaganda Communiste; AN F 7 13174 “Rapport Draguignan”; AN F 7 13176.
military offenses; soldiers and sailors accused of any other crimes would face a civilian court.\textsuperscript{218}

The plan claimed to depoliticize military justice and insure independent judges. Its authors hoped to make the military judiciary independent by removing senior officers’ influence over military courts. The reformers hoped that civilian judges would be free of any group loyalty to the officer corps and more representative of civilian \textit{mores}. The minister would appoint the judges’ specialist advisors and try to insure that they were competent, fair, and loyal Republicans.\textsuperscript{219}

Ironically, the bill’s solution to perceived bias and command influence was to shift the source of potential command influence on the military justice, not to try to root it out. The decision to make the judges and judicial officers dependent on the minister would have ensured the politicization of the military justice system. It would have made military justice dependent on political grace and favor, making military judicial officers directly subject to political change in the same way as civilian political appointments, undermining professionalism and judicial neutrality.

Turning military judges and court officials into political appointments was an attempt to replace segregated objective control with subjective control. In effect, the bill represented a renewed call to Republicanize the Army by building up a party slate of officers. The proposal would have increased the politicization of military justice by giving the Minister of War direct personal control over the military judiciary. Although it would have allowed a minister to appoint “Republican” officers to key judicial positions, it would also have made judicial appointments political positions subject to the

\textsuperscript{218} “La Reforme des Conseils de guerre,” \textit{L’Oeuvre}, 8 Jan 1928.

\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Ibid.}
spoils system. The appointment or dismissal of judicial officers would have rested with a political actor, making officers’ career advancement subject to the whim and partisan affiliation of the minister. Turning military positions into political appointments would have exerted a strong influence pulling officers into the political arena, by forcing them to prove their political reliability to friendly factions and creating an incentive to conspire with rival factions to remove hostile ministers from power or to prevent a hostile faction from taking over the Ministry of War.

The three main Leftist political parties had different objectives in reforming the military justice system. The Communists attacked the basic structure of the military and hoped to make it a political recruiting ground; they sought to destroy the army as a means to the end of destroying the Republican bourgeois state. The Socialists wanted to make the military more closely reflect civilian life and sought to civilianize national defense, including the military justice system but believed the Army should be politically neutral. They adopted policies that kept a radical edge to them, and that would have increased the politicization of the army, but they did not want to subvert the army. The Radical Party tried to find a compromise that would satisfy enough voters to keep its leftwing happy, without alienating the party’s rightwing by appearing to undermine the military’s combat capacity or ability to defend the regime against a domestic uprising. The Radicals found themselves caught between the Socialist Party that refused to accept less than its official position, and its own rightwing that feared radical change. Because the Radicals and the Socialists could not reach an agreement on how to reform the military justice system, the parliamentary consensus in favor of reform did not lead to any substantial changes to the military courts or military law.
Suffrage and Political Rights

Some civilian military reformers advocated undoing the 1872 Army Law and extending the right to vote and hold elective office to soldiers. The right to vote would bring with it the right to receive political propaganda and engage in some forms of electoral politics, including the right to possess political tracts, attend electoral meetings, and discuss pacifist or Marxist ideas. Tampering with the established form of “Universal Suffrage” was politically dangerous during the Third Republic, even for leaders trying to make Universal Suffrage more universal.

The moderate Radical Party and their non-Socialist allies were the least committed to extending the suffrage to soldiers. Although some factions within the party supported expanding voting rights, Radical leaders remained attached to prewar arguments against giving soldiers or other disenfranchised groups, including women, the right to vote.\textsuperscript{220} When the Radicals and Painlevé’s Socialist Republicans abandoned their alliance with the Socialist Party, they also abandoned political reform in the armed forces. The 1927 and 1928 military laws retained the restrictions on military suffrage and political activity.\textsuperscript{221}

Unlike the Radicals, the Socialists favored giving soldiers the right to vote. Socialist leaders wanted to extend greater political rights to soldiers and favored

\textsuperscript{220} John Sherwood, \textit{Georges Mandel and the Third Republic} (Stanford UP: Stanford, 1970), 122-23. In addition to, the failure to extend political rights to soldiers in the 1927 and 1928 Army Laws, the Radicals were generally reticent to make any major change in the political structure of the Third Republic during the interwar period. Although in the late-nineteenth century, the Radicals had supported abolishing the Senate, and championed disestablishment, but by the 1920s, the Radicals generally opposed any major changes to the Third Republic’s political system. In 1931, Radical senators blocked the electoral reform bill supported by André Tardieu’s government, but prepared by the independent conservative Georges Mandel that would have extended the suffrage to women.

\textsuperscript{221} SHAT 7 N 2678; SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. Dossier 2.
extending suffrage rights more generally, to women and to more people living in the colonies and overseas territories. However, the Socialists did not emphasize extending the suffrage. Instead, the party focused on redesigning the French military to eliminate the standing army with a militia, thus effectively nullifying the effect of banning political activity by soldiers.

Although extending Universal Suffrage to soldiers was not a top priority, suffrage reform was part of all the major Socialist military bills in the 1920s. Pierre Renaudel included suffrage reform in his first postwar military bill and other Socialists, including Albert Thomas and Joseph Paul-Boncour did as well. During 1927 and 1928, Renaudel and the Socialists tried to extend suffrage rights in the face of conservative and centrist opposition. Because his own bill lacked enough support to pass, Renaudel attempted to amend the government’s bill to grant soldiers the right to vote. He argued that it was unjust to allow young men exempted from the draft due to physical or mental incapacity to vote, but to deny the same rights to young men compelled to serve in the military by law. He offered a compromise, suggesting soldiers receive the right to vote, not to stand for office, unless they were on a leave of at least one year.

Communist parliamentarians attempted to shame vacillating Radical deputies into supporting bills and amendments extending suffrage rights with negative comparisons between “Universal Suffrage” in France and other countries. The Communists argued that French conscripts had fewer political rights than did the professional soldiers of

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223 SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement Dossier 1. “Amendment No 14” (Renaudel), Response to “Amendment No 14” (Renaudel) 1 July 1927, No 9 “Amendement au project de loin relative au recrutement de l’armée présenté par M Pierre Renaudel” 23 June 1927.
Britain and the United States, and far fewer rights than did soldiers in countries like the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{224}

While the Communists, Socialists, and Radicals shared a commitment to lower the length of time a conscript had to serve, there was no consensus on extending the suffrage to soldiers. The Socialists and Communist pushed for extending the suffrage for many of the same reasons; they believed that Universal Suffrage should cover all adult men and that the influence of the military elite should be curtailed, but the Communists also hoped that granting soldiers political rights would help them to establish their own power inside the army. The Radicals were concerned about the military elite, but they were even more concerned about maintaining discipline within the military and hesitant to accept changes to the political structures of the Third Republic.

The Communist’s support for extending political rights to soldiers probably undermined an otherwise achievable goal. Although the military elite would have been hostile regardless of the Communist position, most Radicals and Socialists were suspicious of the French Communist Party. The belief that the Communists frequently acted on orders from Moscow made their military policies suspect in the eyes of many Frenchmen across the political spectrum.

\textsuperscript{224} SHAT 7 N 2678 “Droits Accord aux militaire en Nature de vote” 10 Feb 1927. In the Soviet Union soldiers officially had full political rights, unless they were of “bourgeois origin.” Soldiers had the right to vote and run for office in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Portugal, Austria, and Switzerland. In the United Kingdom and Greece soldiers had full political rights, but had to resign if elected to office. Some countries, Czechoslovakia for example, allowed all soldiers to vote, but only officers and career NCOs to run for office. The Turks were slightly more restrictive, allowing all soldiers to vote, but only officers could stand for office. The United States allowed all soldiers to vote, but none could run for office. Poland banned active-duty soldiers to all ranks from voting, but allowed officers to stand for office, while Romania denied soldiers both the suffrage and the right to run of office, but reserved four senate seats for generals. France was not, however, alone in barring soldiers from voting and from running for office. France was joined by Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Germany in banning all political rights for soldiers. Fascist Italy used a graduated system, enlisted men could not vote or run, NCOs could run for the lower house, and officers could vote and stand for all offices.
“Under the Moroccan Sun:” Fraternization and the Rif War

Not all supporters of military reform used legal means to challenge the military’s separate status. Some directly challenged the military justice system and appealed to soldiers to obstruct the functioning of the armed forces until major political changes occurred. These calls for soldiers to disobey orders were the most controversial pressure tactic used by opponents of France’s military system during the 1920s. Most of these calls came from members or supporters of the French Communist Party. Attempts to raise soldiers against their officers were rooted in pre-Great War socialist thought and practice, but gained added relevance because of the 1919 mutiny of sailors in France’s Black Sea Fleet.225

As the 1920s progressed, and especially during the Rif War, Communists and some Socialists called for soldiers to disobey any order to fight the Soviet Union, to break strikes, to seize German territory, or to fight a colonial war. Some speakers and pamphlets urged soldiers to strike against orders to use coercive force and to fraternize with strikers, protesters or opposing soldiers, and others called for conscripts and workers to unite and turn any war into a revolutionary civil war.226

Although only a few soldiers actually fraternized or mutinied, calls for fraternization were an important part of the revolutionary Left’s ideology and rhetoric.


226 AN F 7 13091 Séance 19 October 1925.; AN F 7 13092 10 October 1925.
The far Left’s regular calls for soldiers to fraternize deeply affected the military elite’s picture of the French Left as a whole. The anti-war campaign relied on symbols and rhetoric that recalled the French Revolution, the Commune, and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The use of rhetoric derived from the Commune and the Russian Revolution placed the anti-war movement on a collision course with the military elite and the civilian state.

Communist tactics and Republican legality collided over the Rif War of 1925, the conflict between Moroccan rebels and the French and Spanish forces occupying the partitioned protectorate of Morocco. In 1921, an army under Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd El-Karim El-Khattabi, known as Abd el-Krim, defeated a small Spanish army under General Manuel Fernández Silvestre at the battle of Annual. General Silvestre’s defeat led to the near collapse of Spanish Morocco. During his 1921 offensive, Abd el-Krim’s forces massacred over nine thousand Spanish soldiers and Moroccans fighting for Spain after they surrendered at Dar Drius, Monte Arruit, and Nador. Units of the Tercio Estranjero, some under the command of Francisco Franco, beat back Abd el-Krim’s attacks, but only after the Spanish fell back to coastal enclaves. From 1922 until the spring of 1925 Spanish forces probed forward, but were unable to reestablish control over the Rif Valley and the interior of Spanish Morocco.

During 1924, Abd el-Krim’s expansion south into the Moroccan interior began to clash with French attempts to consolidate their hold on their zone of Morocco.

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227 AN F 7 13171. Police report 11 June 1925 Paris; Antoine, Littréature Pacifiste, 1-12, 66-134 passim.

228 Paul Preston, Franco (Fontana Press: London, 1993), xvii, 31-47. Fighting Abd-el-Krim turned Francisco Franco, a young army officers serving in the Tercio (Spanish Foreign Legion) into a national hero and led him to become the youngest European general since Napoleon Bonaparte.
Skirmishes between French patrols and fighters loyal to Abd el-Krim led to rising tensions as the French attempted to isolate his self-proclaimed Rif Republic. In the fall of 1924, Marshal Hubert-Louis Lyautey, the military and political head of French Morocco, warned Paris of an immanent conflict and urgently requested reinforcements.  

In March of 1925, Abd el-Krim launched a major offensive against French Morocco, aimed at driving the Europeans out of Morocco and possibly establishing his control over the entire country. By attacking the personal bonds that kept tribal leaders loyal to the French, Abd el-Krim was able to provoke many tribes to defect from the French to his forces and repeatedly infiltrate through French defense lines. By June of 1925, French forces were fighting a desperate maneuver battle using whatever European troops were available to prevent the rebels from reaching the major cities and unraveling French colonial rule.  

French leaders in Morocco believed that Germany was aiding the Riffians. The Berlin Inter-Islamic Conference called for France and Spain to recognize the Rif Republic, agree to peace without any war indemnity against the Rif, and recognize Abd el-Krim as a belligerent instead of a rebel. Although the Berlin Inter-Islamic Conference was not run by the German government, French officers interpreted it in light of their belief that Germany had supported previous anti-French rebels, including Rassouli, Khunel, and Karem bin Salah, before, during, and after the Great War.  

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230 Ibid.

231 SHAT 7 N 930 Supplement. Lissen Ech CHAB 9 Sept. 1925.

232 SHAT 7 N 929 Supplement. Dossier 5. 64.CMC 20 Juin 1919.
Following victories by Generals Henri Giraud and Gaston Billotte in June and July of 1925, the French allied with the Spanish and went over onto the offensive. In August, political pressure from Paris forced Marshal Lyautey to resign as political and military head of French Morocco. General Naulin replaced him as Resident-General and Marshal Pétain became military commander. Before resigning Lyautey had requested that General Maxime Weygand, known as the hero of the Battle of the Vistula and previously High Commissioner of Syria, be sent as military commander, but political hostility between the Chamber of Deputies’ Leftwing majority and the conservative general led Painlevé, then both Premier and Minister of War, to send Marshal Pétain instead.  

With the new command structure and reinforcements in place, the French and Spanish opened a combined offensive in September 1925. While Pétain’s men struck north, Spanish troops launched an amphibious assault in Alhucemas Bay. Despite Abd el-Krim’s determined resistance, the well-trained and armed European troops proved too much for his men and many of his allies deserted him and rallied back to the Europeans. By the end of 1925, the rebellion was collapsing and Franco-Spanish forces were advancing in all directions, but the military victory did not end the political battle over the war back in France.  

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233 SHAT 2 N 20 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Historique des événements du MAROC en 1925 (23 Jan 1926).” This staff report was written by General Weygand’s staff under the direction of Lt. Colonel Fabre; Philip Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France (New York: Begham 1967).  

234 2 N 20 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Historique des événements du MAROC en 1925 (23 Jan 1926).” Abd-el-Krim understood that the foundation of colonial power was the colonizers’ alliances with local elites. Rather than aiming at destroying France’s armies, he tried to undermine the hundreds of local alliances that held the colonial state together. By attacking tribal lands and pressuring tribal leaders through threats and blackmail, Abd el-Krim was able to induce tribe after tribe to side with him. His victories created a momentum that made it easier for him to win new allies. Lt. Colonel Fabre recognized
Soon after Abd el-Krim invaded French Morocco, Communist groups posted anti-war posters throughout France and called on troops to fraternize with the Riffians. Communist posters claimed the *Cartel des Gauches* and Marshal Lyautey had conspired to provoke the war. They alleged that the Cartel was using the war to reward its financial backers, while Lyautey wanted a war to win more glory on the battlefield. The Communists called for an immediate peace, recognition of the Rif Republic, the evacuation of Morocco, and urged soldiers to fraternize with the Abd el-Krim’s forces if the government did not immediately agree to their demands.235

During 1925, Communist leaders, including the future fascist turncoat Jacques Doriot, clamored for action against the war. Doriot urged troops to fraternize with the Riffians and predicted that unless stopped quickly, the war would lead to another World War. He called for civilians and soldiers to protest against the war and blamed the conflict on the *Compagnie Financière de Paris et des Pays-Bas*’s financial interests in Morocco.236 Following orders from Moscow, Doriot sought to use the Rif War to push a larger critique of colonialism as a form of capitalist exploitation of both colonized peoples and the European working class.237

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236 AN F 7 13171. M. Marty. “War for Banque des Pays-Bas” 21 May 1925; Report 6 June 1925; Report 3 July 1925; 25 May 1925.

Doriot defended his calls for fraternization by arguing that he was not endangering French lives. He denied claims by conservative politicians and military leaders that fraternization encouraged conscripts to shoot each other in the back. He argued that soldiers should fraternize by refusing to obey orders or to resist the advance of Riffian forces. Fraternization was an established Marxist response to conflict, and the Communists pushed it despite evidence from Spanish Morocco that Abd el-Krim’s forces tortured and killed captured soldiers.

French officials were sensitive to propaganda aimed at their Muslim subjects, in part, because they had evidence that Abd el-Krim was trying to persuade Muslims in other French African territories to take up arms. During the summer of 1925, French security forces intercepted letters signed by Abd el-Krim, written to prominent leaders in Algeria’s Muslim communities urging them to assist his revolt. French security forces also intercepted attempts by French Communists to spread Arabic-language anti-war propaganda in Morocco, Algeria, and inside the Muslim units of the French Army.

Despite the Communists’ hopes, and the French state’s fears, Communist propaganda proved ineffective. The Communists’ failure is not surprising. Communist propagandists in France wrote the tracts and then found people to translate them into Arabic. The propagandists knew very little about life, culture, or politics in Morocco and

238 AN F 7 13171. Report 25 May 1925; Report 8 June 1925; Report 11 June 1925.

239 Ibid.; Antoine, Littérature Pacifiste, 3-12; Preston, Franco, 31-2. Given the massacres of Spanish prisoners after Abd el-Krim’s 1921 victory at Annaul fraternization through surrender was a dangerous tactic. The fate of the Spanish prisoners was well-known and Doriot’s claim that fraternization would not endanger lives was little more than a lie to soften the party’s public image and deflect accusations that the party cared more about its ideology than it did the lives of real people.

240 AN F 7 13178. No 75920.

241 AN F 7 13171; AN F 7 13175. Min Interior (Dir de sûreté générale) reports. September and October 1925.
their propaganda appears to have had little or no effect on the Moroccans. Even if the French Communists had created effective propaganda, it would still have been a challenge to get the propaganda into the hands of Moroccans warriors and leaders. Although it was ineffective, military and civilian authorities watched the Communist propaganda campaign closely and worried that it would spark a general Muslim rebellion in North Africa.

Domestically, anti-war propagandists combined an anti-conscription message with their anti-war position. By fusing anti-war and anti-conscription messages, the Communists hoped to tap into post-war France’s deep vein of anti-militarism and use it to expand party membership as well as building opposition to the war. In newspapers, posters, pamphlets, and speeches the Communists blamed the war on banking interests, called on conscripts to disobey their “fascist” officers, urged soldiers to fraternize with the Riffians, and demanded the early liberation of conscripts.

During the summer of 1925 anti-war protestors sang songs as soldiers boarded ships bound for Morocco in an attempt to sap their morale and encourage dissent in the ranks. The songs condemned the war as unjust, and predicted that many of the men who left France for Africa would never return alive. One song predicted that “the war takes all our children . . . they are going to fall, under the Moroccan sun, the poor boys . . . .” The propaganda campaign sought to undermine the army and politicizing it as a means to the end of weakening the bourgeois state.

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242 Ibid.


244 AN F 7 13178. “Au Maroc.” Sung to the tune of Dolorosa, the first verse and refrain are:
The Communist press and speakers continually invoked the image and spirit of the 1919 Black Sea Mutiny. For much of the Marxist Left, Marty and the Mutiny became a symbol of popular resistance to military adventurism and imperialism. Marty, who won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies during the 1924 election after having several previous bi-election victories annulled by the conservative majority, campaigned vigorously against the war and urged soldiers and sailors to follow the example he set in the Black Sea.245

The Socialist Party and its leaders recognized the double game embedded in the Communist position, and despite the Socialists’ long history of opposing colonialism, supported the war. Blum and his party had not experienced a conversion to colonialism, but they could not bring themselves to sacrifice the lives of Frenchmen, whether workers, peasants, aristocrats, or bourgeoisies at the service of ideology. Blum and his party argued that the Rif War was not a nationalist or a class revolt. Instead, they claimed Abd

La foule accourt, chacun veut voir l’embarquement
De ces poilus, tous jeunes gens de vingt ans
Bien des mouchoise sont agités,
Plus d’un Coeur bat à se briser.
Un coup d’ sirèn’ c’est le signal on tir’ le pont,
De voir partir cett’ bell’ jeuness’ quelle emotion
Une maman seule à son tour,
Murmure alors avec amour:

REFRAIN
Ils vont là-bas
Sous le soleil marocain,
Ces pauvres gars
Pour eux, que sera demain,
Dans notre Coeur
C’est une grande douleur
De Voir partir ces pauvres gars,
Qui vont là-bas.

245 AN F 7 12176. Depêche de Brest (Brest); Judt., 103.
el-Krim was a feudal empire builder and not the leader of a republican movement of national self-determination, as he and the Communists claimed.  

The Communist anti-war movement tried to use serving soldiers and sailors in their propaganda efforts. In August of 1925, the Communist Party had three sailors appear at a local party congress, in full uniform, to denounce the military justice system and military prisons. Their presence allowed them to deliver their verbal attack against the military elite in uniform, thus enhancing its impact. Their presence also signaled the party’s rejection of the separation of the military from the political system and the rights that underpinned it. Political activity by serving members of the armed forces was strictly illegal, and the Communists’ use of uniformed personnel was a challenge to the legitimacy of both the armed forces, and the “bourgeois” Republic.

Police reports indicated that some Communists believed the outbreak of the war gave them an opportunity to use coercive force against the government. Communist leaders hoped that, with so many men deployed to North Africa and the Rhineland, that the Army would not have enough men to break a major political strike. Communist leaders spent most of September 1925 debating whether to attempt a general strike and testing support for it. Young militants, especially members of the Communist youth group, the Fédération des Jeunesse Communistes, supported stronger action against the

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247 AN F 7 13090. 7165 Ministe Int (Dir de la Surete Gen) à Min Marine (EMG 2e Bur B) Commandant Chenouard. Agents of the Sûreté Général successfully identified one of the speakers as Mathieu Tomeï, a sailor stationed in Provence.


war and favored a prolonged strike, but party leaders were reluctant to risk a defeat. Pressure from Doriot, young militants, and Moscow eventually pushed party leaders into ordering the strike. Party leaders hoped that they would embarrass the Socialists, while the leaders of the Communist CGTU accepted the strike after the party tied the anti-war protest to demands for major wage increases to counterbalance inflationary pressure on wages.\textsuperscript{250} On 10 October 1925, a special issue of \textit{L’Humanité} announced the Communist Party’s decision to call a twenty-four hour general strike for 12 October 1925.\textsuperscript{251}

Despite the high hopes of some militants, by mid-morning on 12 October 1925 it was clear that the twenty-four hour general strike had failed. Public services were functioning and most private businesses were working. Although prefects reported sporadic work stoppages, the general strike failed. Forty-six departments reported no noticeable strike activity at all, while most of the rest reported only minor actions. The French government estimated that only 88,000 men and women went out on strike, and 77,000 of the strikers were members of Communist unions.\textsuperscript{252} The strike did not generate new support for the Communists, and its failure confirmed the unwillingness of the French population to embrace any radical challenge to the Third Republic’s basic political arrangements. The defeat of the general strike caused recriminations inside the Communist Party and showed the true weakness of Communism and radical anti-militarism in France.\textsuperscript{253}

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\textsuperscript{250} Slavin, 6, 17, 23-6.
\textsuperscript{251} \textit{L’Humanité} (Paris) 10 October 1925.
\textsuperscript{252} AN F 7 12969. Many of the non-Communist strikers were chauffeurs who had a preexisting dispute and had recently been out on strike.
\end{flushright}
Throughout 1925 and 1926, the police maintained steady pressure on anti-war groups trying to undermine the armed forces. The result of the intense persecution suggests that the anti-war movement was louder than it was large. Despite systematic repression, by November 1925 the police had only arrested 351 people for provoking military personnel to disobedience. This small number of arrests suggests that, although the calls greatly worried military leaders, the militant antiwar movement was a very small force.\textsuperscript{254}

The government punished anti-war activity in metropolitan France, but it was especially brutal in Algeria and Tunisia. Because French leaders feared the Moroccan revolt could spread to other North African territories, people convicted of anti-war offensives in Algerian and Tunisia received stiffer sentences than those convicted in the metropole. While provocation of military personnel to disobedience often led to prison terms of weeks or months in European France, in Algeria similar acts could draw sentences of several years.\textsuperscript{255}

Government repression of anti-war activists went beyond arresting street-level activists. French prosecutors targeted antiwar leaders, including André Marty. Marty called for troops to fraternize with the Riffians and enlisted men to disobey their officers, and accused Marshal Foch of being an anti-Republican criminal for helping to cause the Rif war, oppress Germany, and trying to destroy the Soviet Union. Marty was arrested, tried, and convicted for his anti-war comments and his slanderous remarks about Marshal

\textsuperscript{254} AN F 7 13171. 23 Oct 1925; 12 Nov 1925.

\textsuperscript{255} AN F 7 13178. Telegram No 21057; AN F 7 13176.
Foch. The civilian court fined the deputy 30,000 Francs and sentenced him to four years in prison.  

The Communists were not the only Frenchmen attacking the French Army during the Rif War. In 1926, sections of the League of the Rights of Man attacked the administration of military justice, called for the abolition of military courts, and demanded the withdrawal of French forces from Morocco and Syria. The league’s delegates combined their calls to abandon the Syrian Mandate and Morocco with demands to ban Catholic schools and that any Frenchman who did not send his children to public and lay schools should have his right to hold public office revoked.

The League was itself strongly divided over the Moroccan question. Although the Vichy section called for effective surrender, speakers in Nice defended the war. They argued that the Communists were attempting to use the Rif War to attack the Republic and that Abd el-Krim was little better than a barbarian who, if not checked, would launch a campaign of massacre across North Africa. Speakers criticized the government for its refusal to negotiate after the military situation turned in its favor, but insisted that the war was just and necessary.

Although the anti-militarist campaigns failed to force an early end to the war, and failed to create a revolutionary atmosphere within the armed forces, military and civilian

256 AN F 7 13190. Poster. “LES CRIMES des CONSEILS DE GUERRE 321 NOIS DE PRISON” 1928; “LE Travail des Cellules d’Unsines” edited by the Parti Communiste (SFIC); “Paix a l’URSS et AMNISTIE” November 1930.


leaders believed the campaign did have an effect inside the army. In May of 1927, Minister of War Paul Painlevé claimed that during the period of heavy fighting between January and July 1925, there were 1,371 soldiers convicted of disobeying orders in Morocco. He argued that, “There is no doubt that the menacing communist campaigns of this period had an influence on the grave breaches of military discipline and duty.”

The military elite and civilian political leaders feared Communist propaganda, in part, because they believed the Communists were infiltrating the French Army. In 1927, Painlevé and the army’s top generals believed that Communists cells were operating throughout the army. Intelligence reports suggested there were hundreds of cells in units all over France and North Africa. Police and intelligence officials reported that there were cells in combat units, support units, and administrative stations in provinces all over France as well as in the colonies and the occupied Rhineland.

Even as government repression continued, the Communist Party campaigned for amnesty for everybody convicted of what it called political crimes. In 1927, Communist leaders ordered L’Humanité to concentrate its efforts on the amnesty campaign. The writers at L’Humanité attacked the military justice system for punishing soldiers for organizing or participating in anti-war protests or expressing anti-war sentiments in

259 AN F 7 13099 “BE/I Le Ministre de la Guerre À Monsieur le Ministre de l’Interieur” 24 Mai 1927. Although Painlevé did have a list of convictions for offenses including distributing anti-military literature, refusal to obey orders, and helping to organize Communist rallies, a pencil note on the bottom states that there were 1,371 convictions between 1924 and 1927, not between January-July 1925. Despite Painlevé’s manipulation of the statistics, he still appears to have believed that the Communist campaign had had a negative effect on army discipline.

260 AN F 7 13099 Note 23 Avril 1927.

261 AN F 7 13100. Police Reports. 26 Oct 1927
public. *L’Humanité* argued that because their actions would not have been a crime in the civilian world, it was unjust to punish them in the military world.\textsuperscript{262}

*L’Humanité*’s argument for amnesty was a continuation of the larger campaign against military justice. By arguing that the standard for criminality within the armed forces should be identical, except on the battlefield, to the standard in civilian life the writer questioned the validity of allowing the peacetime army to function by different rules the rest of the French state. He argued for the inclusion of soldiers inside the civilian world and the disappearance of separate military structures outside of a battle zone.

The Communist campaign against the Rif War exacerbated many Frenchmen’s fear of the Communist Party. During the 1920s, Soviet leaders and Communist agents attempted to organize supporters in the European colonies. Many Frenchmen saw the black hand of international Communism behind both Abd el-Krim’s rebellion in Morocco and the contemporaneous revolt in French Syria.\textsuperscript{263}

French leaders, especially conservatives like Louis Marin, the leader of the Republican Federation, worried that the French Communists were little more than agents of the Soviet Union and the Third (Communist) International. Marin and his supporters accused the Communists of being part of an international conspiracy against France, and the Western world more broadly. *La Nation*, Marin’s newspaper, claimed Abd el-Krim was a part of this conspiracy and was acting as an agent of the Communists and receiving

\textsuperscript{262} AN F 7 13099 “L’Humanité 28 August 1927.”

\textsuperscript{263} George Decroq, “L’Allemagne contre l’Occident” *La Nation*, 1 July 1925; “Russia Bolchevik” *Nation*, 1 July 1925.
assistance from the Soviet Union and Germany. The French Communist party’s public support for the rebels, their attempt to spread propaganda in North Africa to increase Muslim support for the revolt, and their calls for French soldiers to mutiny played into the hands of conservative elements who already distrusted the Communists. The Communist’s support for the Rif War combined with their efforts to infiltrate the army to create mistrust of the party and the defense policies it advocated, especially granting political rights to soldiers.

Collapse of the Cartel

By late 1925, the Cartel des Gauches was barely holding together. The Socialists were angry over the Radical’s failure to produce significant social reforms, to crackdown against the Catholic Church, or to reform the military. In vote after vote, the Socialists narrowly voted to continue to support the Radical government, but always by very thin margins. Thus, although the Cartel survived, increasing numbers of Radicals looked for new allies in the Center and on the Right, while some Socialists tried to cement the Socialist-Radical Cartel by forming a formal coalition. Throughout 1926, bitter debates over participation within the Socialist Party threatened party unity and military reform became a key issue in the battle over participation. Speaking for the supporters of participation, Pierre Renaudel, the party’s leading defense thinker, argued that the Socialists needed to choose between participation or opposition, claiming that on a motion of confidence there were only two ways to vote “white or blue” (Yes or No).

264 Slavin, “The French Left and the Rif War,” 17; George Decroq, “L’Allemagne contre l’Occident” La Nation, 1 July 1925; “Russie Bolchevik” Nation, 1 July 1925.

265 AN F 7 130776.
Blum countered that the Socialists should choose “Neither the one nor the other,” and consistently carried the day with a general opposition to participation or “ministerialism.”

After the remnant of the Cartel collapsed during the financial panic of 1926 and Poincaré returned as Premier, infighting on the Left became increasingly severe. By 1928, the combination of Radical and centrist support for the financial retrenchment necessary for Poincaré to stabilize the Franc and the 1927-28 Army Laws led to a major crisis within the larger Leftist community. The military reform movement’s splintering was both a part of the larger fragmentation of the Left, and one of its causes. Socialist-Radical divisions on military reform contributed to the alliance’s collapse by driving Radicals to the right and embittering Socialists toward the Radicals. One symptom of the movement’s collapse was the League of the Rights of Man’s 1928 decision to expel Paul Painlevé for his support for the 1927/28 Military Laws.

The military reform debate played an unrecognized role in weakening the Cartel by highlighting the divisions between the Socialists and the Radicals, and by showing the Cartel’s inability to achieve results. Although the Radicals shared blame with the Socialists for the alliance’s failure, in terms of the military reform debate, the Socialists were primarily responsible for the movement’s failures. By insisting on a militia army, Léon Blum was able to maintain party unity, but at the price of not trying to integrate the army into the political system by extending the right to vote to soldiers. Blum’s intransigence prevented the Cartel from passing any military reforms and created a source...

266 AN F 13076. Victoire 12 Jan 1926.

267 AN F 7 13086. L’Homme Libre (Paris) 19 Jul 1928.
of bitterness between the Radicals and the Socialists that contributed to the Cartel’s collapse.

In late 1927, as the Socialist Party was preparing for the upcoming 1928 elections, the party endorsed further cuts in the term of service and the internationalization of French defense policy. The 1928 Socialists’ platform echoed the immediate post-war idealism of Albert Thomas and Pierre Renaudel, even as Blum’s intransigent anti-ministerialism and was driving Renaudel out from the party. The Socialist’s defense policy had become a dogma, useful when competing with the Communists, but detached from international and domestic political realities.

The military reform movement drew much of its power in the early and mid-1920s from competition among its diverse members, but that competitive energy also prevented the reformists from coming together to enact any reforms. Communist calls for massive changes in the French military system pulled the Socialist to the Left, in order to defend their political base, and put pressure on the Radicals to accept additional reforms in order to assert their own Leftist credentials. After the Congress of Tours, Léon Blum’s obsession with party unity kept Socialist defense policy firmly rooted in prewar thought. By tacking as far to the Left as possible, and consequently as close to the Communists as possible, the Socialists competed directly with the Communists for support, encouraging the Communists to adopt even more radical positions, and through their periodic alliances with the Radicals, the Socialists pulled the Radicals toward more systemic reforms of the military.

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268 AN F 7 13077. Le Peuple 30 December 1927.
The Radicals’ position incorporated the Socialists’ support for internationalism and desire to reduce the term of military service with a belief in the Republican legitimacy of conscript armies. Radical Party leaders tried to assert their Leftist credentials by supporting a cautious form of disarmament, an arbitration-centered internationalist foreign policy, and reductions in the term of conscript service, but they were generally satisfied with an army that resembled the prewar army. Unable to satisfy both the Left wing, which inclined toward the Socialist’s on most issues, and the party’s conservative wing, that prioritized stable finances and opposed altering the balance of power inside the Republic, the Radicals shifted between alliances with the Left and the Right. Unable to legislate with the Socialists, the Radicals eventually sacrificed Republicanization in order to join Poincaré in the battle to save the Franc.269

Ultimately, internal competition destroyed the military reform movement. Divisions between the Radicals and the Socialists became increasingly acute as economic issues moved to the front of the political agenda in the face of renewed exchange rate instability. Léon Blum’s obsession with party unity sabotaged attempts to reinforce the Cartel. Because he refused to bring his party into the government and make the compromises necessary to sustain a Socialist-Radical coalition, the Radical Party increasingly looked to the Center for support, ultimately abandoning the Cartel and joining with the Center and the Right in a National Union government under Raymond Poincaré, the man the Radicals ran against in the 1924 elections. Unlike the Socialists, the Radicals’ new conservative allies were willing to compromise on military reform. They supported the Radicals’ desire to cut the term of conscript service to twelve months and in exchange the Radicals dropped their efforts to alter the military legal system and

extend political rights to soldiers. Poincaré’s return to power broke the deadlock Blum’s intransigence had created and allowed the Radicals to pass a modest reform agenda. Ironically, the collapse of the Cartel allowed reforms to proceed. So long as the Radicals remained tied to the Socialists, and Blum refused to accept less than the party’s official position, the Chamber was effectively deadlocked and could not pass any significant military reforms.
CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND ALLIANCE OF THE DISENFRANCHISED: WOMEN, COLONIALS, AND THE MANIPULATION OF RACE AND GENDER BY THE GENERAL STAFF

In the February 2004 issue of *Terre Magazine*, the monthly magazine of the French Army, General Michel Poulet defended France’s recent transition to a professional army. He praised female soldiers, reservists, and civil employees for taking on more responsibilities and argued that professional male soldiers should accept them as indispensable comrades in the new French Army. Responding to concerns that the Army’s reliance on women was a weakness, General Poulet praised France’s female soldiers for daily displaying “incontestable qualities: pugnacity, efficiency, precision, energy, [and] determination.” He went on to recognize the increased importance of reservists and called attention to the vital role of civilian employees, fully twenty percent of the army’s personnel. After reminding his readers that the Army would collapse without its female soldiers, reservists, and civilians, Poulet concluded with a call for the “military communities” to unite “in discipline and in the fraternity of arms” to complete the transformation and serve the interests of France.  

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General Poulet’s description of the contemporary French Army’s struggle to transform itself reflects the French Army’s struggles in the 1920s. Then, as now, appeals to unity and strident defenses of the army’s new path masked concerns within the ranks over the redefinition of military identity. During the 1920s, a coalition of left-of-center political groupings exerted pressure against the government and military elite to accept major reforms aimed at Republicanizing the Army. This chapter shows that in addition to urging repression against Leftwing agitators, the military elite tried to reorganize the Army using French women, colonial men, and semi-retired soldiers to deflect the demands of the reform movement and preserve the Army’s conservative political and social culture. In so doing, the military elite prefigured the contemporary reforms that General Poulet defended, though with a stronger interest in race and more sinister undertones.

In the 1920s, the French military elite’s hostility to the class-based political claims of the Left shaped its response to Socialist, Communist, and Radical politicians’ attempts to Republicanize the Army. The military elite tried to fight Republicanization by insulating the army from electoral politics and civilian society through integrating large numbers of colonial men and French women into the army. The military elite’s response to the reform debate redefined military identity and challenged officers to reexamine the role of race and gender in defining military identity.

Attention to race and gender reveals that instead of Republicanizing the Army, the military reform movement’s pressure further entrenched the army’s anti-Republican bias and increased its separation from civilian society. By opening military employment to
women, recruiting more soldiers from colonized areas, and creating new categories of
civilian employees for politically friendly veterans, the military elite successfully
insulated itself and its institution from the reform movement’s attacks by creating an
alternate version of French society. In this alternate version of France, the Army
organized civilian women, semi-militarized French men, colonized men, conscripts, and
professional soldiers into a hierarchical power structure defined by professionalism and
designed to resist democratization. Surprisingly this hierarchy proved fluid, and over the
course of the 1920s, as women gained increased prestige within the army as officers
began to see them as more professional, and thus reliable, than many of the conscripts
and male civilian workers.

This chapter begins by examining the experience of women in the French Army
during the 1920s. It argues that the example of women in the French Army in the 1920s
contradicts the dominant historiography of women, gender, and demobilization. During
the 1920s, the military elite assimilated women into its construction of military identity.
By the mid-1920s, the construction of gender within the French Army had changed so
much that instead of seeing women as alien and dangerous, as it had in 1919, the military
elite viewed them as vital pieces in the its plan to protect the Army and its culture from
the reformists.

After establishing the significance of the change in the construction of gender in
the French Army, the chapter argues that the military elite also tried to use race to
sabotage the goals of the military reform movement. Fears of miscegenation and
upsetting the empire’s racial hierarchy eventually defeated plans significantly to increase
the use of colonized men in the Army, but the attempt to do so showed many of the same

characteristics as the efforts to use women to strengthen the French Army. In both cases, the military elite hoped to use a politically disenfranchised and marginalized group to compensate for growing opposition to conscription and sidestep calls to give soldiers political rights.

The last section of the chapter studies the details of Marshal Philippe Pétain’s compromise that produced the 1927/28 Army Laws. The deal gave the Center-Left politicians their key demand, a reduction in the term of conscript service in exchange for concessions that allowed the military elite to continue to suppress Leftwing politics inside the army and endorsed army leaders’ use of women and semi-militarized men to compensate for its loss of conscripts.

During the 1920s, the military elite’s attitude toward women within the military community changed dramatically. Women went from being targets of the military elite’s conservative backlash to integral parts of the conservative elite’s plans for preserving conservative power and privilege within the armed forces. In the negotiations leading to the 1927/28 Army Laws, the military elite broke with its pre-war opposition to allowing women to work inside the Army and gave female civil employees a central place in its plans for the army’s future. This chapter argues that in France, the military elite’s reaction to the labor shortages created by the war and demobilization led to a different experience for women within the Army than the dominant women’s and gender historiography has claimed. The demobilization processes initially followed the model established by women’s and gender historians, but then changed course.

Immediately after the war a conservative backlash against women’s wartime gains did occur, but male-manpower shortages in the post-1918 French Army frustrated the
reaction in the army. Steven Hause has argued that the backlash made women worse off in France after the war than they had been before the war, but in the case of the army, the backlash at first failed to reverse women’s gains and eventually created the conditions for women to gain new opportunities and prestige within the French Army.271

Historians have misread the Great War’s impact on French women’s relationship with the French Army. Margaret Darrow’s pioneering research into women and the French Army has noted that the French Army was unusual in that it did not create a women’s auxiliary corps or admit women into the regular army during the Great War. She has shown that although women did not become soldiers, the Army did hire women as civilian employees and that a few worked as drivers in quasi-militarized positions, but Darrow wrongly believed that these women lost their jobs during demobilization.272

Through their “double helix” theory, Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have provided a theoretical basis for the writings of many other gender historians. They argued that the gendered construction of prewar employment patterns created a relative hierarchy of prestige and that the structure of those hierarchies survived the outbreak of war. Women appeared to “move forward” by taking jobs previously reserved for men, but men also “move[d] forward” into the even more masculine and prestigious role of wartime soldier. The relative gender hierarchy thus remained intact and when men left


272 Margaret Darrow, French Women and the First World War: War Stories from the Home Front (New York: Berg, 2000), 229-63. Darrow noted the lack of a women’s auxiliary corps and argued that women could not be admitted into the French Army because it would have implied full citizenship and threatened the wartime construction of gender which depended on the unquestioned acceptance of the masculinity of warfare. The recognition that women survived demobilization and partially recovered many of their positions challenges Darrow’s belief the women’s lack of full citizenship prevented their full assimilation into the army.
the hyper-masculine world of the wartime army and reverted to being merely masculine, they reclaimed the prewar masculine jobs that wartime women had taken during the war. When the men returned to their prewar positions, they forced women to “move back” into traditionally feminine areas of employment and stripped them of the prestige they appeared to gain during the war.273

Many historians have studied demobilization and come to the same basic conclusion as the Higgonnets. In her study of women in wartime Germany, Ute Daniel has shown that demobilization erased women’s minor gains in wartime Germany.274 Mary Louise Roberts and Steven Hause have shown that wartime changes led to a strong conservative backlash that sought to enforce prewar gender norms on postwar French women. These backlashes helped to push women out of wartime employment and to strip away claims to political representation they had gained during the Great War. Roberts argues that the backlash was unable to force a return to prewar attitudes and gender relations because of changes in society created by the war, but it did erase many of the political and economic gains women had made.275

Darrow has shown that although industrial and commercial opportunities for women expanded during the war, the formerly masculine fields women entered during


274 Ute Daniel, The War from Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War trans. Margaret Ries (New York: Berg, 1997). In chapter III, Daniel argues that women made only minor gains during the war and that those gains disappeared during the demobilization. She has shown that in Germany the women who worked in munitions plants and other war industries had usually been employed outside their homes before the war and were often simply moving from one factory job to another based on the changing demand for labor and the higher wages offered in many war related factories.

the war became feminized by comparison to the hyper-masculine combat roles men filled. Women were able to get jobs previously denied to them, but only after those jobs’ relative prestige had fallen. Women were stranded on the lower-rungs of a heavily gendered system, and when the war ended their wartime access to new professions disappeared as men returned from the battlefield to reclaim and remasculinize their prewar professions. 276

This chapter establishes that the postwar history of French women working for the army departed from the established line of French women’s and gender history. During the Great War, women did indeed “move forward” and take previously male-only positions in the French Army. Although unwilling to allow women to become soldiers, the French government and military elite did open some jobs in the Army to women. In 1916, Minister of War Pierre Auguste Roques issued a decree authorizing the hiring of temporary civilian auxiliary workers to free soldiers for the frontlines. Because of the absence of much of the male working population at the front, most of these auxiliary workers were women. The majority of the new female employees worked as secretaries and bookkeepers, though some did manual labor or filled junior administrative positions supervising other women. Military and political leaders intended the 1916 Regime to be an expedient that they would abolish as soon as circumstances allowed. 277

Based on her study of wartime military records, Margaret Darrow argued that the French Army began to purge women even before the end of the Great War and that the

276 Darrow, French Women and the First World War, 229-63.

purge led to the firing of almost all of the army’s women during demobilization. However, based on newer records from the interwar era this chapter will show that Darrow was mistaken and not only did thousands of women continued to work for the French Army throughout the interwar era, but their relative prestige inside the army rose during the period. Some of these women had been hired during the Great War, but others were hired during and after the demobilization, which rather than serving as a way to get women out of the military provided an opening for many new women to enter army employment. These French Army records have been unavailable to scholars because after the Germans captured them in June of 1940, the Russians recaptured them from the Germans in 1945 and the papers spent the Cold War in Moscow. Boris Yeltsin returned them to France as a goodwill gesture in the late-1990s.

Although meant as an emergency measure, the 1916 program survived the war and demobilization. Many of the “temporary” 1916 Regime workers filled the regular clerical needs of the Army throughout the 1920s. Although women remained a small fraction of the Army’s total military and civilian workforce, the presence of thousands of women inside the military made gender an important part of the redefinition of French military identity in the 1920s. These women provided a beachhead for future expansion of women’s opportunities within the French armed forces. The 7,500 1916 Regime employees who continued working for the army into the early 1920s affected the way senior officers constructed military identity. During the 1920s, French Army leaders engaged in a complex debate over the meaning of what it meant to be a “militaire.”

\footnote{278} \textit{Ibid.}
debate was both internal to the military, and external to it, as French officers debated amongst themselves, and simultaneously participated in a broader debate that included politicians and politicized members of the public. This debate involved many linked concepts, including discipline and loyalty, both of which interacted with gender and race to construct the French military’s response to the military reform movement.

Although there is a significant and nuanced historiography of race in interwar France, the historiography of race in the French Army has lagged behind, though not nearly so much so as the historiography of gender in the French Army. Myron Echenberg’s *Colonial Conscripts* introduces race as part of his social history of the *Tirailleurs Senegalais*, but Echenberg’s strength, his focus on the experience of Africans in the French Army obscured the politics surrounding African forces in the interwar period.280

Sally Marks and Tyler Stovall have emphasized the problems associated with race in immediate post Great War Europe. In her article “Black Watch on the Rhine,” Marks showed that the Weimar government and church groups turned the French use of colonial forces in the occupation of the Rhineland into an effective propaganda weapon against the French and the Treaty of Versailles.281 Stovall has shown an attempt by French military authorities to use Africans as dockworkers to load munitions bound for the White Russian forces of Generals Denikin and Wrangel provoked a violent class and race based reaction from white dockworkers. The workers accused the government of using men from the colonies to break the French working class, objected that employing blacks


instead of whites undermined the natural racial hierarchy, and expressed fears that the presence of large groups of African men in France would endanger French women. Military and political leaders, however, hoped that the Africans would prove less susceptible to Socialist and radical Marxist calls for workers to refuse to load munitions or weapons bound of the Soviet Union’s enemies.282

Demobilization, Women, and the Defense of Military Manhood

The demobilization of 1919 unexpectedly expanded and consolidated women’s roles within the French Army. Demobilization required a tremendous amount of paperwork: demobilization forms for each individual, composite forms detailing collective information on the soldiers demobilized each week and each month from every battalion, regiment, and division in the French Army, as well as the calculation of partial pay and bonuses. Demobilization paperwork needed to be prepared quickly and had to be done in addition to the army’s normal administrative burden at the same time the army was preparing for the occupation of the Saar and the Rhineland as well as transitioning to a peacetime force. The flood of postwar paper work threatened to overwhelm the shrinking military workforce, because the soldiers posted to army administration were themselves being demobilized. The combination of a rising workload and a shrinking

workforce created a growing backlog of work and led the Army General Staff and the
*Intendance* to spend the summer of 1919 complaining about administrative failures.\textsuperscript{283}

The Army responded to its renewed labor shortage by seeking more temporary
auxiliaries under the 1916 Regime. Most of the people hired were women. These new
female employees generally worked in the same fields, typically secretarial work and
accounting, as the women previously hired under the 1916 Regime during the war. The
officers and male civilian functionaries responsible for military administration were
nearly unanimous in concurring that they needed these women in order to deal with the
ever-growing mountain of paperwork that the end of the war had created.\textsuperscript{284}

Military leaders expected this new wave of female hires to be merely a stopgap
measure. Even at the height of the 1919-20 personnel crisis, while the Army was hiring
thousands of new female employees, it was already planning to fire them all. One
*Intendance* report titled “Report Relative to Female labor,” but subtitled “The Abuse of
Female Civil Employees,” written by Controller-General Piquet urged rapid action to
eliminate female employees. The report cited a series of inspections by *Intendance*
officials on mission and concluded that although the army urgently needed its female
employees, it was using them on too large a scale. Piquet argued that many women were
underemployed performing make-work office tasks that, although allegedly specialized, a

\textsuperscript{283} SHAT 8 N 36 Supplement dossier 1. Num 464 29 August 1919. “Rapport relative à la main
d’oeuvre feminine (Régime de 1916)”.

\textsuperscript{284} *Ibid.* Controller-General Piquet was a senior civilian official in the *Intendance*, which was
subordinate to the Fifth Bureau of the General Staff of the Army. He was one of the most senior civilian
functionaries in the French Army and responsible for overseeing military administration.
single employee doing general office work could easily have performed more cheaply than several women employed as specialists could.285

The Piquet Report was symptomatic of a military command that was deeply uneasy about its position and future in the aftermath of its victory. Demobilization was a sign of victory, and rapid demobilization was necessary for a range of political and economic reasons, not the least of which was the cost of paying for the mobilized army. However, demobilization also weakened the political influence of the army and undermined the personal authority of army officers by reducing the army’s strength and budget and by dismantling wartime hierarchies.286

The Piquet Report’s reaction to women working for the army was part of a larger attempt by the French Army to redefine itself at the dawn of the post-war world. The terrible losses and mobilization of the Great War upset the military elite’s self-conception, and with the end of the war its surviving members sought to control they army’s postwar rebuilding. Controller-General Piquet’s opposition to keeping women in their wartime professions expressed a common French desire to return to a prewar ideal while being forced to accept that the war had rendered a return to the Belle Époque impossible.287


286 Roberts, Civilization without Sexes, 4-6. Roberts describes this phenomenon in French society more broadly. She shows how rather than the military victory reinforcing prewar masculine privileges and values, it destabilized the relationships it had been expected to cement. Roberts has established both that during the 1920s French culture was dominated by a desire to recover the Belle Époque and a recognition that the changes created by the war made it impossible to go back to prewar norms. She has also argued that gender was central to the process of redefining French cultural norms and power relationships in the 1920s

287 Ibid.
Piquet argued that female laborers, as he called the army’s female employees, were undisciplined and required strong male oversight to make their work useful. He claimed that employing more women produced more errors and ultimately created more work because men had to fix their errors. He noted that the “Havre [office] signals that its verification process has revealed numerous errors, and that it has had to return to the units a large number of dossiers.” The report identified the 129th Infantry Regiment, which had more female employees than any other unit in the Havre region, as the worst offender. Piquet complained that the intendance officials had to return the regiment’s dossiers “covered in red.” He blasted the Army’s policy of employing women by castigating them for indiscipline. In a blistering summation he attacked the Army’s female employees calling them, “a personnel insufficiently trained or insufficiently attentive, too numerous to be controlled, and working too quickly.”

The Piquet report did cite some hopeful signs in efforts to control female employees. Increased staff inspections were allowing officers to uncover and eliminate cases of excessive female employment and standardized exams for prospective employees were being prepared for the most common clerical positions. Piquet valued staff inspections above standardized exams because exams could only fulfill the gatekeeper function of reducing the number of under-qualified women hired. But, aggressive inspections could reduce employees by up to one quarter, with the firings effective immediately.

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289 Ibid., 9-12.
Piquet sought to channel women into dead-end and narrowly defined jobs in order to marginalize them within the army and ease the process of purging them. Male discipline, in the form of exams and inspections, could slow the rate of new hires and might reduce the number of women in the Army, but Piquet feared it would not be enough to get rid of all the army’s female employees. To speed the women’s transition out of military employment, Piquet suggested that female workers specialize in accounting and especially in preparing the demobilization bonuses and indemnities. This narrow specialization in fields that would shrink quickly at the end of the demobilization would create a clear end to women’s work and allow male officers and functionaries to more rigorously oversee the women before their departure from army employment.290

The Piquet Report’s criticisms of female employees revealed the military elite’s core assumptions about the basic traits necessary for militaires and military life. The complaints about mistakes and sloppy work show the importance of individual self-discipline and Piquet’s implicit assumption that women lacked the capacity for this manly trait.291 It is significant that the Piquet Report did not engage in any comparative analysis of error rates between new male and female employees. He blamed female employees for errors but ignored new male civil employees, who were presumably just as untrained

290 Ibid., 13. In this case narrow specialization was intended to isolate the women within the civilian apparatus of the French Army. By pushing as many of them as possible into a relatively narrow field of work the Army hoped to gain the advantage of using their labor without having to risk women gaining access to promotion and the possibility of exercising authority over men. By assigning as many as possible of them to a few specialized fields, the military elite effectively constructed those specialties as different from the rest of the military administrative apparatus, and by feminizing them within a masculine army defined them as less worthy and prestigious occupations.

as were their female coworkers. He also ignored the role of untrained soldiers reassigned from dissolved combat units in causing errors. By making women instead of new civilian employees or under-trained personnel the subject of his investigation, Piquet exposed his assumption that women’s gender rather than their status as civilians or level of training was the cause of their presumed lack of self-discipline.

Piquet’s assumption fits into a broader French belief that women were unable to exercise self-control. Judith Stone has established that the Third Republic’s political institutions were built on gendered understandings of citizenship and republicanism that assumed women lacked the mental discipline to use their reason to overcome frivolity and superstition.292 Immediately after the Great War, French military leaders and most of the Republican political elite believed women’s ability to exercise intelligent self-control was so much weaker than men’s that it was dangerous to risk allowing them to vote or exercise public responsibilities, lest they be controlled by their attachment to the religion or their emotions.293

The military elite’s reaction to female civil employees reveals concerns about the manliness and self-discipline of the post-war French Army. The Piquet Report condemned officers for abusing their right to hire women and not properly discipline them. As a result, the report claimed that the army was saddled with needless expense, and the women were producing an inferior product. Piquet complained that by the low


293 Ibid.
cost of female labor had seduced officers into hiring women for tasks that a smaller number of men could have done better.²⁹⁴

Piquet charged that male officers were treating lazy or incompetent female employees too leniently because they were women. Rather than firing unneeded or under-performing women, commanding officers merely transferred them to another office or unit, further complicating the difficulties the army was having in controlling the women. He argued that although the army could pay women less to do the same job it was better, in terms of quality of work and efficiency, to rely on higher paid, but more efficient male labor whenever possible.²⁹⁵

Central to Piquet’s criticism of male officers for their weakness in dealing with female employees was his concern for maintaining “manly” values. He feared that allowing women into military life was undermining military self-discipline. Piquet blamed the officers’ failure to discipline their female charges properly to the women’s gender, thus suggesting that the officer corps’ professionalism was fragile and constructed on a strongly gendered base. The army had to be essentially masculine because exposing its power structure to women would create indiscipline and cripple military effectiveness by introducing unruly women and by eroding the professional self-discipline of male officers. He presented male self-discipline as simultaneously the

²⁹⁴ SHAT 8 N 36 Supplement dossier 1. Num 464 29 August 1919. Controller-General Piquet “Rapport relative à la main d’oeuvre feminine (Régime de 1916)” In 1919 there was no single official pay-scale for female civil employees. Their pay and work rules varied widely by military region. This led to radical inequalities in pay between regions. The average wage of a secretary in Rouen was forty-eight percent higher than the maximum wage of a female secretary in La Havre. The army maintained separate wage table for men and women in its regions. Not surprisingly the table show women were paid less than men of the same position, though disparities between men and women within a region were dwarfed by disparities between regions. The average pay of women in Rouen exceeded the maximum pay of men in the same positions within the La Havre military district.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.
cornerstone of military professionalism, but also as a fragile achievement that needed to be protected and reinforced through a rigorous masculinization of the military environment.

Despite the Piquet Report’s bitter complaints about the effects of female civil employees, the Army found that it could not do without them. The 1920 reduction in military service from three years to two, and the decision by the government to temporarily reduce that to eighteen months, left the Army with a perceived manpower shortage. This shortage derailed efforts to purge the administrative machine of female employees. In June 1920, a reluctant Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre accepted a reduction in the term of conscript service to eighteen months and approved plans to free 4,500 soldiers for combat duty by replacing 75 soldiers doing clerical and mobilization work with civil employees in each of the army’s 60 authorized infantry regiments.\(^{296}\) This decision effectively saved the jobs of many women hired under the 1916 Regime and marked the first official sanction for their long-term presence within the army.

**Rebuilding a Military Identity: Integrating Women into the French Army**

The 1920 decision ended efforts to push women out of Army employment and began the process of integrating them into the Army. By 1925, the number of female

\(^{296}\) SHAT 1 N 5 dossier 1. CSG. 22 June 1920. The *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* (Superior War Council) was created early in the Third Republic and chaired by the President of the Republic, though its composition and duties changed over time. In the interwar era, President Alexandre Millerand usually chaired the council himself, but later presidents usually delegated their authority to the Minister of War or the Vice-President of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre*. The Vice-President was the general designated as the wartime commanding general. The council had the right to be compulsorily consulted by the government on questions of national defense and army organization, but the government was not bound to follow the council’s advice.
civil employees working for the peacetime Army under the wartime 1916 Regime had stabilized at 7,500 out of 10,000 civil employees. Despite the fact that many women had held their jobs for five to nine years, they all remained officially temporary employees. 297

From 1920 until 1925, the General Staff and Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre virtually ignored their female employees. The neglect of female civil employees by the highest command authorities allowed them to remain in their positions and left it to lower ranking officers to integrate them into their commands. Women remained in their positions with little official interest until the victory of the Cartel des Gauches in 1924 forced the military elite to reexamine its vision of itself while it confronted a politically hostile government. When the Cartel’s 1924 electoral victory and the 1925-26 Riff War undermined the Army’s political position and exposed the military elite to demands that it accept fundamental changes to army’s organization, thousands of female civil employees were still working for the army and were available for the military elite to use as shields against reform plans.

In the early 1920s, mid-level officers and female employees accidentally constructed a military identity for women by emphasizing unit loyalty and blood ties. Many of the women working for the army were the widows of soldiers or the mothers of either career soldiers, or reservists who died while serving in the unit. In addition to marriage and blood ties, women usually remained with the same unit for years, developing personal friendships and professional ties to their units and their officers.

Women remained with their units when they moved inside of France, and deployed with them to the army of occupation in the Rhineland and the Saar.\textsuperscript{298}

Because of female civil employee’s long-term relationships with their units, commanding officers came to view their female employees as regular parts of their command, and extended concepts of unit loyalty to them. When questions emerged about their grade or pay status, female employees could often rely on their officer-supervisors’ support. These officers defended their employees’ interests by referencing their efficiency, discipline, and loyalty. Officers fought attempts to transfer their civilian employees to other commands by citing the bonds of loyalty that had developed between the employees and the soldiers in their units, especially if she was the widow or mother of a former soldier in the unit.\textsuperscript{299}

The case of Madame Hélias exposes the process by which women integrated into the French Army’s culture. In 1923, Hélias was a civil employee attached to a battalion headquarters assigned to the occupation of the Saar Valley. Because of a dispute about her proper grade, she faced demotion and a major pay-cut unless she agreed to transfer to a unit stationed inside of France. She refused to accept any transfer away from her unit, despite the threatened financial hardship for herself and her young son.\textsuperscript{300} She had been with her unit, the same unit her husband had served in before his death during the war, since 1918. Throughout the dispute, her unit commander repeatedly intervened with higher authorities, both with the commander of the Saar occupation, general George-

\textsuperscript{298} SHAT 19 N 160 Supplement. No 927/T 9 Avril 1923

\textsuperscript{299} SHAT 19 N 160 Supplement. No 7141/T 28 Avril 1922 (Brissaud-Desmaillet), 08-1/5 26 Feb. 1923, No 199 8/C 7 April 1923.

\textsuperscript{300} SHAT 19 N 160 Supplement. No 927/T 9 Avril 1923, 16 May 1923, 20 July 1925.
Henri Brissaud-Desmaïllet, and the Ministry of War in Paris, to press her claims and fight against her transfer.301

Even after the Ministry ordered Héliaïs repatriated, her commanding officer continued to fight to retain her. He plead for her to remain, citing the bonds of trust she had established with the men and the blood tie created by her husband’s death while serving in the unit. In making their case, Héliaïs and her commander claimed she was a part of the unit’s family.302 Pressure from her commanding officer convinced Brissaud-Desmaïllet and the Ministry to let her keep her job until a position equal to her grade opened in the Saar.303 This, officially temporary, privilege effectively allowed her to remain in the Saar and with her unit indefinitely because there were only two positions in the occupational army that the Ministry believed were equal to her grade and open to women.304

The unit loyalty shown by and to female civilian employees grew out of the Army’s practice of hiring at the unit level and favoring the hiring of the wives and mothers of soldiers from the unit. By keeping administrative and secretarial cadres with the same unit for years, women and officers built bonds of reciprocal loyalty because the women and career soldiers served together for much longer periods than the eight to eleven months a typical conscript solider spent with his unit in the 1920s. Given the need

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301 SHAT 19 N 160 Supplement. Dossier 1. No 927/T 9 Avril 1923; No 983 10 April 1923; Letter from the Ministry of War 14 May 1923.


303 SHAT 19 N 160 Supplement. Dossier 1. No 289 1/1 27 December 1923; No 289/ 28 December 1923.

for training and leaves, a conscript would spend less than one year with his unit while the women spent years with the same unit.

Unit loyalty fostered by the army’s employment practices helped to change the dominant assumptions about female civilian employees. The experience of working side-by-side with stable and increasingly professional cadres of women created bonds of experience and professional trust between career officers and their female civilian employees. Because of their experiences with female civil employees, male officers began to associate the military and “manly” traits of loyalty, discipline, and professionalism with their female staff, including many of the same women whom officers once saw as undisciplined and dangerous to military professionalism.

The Disenfranchised and Conservative Order: Women and the 1927/28 Army Laws

The 1924-28 military reform debate marked a major change in French military elite’s gendered construction of military identity. Although women’s entry into army employment during and immediately after the Great War was marked by anxiety and hostility on the part of male officers and civilian functionaries, over the course of the early 1920s military leaders accepted that women shared important qualities of loyalty, self-discipline, and professionalism with career soldiers. Conflicts between military and civilian leaders over army organization, extending political rights to soldiers, and the length of conscript service accelerated women’s integration into military identity. This embrace was a result of a mutually constructive process whereby the military elite came to see women as more disciplined, and thus more military, than the army’s short-
service conscripts because of women’s inability to vote and long-term assignment to the same unit.

The January 1924 elections saw the defeat of Raymond Poincaré and the Bloc National government and victory for the Cartel des Gauches, an alliance of the Center-Left Radical Party and the Socialist Party. The Socialists refused to join the government, but supported a Left-leaning Radical government pledged to force reforms on the Army, though the allies did not agree to a joint program. Instead, the reformer presented a collage of often clashing ideas that ranged from changing the term of service for conscripts to abolishing the standing army.

Despite the Cartel’s electoral success, the Army General Staff (Etat-Major de la Armée) resolved to fight for its vision of the army. Although willing to make some concessions the General Staff and Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre sought to maintain their vision of a separation between the French Army and French society. The military elite opposed granting political rights to soldiers and prioritized protecting the army from the Republican political system because they believed it was a greater threat to military cohesion than were further cuts in force structure. The General Staff prepared extensive critiques of every proposed law or amendment granting soldier the right to vote and was heavily involved in negotiations with the government over any extension of the suffrage. During parliamentary debates, the General Staff provided Minister of War Paul Painlevé with detailed responses to speeches or amendments that proposed any change to the total ban on active duty soldiers voting, holding elected office, or campaigning.\textsuperscript{305} One typical example was a 1 July 1927 note from the General Staff advising Painlevé that granting

\textsuperscript{305} SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. Dossier 1. The dossier contains descriptions of legislative proposals and the General Staff’s positions on them.
soldiers the suffrage was “inadmissible because of the consequences which would result for [military] discipline.”

The généralissime, Marshal Philippe Pétain, and his commanders feared that a politically enfranchised conscript army would become a breeding ground of anti-militarism and anti-patriotism. With the ban in place, officers could prohibit political propaganda on military bases and punish soldiers for expressing anti-military or anti-patriotic sentiments. Commanders feared that if soldiers became voters, they would have to allow anti-military or pacifist political materials and activity inside bases. In July 1927, in response to one of the Socialist Deputy Pierre Renaudel’s many amendments to the 1927 Army bill that would have given soldiers the vote and political rights, the General Staff wrote, “To accord the right to vote to soldiers would be to recognize their right to express their opinions, to spread propaganda, [and] to criticize the government. The exercise of the right to vote may work with the moral characteristics of other races, for ours, the consequences would certainly be fatal.”

Drawing on their experiences with the 1917 Army Mutiny on the Chemin-des-Dames, the 1919 Black Sea Mutiny, and the Russian Revolution, senior officers assumed that exposure to anti-military propaganda would sap the morale and weaken the discipline of the army leading to revolutionary risings among soldiers.

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307 SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. Dossier 1. Response to “Amendment No 14” (Renaudel) 1 July 1927.

The military elite devoted considerable attention to fighting Communist and pacifist propaganda. The military and civilian police ran constant surveillance operations and periodic arrest campaign against agitators. So long as French law denied soldiers political rights, officers believed that they could minimize the spread of anti-military, Communist, or revolutionary propaganda within the barracks through confiscating literature and punishing soldiers or civilians who possessed or distributed political materials.

The shrinking length of conscript service magnified the military elite’s fear of indiscipline. It was an article of faith among French officers, whether Rightists like Marshal Ferdinand Foch and General Maxime Weygand, or Republican Leftists like Marshal Joseph Joffre, that soldiers did not become fully combat effective and reliable until they had passed a considerable period under arms. The pre-Great War military elite believed a soldier needed to spend his first year learning how to be a soldier and internalizing military discipline and only in his second year would he constitute part of the effective combat force. Although the interwar elite abandoned the one-year theory, it continued to presume its conscripts were predisposed toward indiscipline.309

Faced with a government committed to a maximum of one year of conscript service and flirting with even more radical reforms, army leaders initially resisted any more cuts in the term of service that could further erode military discipline. Motivated by its members’ fear of indiscipline in the ranks, the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre

unanimously rejected a further reduction in military service. On 30 March 1925, Marshal Pétain took the lead in criticizing any plans to reduce the size of the army. He complained that the government had not fulfilled the promises it made in the 1923 Law to increase the numbers of career soldiers and insisted that the army would not agree to new cuts until the old promises were kept. General Weygand added that rather than the 75,000 career soldiers suggested by the Radical-dominated Herriot Government, the army required 150,000 and a further increase in civil employees. 310 On 10 April 1925, the senior generals declared that it was “currently inopportune and dangerous to envision a new reduction of the term of service.”311 Instead, the generals advised the government to improve conscript life to alleviate voters’ complaints about conscript service. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre also presented the government with a letter declaring the “very existence of the army will be gravely compromised and the security of the country cannot be assured” if twelve months service were implemented.312

Although initially hostile to all the Cartel’s reform plans, Marshal Pétain, then Vice-President of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre and généralissime, eventually steered France’s senior generals toward compromise. Following a gradualist approach, Pétain secured a series of individual pledges from the government that built toward the council’s official acceptance of a one-year service law. The process included talks on fortifying the Franco-German border that accelerated after December 1925 and evolved

310 SHAT 1 N 21.
311 SHAT 1 N 20.
312 SHAT 1 N 50 dossier 2.
into the Maginot Line.\textsuperscript{313} On 28 October 1926, the council advised the government that safely implementing a twelve-month service law would require special standing units to provide \textit{couverture} and an increase in the number of junior officers in the standing army. 

At the same meeting, the \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre} signaled it was serious about its offer of support by advising the government to reorganize some units, especially \textit{chasseurs} to allow them to fulfill new roles under a twelve-month service law.\textsuperscript{314}

The \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre}’s piece-meal proposals and decisions were part of an elaborate negotiation with the elected government. The military elite began by rejecting all the proposed reforms, but, under Marshal Pétain’s leadership, the generals adopted a series of positions that presupposed the establishment of twelve months service, before actually agreeing to it. They thus signaled both their own flexibility and the counter-concessions they hoped to get in return.

After the ideological fervor of the early \textit{Cartel} government faded the military elite and the government were able to deepen their negotiations and reach a compromise. Under Pétain’s guidance, the army chiefs agreed to a compromise with the Minister of War, Paul Painlevé. On 8 November 1926 the \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre} pronounced in favor of one year service provided that there was no change in the army’s legal relationship to the civilian legal and political systems, and the army was allowed to compensate for loss of effectives by increasing the number of career soldiers to 100,000

\textsuperscript{313} SHAT 1 N 20 Supplement. CSG 15 December 1925. These were early discussions in which the military officially stated the need to fortify the border. The meeting was chair by the President of the Republic Gaston Doumergue. This initiative eventually evolved into the Maginot Line.

\textsuperscript{314} \textit{Idid}. CSG 28 October 1926.; \textit{Couverture} is a term drawn from French military doctrine. Although translatable as “defense” the terms lacks an equivalent in English because the exact concept does not exist in either the American or British military traditions. The term implies a temporary cordon defense of the frontier to defend the population and economic base of the nation and enable the mobilization of reserve units and the war economy.
and civil employees to 30,000. Many, if not most, of these civil employees would be women and despite the anticipated influx of new women, the military elite expressed none of the concern about the effect on military cohesion or efficiency that the 1919 Piquet Report had revealed.

Because the Third Republic denied women the vote, military leaders saw them as apolitical and welcome, if subordinate, allies in the fight against Marxism and the egalitarian ideas army leaders feared could overwhelm military discipline. Because of the inaccessibility of political rights to women, army leaders believed women could play a vital role in reprofessionalizing the army in preparation for the next war by strengthening the separation of the army from civilian politics.

Marshal Pétain’s conciliatory approach was not the only avenue open to military leaders in which women and the manipulation of gender roles played an important role. At the same time that Pétain and the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre were negotiating with the government, other elements of the military elite were expecting the worst and were preparing to defy the government. A minority of military leaders sought ways to circumvent a radical reform of the French Army by actively disobeying and deceiving the civilian government. They feared that the Cartel government’s radical reforms would destroy the army and rather than negotiating with the government to reduce the reforms’ impact, this faction wanted to circumvent the government. They wanted to create a shadow army that would be invisible to the international community and to the French government. Like Pétain and the moderates, this more radical faction also believed women would be vital to preserving the future of the French Army.

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315 SHAT 1 N 13 Supplement dossier 1.
One military leader who believed the army would have to circumvent the government was the former commander of the Saar garrison, General Brissaud-Desmaillet. Brissaud-Desmaillet, a republican and future military affairs spokesman for the Radical Party in the 1930s, called on his fellow generals to emulate the army of Weimar Germany. He believed that despite the armaments clauses of the Versailles Treaty it was, “trained for war; it [was] the best professional army in Europe.” Using Weimar Germany as a model, the 1927 report of the Brissaud-Desmaillet commission on civil employees articulated a plan to use civil employees and civilian cover groups as auxiliaries to give the army a larger effective strength than the number allowed by the government.\(^{316}\)

General Brissaud-Desmaillet argued for dramatic increases in the number of women in army employ. In both his final report and in the earlier partial reports, Brissaud-Desmaillet argued for a significant increase in the number of civil employees of both sexes and the creation of agents militaires to civilianize much of the administration of the army- including posts down to the battalion and company level.\(^{317}\) For Brissaud-Desmaillet, women were especially useful in hiding the true size of the military machine, because politicians assumed women could only be non-combatants. However, despite being non-combatants, he believed that each woman freed at least one soldier, and probably more than one soldier, for combat units. The male agents militaires were all trained and experienced soldiers who could function as soldiers while hiding behind a


civilian cover, allowing the army to clandestinely maintain a larger force than the government had authorized.

The public report of the Brissaud-Desmaillet commission called for major changes, but was well within the bounds of loyalty to the civilian government. However, the commission’s president developed proposals that he did not publish in the official report. Brissaud-Desmaillet produced an alternate version of the report that included the commission’s proposals for better integrating civilian employees into the army’s structure, but also described the French Army as facing terminal decline in the face of a powerful and vibrant German Army that could strike at any time.\textsuperscript{318}

Brissaud-Desmaillet accused the French government of systematically destroying French defenses and preparing the way for the coming German invasion. The general urged other officers to use his report as a starting point for emulating the Germans to create a force capable of defending France regardless of the wishes of the French government or international opinion at the League of Nations. Officers on the General Staff paired the public and secret reports and distributed them to selected unit commanders throughout the French Army. One copy survived in a report forwarded by the colonial directorate to a garrison unit in Tunisia.\textsuperscript{319}

The secret report severely criticized the internationalist tone of French foreign policy. It mocked the elected government for believing that, “in order to better assure world peace and facilitate the recovery of trade, France must sacrifice yet again and add to the naval effacement, which was so ‘cordially’ imposed, the sacrifice of its army, with

\textsuperscript{318} Ibid.; SHAT 9 N 1169 Supplement. Dossier 1.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid.; The official report and its supporting material are in SHAT 9 N 1169 Supplement. Dossier 1.
a security guarantee, under the control of the League of Nations.” He painted a dire picture of weak leaders undermining French security. The general complained that the politicians were surrendering to hostile international opinion that demanded that:

having already considerably reduced its armaments, cut its troop strength and defense budget, eliminated divisions, suspended reserve call-ups for training since the peace treaty, reduced the length of military service to eighteen months, studied and prepared for one year service, France must prove still further its peaceful intentions to the very point of compromising its own security. 

Reacting to his own caricature of the reformists’ platform, General Brissaud-Desmaillet called for major efforts to evade the intent of the reforms, should they pass. His report called for abandoning the idea of a functioning standing army. Fearing that the Cartel was about to destroy the Army by imposing draconian defense cuts, Brissaud-Desmaillet called on the military elite to strip their conception of the army down to its foundations and rebuild a new army based on a semi-clandestine system of organization. He suggested abandoning the idea of standard military units by emphasizing staff training for professional officers and training in basic soldiering skills for conscripts. He argued that conscripts should spend their entire term of service exclusively training and command functions centralized at the highest possible level to compensate for the conscripts’ lack of experience in organized units. Brissaud-Desmaillet also wanted to civilianize as much of the military as possible by training civilians with specialist skills in their skills’ military applications and through a massive increase in civilian employees.

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321 Ibid.
322 Ibid.
Brissaud-Desmaillet’s reports embraced a gendered division of civilian employees into the all male agents militaires and the increasingly female, both conceptually and statistically, civil employees. Agents militaires were retired soldiers, both officers and enlisted men, who worked for the Army in positions normally requiring active duty soldiers but retained their status as civilians, though almost all of them would be reservists. By drawing the agents militaires exclusively from retired soldiers the military elite hoped it could prevent Communist infiltration or control over vital military functions.\textsuperscript{323} Although the secret annex to the Brissaud-Desmaillet Report never became official policy, its basic assumptions revealed a deep crisis of confidence in the political regime among army officers in the 1920s. The official report’s support for female civil employees and agents militaires became the basis of Pétain and the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre’s conciliatory response to the Cartel’s reform plans, entrenching a gendered system of army organization in the heart of the 1927/28 Army Laws.

The creation of the agents militaires was influenced by concerns about the political reliability of male laborers, especially in mobilization centers. In 1925, the Military Governor of Paris, General Gouraud, spoke for many when he warned against turning mobilization centers over to civilian labor. He pronounced it “inadmissible à fortiori to place mobilization in the hands of the communists.”\textsuperscript{324} By limiting male civilian employment in crucial areas to men officers believed were friendly to the army, the general hoped to minimize the danger of ideological contamination and gain the

\textsuperscript{323} SHAT 7 N29 Supplement. No 28/C5.

\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.
benefits of specialized labor, as well as *de facto* increasing the number of soldiers in the Army.

The generals who supported relying on *agents militaires* were emulating the German example. The French military intelligence believed that German youth and sporting groups functioned as covers for the training of German soldiers and under pressure from the military reform movements, French generals sought to emulate the Germans. By keeping former soldiers with the army as *agents militaires* the military elite hoped to maintain a force that effectively contained more career soldiers than French law allowed. In his reports, Brissaud-Desmaillet was careful to make clear that the rise in civil employees was important, but gave priority to the *agents militaires*. To maintain the hierarchy of rank, *agents militaires* could not command officers or non-commissioned officers, but they were allowed to have common soldiers subordinated to them. In effect, the *agents militaires* became *de facto* non-commissioned officers.

There was some nervousness among political leaders at the thought of too large a number of quasi-military civilian employees. The Minster of War limited the number of *agents militaires* that were authorized in the government’s early draft bills. However, Pétain and the General Staff insisted that *agents militaires* were crucial to the Army’s future and over the course of 1926 successfully lobbied the Chamber Army Committee to

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326 SHAT 9 N 1167 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Armée Minima”

327 SHAT 9 N 1167 Supplement dossier 2. 24 October 1927.
increase the initial number of *agents militaires* to 15,000, the equivalent of an entire division of manpower.\(^3\)

The key to this new organization was strict self-discipline and obedience to a hierarchical system. This ultra-professional hierarchy would be full of self-disciplined and highly motivated men and women willing to obey their military superiors in their effort to defend the army and its hierarchies against the corrupted Republican government. The passage from the Piquet Report to the two Brissaud-Desmaillet Reports showed that during the 1920s, the French military elite fundamentally redefined its understanding of the gendered construction of military identity. As the generals began to trust the their male conscripts less and less because the shrinking term of service made them seem less professional, women, who gained experience every day, emerged as increasingly professional, in both relative and absolute terms. By establishing claims to military professionalism, women gained respect and prestige from the officer corp.

The military elite’s decision of to give female civil employees a key place in their plan to protect the army from civilian influence was part of a gendered paradox. The Brissaud-Desmaillet reports built on the foundations of previous policies that proceeded from the military elite’s opposition to female civil employees. The reluctant and *ad hoc* arrangements for hiring women that pushed them down to the regimental or battalion level during and after the war unintentionally created an environment that fostered unit loyalty and the integration of women into the army’s vision of itself. Over time, officers accepted women into the army’s family based on their common experiences with the officer corps, experiences they had because of policies designed to isolate them and aid in getting rid of them. Because of the importance of professionalism and group loyalty to

\(^3\) SHAT 1 N 15 Supplement Dossier 2 “Projet de loi des Cadres et Effectifs” October 1926.
women’s integration, the officer corps did not extend its rising respect for its women to all women generally.

Although by the mid-1920s the military elite generally trusted its female civil employees, military leaders continued to distrust non-racially French women. A 1928 General Staff directive banned officers married to foreign women from serving in the intelligence divisions of Morocco and Syria. In 1929 the General Staff expanded the order to cover Algeria and Tunisia as well. Military leaders trusted certain French women, but were wary of trusting their own officers if they were exposed to non-French women, whether they were married to *indigènes* or non-French European women. The military elite found the interplay of race and gender to be far more dangerous and potentially corrosive to military discipline and patriotism than were gender or race alone.

Race: Colonial Troops and the Battle Against Subversion.

The military elite’s inability to trust non-French, and especially *indigène* women was part of a larger conflict over race in the French Army. Throughout the 1920s, the military elite wrestled with the role of colonized Africans and Asians in the French Army. During the Great War, the same manpower shortages which led to the 1916 Regime also led to the mass recruitment of African men to fight in the French Army. Although African forces showed some limitations in European warfare, they contributed to the *Entente*’s victory. At the end of the war, some political and military elites

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believed that the war had shown that Africans could takeover more of the burden of defending France and its empire. Some of these leaders advocated merging African soldiers into regular French divisions to strengthen the French Army and reduce the number of white Frenchmen who would die in the next war.

Although racial divisions between the French population and colonial soldiers made using more colonials in the military attractive to the military elite, they also made it difficult to execute the plan. Concerns about race, prestige, and hierarchy worked at cross-purposes to the Army’s attempt to strengthen its colonial forces. While noting that military service needed to be more attractive to indigènes, senior officers fought against improving the conditions and career prospects for indigène soldiers.331 A 1927 General Staff document opposed giving indigène officers and non-commissioned officers full command rights. Citing the need to protect the authority of white non-commissioned officers and “the necessity of maintaining White prestige,” the report strongly opposed granting indigènes the full rights attendant to their military grade, such as the right to receive salutes from lower-ranking whites.332

Race proved more difficult for the military elite to manipulate for their advantage than did gender. Perhaps because there was no suggestion that French women should command male soldiers, gender proved safer for the army to manipulate. Pulling at the strings of race created more questions than the military elite had expected, and markedly more problems than the opening to women had created.

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331 SHAT 7 N 1006 Supplement. Dossier 3. No 316/FN.

Ultimately, the 1927/28 Army Laws approved large increases in female and male civilian employees while rejecting significant changes in the colonial forces. After an extensive internal debate, lasting from 1919 until 1926, the military and political elite both chose to retain the division between the colonial and metropolitan armies. Pseudo-strategic racist thinking and fear of sexual contact between African men and white women marked both sides of the debate. Officers and functionaries’ fear about miscegenation obscured many of the important moral and political questions involved in the proposals.

Military fears that cuts in the term of conscript service would compromise the army’s combat effectiveness and defenses against internal subversion fueled support for fusing the metropolitan and colonial armies. Supporters argued that adding colonial troops to metropolitan manpower would allow the army to compensate for cuts in conscript service, thus maintaining overall troop strength. Fusing the two armies would also reduce administrative needs and create homogeneously trained and equipped units. The administrative savings would free money and soldiers for combat units and the creation of more homogeneous units would make the wartime army a better fit with the assumptions behind bataille conduite.\(^{333}\)

Plans to integrate the colonial and metropolitan armies clearly marked indigène soldiers as a subordinate class within the fused army. Despite fusion, indigènes would continue to serve longer terms of service even while the terms of service for white Frenchmen fell from three years to two years, to eighteen months, and then to one year. Maintaining unequal service terms would allow the Army to minimize the need for white

\(^{333}\) SHAT 7 N 617 Supplement. Dossier 1. “Note: 3 Mai 1920.”
manpower. The military elite justified the need for longer service requirements for Asians and Africans by claiming that they usually entered the Army physically weaker than whites and took longer to train to European standards of discipline and military competence.334

The military elite’s plan shifted the burden of military service and casualties from white Frenchmen to colonial subjects. The fusion plan would have maximized African and Asian casualties in a future war by putting all the colonial forces into infantry regiments. The plan called for adding a colonial infantry regiment to each French division. Even later fusion plans that left some divisions exclusively white so they could serve as bases for mobilization continued to restrict indigènes to segregated infantry regiments within otherwise white divisions.335 Because the French infantry had taken significantly higher losses than any other arm of service during the Great War, military planners knew that restricting blacks to infantry regiments would maximize colonial casualties and in effect, allow fewer white Frenchmen to be on the front lines.336

This cynical effort to shift future casualties and service obligations from white Frenchmen to Asian and African men faced significant opposition within French military elite, though not because of its racism. Some colonial officers broke ranks with their superiors and argued that fusing the colonial and regular armies would undermine France’s hold on its colonies. Claiming to possess special professional expertise that

334 SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. “Article 97” Letter from Painlevé to the Governor General of Algeria. 30 June 1927.

335 SHAT 7 N 128 Supplement. Dossier 1. “Hisorique du projet de loi des cadres.” The initial plan was submitted in 1920 and modified in 1921.

336 SHAT 7 N 127 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Etude: relative au nombre d’officiers de complement à recruter chaque année.” 20 June 1923. During the Battle of the Frontiers infantry losses were more than double the per capita losses for other combat branches.
others could only learn from long years of service in the colonies, colonial army officers warned that eliminating the separate colonial army would undermine the empire. 337

Some of the military elite expressed concern that integrating the two armies would lead to an exodus of experienced officers from the colonies. Although they believed colonial service would be popular with young officers because it offered the chance for adventure and combat experience, they feared that older married officers would prefer to live in France. Colonial Army generals and Colonial Ministry officials feared the better cultural and material environment of France would lead officers with wives and children to seek homeland postings just when they reached the age when their experience in the colonies qualified them for senior positions within the imperial administration. 338

Military leaders were not the only ones to object to integrating the metropolitan and colonial armies. Blaise Diagne, the black deputy from Senegal and wartime Commissioner of the Republic for Recruitment in West Africa, wrote to Marshal Pétain objecting to the integration plan and pleading with the marshal to defend the Colonial Army. Diagne complained that the Colonial Army needed specially trained officers to handle the racial diversity of its soldiers. The deputy reminded the marshal that many African troops failed to perform as well as expected during the Great War when they were under the command of metropolitan officers, even experienced professional

338 Ibid.
officers. He also cited examples of the inability of professional metropolitan officers to keep control of Senegalese troops during the pre-Great War campaigns in Morocco.\footnote{339 SHAT 1 N 5 Supplement CSG. Dossier 1. No 7721 ST. 8 March 1920 Letter from Blaise Diagne to Marshal Pétain.}

Some generals worried that fusing colonial and metropolitan forces would inhibit mobilization. Because the mobilization system favored by most generals broke each peacetime unit down into cadres for three wartime units, French commanders had to choose between fusion and segregation. If commanders retained segregation, they could not cannibalize colonial units to provide cadres for reserve units, which would obstruct the mobilization process. Cannibalizing colonial units to provide leadership cadres for reserve units would have required white reservists to serve under \textit{indigène} officers or non-commissioned officers.

The \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre} addressed concerns that fusing the colonial and metropolitan Armies would hamper mobilization in February 1922. In order to simplify the effect of fusion on mobilization, the council proposed to divide the Army into two kinds of peacetime divisions, fused divisions and white divisions. The fused divisions would retain their structure and personnel in the event of war, while the white divisions would be cannibalized for manpower to form the structure of reserve units.\footnote{340 SHAT 7 N 128 Dossier 1. 10 February 1922.} After a long debate, in which both the pro and anti fusion factions appeared to triumph at different times, the fusion plan collapsed.

Many politicians feared that fusion would encourage militarism and undermine the alleged pacific tendencies of the nation in arms. They worried that if the Army relied too heavily on colonials, ministers and generals would be more likely to order an
aggressive war. They also worried that an army of professional or semi-professional colonial troops commanded by professional officers was a recipe for disaster. Republican politicians saw fusion as a back-door method for creating a praetorian military whose reactionary ideology would be a danger to the Republic.

In the midst of the debate over fusion, the General Staff introduced new training regimes to prepare colonial forces for a continental war. The new training regime emphasized fighting with modern technology on crowded battlefields. Colonial commanders even prepared their men for gas warfare. In 1922, the General Staff ordered French commanders in North Africa to conduct gas warfare exercises. Even this training regime though reflected the racial hierarchy of the French Army: Colonial troops trained on obsolete gas masks that the army leaders deemed unsafe under ideal conditions. Colonial units in North Africa received M2 gas masks to use in field exercises and combat, but Paris-based planners also issued colonial units a handful of more modern ARS masks to use when actually exposing men to gas in training chambers. The French Army expected colonial forces to use the M2 in combat, but considered it too dangerous to use under controlled conditions.341

Although the plan to fuse the colonial and metropolitan armies failed, it did not disappear. Despite its failure in the early 1920s, when the Rif War and the Cartel government sparked a new wave of demands for military reform the fusion plan came back to life. Officers of the General Staff and the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre wanted to use colonial forces to compensate for the weakening of the metropolitan French Army

341 SHAT 9 N 584 Supplement Dossier 2. Circular of 11 July 1922. Direction de Artillerie, 2e Bureau 9e Section à Lyautey, Gouverneurs Militaire et Commandants de Corps Tunis, Rhin, Sarre.”
by further improving training methods to increase the number of colonial soldiers that would be able to fight on European battlefields.

Many of the arguments in favor of fusion during the 1919-1924 period were reused later in the decade. There were also new arguments centered on the question of political rights. Colonial troops, like French women, were not a political threat in the eyes of French officers. Because they were not citizens and could not vote, colonial soldiers were outside of the French political system and few Frenchmen would care about their access to political material. Officers also hoped that because they were not Frenchmen, they would be less likely to support dangerous or radical ideologies than were the conscripts. The military elite hoped to use race to offset the perceived danger of class-based Marxism and Republican liberalism in the same way it was learning to use gender to mitigate the effectiveness of class-based ideology.342

Increased reliance on indigènes soldiers would require recruiting more soldiers. The military elite knew that racism within the army inhibited recruitment by discouraging indigènes from choosing a military career. The Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre tried to remedy recruitment problems by opening more opportunities for indigènes in the colonial army. In March 1928, at the suggestion of Marshal Louis Franchet-d’Esperey, the council adopted a plan to allow indigènes what he described as an “honorable” career. Specifically Franchet-d’Esperey urged the government to make it easier for indigènes to

become non-commissioned officers regardless of the arm of service and to open outlets to become a junior officer.\textsuperscript{343}

The French Army’s receptiveness to relying more heavily on colonial troops and French women did not extend to colonial women. The \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Defense Nationale} discussed the issue of employing \textit{indigène} women and strongly opposed the idea. In July 1926, the council’s study committee met to consider using civilian colonial labor in the French Army and dealt specifically with colonial women. Speaking for the Colonial Army, General Peltier “insist[ed] on the necessity of not foreseeing, in any manner, the eventual use of \textit{indigène} women in the colonial contingents.”\textsuperscript{344} He insisted that, “this use would be, in effect, contrary to the customs of the population, where women, notably, do not possess any civil personality.”\textsuperscript{345}

French military and political leaders both feared the social conflicts that surrounded mixing black men and white women. The \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Defense Nationale} advised the government to keep French female civil employees away from colonial units. The Foreign Ministry’s representative, Monsieur Pansot, argued that, “it is of the greatest importance that \textit{indigènes} not have contact with French women. It is a capital question of prestige.”\textsuperscript{346} General Peltier agreed that it was necessary to keep the \textit{indigènes} away from French women, but argued that it could best be done by adopting

\textsuperscript{343} SHAT 1 N 5 Supplement. Rapport du Maréchal Franchet-d’Esperey sur les modifications à apporter à loi des cadres du 28 Mars 1928. At the time, only the infantry and cavalry arms allowed \textit{indigènes} to become noncommissioned officers.

\textsuperscript{344} SHAT 2 N 10 dossier 1 No 627 20 July 1926 “Projet d’Instruction sur le recrutement et l’emploi de la main d’œuvre coloniale.”

\textsuperscript{345} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{346} \textit{Ibid.}
measures “to satisfy the sexual needs of the indigènes” in order to end their “frequenting French women.” He further explained that the French women that colonial troops interacted with, socially and sexually, were usually the “least healthy” groups in society. ³⁴⁷

During the Great War, fear of miscegenation had led political leaders to impose racial segregation of workers from the colonies in France. Many colonial workers were forced to live in barracks environments and, when possible, to work separately from white French men and women. Both military and political leaders supported segregation because they recognized that sexual relations between men from the colonies and white women in France undermined the colonial hierarchies that reinforced France’s African and Asian empire and because they feared racial conflicts inside of France.³⁴⁸

The combination of gender and race in the colonial context complicated the extension of the General Staff’s plans to use women and colonized men to maintain conservative hierarchies. French military leaders could separately rationalize French women and colonial men as collaborators whose subordinate presence would not endanger their prestige and masculine hierarchies, but combining the two groups caused too many problems. Despite the initial attractiveness of using colonial men in the metropolitan army, the military elite’s fear of miscegenation eventually destroyed support for bringing large numbers of African men to France.

Some colonial officers warned the General Staff that Paris-based planners were overrating colonial troops’ value. Commandant O’Kelly, commanding the 10th

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ SHAT 7 N 1001 Report June 1917; SHAT 7 N 1001 “Rapport sur les operations de la commission militaire de contrôle postale de Tunis” April 1917.
Regiment of Tirailleurs Coloniaux warned his superiors that the quality of recruits entering the tirailleurs was declining and that his men were less physically capable than senior officers assumed. He cautioned that his tirailleurs lacked the mental discipline for European warfare.\(^{349}\) A General Staff minute from May 1929 described the Colonial Army’s elite mobile reserve, including the white colonial division, as lacking tanks, engineers, and aircraft. The report concluded that even the Colonial Army’s elite forces were under-armed and needed modernization before fighting in Europe.\(^{350}\)

Even as the military elite’s enthusiasm for fusing colonial and metropolitan forces cooled, they encountered deep growing opposition from key political leaders. In June 1927, the Minister of War, Painlevé, expressed concerns that North African troops were unreliable. Painlevé argued that North African Muslim troops had shown they were prone to disloyalty when asked to fight a Muslim opponent and were unreliable in modern European wars. He also opposed Algerian indigènes being allowed to join French regular forces, which would have allowed them to command white enlisted men. Instead, Painlevé supported segregating Muslim Algerians into separate units that would serve under different conditions than whites because he believed that North Africans were physically weaker and less well educated. Because of their alleged physical and mental inferiority, Painlevé believed indigènes needed more training than white troops to reach the same level of effectiveness. He argued that because of their physical and

\(^{349}\) SHAT 9 N 1159 Supplement. 19. Mars 1926.

mental inferiority, Africans should be kept under the Directory of Colonial Troops, which served under different conditions from the regular French Army.\textsuperscript{351}

A combination of military weaknesses in colonial units and misogynist fears of exposing French women to African men undermined support for shifting the burden of defending France from white Frenchmen to colonized men. Although plans to use race to deflect the military reform movement’s attacks failed, the military elite was still able to use women and former soldiers to insulate the army from French civilian society. The final version of the 1927/28 Army Laws remained the foundation of French national defense until the outbreak of the Second World War. The laws’ major provisions reduced the term of conscript service to one year, increased the number of civil employees, created 15,000 \textit{agents militaires}, and boosted the number of authorized career soldiers to 125,000.\textsuperscript{352} The Colonial Army remained independent from the Metropolitan Army, though there were efforts to improve the quality of colonial units by increasing opportunities for career advancement to encourage veteran \textit{indigènes} to remain in the military.

Bargaining with the Devil: The 1927/8 Army Laws

The Cartel government and its supporters succeeded in forcing the military elite to accept a cut in the term of conscript service, but because of governmental instability, the Cartel was unable to force a broader democratization of the military. The partial success

\textsuperscript{351} SHAT 5 N 10 Supplement. “Article 97” Letter from Painlevé to the Governor General of Algeria. 30 June 1927.

\textsuperscript{352} SHAT 1 N 15 Supplement. Dossier 2.
of the Left made the military elite accept a version of the Nation in Arms that it deeply distrusted, but through negotiation and stalling tactics, the military elite protected its institutional culture from the democratizing reforms urged by many on the Left. Faced with a simultaneous challenge to both the combat capacity of the army and the conservative political and cultural values they prized, French officers chose to preserve the army “apolitical” atmosphere and strict hierarchy by sacrificing some force structure.

Faced with an aggressive and well-organized reform movement, which was dependent on the Center-Left Radical Party the French Army had several options about how to respond. It could, of course, have embraced radical reform and accepted a much smaller army that was more closely tied to the regime, the General Staff could have fought against all of the reforms, but instead military leaders chose to divide the reform movement. When Pétain and his senior generals made the decision to negotiate they faced a choice between defending the Army’s legal separation from the political regime by sacrificing combat power, or trying to maximize the army’s combat power by accepting Republicanization. When military leaders chose the former over the latter, they revealed their belief that subversion was a greater danger to France than were foreign armies.

The military elite decided to trade away some force structure in order to retain control over politics and criminal justice inside the army. Having agreed to shorten the period of conscript service to one year, the General Staff fended off reformist attempts to abolish military law, and strongly resisted attempts to reduce the jurisdiction of military law in peacetime or to appoint civilian judges for military cases. The General Staff successfully argued that weakening the peacetime power of military justice, especially its
jurisdiction over attempts to corrupt draft boards and otherwise evade military service, would imperil the entire system of national defense. They claimed that it would allow dangerous subversives to attack the basic structure of French defense policy with impunity because French civil law was less able to adapt to new protest tactics than was French military law.\footnote{SHAT 5 N 9 Supplement. Dossier 1. “Article 85 bis (Amendement No 75, présenté par Monsieur RENAUDEL) July 1927.}

The military elite tried to reduce the effects of the reforms by manipulating the racial and gender make-up of the Army establishment. Senior Army leaders tried to use women and colonial subjects to reinforce the army and allow a slightly larger number of career soldiers and a dwindling number of conscripts maintain the combat power of the French Army. The Brissaud-Desmaillet Commission’s report and the deliberations of the \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre} showed the military command’s preference for politically disenfranchised groups that it believed were traditionalist, religious, and weakly attached to the Republic.

The Army leadership’s response to the reform debate does not provide a linear link to the Vichy regime, but it does establish a powerful and sometimes conspiratorial attachment to conservative hierarchy among French general officers. It shows that in the minds of French military leaders, internal enemies were at least equally as dangerous as was any foreign army. When forced to choose between fighting for a stronger army or maintaining their totalizing conception of discipline that defined political dissent as dangerous and antithetical to good order and discipline, they preferred to protect their conservative institutional culture. For France’s most senior military men the ideology of the working class was seen as a grave danger against which they pitted a coalition of
disenfranchised women and “disciplined” men in the form of female civil employees, professional male soldiers, *agents militaires*, and colonized African and Indochinese men.

The great irony of the military reform debates of the 1920s was that the Left’s attempt to weaken the power of the military chiefs and to democratize the Republic’s Army produced the opposite result. The military elite’s stonewalling tactics and negotiations successfully defeated most of the reform movement’s agenda. After a long fight, the Radical Party abandoned its alliance with the Socialists and accepted a compromise with the military elite that entrenched the generals’ control over politics within the Army and strengthened the Army’s separation from civilian society. In fighting against the reform movement the military elite was prepared to conspire to violate French law and in the process of fighting the reform movement they made the Army a less democratic institution, and a less flexible military instrument.
CHAPTER V:

THE BATTLE OF FRANCE:

THE CIVIL-MILITARY CRISIS OF THE 1930S

The collapse of the *Cartel des Gauches* broke-up the military reform coalition in 1926. By defecting and allying with the Center and Right, the Radicals broke the chain of influence that had transmitted radical reformist positions from the far Left to the Center-Left. Ironically, the collapse of the reformist coalition opened the way for successful negotiations between the military elite and political leaders and finally allowed the Chamber to vote a reform plan. The Radicals agreed to drop demands for political reforms aimed at integrating the army into the Republican political system and Republicanizing the military elite, and the Right conceded a cut in the term of conscript service from eighteen to twelve months.

The resulting legislation, the 1927 and 1928 Army Laws, created the army that fought the Second World War. Although the military laws lasted until the war, the remnants of the reformist coalition continued to attack them. The plan to shrink the military eventually constituted a *de facto* attempt to implement the militia army that the Communists and Socialists had defended in the 1920s.
The revived debate led to bitter clashes between the military leaders and the Radical leaders of the revived *Cartel des Gauches* in the early 1930s. Military leaders felt that the demands were a betrayal of the 1927/28 compromise. In the 1920s, Marshal Pétain had led the military elite into negotiations with the government that produced the 1927/28 military laws, but in 1931 Pétain retired as commander-in-chief designate and the more confrontational General Maxime Weygand replaced him. Under Weygand, the military elite became more aggressive toward the civilian government and ignited a crisis of civil military relations.

The compromise Army: The Army of the 1927/28 Laws

The 1927 Law on the General Organization of the Army and the 1928 Law of Cadres and Effectives defined the basic organization and structure of the French Army until the beginning of the Second World War. The 1927/8 Army Laws emerged from a series of compromises between the military elite and governmental leaders. The compromises covered the term of conscript service, the number and type of civilian employees, the number of professional soldiers, the relationship of the military to democratic politics, and the decision to build the Maginot Line. The two laws set the term of conscript service at twelve months, but maintained the military’s separation from the political regime by retaining the ban on political rights for soldiers. The laws authorized a small increase in the number of professional soldiers and allowed the army to hire civilians as both civil employees and *agents militaires* to replace some of the manpower lost when the number of conscripts fell, leaving approximately 90,000
conscripts lost without being off-set. The legislators phased the laws’ provisions in over a period of years, so it would not be until 1932 that all of their provisions came into force.  

Although the political leaders dictated the broad strokes of the 1927/28 Army Laws, they allowed the military elite significant discretion in deciding how to implement the compromises. As part of the compromise orchestrated by Pétain, Painlevé, and Poincaré, the military elite accepted that the wartime army would have to rely on reservists trained in the short-service conscript force to fight the next war, but continued to mistrust such soldiers and filled in the new defense system’s details based on their fear of their own troops.

In designing the mobilization system, Marshal Pétain and General Eugen Debeney sought to maximize the ability of career soldiers to control the conscripts by spreading the shrinking active component over as many wartime units as possible. The mobilization process divided every unit in the French Army into three sub-groups that formed the nucleus of a mobilized unit. The plan called for units to reproduce themselves, thus one peacetime infantry regiment would form the skeletons of three wartime infantry regiments. The new units would then be filled-up to combat strength by recalled reservists according to an equation that created one “active” unit, one series “A” reserve unit, and one series “B” reserve unit, each with a progressively smaller proportion of active soldiers. 

354 SHAT 1 N 50 Supplement. Dossier 2. “loi relative à l'organisation générale de l'armée”

355 SHAT 1 N 50 Supplement Dossier 2. 1 Apr 1925, 15 October 1926.
Because of the tripling mechanism, none of the peacetime units translated directly into wartime units, and none of the wartime units would train together in peacetime. Officers and men would not know each other, and many soldiers would have to learn their jobs in the field. Although the military elite tried to spread professionals throughout the mobilized units, the relatively small number of professionals meant that there were not enough professional officers and non-commissioned officers to go around. Even in the “Active” units, designed to be the best combat units, two-thirds of officers and forty-five percent of enlisted men were reservists. Because there were not enough active divisions to defend France’s eastern frontier, the lower echelon reserve units would have to go into the line immediately and fight beside the active units. The General Staff divided reserve-dominated units into two groups based on the percentage of active duty soldiers supplementing the reservists. In Series A divisions, reservists made up seventy-seven percent of officers, eighty-three percent of non-commissioned officers, and ninety-eight percent of enlisted men. The lower-quality Series B divisions, such as the divisions that defended the Sedan sector in May of 1940, consisted almost entirely of reservists supplemented by tiny cadres of active-duty troops.³⁵⁶

Because the tripling provisions of the 1927/28 reserve system prevented the Army from mobilizing and fighting simultaneously, it limited the French government’s options in a crisis. If France faced a military crisis, the Army would have to mobilize before taking offensive action, or fighting defensively, because the mobilization system could

³⁵⁶ Robert Doughty Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine 1919-1939 (Archon Books, 1985) 23.; Julian Jackson The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940 (New York: Oxford UP, 2003) 44. General Huntzinger believed the geography at Sedan favored the defense over the attack and so considered it a safe sector. As a result it was defended by General Lafontaine’s 55th Infantry Division, a Series B reserve unit and supported by the 71st Infantry Division, another Series B unit.
collapse if the standing army was committed to battle before the tripling process had disassembled the standing army.

The 1927/8 system narrowed the diplomatic and strategic options available to political and military leaders by increasing the economic and political risks of any attempt to coerce Germany through limited military action. Mobilization was highly disruptive; millions of men had to leave their civilian lives, their families, and their jobs to become soldiers. The lost labor and wages would hurt the economy, and the need to pay the mobilized soldiers would quickly drain the military budget. In addition, mobilization was politically sensitive because of the hardships inflicted on the mobilized men and their families. The military elite’s system for implementing the 1927/8 Law effectively required mobilization before any significant military action could take place, or be credibility threatened, but the economic and political effects of mobilization made it very hard for a government to order it.

The mobilization process tied to the 1927/28 system relied heavily on reservists to provide the combat power of the French Army, but also undermined the quality of reservists. The reservists turned out by the 1927/28 system spent less time in the active army than did previous classes of soldiers. Under the two-year and eighteen-month service laws, the best conscripts became non-commissioned officers during their term of service, but one-year service effectively prevented that. After the 1927/28 laws were implemented, most reserve non-commissioned officers received their rank only at the moment of their discharge, and thus their only experience serving in their wartime positions would come in the reserve exercises once or twice a decade.\(^{357}\)

\(^{357}\) SHAT 7 N 153 Supplement Dossier 2. Number 7036 3/11-4. 18 September 1930.
The 1927/28 Laws imposed a light training requirement on reservists. The laws divided the reservists into three groups: the active reserve, the first inactive reserve, and the second inactive reserve. During the first three years after the end of their active service, reservists received a maximum of three weeks of training as part of the “Active Reserve.” During the next sixteen years, as members of the “first inactive reserve,” they had only two training periods totaling no more than six weeks. Reservists then passed to the “second inactive reserve” for eight years during which time they received a maximum of one week of training.  

Thus the total reserve-training requirement, assuming a reservist received the maximum amount of training allowed by law, was ten weeks. The ten weeks came over twenty-seven years, an average of less than three days a year. A typical reservist under the 1927/28 system who left the army in 1933 could expect a maximum of six weeks of training, including field maneuvers and barracks training, before the war began in September 1939. In response to complaints from generals that reserve training was inadequate, the Ministry of War allowed the army to recall two classes a year, instead of one, for training. This increased the number of reservists who received training before the war, but did not increase the base amount of training reservists received.

By cutting the term of conscript service, and thus the number of active duty troops, the 1927/28 system made the military more dependent on civilian employees. The military elite carefully watched its civilian workers to make sure they remained loyal to the army and did not fall under the sway of “anti-national” groups or class-based organizations, like labor unions. The increase in the number of civilians working with

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358 Doughty, Seeds of Disaster, 28.

359 SHAT 5 N 12 Supplement. Dossier 3.
the army, and the growing awareness of strategic bombing theories created a perceived need to teach the army’s civilians to defend themselves against air raids. Many leaders feared that Germany or Italy would use poison gas bombs against fortifications, depots, mobilization centers, and military offices buildings all over France.\textsuperscript{360}

Fear of airborne gas attacks convinced the military and political elite that civilian employees had to be trained in anti-gas procedures and in the proper use of equipment. As a result, throughout the 1930s, civilian employees of the army and the Ministry of War were trained to use gas masks and other anti-gas equipment. Their training included lectures on the effects of gas, training in how to use anti-gas equipment, and often required civilian employees to enter gas chambers.\textsuperscript{361}

Subjecting civilian employees, including \textit{agents militaires} and civil employees, to gas training and gas chambers served two purposes. On one hand, it served the practical purpose of preparing employees to react appropriately to a possible gas attack, but it also served to reinforce the distinctiveness of the army’s civil employees. Men working in armaments factories did not have to pass through gas chambers, despite working in a likely target, but men and women doing bureaucratic tasks in Paris office buildings or staffing mobilization centers Bayonne did. If civilian personnel faced gas attacks, the training would save many lives, but it also served to mark the military’s civilians as different from other civilians.


Anti-gas training provided a social marker, proof that those who underwent it were different from their neighbors doing similar jobs in the private sector, or for other parts of the government. That marker of social difference reinforced the sense that civilian employees of the Army were in some way part the French Army. The training did not make them soldiers, but it did suggest that they were not really civilians either. For the army’s female employees, anti-gas training proved that they were different from other civilians and were part of the military family.

Army morale reports reflected the inclusion of some groups of civilians within the collective military identity. During the interwar era, the general staff compiled a yearly report on the state of morale. The reports broke that Army down into what its authors, and most important consumers, thought were the Army’s basic subdivisions. The groups included conscripts, career non-commissioned officers, officers, *indigènes*, *agents militaires*, and civil employees.\(^{362}\) Including civilian workers showed that the military elite viewed them as part of its institution, and important to the functioning of the army. The report could have included other groups, including civilian contractors doing work on army bases or armaments worker, but did not.\(^{363}\)

The military elite was protective of those civilians it deemed to be part of the army. Officers worked to keep their civil employees and *agents militaires* aligned with the army, and away from labor unions or other groups deemed subversive to military identity. Military leaders closely monitored the *agents militaires* for any sign of union

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activity and pushed for better pay and working conditions to forestall unionization. In 1933, military officials expressed alarm that some agents militaires were joining, or expressing support for, the Fédération Nationale des Agents Militaires, a potential union.364 Although reports of unionization were disquieting, most proved false, and the consensus was that the agents militaires were meeting or exceeding the army command’s expectations of them in performance of their duties, and were solidly loyal to the army.365 That the same report contained both the claim that the agents militaires were unionizing and that they were not unionizing indicates that the French military elite found it difficult to track political and union activities among its civilian employees. Examining officers often allowed their ideological commitments and personal reaction to agents to color their evaluation of their political leanings and reliability.

The 1927/8 Army laws continued the prohibition on soldiers voting or holding office, but there were attempts to clarify the role of parliamentarians in wartime. The balance between a deputy’s duty to perform military service upon mobilization and his duty to carryout his elected office had been controversial since the Martimprey Affair and the Boulanger Compromise in the late-nineteenth century, but the Chamber had refused to provide clear statutory guidance. In 1928, the Chamber attempted to put its members’ wartime rights and responsibilities on a clear statutory footing as part of the Paul-Boncour Law.

The Paul-Boncour Law, or the Law on the General Organization of the Country for War, was intended to prepare the economic mobilization of the country so that the

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365 Ibid.
home front could move from peace to war footing as quickly as the military did. The failure to pass the law left the 1927/28 system unfinished. Political and military leaders intended the three laws to work together to prepare France for a long war of attrition, instead only the two Army Laws came into force and the home front remained unorganized.

One provision of the Paul-Boncour Law stated that parliamentarians had the right to choose whether to accept mobilization. If a deputy or senator accepted mobilization, he would keep his seat, and receive a leave of absence from the Chamber or the Senate until the end of the war. In the alternative, the senator or deputy could refuse mobilization and continue as a parliamentarian. It thus made it impossible for deputies to slip between the military and political worlds, but gave them the right to choose between the two. In essence, it finally codified the Boulanger Compromise. ³⁶⁶

The Paul-Boncour Law’s provision on parliamentary mobilization represented the best opportunity to place the democratic regime on a firm legal basis in wartime since the 1875 Law had first imperiled the system by creating an incompatibility between holding a mandate and being mobilized. It would have created a predictable system for carrying on representative government that was based on a clear statutory basis instead of resorting to ideological appeals to justify ignoring laws. However, it did not solve all of the problems associated with exclusion. By stripping members who accepted mobilization of their voting rights, but by not replacing them with new members, the law accepted that whole constituencies would lose their representation in the Chamber. It

also remained silent on the problem of what would happen if the mobilization overturned a government majority.

Deputies were embarrassed by voting themselves special privileges, but accepted the need for clear regulations that would preserve military hierarchy and parliamentary authority. Unfortunately, the parliamentary provisions died when the Chamber and Senate were unable to agree on a common version of the overall law. The disagreement was unrelated to its grant of parliamentary immunity from mobilization, but when the bill collapsed, so did the immunity. As a result, the status of mobilized deputies continued to be ambiguous and ruled by questionably legal compromises and *ad hoc* agreements.\(^{367}\)

Continuing Contention: The Crisis of the early 1930s

Although the 1927/8 system substantially reduced the cost of the standing army, the arrival of the Great Depression put even that reduced military budget under pressure. In July of 1932, the Socialists attacked the Radical-led government’s decision to cut social spending, but not to slash credits for reserve training. Speaking for the Socialists, Pierre Renaudel argued that cuts in reserve training would not materially reduce the army’s fighting ability and it was better to cut the military budget than to impose deeper cuts in social services. Conservatives attacked Renaudel and the Socialists for having previously proposed an all reserve army and now trying to cut reserve training. Colonel Jean Fabry, the powerful and influential president of the Chamber’s Army Committee,

\(^{367}\) Eugenia Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence KA: Kansas University Press, 1991), 18-23. The bill failed because of disagreements between the Chamber and the Senate over the economic mobilization of women and the terms under which the government could seize or commandeer private property.
argued that because the reserves now formed the wartime army, it would be a “crime against the Nation” to economize on their training because it was no longer possible to rely on the active army to absorb the enemy’s initial blows. The reserves needed to be able to fight and win immediately, instead of spending the first months of the war relearning how to be soldiers.\textsuperscript{368}

Although the Socialists failed to cut reserve training, their pressure for cuts in the military budget did have an effect. Strong Socialist and union support for the Geneva disarmament conference pushed Center and Radical governments into repeated conflicts with the military elite, especially after General Maxime Weygand replaced Marshal Pétain as \textit{généralissime} in 1931. Between 1931 and 1933, Weygand repeatedly clashed with the government over arms control proposals. When Weygand’s protests failed to sway the ministers, he became increasingly frustrated. He fumed that his army faced a constant stream of calls for new concessions while German violations of the Treaty of Versailles’s armaments clauses escalated.\textsuperscript{369}

In October of 1932, conversations between civilian and military leaders boiled over at a meeting of the \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale}. During the meeting, civilian leaders overrode military objections to new arms reductions and backed new arms control concessions; General Weygand lashed out at his civilian masters. The general accused the politicians of caving in to France’s enemies and throwing away the victory of 1918. Although Marshal Pétain remained aloof from Weygand’s angry

\textsuperscript{368} SHAT 2 N 1453.

rhetoric, he joined his successor as généralissime in the unsuccessful attempt to stop the politicians agreeing to a new round of military cuts.\textsuperscript{370}

1933 was a crucial year in French civil-military relations. The year opened with Adolph Hitler’s accession to power as German Chancellor and ended with a crisis of civil-military relations in France. Over the course of the year, military commanders battled with the Radical-dominated government over the government’s demands for new military cuts to free money to defend the Franc and to show France’s good faith at the Geneva disarmament conference. The conflicting political and military pressures encouraged a heightening of tensions between the military elite and the civilian government.

In early 1933, Edouard Daladier, then Minister of War in his own government, decided to impose new economies on the active army. Daladier forced through a cut of five thousand officers, or one-sixth of the entire officer corp. The cuts represented a major reduction in the professional officer corps, a group that was essential to mobilization and controlling the wartime army, but hated by much of the Left. The military elite, in the persons of Generals Weygand and Maurice Gamelin, managed to spread the cuts over five years and to get control over choosing whom to purge, but the cuts remained painful and reinforced the impression that major portions of the French political elite were intent on dismantling the army.\textsuperscript{371}


The battle over reducing the number of professional officers followed a similar pattern to the civil-military conflicts of the 1920s. Faced with the government’s demand that they accept a painful reduction in the army’s fighting ability, senior military leaders first resisted and then agreed to concessions in exchange for consolidating their control over their institution. In this case, the military elite gained control over promotions for mid-career officers, powers the military elite lost after the Dreyfus Affair.\footnote{Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand, 91-2.}

In May of 1933, Weygand and Daladier clashed in a meeting of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre dedicated to revising the July 1927 Law on the General Organization of the Army. In response to a question from Marshal Pétain, Weygand argued that although he had previously agreed to a new reduction in the number of effectives, he had agreed only because of heavy pressure from the government to find economies, and that Hitler’s disquieting behavior had changed the international situation, causing him to reconsider. Weygand argued that, “since the armistice, we have never been so close to the chance of war” and that given the situation it would be “particularly grave . . . to further reduce the Army’s forces.”\footnote{SHAT 1 N 22. CSG. Book 17. Proces Verbal. 15 May 1933.}

Edouard Daladier challenged Weygand’s interpretation of Hitler’s policies. Daladier argued that even if Hitler did want war, lack of war material meant that Hitler could not attack for two to three years and so there was no reason to reverse plans to reduce military spending. Daladier insisted that the Army must adapt itself to the
resources and manpower given it by the government, and not expect the government to adapt its budget to the military’s perception of its needs.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

After an acrimonious debate, that saw the divisions between Weygand and the Army Chief of Staff, and his eventual successor, General Gamelin burst into the open, Daladier won qualified support from the generals. Despite the clear reservations of many of the members, Daladier secured the council’s blessing for plans to reduce the number of divisions in the French Army from twenty to eighteen in order to economize on manpower and expenses.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

On the heals of the reduction in officers and the disarmament controversies, the government proposed to cut the term of active service to seven and a half months. The proposal, called the Bernier Law, tried to “economize” conscript classes by temporarily reducing the term of service and cutting the age of conscription from twenty-two to twenty-one. The intended result was to save money in the short-term and help ease the effects of the \textit{années creuses}, the period when the sharply reduced birthrate of the Great War would slash the size of conscript classes. Proponents hoped that staggering classes by economizing them would allow classes to overlap during the \textit{années creuses}, thus reducing the impact of the sharply reduced size of the wartime conscript classes.\footnote{\textit{Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand}, 96.}

The Bernier Law provoked another conflict between the military elite and the government. Initially General Gamelin was able to convince General Weygand to adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Daladier and the proposal. Weygand, Gamelin, and

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

\footnote{\textit{Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand}, 96.}
Daladier agreed that the army command would support the bill if the government capped the economies at an added two months and the Minister of War received the authority to suspend the economies if circumstances changed.\textsuperscript{377}

During the fall, the Daladier-Gamelin-Weygand agreement collapsed and Weygand confronted Daladier and Gamelin. When the Bernier Law passed its first parliamentary hurdles in October 1933, it did not include the provision giving the minister the discretion to rescind the economies. Gamelin favored continued negotiations and Daladier assured him that there was still time to amend the bill to put discretion back into it, but Weygand believed Daladier had betrayed his trust and refused to support the bill. Despite clear evidence to the contrary, he even denied he had previously agreed to support the bill and instead claimed he had only agreed to study it.\textsuperscript{378}

The debate over the Bernier Law occurred in the context of rising international tensions, and growing fear of Germany among French leaders. In November 1933, Georges Mandel, the conservative deputy of Lesparre, gave voice to the growing suspicions of many in a speech that stunned the Chamber of Deputies. Mandel’s speech exposed the rapidly escalating German rearmament program and blasted French leaders for sleeping while Germany was preparing for war.\textsuperscript{379}

Despite a growing awareness that Hitler might be a serious danger to French security and European peace, the French government and political class was not yet ready

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{377} \textit{Ibid.}, 94-5
\item \textsuperscript{378} \textit{Ibid.}, 96-7.
\item \textsuperscript{379} Georges Mandel, \textit{L’Allemagne Réarme: Que Faire: Discours Proononcé a la Chambre des Deputés le 9 Novembre 1933} (Paris: PLON, 1933). Mandel tried to bridge the gap between nationalists and the military reformers by exposing the Germans and urging the government to demand a League of Nations investigation as a way to test German good will and make a final attempt at a peaceful resolution of the conflict.
\end{itemize}
to accept a new arms race. Instead, the French Left reinforced its efforts to use the Geneva Disarmament Conference to divert German ambitions away from armed struggle. As a result, tensions between the army and the government continued to grow.

General Weygand believed that the politicians had betrayed him and worried that they were squeezing the army to death even as a new German threat took shape. Weygand’s belief that his most senior subordinate, General Gamelin, had joined with the politicians to destroy the army magnified his fear that the army could disintegrate unless he stopped the politicians. Rather than accept defeat Weygand, in the style of his mentor Marshal Ferdinand Foch, chose to attack. Phillip Bankwitz has chronicled Weygand’s attempts to use the press against the government by selectively leaking information to friendly journalists. The leaks angered Daladier who believed Weygand was interfering in politics, but did not dissuade the government from continuing with the Bernier Law nor produce a public outcry against the proposal.  

In a desperate bid to stop a law he feared would destroy the army, Weygand chose to use the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre as a weapon against Daladier’s plans. He insisted that the government had a legal duty to consult the council before the Chamber voted on the legislation. Daladier was hesitant, but accepted that Weygand was correct and scheduled a special meeting of the council four days later, on 18 December 1933, the day before the Chamber was voting on the Bernier Law.  

The 18 December 1933 meeting of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre witnessed a direct confrontation between civil and military authorities. In the run-up to the meeting,

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380 Bankwitz, 96-7.
381 Ibid., 99.
Weygand alleged that Daladier was imposing dangerous policies that would cripple France’s army and that it was the duty of the council to voice its opposition, even if that meant having its advice ignored and angering powerful civilian leaders. Weygand argued that the cuts associated with the 1927/28 Laws and the recent reductions forced on the army had reduced its units to the verge of collapse. He described active units existing as administrative fictions full of skeleton units and predicted that deeper cuts could destroy the army as a fighting force.  

Unlike the previous May, when Daladier had been able to override Weygand’s concerns, in December Weygand carried the day in the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre. The debate began with Weygand sparring with Gamelin and Daladier. Pétain, who had refused to commit himself to either side before the meeting began, asked Weygand to summarize “the value of the Army from the point of view of war and the confidence that he had in it.” Weygand responded that although he retained “the greatest confidence in the Army . . . he had to say that from the point of view of its employment in time of war: mobilization, concentration, and unit cohesion, its value was gravely diminished.” When Marshal Pétain finally took the floor himself, he strongly supported Weygand. Marshal Pétain, the most senior surviving Marshal of France, attacked the Bernier Law, accusing its supporters of betraying France and her future soldiers. The climax of Pétain’s speech came when he read a report written by an officer commanding a reserve unit during the 1914 Battle of the Frontiers. The officer, who committed suicide after sending his report,

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382 SHAT 1 N 22. CSG. Dossier 17. Process Verbal. 18 December 1933.
described the unit’s internal collapse and his shame at being unable to prevent the reservists dissolving in the face of the enemy.  

Pétain’s powerful presentation combined with Weygand’s lobbying secured a large majority against the law. Several members of the council wept listening to Pétain’s speech and the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre rejected the Bernier Law by a lopsided eleven to three vote, with two abstentions. Daladier was rightly furious and stormed out of the meeting promising that if Weygand would not accept his policies, then the general would have to resign.  

Although Weygand’s humiliation of his civilian superior raised troubling questions about that state of civil-military relations, Daladier’s actions in the crisis also raise questions about his own leadership. Despite knowing the depth of Weygand’s hostility to the Bernier Law, Daladier consented to a council meeting the day before the Chamber’s vote on the plan. Such a late meeting date gave no opportunity for the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre to function as a forum for in-depth negotiations or an a forum for consultation and conciliation. Instead, Daladier allowed Weygand to lure him into an obvious trap.  

Daladier’s decision to call a meeting of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre the day before the vote was a serious mistake. He had probably hoped to avoid a direct confrontation with the generals by not calling a meeting where he might lose a vote, but caved in under pressure when Weygand demanded a meeting. Daladier’s unwillingness

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383 Ibid.  
384 Ibid.  
385 Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand, 104.
to confront Weygand led him to temporize and led to a deeper civil-military crisis than a personal clash between the minister and the généralissime would have been.

Weygand and Pétain’s performances were powerful indictments of Daladier’s policies and personal leadership. They registered their opposition to the plan, as they were entitled to do under the law that created the interwar version of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, but their rhetoric went further than just expressing opposition and counseling the minister to follow a different path. Weygand accused Daladier of lying to him and to the other generals. In his speech, Pétain accused Daladier of dooming France to eventual defeat and sentencing thousands of French soldiers to die needless deaths. His rhetoric and personal attacks against the minister undermined civil-military cooperation and caused a crisis in civil-military relations.\footnote{SHAT 1 N 22. CSG. Dossier 17. Process Verbal. 18 December 1933.}

Weygand’s vitriol was clearly painful for Daladier, but Pétain’s intervention was more significant. Pétain’s status as the senior French marshal gave him enormous prestige, both inside and outside the armed forces. His speech implicitly accused Daladier of sacrificing thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of French lives in the name of personal political expediency. Such a brutal attack by the man who had guided the military elite toward compromise throughout the 1920s suggested that the continuing debate about the size and structure of the army was driving a wedge between the military elite and the French government.

The next day the Chamber passed the Bernier Law despite the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre’s opposition. When André Tardieu pressed Daladier and Bernier on the council’s opposition, Bernier retorted “Ah! If only the grande muette [Great Mute] would
not talk.” Despite conservative attacks, Daladier carried the vote by an overwhelming 449 to 147.\textsuperscript{387}

Weygand’s strategy of confrontation failed to stop the Bernier Law, but it did mark a shift in French civil-military relations. For the first time in the interwar period, the military elite publicly defied the government. During the 1920s the military elite, acting through the \textit{Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre}, had opposed government policies, but within a context of negotiations and respectful subordination. Military leaders had been willing to make compromises and refrained from opposing the final versions of government legislation. In December of 1933, Weygand and Pétain felt the government had gone too far and broke with the policies on the 1920s by attacking and the government and insulting the Minister of War.

Weygand’s confrontational tactics backfired; he failed to stop the bill and undermined the ability of the military elite to use its main mechanism of consultation with the government. Daladier was furious at his ritual humiliation and tried to bring Weygand to heal by refusing to renew his letter of command for 1934. Weygand’s position as \textit{généralissime} required reappointment every year by the War Minister. Daladier declared that if Weygand could not accept his policies the general would have to resign. The general ignored Daladier’s attempt at coercion and made it clear he would not resign; if Daladier wanted to get rid of him he would have to fire him.\textsuperscript{388}

The long-term effects of Weygand’s defiance took time to develop because within weeks of the Weygand-Daladier crisis, the Stavisky Riots swept Daladier and the

\textsuperscript{387} Bankwitz, \textit{Maxime Weygand}, 104.; \textit{JO Débats}, 19 December 1933, 4701.

\textsuperscript{388} \textit{Ibid.}, 104.; SHAT 1 N 1. Minutes of meetings. After mid 1936, when Daladier returned to power the CSG almost ceased to meet.
Radicals out of office. The Stavisky Scandal, which revolved around a confidence man whose nefarious dealings Radical politicians covered up, sparked massive rightwing riots in early-February 1934 that many feared would bring down the Republic. The anti-parliamentary leagues and the Communists mobilized their membership on 6 February 1934 after the Radical government sacked the conservative chief of the Parisian police. Many conservatives believed the government was trying to cover up its involvement in Stavisky’s crimes and his mysterious death in custody.\footnote{Charles Sowerwine, \textit{France Since 1870: Culture, Politics, and Society} (New York: Palgrave, 1991), 44-5; Paul Jankowski, \textit{Stavisky: A Confidence Man in the Republic of Virtue} (Ithica: Cornel University Press, 2002).}

The protests became a riot when the protestors and police clashed in the Place de la Concorde, just across the Seine from the Palais Bourbon. As the protestors pushed the police out of the plaza and onto the bridge leading to the Chamber of Deputies, the deputies debated the affair. As they debated the affair, they heard the police open fire on the demonstrators. The riot and repression left fifteen dead and over fourteen hundred wounded and demoralized the Radical Party. Daladier resigned the next day.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 145.}

Daladier’s abdication deepened the political crisis and leading politicians accepted the need for a government of national unity. The former president Gaston Doumergue, a centrist who won election to the presidency in 1924 with votes from the Right, accepted the call to form a National Union government ranging from the Radicals to Louis Marin’s Republican Federation. Doumergue invited Marshal Pétain to join his government as Minister of War, marking a political surrender to the generals’ insubordination.
As Minister of War, Marshal Pétain was able to bring a period of peace between the military and political elites by canceling Daladier’s initiatives. Pétain dropped the Ministry’s support for the Bernier Law and reasserted the finality of the 1927/28 compromise he had helped craft. When Pétain left the ministry General Maurin, a member of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre in 1933 who had voted for Daladier, replaced him. Shortly after Pétain resigned as Minister of War and effectively retired, General Weygand reached his preplanned retirement age and Gamelin succeeded him. The collapse of the Radical government and fortunate personnel changes temporarily eliminated the main points of contact between the two belligerent camps but did not solve the underlying conflict between the military elite and the French Left.

The departure of Weygand from the high command in 1935, because of age, marked a shift in civil-military relations. Instead of Weygand’s confrontational approach, his replacement, General Maurice Gamelin preferred to work closely with political leaders hoping to influence and guide their decisions. Gamelin’s relationship with the governments he served, especially during the long period (June 1936-March 1940) when Daladier was Minister of War has been controversial. Martin Alexander has presented Gamelin as a faithful servant of the army and the Republic who understood the very weak position of interwar governments and tried to avoid new civil-military conflicts in order to preserve national unity and civilian supremacy.391 Others historians

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have seen Gamelin as a mediocrity promoted above his ability because of his cozy relationship with politicians, especially Edouard Daladier. 392

When Daladier returned to the Ministry of War he effectively ended civil-military coordination and negotiations. Daladier refusing to attend sessions of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre when he returned and preferred to cherry picked officers who supported government policy. By ignoring the Republic’s main vehicle for civil-military dialogue, and replacing it with committees on which politicians predominated and the army was represented by hand-picked officers Daladier denied the generals a forum in which to attack the government, but also abandoned his best vehicle for engaging with the army’s most senior generals as a group. 393

Defending Military Identity

During the late-1920s and early-1930s, military leaders continued to worry that Communist propaganda inside the army could subvert officer’s control of their soldiers.

392 Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand; Ernest May, Strange Victory: Hitler’s Conquest of France (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 459; Doughty, Seeds of Disaster; Guy Chapman, Why France Fell; The defeat of the French Army in 1940 (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968); Marc Bloch Strange Defeat. Bankwitz presented Gamelin as a well-meaning general who could never measure up to the standards set by Weygand and Pétain. May’s portrayal of Gamelin is sometimes contradictory. He blames Gamelin for making serious errors in organizing his army and in strategy that led directly to the defeat of 1940, but also excuses those errors claiming that if he had not been replaced, he would have launched a potentially decisive counter attack similar to what Weygand later attempted, but two days earlier. Another reading of May’s evidence could argue that Gamelin’s spite led him to cancel the proposed operation, which he did not tell Weygand about, because he did not want his rival to win credit for his own plan. Doughty criticizes Gamelin for slavish adherence to an overly cautious doctrine. Chapman condemns him as an intellectual mediocrity more concerned with currying political favor than standing up to the politicians and although Marc Bloch does not study Gamelin personally, he argued that France’s generals were too old and attached to the cautious doctrines of the Great War and Gamelin was the army’s chief general.

393 Ibid., 104.; SHAT 1 N 1 CSG. Minutes of meetings. After mid 1936, when Daladier returned to power the CSG almost ceased to meet.
Members of the military elite maintained their efforts to keep Communist influence out of the military, and to keep the military available as a weapon against potential Leftist radicalism.

During the elaboration of the 1927/8 military system, the military elite moved to protect sensitive military positions from foreign influence. In 1928, the general staff and the Minister of War forbade officers married to foreign women from working in the intelligence sections covering Syria and Morocco. In 1929, military leaders expanded the prohibition to cover officers in the intelligence sections responsible for Algeria and Tunisia. 394

The military elite’s concern about wives revealed a continuing focus on tightly constructing military identity. The order excluding officers with foreign-born wives did not distinguish between the woman’s national origin and citizenship. Although there would have been a continuing effort by counter-intelligence officers to identify potential spies, a clean bill of health for the woman did not allow her husband’s career to continue without interruption. Merely marrying a foreigner cast a cloud over an officer’s loyalty in the eyes of his military superiors.

The military elite worried about any close interaction between a French officer and a foreign woman, even if the relationship was platonic. In 1935, General Nieger, commander of the Paris Military Region, issued orders forbidding officers to employ German women, including refugees, as *au pairs*, babysitters, or maids. The order expressed concern that such women could exert an unhealthy influence on officers from a position of trust within the family. The foreign woman could use her position of trust to

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compromise the officer or she could passively observe and report whatever information she could gather from him and his family.  

French leaders were concerned about foreign wives and childcare workers because their presence within a military household raised the possibility of multiple loyalties. Officers could become enmeshed in overlapping loyalties created by close personal bonds with foreign women. These foreign loyalties could conflict with the military elite’s preference that officers’ focus their primary loyalty on the French Army.

Although French leaders viewed the intersection of gender and nationality as especially dangerous, nationality alone could be cause for alarm. In 1933, reports from the military regions to the General Staff noted the dangers of foreign-born soldiers, and the sons of foreign-born parents in the military. One report noted that many such soldiers were suspect and their military value “very doubtful.” It went on to argue that allowing a large number of immigrants or the children of immigrants from the same country to serve in the same unit constituted a “real danger.” The report’s author concluded that the maximum number of such men should never exceed ten-percent. They feared that large groups of men with foreign loyalties could subvert the entire unit if either their will to fight failed or they changed their allegiance again.

The military elite’s fear of subversion was not limited to gender and nationality, it also worried that religion and class, or a combination of those factors with gender, could undermine military discipline. The military elite remained watchful for any signs of disloyalty among its colonial forces. In 1929, Marshal Louis Franchet d’Espérey argued

395 SHAT 5 N 7 Supplement. Dossier 4. 5 June 1935.

396 SHAT 1 N 8. Dossier 7 “Se/ Nationalisés et fils d’étrangers.”
that racial and religious bonds could undermine Muslim troops’ loyalty to France. In a session of the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre, the marshal urged the government to reassign Muslim North African units to garrison only non-Muslim territories where the population would be racially and religiously dissimilar to them. He feared that racial, linguistic, and religious affiliations would overwhelm their training and loyalty to France.397

The marshal argued that Muslims’ weak family bonds made them particularly susceptible to having mixed or shifting loyalties. He feared that “the weakness of the commandment of marriage” in Muslim societies led to weak family loyalty and allowed Muslim men to transfer their loyalty to local Muslim populations, even if they were serving in a different part of the French Empire from where their wives and children lived. Marshal Franchet d’Espérey, a conservative practicing Catholic and occasional fascist admirer, believed that the Muslim practice of polygamy indicated that Muslim men were weakly attached to their families. He argued that sexual passion swayed Muslim men more easily than it did Christians or Animists and as a result of their sexual excesses, Muslims found it easier to feel solidarity with ethnically dissimilar populations.398

The same year that Marshal Franchet d’Espérey warned the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre against the dangers of garrisoning Muslim men in Muslim countries, Marshal Pétain urged the council to keep indigène forces out of France. Pétain said he supported recruiting more indigènes, but wanted to limited the number of colonial units stationed in

397 SHAT 1 N 5 Supplement. 9 Abril 1929. No 306.
398 Ibid.
France because of the “moral inconveniences and incompatibilities resulting from the presence of *indigènes* on metropolitan territory” and the special precautions necessary to “maintain public order” when they were present. He concluded by arguing that although the 1927/28 Laws created a manpower shortage that had to be partially filled with *indigènes*, they should be kept in special camps as a reserve force.  

Foreigners, whether other Europeans or colonial subjects, were just one of the groups that military leaders feared could subvert the army. Conservative elements within the military elite had long mistrusted Free Masons and the military elite discouraged French officers from joining, or interacting with, any international or internationalist organizations. In November of 1934, the General Staff issued instructions warning officers involved in the Rotary Club that they were espionage targets. The instructions warned that the Rotary Club was a haven for foreign spies and cautioned them that enemy agents used meetings to extract secret information. Although the instructions did not ban soldiers from participating in the Rotary Club, it implied that soldiers should avoid the organization.

The military elite’s concern with race, religion, and gender did not end its fear of Communist propaganda. Throughout the 1930s, the Communists launched periodic anti-militarist campaigns. On 31 October 1931, General Nieger, the commander of the Paris Military Area, complained about one such campaign. Nieger warned his superiors that

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399 SHAT 1 N 5. Supplement. Dossier 4 “Loi de recrutement.”

400 SHAT 5 N 7 Supplement. Dossier 5. 12 November 1934.
barracking protestors were molesting troops while on training maneuvers and assaulting or insulting soldiers in the streets of Paris.\footnote{SHAT 5 N 7 Supplement. Dossier 4. 31 Oct. 1935; 9 Jan. 1935.}

Although the Communist campaigns of the early-1930s worried military leaders, the growth of the Popular Front and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War exacerbated the military’s fear of Communist subversion in the middle years of the 1930s. After the 1934 formation of the Popular Front, and the likelihood that the alliance of the Radicals, Socialists, and Communists would win power in the 1936 elections, the military elite became increasingly concerned about Communist influence in the army and in French society.

Concern with Communist infiltration extended beyond the generals to political figures as well. In October 1935, Minster of War Jean Fabry, previously the powerful president of the Chamber’s Army Committee, warned commanders that “certain political groups” were again attempting to spread propaganda inside the Army and that it was vital to destroy any influence they had among the conscripts and reservists. He went on to lay out the primary missions of the armed forces.

The Army must remain attached to its unique mission, which is to be always ready to defend the country against foreign aggression and to be ready to contribute to the maintenance of order in the interior. Its loyalty vis-à-vis the Republican Government which represents France must be beyond doubt; she is without parties and at the sole service of the entire France, and under no pretext can she tolerate in her house the least manifestation having a political or confessional character.\footnote{SHAT 1 N 8 Supplement. “Number 5170/D” 8 Oct. 1935.}

Jean Fabry’s comment harkened back to the nineteenth-century tradition of the Army as the “\textit{Grande Muette}” or Great Mute of French politics. He argued for absolute neutrality in the face of a growing political polarization. By linking political neutrality,
which had become a code phrase for resisting Leftist influence inside the army, with confessional neutrality, which ever since the Dreyfus Affair had been a code for resistance to the right wing, Fabry urged the army to avoid the growing divisions plaguing French politics. He also exploited the military elite’s fear of Communism as a tactic to encourage the generals to avoid intervening in politics to oppose the anti-clerical Left. His linkage implied that the army could best defend itself against Communist infiltration and Leftist attacks if its leaders avoided public pronouncements or supporting the Right.

Fabry’s circular used the threat of the Left to scare soldiers into either rallying to the Republic, or at least staying out of politics. The circular, which was prepared by the minister’s military cabinet, warned senior officers that “political groups which have an interest in weakening the forces of order are exploiting all incidents able to give material to critique the actions of the command . . . .” He cautioned commanders that the far-Left would seize on any apparent breach of professionalism, especially political statements, by military officers and that such outbursts would only hurt the army and help the Communists’ election campaign.403

Despite Fabry’s warning, the growing popularity of the Popular Front frightened many soldiers, and the general staff began to plan in case the Popular Front movement turned revolutionary. In September of 1935, the 1er Bureau, the army office responsible for planning military operations, began to review old plans to suppress a new Paris Commune. The new military governor of Paris, General Pretelat, prompted the review when he expressed concern about whether he had enough troops available to suppress an

403 SHAT 7 N 64 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Number 5170/D” 8 Oct. 1935
insurrection or revolutionary strike. The resulting planning sessions agreed with Pretelat that he would need at least five divisions in order to besiege and retake Paris. Planners were, however, concerned that a revolt in Paris might coincide with a German invasion. They did not specify if they feared that dissident Frenchmen would rise to stop mobilization aimed at defending against a German invasion, or if they thought the revolt would occur for purely domestic reasons and Germany would take advantage of the opportunity to invade. As a result, the military elite adjusted its old plans to allow for a siege of Paris using units already slated for immediate service against the Germans.  

The new plan included using colonial troops against the people of Paris. The planners assigned the Moroccan Colonial Infantry Regiment to the Paris siege force. Despite the military elite’s usual sensitivity to the potential effect on public opinion of using colonial forces in Europe, none of the planners expressed concern about using Moroccans against Parisians. It may be that the military elite assumed that in the event of an armed revolt, normal political considerations would not apply and so felt free to use any of the weapons at its disposal to end the crisis as quickly as possible. It is also possible that military commanders either did not care, or even relished the thought, of using allegedly brutal, colonial forces against the, presumably, Communist and Socialist rebels.

\[404\] SHAT 7 N 64 Supplement. Dossier 2. “Note relative à l’investissement de Paris en cas d’insurrection grave.” 30 Septemeber 1935. Pretalet requested five divisions, the 5th, 19th, 23rd, and 36th Infantry Divisions, and the 3rd Cavalry Division. Because of concerns about maintaining the couverture, the 5th Division was replaced by a mixed group containing a demi-brigade of alpine troops, a cavalry regiment, an air defense regiment, and a regiment of Moroccan troops detached from the 4th Colonial Infantry Division.

\[405\] Ibid.
Including colonial forces in a force sent to reduce Paris had some advantages. Because the colonial forces came from outside France, they might have been more willing to kill French civilians than French soldiers would have been. In addition, because colonial units were segregated, they did not have to be tripled at the beginning of the war and would consist almost exclusively of professionals. They could also be sent to Paris without interfering with the mobilization system.

In April 1936, in the midst of the French Popular Front’s successful election campaign, military leaders showed their concern that the united Left’s victory could trigger another revolution. During the campaign, French intelligence obtained documents in Spain describing plans for Spanish revolutionaries to attack and neutralize Spanish army units in their barracks as an opening step in a possible coup attempt. The instructions called for groups of armed civilian militants to coordinate with committees of dissident soldiers to arrange for a simultaneous rising inside the base and invasion of the base by civilian militants. The committee would then identify the political leanings of the soldiers and officers, recruiting some into the coup effort while imprisoning or executing conservatives. French intelligence distributed copies to military leaders, implicitly warning French commanders to be on guard against similar attacks by Popular Front supporters.406

The wave of political strikes that followed the Popular Front’s victory in the elections of April and May of 1936 briefly appeared to validate the military elite’s fears. General Gouraud, Pretalet’s successor as military governor of Paris, feared that the strikes were escalating into a revolt. On 5 June 1936, he warned his superiors that

because of the defensive measures taken against the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, he lacked enough troops to maintain order in Paris if the government called on him to do so. Rather than the 9,100 troops he was supposed to have on hand, during the middle of June he would have only 5,100 men.407

The military leaders worried that Soviet or German agents had infiltrated the strikers. The military cabinet of the Ministry of National Defense and War expressed concern that the occupation of factories would allow foreign agents among the strikers to learn military secrets by examining undelivered war material stored at factories. Other reports noted that secret weapon designs and details of mobilization plans were stored in factories strikers had taken over.408

The military elite feared that the strikers would gain access to weapons and turn their strikes into an insurrection. Military leaders tried to track down war material in factories to prevent the strikers from gaining control of large arms caches. They were especially concerned about the fate of war material inside the Reynaud tank factory that was taken over by strikers. The high command was relieved to learn that soldiers assigned to the tank factory to oversee production had successfully sabotaged the undelivered tanks before the workers took over the factory.409

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408 SHAT 7 N 64 Supplement. Dossier 2. PV/10 “Note pour L’ETAT-MAJOR de L’ARMEE – Cabinet” 17 Juin 1936.; Number 7323. 11 July 1936; Number 101889 1/EMA 14 October 1936. In October of 1936 the Army required factories to store sensitive documents in a military office, if one was located close to the factory, and if not in the local Gendarme post.

409 SHAT 7 N 64 Supplement. Dossier 2. 5 Juin 1936.
The Third Republic’s ambiguous relationship with its own army ultimately contributed to the regime’s failure. The effects of the 1927/28 Laws exerted enormous pressure on Albert Sarraut’s government during the Rhineland Crisis of March 1936. When Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland, the coalition Albert Sarraut’s government faced a serious military crisis at a delicate time for France’s internal and external politics.

France’s diplomatic situation made the government reluctant to risk war. Unlike in 1914, when French leaders were confident of the support of allies, in 1936 France was relatively isolated. The Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact had strengthened France’s relationship with the Soviets and raised the prospect of Soviet aid in an Eastern European War, but otherwise France’s alliances were in crisis. The *entente* with Britain was frayed, the alliance with Poland was in doubt following the 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact, the United States was isolationist, and France’s relationship with her Great War ally Italy was in crisis because of the Italo-Abyssinian War.

Although the French government faced a difficult diplomatic situation, its response to Hitler’s move into the Rhineland also had to take into account the effects of 1927/28 system and the continued ban of political rights for soldiers. Because the army relied on reservists for its combat power and the tripling mechanism forced the government to mobilize before risking any serious armed conflict the French government found itself with few good options. General Maurice Gamelin, the Chief of Staff and
Supreme Commander-designate, told Sarraut and his ministers that any significant response to the Rhineland intrusion required mobilization.410

Historians have condemned Gamelin’s arguments as justifications for his preferred course of inaction, and some members of the Sarraut government challenged him. Hawkish politicians, especially Georges Mandel, angrily prodded the general to react quickly to the German move, but to no avail. Later historians have tended to agree with Mandel and argue that Gamelin was too pessimistic in his analysis of German strength and French weakness. They have determined the German intrusion force was much weaker than Gamelin assumed and argued that the French Army could easily have defeated the German incursion.411

Gamelin’s critics may well be right that he should have acted more aggressively, but they underrate the difficulties he faced launching an offensive. Besides the political problems associated with risking casualties just before an election, a rapid thrust into the Rhineland would have wrecked the mobilization system. The political and military compromises made during the 1920s meant that France’s political and military leaders faced a choice between mobilization and inaction, with very few intermediate possibilities. When Sarraut proved unwilling to accept full mobilization, just weeks before an election, he had to accept remilitarization of the Rhineland with the consequent loss of credibility for France’s alliances with Poland and the Little Entente powers.

410 May, Strange Victory, 142.

Historians of the interwar period have often noted that the timing of the Rhineland invasion, just before an election, was important but have not fully explored why. They have suggested that Sarraut was afraid to risk war right before an election, but have missed one reason why even a short conflict would have been extremely difficult. Tripling required mobilization before any major operations began, and the military elite’s successful campaign against giving soldiers political rights meant that a “Khaki election” was impossible.

The 1872 Law prohibited soldiers from voting, holding office, or standing for office and the 1927/28 system had preserved those prohibitions. Thus, any attempt to push the Germans out of the Rhineland would have required mobilization, which would have removed all of the recalled reservists from the voting rolls and rendered many candidates ineligible to stand for office until demobilized. To confront Germany, the Sarraut government would have had to extend the 1932 Chamber’s mandate by delaying the March/April 1936 elections until after the crisis had passed, or perhaps until a war with Germany had concluded.

Some French leaders were willing to run the risks of intervention, gambling that the Germans would have backed down in the face of a French response, but it was a risky move. In the cabinet Mandel favored action, believing France would quickly prevail, but others, including Pierre-Étienne Flandin believed the Germans could and would resist and called for negotiations. In retrospect, most historians believe the Germans would have either withdrawn or been quickly routed, but that was not clear to leaders at the time.412

412 Sherwood, Georges Mandel and the Third Republic, 178-83; Emerson, The Rhineland Crisis; Piotr Wandycz, The Twilight of French Eastern Alliance.
Instead, they were constrained by a military and political system, both of their own making, that narrowed their options and encouraged inaction.

The 1927/28 Laws set the basis for French defense policy and military organization for the rest of the interwar period, but did not end civil-military contention. During the early-1930s, military and political leaders battled over plans to reduce the size of the Army beneath the levels set in the 1927/28 Laws. Over the course of the early 1930s the crisis deepened until it exploded in a crisis of civil-military relations in December of 1933 when the military elite offered a *de facto* vote of no confidence in the elected government. Weygand and his military colleagues knew that their actions were probably futile, but decided to make a stand anyway. After an acrimonious debate between Weygand and Daladier’s few supporters, and an emotional intervention by Marshal Pétain, France’s senior military commanders officially denounced the government’s defense policy less than twenty-four hours before it was scheduled for a final vote in the Chamber.

The divide between the military elite and political society widened after the February Riots in 1934. Although the riots initially brought a reduction in civil-military tension because of the collapse of the Radical government and the creation of a Center-Right National Union government, the riots also created a widespread fear of fascism and a sense that the Republic was in danger, leading to the creation of the Popular Front. The Popular Front alliance of Radicals, Socialists, and Communist frightened the military elite. Senior generals feared that the Popular Front was a Communist tool to undermine the French state and worried it could be the prelude to a Communist revolt.
Throughout the 1930s, the military elite consistently exaggerated the Communist threat. They interpreted the Popular Front in terms of their own fight against Communist subversion, which had lasted since at least 1919, and could not believe that the Communists were serious about working with other Frenchmen to defeat Germany. Although the military elite’s fears were exaggerated, historians should take them seriously. Much of the French military hierarchy feared that the Popular Front would pave the way for a Communist move against the French state and were determined to resist that move. The military elite’s paranoia over a Communist revolt in the summer of 1940, which historians from Winston Churchill to Martin Alexander have justly ridiculed, was not just an excuse to justify surrendering to the Germans, it represented the logical conclusion of twenty-years of struggling to defend the army and French society from radical influence.

The institutions and structures created out of the great compromise of 1927/28 survived many shocks and attacks on them during the 1930s, and formed the basis of French national defense policy at the outbreak of the Second World War. Those policies had both military and political implications that affected how French leaders acted during the difficult crises that repeatedly confronted the democracies in the mid- and late-1930s. Military and political leaders designed the short-service army created by the great compromise of 1927/28 to fight a long defensive war of attrition. Its offensive capabilities were minimal and the 1927/8 system’s tripling provisions meant that it was dangerous to commit active units to battle without fully mobilizing first.

Under Daladier and Gamelin, the organs created to insure contact and an exchange of ideas between the military elite and the civilians, especially the Conseil
Supérieur de la Guerre, atrophied, in part because of the civil-military crisis of the early-1930s had been expressed through them. The government continued to have contact with military leaders, but usually that contact was with generals who had been hand picked by the government and in committees dominated by civilian politicians. At the moment when the government and military elite should have been asking hard questions about how well capabilities and war plans fit with the government’s diplomatic strategy and the rapidly changing international situation, the military elite retreated into relative isolation and sulked, while political leaders were happy to focus on their own problems and ignore the officer corps.

The lessening of interaction between French commanders and French political leaders reinforced a tendency toward isolation within the military that had been gaining momentum since the end of the Great War. The military elite refined their centralizing doctrines and tried to perfect the complicated mobilization system, but did so with little regard to offering the government strategic flexibility. The failure of the 1927/28 system to give the government graduated options during the Rhineland Crisis should have set off alarm bells in both the political and military elites, but it did not. Instead, the generals continued to tinker with the system the politicians had given them, and the politicians were content to fight over “economic mobilization” and diplomatic policy toward Poland and Czechoslovakia without asking too many questions about what the military could or would do in the event of war.

The civilian reformers who tried to remake the French army in the wake of the Great War wanted to create a Republican Army, but instead helped to drive the army and the Republic further apart. The 1927/28 Laws created a segregated version of French
society, complete with men, women, colonials, soldiers, and civilians that was outside of
the normal political institutions of the French state. The constant conflict between the
leaders of that alternate France and civilian activists and politicians ultimately exploded
into open hostility, before settling into a quiet contempt for civilians shared by much of
the military elite.
CONCLUSION

THE AGE OF THE GENERALS

This dissertation followed the path suggested by Martin Alexander’s *The Republic in Danger* by studying the effects of military politics and civil-military relations on modern French history. By studying the French Army’s relationship to politics and the civilian state during the 1920s and early 1930s it has been able to establish that Marshal Pétain and General Weygand’s usurpation of political authority in June of 1940 grew out of twenty years of civil-military conflicts. The bitter civil-military struggles of the interwar era led to a redefinition of military identity in opposition to the democratic political system.

On 3 September 1939, when the Radical-led coalition government of Edouard Daladier declared war on Germany, General Maurice Gamelin, who had loyalty supported Daladier during his ritual humiliation before the *Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre* meeting in December of 1933, assumed command of the French Army. Gamelin followed the prescriptions offered by the defensive variant of *bataille conduite* that captured the French officer corps in the late 1920s and waited for the Germans to attack.

While Gamelin and his army awaited the German invasion, French domestic politics continued. On 21 March of 1940, continuing divisions in the Chamber and

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among Daladier’s ministers led to the fall of his government and his rival and Minister of Finance, Paul Reynaud succeeded him. Unlike Daladier, who had aligned with the dominant strain of French military thought, Reynaud had been Charles de Gaulle’s strongest civilian support in the 1930s, after de Gaulle had abandoned *bataille conduite*. Despite Daladier’s fall, Reynaud needed the support of his faction of the Radical Party and felt compelled to keep Daladier as Minister of National Defense and War. Daladier, in turn demanded that Gamelin remain as supreme commander.414 After Germany’s invasion of Norway and Denmark appeared to catch Gamelin unprepared, Reynaud demanded his resignation during an 8 May 1940 cabinet meeting. Daladier defended his general declaring, “If he is guilty, then I am” and resigned himself, probably hoping to bring down the Reynaud government. Reynaud responded by announcing his own resignation and began preparing a new cabinet without Daladier.415

The German invasion of 10 May 1940 came before a new government had been organized and forced Reynaud to rescind his resignation. The invasion gave Gamelin a reprieve, and in obedience to the principles of *bataille conduite*, he ordered his best units to advance into central Belgium to aid the Belgian Army in defending Brussels and keep Belgium’s population, natural resources, and industrial base safely in Allied hands for the expected war of attrition. In so doing, he fell into the German Army’s trap and exposed his best units to encirclement when the German panzer divisions ruptured his lines further


south between Dinant and Sedan. In the midst of the battle, the continuing rivalry between Reynaud and Daladier led to a new crisis in which Reynaud dismissed Daladier on 18 May 1940 and then Gamelin on 20 May.

When Reynaud summoned Maxime Weygand from Syria to take command of the Allied forces in France, he handed the aging general a battle that was almost certainly already lost. The German victories in May and June of 1940 reflected Germany’s population and economic superiority compared to France, Britain’s failure to provide more substantial aid to France, the inadequacy of bataille conduite, the overall weakness of the 1927/28 military system’s reserve forces, and Gamelin’s mistakes. The German military victory meant that Germany would occupy France, but it need not have led to the fall of the Third Republic and the creation of the Vichy Regime. When France’s military and political leaders recognized that they had lost the war, a new battle began, between the politicians and the generals over how the government would react to the defeat. The generals’ victory over the politicians brought Pétain to power and destroyed the Third Republic.

Although historians of the interwar era and the French military have presented the 1920s as an era of stabilization and recovery, this dissertation revealed that beneath the seemingly calm exterior, the 1920s witnessed a growing civil-military conflict that

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416 Alexander, Republic in Danger, 185; SHAT 7 N 624 Supplement Maurice Gamelin “Note sur les tendances du haut commandement Italien et les mesures correspondantes qu’elles appellent du cote français.” Ironically, Gamelin had warned his subordinates that the French Army was vulnerable to a rapid mechanized attack launched through terrain it believed to be impassable. Unfortunately for Gamelin, he had warned his commanders in the Alps to be on the look out for such an attack from the Italian Army.

417 Weygand had been summoned to replace his own successor General Gamelin on 19 May 1940 after civilian leaders lost faith in General Gamelin’s conduct of the Battle of France. By the time Weygand assumed command of the army, the Germans had already ruptured Gamelin’s front and were completing the encirclement of the best units of the British and French Armies. Weygand tried and failed to break the encirclement and then made a last stand on the Somme.
erupted in 1933 and remained unresolved for decades. During the 1920s, the French military elite grew progressively further apart from the political regime. General Georges-Henri Brissaud-Desmaillet’s secret annex to *Armée Minima* showed that during the 1920s, French generals were already considering defying the civilian government. The 1927/28 Army Laws offered a chance to restore stability to the military system, but the truce collapsed in the early-1930s.

After a reformed *Cartel des Gauches* returned to power in 1932, civil-military relations deteriorated sharply when the new government demanded deep cuts that threatened to destroy the 1927/28 military system by further reducing the term of conscript service. Rather than adopting a conciliatory strategy as Pétain had done in the mid-1920s, the new généralissime, General Weygand directly confronted the government. Weygand’s December 1933 humiliation of Edouard Daladier showed that the crisis was deepening, but rather than face the military’s challenge, civilian leaders ignored the growing problem. The 1933 Crisis showed that the military was not strong enough to depose the government, but nor was the government strong enough to punish its generals for their insubordination.

Although the rest of the 1930s appeared to pass in relative peace, beneath the surface the military elite was constantly searching for domestic threats. Martin Alexander has shown that General Maurice Gamelin struggled to repair France’s strained civil-military relations during the late-1930s, but without more help from his fellow generals and from Daladier, Gamelin’s efforts were hopeless. By the mid-1930s, most

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generals had effectively written off the government and had withdrawn into the friendly confines of the military’s alternate version of France. As the Popular Front gained strength, the generals prepared plans to meet the feared Communist rising with armed force in the streets of Paris. Instead of standing with a Republican regime under threat from extremists at home and powerful foreign enemies, the generals stood apart from the government and counted it among the dangers facing France.

When Daladier returned to the War Ministry during the Popular Front government, he preferred to ignore the civil-military divide by ending effective consultations between the government and senior officers through preventing the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre from meeting and refusing to attend the few meetings he could not prevent. By refusing to open a dialogue with the military elite and dealing only with his hand-selected generals, Daladier missed a golden opportunity to affect a rapprochement between the military elite and the French Left that had recognized the threat posed by Germany and was ready to embark on a massive military build-up.

Over the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, civilian leaders allowed the military elite to become a virtually autonomous organization and to challenge the government’s authority without paying any price. The growing civil-military conflict led to a disaster in June of 1940 when General Weygand and Marshal Pétain told Paul Reynaud that they would refuse to obey any order to carry on the fight from abroad and insisted on an immediate political surrender. Faced with another crisis of civil-military relations, the civilians again proved incapable of asserting their claim to rule France in the face of opposition from the military caste.
This time the civil-military crisis destroyed the Republic. Rather than firing the insubordinate generals, Reynaud, like Daladier in December 1933, froze. However, unlike Daladier, Reynaud did not have the luxury of ignoring the problem. With the Germans taking more territory every day and with the French Army collapsing around him, Reynaud had to impose his will or resign. He chose resignation, which signaled the political dominance of the supporters of the Armistice. In the face of Reynaud’s abdication, President Albert Lebrun chose Pétain, the leader of the victorious cabinet faction, to succeed him. By the end of July, the Third Republic was dead and Pétain, who established himself in Vichy, was head of the French State. The German Army conquered France, and then the French Army conquered the Third Republic.

The politics of voting have loomed large in this dissertation and in the failure of French civil-military relations under the Third Republic. The failure of the Third Republic’s segregated objective control model challenges the “academic” critique of contemporary American civil-military relations. Contemporary American studies of civil-military relations have generally argued that the American military has become heavily partisan and over involved in politics. Richard Kohn suggested that the problem could be solved by stripping soldiers of the right to vote. 419

The effects of denying soldiers political rights during the Third Republic calls Kohn and the other academics’ critique of American civil-military relations into question. This dissertation established that removing political rights from soldiers in Third

Republican France did not remove the military from politics. Instead of protecting the political system from military influence, it enhanced military leaders’ power by making them the only authorized representatives of their men. The attempt at segregated objective control guaranteed that the military’s relationship to the regime was the source of chronic conflict between the military elite, the civilian government, and political factions. Over the late-nineteenth century, military and political leaders learned how to manipulate the exclusionary laws to allow the military to intervene in factional political struggles, and sometimes to pull the army into political conflicts for the advantage of a parliamentary faction.

During the interwar era, French generals established their independence from the civilian political system. Military leaders’ tried to use race and gender to protect their organization and cultural values from class-based politics and evolved a military identity that emphasized separation from electoral politics, the slow accretion of professional expertise, and paternal authority.

By drawing on previously unused documents in the French Army’s archive, this dissertation has shown the redefinition of military identity allowed women to gain new opportunities inside the French Army and to realize significant gains in prestige and respect. Over the course of the early 1920s, women integrated themselves into the army by building professional credentials in an organization that valued professionalism and length of service. Although women initially faced strong hostility from many soldiers and senior civilian functionaries who feared women would undermine military professionalism, they eventually won acceptance as valued members of the army’s
organization. By the late-1920s, France’s top generals viewed women as valuable allies in the struggle to maintain the army as a bastion of conservative order.

The combination of race, gender, and paternal authority proved too complex for the military elite to integrate and prevented major changes in the role of men from the colonies inside the French Army. Although initially open to racial change and resistant to gender change, military leaders reversed their positions when faced with the danger of disrupting colonial hierarchies. French military leaders feared that expanding opportunities for colonized men would disrupt colonial hierarchies by challenging the belief in the superiority of whites that underwrote European colonialism. As military identity adapted to the presence of large groups of women in army life, officers had an increasingly difficult time accepting non-white men. Senior officers feared that allowing black or North African men to better integrate into the army would endanger their female employees and the racial hierarchies of prestige and power that underpinned France’s control of her colonial empire.

The 1940-1961 period warrants being called the Age of the Generals. From 1940 until 1961, the Army’s interventions in politics dictated the chronology of French history. The military elite’s complex maneuvers during the 1920s and the civil-military crises that resulted from them opened a new era in French military and political history. During the nineteenth century France’s political system experienced regular crises, but the French Army generally supported whatever government was in place, and accepted the regular changes of regime. However, in June of 1940, the civil-military failures of the 1920s and 1930s led to Pétain’s seizure of power and opened a period of direct military intervention
in politics. In response to Pétain’s decision to surrender General Charles de Gaulle rebelled and created the Free French. Before the Liberation in 1944, de Gaulle had to compete with two other officers for control of the government in exile. General Henri Giraud challenged de Gaulle’s position and Pétain’s deputy Admiral François Darlan, who changed sides after being captured in Operation Torch, claimed to be the supreme head of French forces in North Africa until his assassination on 24 December 1942. De Gaulle’s victory over his rivals unified the anti-Vichy front, but also confirmed military dominance over political leaders, who remained secondary figures within the Free French.

After the Liberation, de Gaulle tried and failed to retain his preeminent position in politics, but the civilians’ victory over de Gaulle did not banish the military from politics. In the midst of the Algerian War, the French Army reasserted its claim to protect and guide the country by launching a rebellion against the Fourth Republic. French generals in Algeria demanded that de Gaulle return to office with emergency powers and threatened to invade European France if the civilian government refused to comply. When the Fourth Republic’s leaders attempted to resist, French paratroopers conquered Corsica and the National Assembly accepted de Gaulle as premier and voted him emergency powers. When de Gaulle began negotiations with the Algerian rebels and appeared to be preparing to abandon French Algeria, the army again intervened in politics, this time to unseat him. Unlike the previous military interventions, the 1961 Putsch failed when de Gaulle opposed them and showed a willingness to fight to defend the Republic against an illegal military intrusion into politics. De Gaulle’s victory over
the 1961 Putsch and its remnants in the OAS reestablished civilian control of the French military and ended the crisis of civil-military relations that began in the 1920s.
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