



TOWARDS THE FALL OF THE FRENCH FIFTH REPUBLIC

Posted on August 1, 2020 by Philippe Fabry



The complete lockdown of my country, in March to May 2020, was a good opportunity to sit down and think about its political and institutional condition, a topic that particularly worries me ever since the Yellow Vest riots at the end of 2018, when I, and a lot of my fellow countrymen, felt the regime of the Fifth Republic falter. From that moment, the possibility of the collapse of the regime obsessed me, along with my previous thoughts on the real nature of the Fifth Republic as political regime. I tried to figure out what is to be expected in the coming months and years in my country, using my usual method of historic comparative analysis.

Here's why I think that the French Fifth Republic is not a democracy, but a new Ancien Régime, and will therefore be destroyed by a new Revolution. And this is how it will happen.

A New Ancien Régime

The first thing to say is that France is not a democracy, and that's true from the very beginning of the Fifth Republic, in 1958, and has only worsened since.

Usually in France, we think that our Constitution implements a possible form of democracy, one of the many different sorts existing in the West, and showing only a few constitutional and institutional variations from these; and that the others differ amongst each other in the same way and range, and that they together thus draw a spectrum of possibilities in the political realm called, "democracy," which constitutes the enlightened form of government in the modern West.

That's completely wrong. All our European neighbor-states have identical constitutions and rules about some crucial points, while France shows a radical singularity. Thus, France is not another democracy among others; it's the exception to the rule. All great democracies in Europe (United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain), are parliamentary democracies, where head of state and head of government are clearly separated, and the Government is accountable to parliament. It's also the case in India, in Japan, Canada, and Australia. It was also the case under the French Third Republic. It's not the case in France today.

The separation of power is not even strictly implemented, as in the American constitution, in which the President is both head of state and government, but the Congress is independent from him.

France has a so-called "semi-presidential system," in common with countries like Russia, Syria, Algeria or Egypt, which are not democracies at all. France is not a "democracy" in the usual sense of this word.

But nor is it a dictatorship – France under King Louis XVI was not a dictatorship, neither was Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II. France is an exception, an intruder in the democratic world. There is no balance between powers. The President isn't accountable before anyone, as long as his term lasts; but he has the power to dissolve the Parliament. The presidential function is a sort of political gravity pit – as time passes, everything ends up depending on it.

In a society, political mores and institutions form a feedback loop. When the Fifth Republic was founded, democratic culture in France had been well established for more than eighty years. The “Republican monarchy,” as the French constitutionalist, Maurice Duverger, called it, gradually altered and erased this democratic habitus – court manners now came to rule the political world and the media, the arts and the economy. The French political ecosystem today matches the institutions of the Fifth Republic, that is to say, we are now culturally this “Republican monarchy,” which we were previously, in the 1960s and the 1970s, only formally. Among our neighbors, the seat of political power is the Parliament. In France, it's the Elysée palace, the presidential residence – and it's just not the main seat, but the only one. There's no debate there; everything is decided in the backrooms, and the French people only hear some rumors in the press about why and how important decisions are made.

This return to a pre-democratic political culture, as in the Ancien Régime or the German Empire in the 1900s, has had a spectacular outcome – missing real democratic debate, the French people show their discontent with riots, such as the Yellow Vest movement.

Here, I should reiterate what I said in my last book, *La Structure de l'Histoire* (The Structure of History) – that the parliamentary Nation-State is the result of a long deterministic process. First, a feudal society evolves towards centralized monarchy through the growing power of the feudal king, and the creation of a representative assembly made up of different parts of the feudal system (English Model Parliament in 1295, French Estates General in 1302). The last stage of the process towards national parliamentarism is what I call a “national revolution,” a revolutionary cycle which transform a regime of centralized monarchy into a parliamentary regime, an autocratic power into a democratic-representative power. This stage lasts approximately forty to fifty years, as in the two English revolutions (1641-1689), the French Revolution and the July Revolution (1789-1830), or the Spanish revolution and Spanish transition to democracy (1931-1977). The scheme is always the same: Fall of the old regime, an attempt to establish a moderate new regime, economic collapse and the rise of the radical revolutionaries, civil war and military dictatorship, authoritarian regime, then finally an “easygoing” revolutionary episode.

In my previous book, *Atlas des guerres à venir* (Atlas of the Wars to Come), I also described the historical phenomenon which I termed, "avenger-imperialist," or "revolutionary imperialist," a nationalist dictator. who simultaneously is a product of a "national revolution," who seeks to end this revolution by way of a synthetic new order by amalgamating revolutionary democracy with the autocracy of the old regime; and seeks to insure the domination of his people by what he sees as "natural borders." Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin or even Mussolini or Francisco Franco are such figures.

So here's the point: If the deterministic historical process dictates a one-way evolution towards a parliamentary nation-state, a reality we observe in every great European state, how is it that France has regressed to a sort of new Ancien Régime in the middle of the twentieth century? It can't be because of any sort of advancement that France had made, in comparison to its neighbors, since the United Kingdom is its elder in the fulfilment of this historical path and is still ruled under the same parliamentary system we find in Germany, Spain or Italy, which all accomplished their national revolutions later than France.

The answer, in fact, is to be found in Russia. This country is remarkable for having passed through two national revolutions in a row during the twentieth century; first in 1917, then in 1991, which is ongoing (in which Putin is a new avenger-imperialist; but that's another topic).

How is such a thing possible? Because the first Russian revolution took place at the same time as the German revolution (1918), and the Russian and German revolutionary-imperialists, Stalin and Hitler, crashed into each other. Normally, a revolutionary imperialist expends the power of his country, unites against him all the neighboring countries, and is finally crushed by their coalition, and his defeat finally establishes the borders of his country by terminating its imperialists ambitions. The typical case is Napoleonic France. Hitler's Germany also matched this scheme, because Hitler was, as Napoleon, the aggressor, and created the unity of the nations against him.

But Stalin, who was on the same trajectory, was attacked by Hitler before he himself could attack Germany. Thenceforth he was not an aggressor, but a defender of the Russian homeland, in what is known in Russia as the "Great Patriotic War," which legitimized the Communist regime internationally, making USSR one of the Allies against Hitler, and internally, where the Communist regime become the savior of the motherland.

This historical accident derailed the Russian trajectory, changing the revolutionary – and as such, temporary - Soviet regime into a new "old regime," which is to say, a regime strongly accepted by the

people, not only by the means of terror but because of its great prestige, its authority which faced no serious questioning, and propped by national pride because of its imperial capacity. Such had been the case of France in the 18th-century, right after the numerous conquests of Louis XIV and the victory in the war of the Spanish Succession; it had been the case in Germany, united under Prussian rule, after the victory against France in 1871; it had been the case of Russia after a series of wars that took place in the second half of the 19th-century, which had resulted, in the extreme extent, in the Russian Empire in Europe, against the Ottomans. That is why the Soviet regime, in 1991, collapsed, as all "Ancien Régimes" are supposed to, that is to say, by a national revolution.

This brief look at the Russian case proves that in some cases, a temporary structural backward trajectory can be observed, a one-off regression from the historical path.

And it's precisely this kind of historical accident which is the cause of France's current institutional problem. In France, the historical accident is the defeat in 1940. No other European country had to face such an upheaval so late in its national historical path, after becoming a parliamentary nation-state. In fact, at this time, only two great European countries had reached this stage of evolution: United Kingdom and France. The defeat provoked the collapse of the French democratic regime of the Third Republic, and the establishment of an authoritarian regime for a few years with Vichy France, and which opened a new revolutionary phase. It must be noted, indeed, that a national revolution always starts with a painful episode that discredits the previous regime, destroys its authority and plunges the population into disarray. Such was the case of the humiliating defeat of France in the Seven Years' War, which cost the monarchy the people's trust, inspiring a predictive resentful song, *Comprenez-vous?* (Do you understand?), attributed to Voltaire: "When we'll be out of tears / When we'll be exasperated / We'll know well to who, Madam / We'll have to bend our neck / Do you understand?"

It was, similarly the case of Russian and German defeats in the First World War, ending the Russian and German Empires with revolutions. And we saw again the same scheme when the USSR, humiliated by defeat in Afghanistan, and with its incapacity to match Reagan's IDS, along with the Chernobyl disaster, collapsed in 1991.

Such catastrophic defeat leads to an all-round questioning of values and the ruling system, and generates a collective impulse towards a new political model, through a national revolution. Thus began a new revolutionary phase, in France, including its radicals (Communists) and its synthetic dictator, an avenger-imperialist – General Charles de Gaulle, who was often called a Bonapartist,

unsurprisingly. Of course, this national revolution was less violent and its consequences lower than the first occurrence, but it seems that it's always so with such an accidental repetition of a national revolution – in the same way, the collapse of USSR was much less bloody than the Revolution of 1917, and Putin is not Stalin.

In fact, it was not the first time France has gone through a throw-back and new national revolution. As a matter of fact, France went through three national revolutions: The first started in 1789, the third in 1940, and the second in 1870, after the humiliating defeat against Prussia. Then, France suffered the Paris Commune, then an aborted avenger-imperialist with general Boulanger, who never took power, allowing democracy to be established quickly.

But de Gaulle failed to establish the regime he wanted in 1946 – the Fourth Republic was in fact a restoration of the Third. And the Fifth Republic is the product of a coup, which was its original sin. De Gaulle came back to power with a putsch – or under the threat of a putsch, which is the same thing. The Constitution wasn't written by an Assembly elected for that, which is the normal way to adopt a constitution in the democratic tradition, but by a man – Michel Debré – on behalf of another – de Gaulle – and then offered to the people by way of a referendum. So, there it is: The French Fifth Republic was set up by an avenger-imperialist.

As well, this regime wasn't contested afterwards, and it came to accentuate its vices through the many successive amendments to the Constitution. That's how, like the Soviets in the 1980s, we again have today, in France, a new pre-national revolution regime, a new Ancien Régime: a non-democracy, marked by all the vices of this kind of aging system – very little social mobility, very much depending on the State and its apparatus, and diminishing freedom of speech.

A New Revolution

With that being said, where are we headed? The answer is quite obvious: A new national revolution. It's the way defined by the determinism I explained earlier; and even when an accidental regression occurs on the path to historical determinism, a country continues moving forward, as Russia did after 1945. And this implies that it follows the same determinism.

What is the first stage of a national revolution, the trigger of the regime's collapse? A humiliating event

that seriously undermines its authority, especially one which questions its core-legitimacy and is the institution that is the main pillar of its supremacy. In the 2020 France of the Fifth Republic, the most cited pillar of the State's legitimacy is the so called "modèle social français" (the French social model), which is based on a very powerful welfare-state and the promise of an unrivaled healthcare, brought about by the largest investment of the European Union in this sector – 11.3 % of the GDP.

In dealing with Covid-19, France obviously did much worse than Germany, and not much better than Spain or Italy – whose healthcare systems were described in the mainstream French media up until March 2020 as less professional and less efficient. France still had a worse mortality rate per million inhabitants than the United States or Brazil, despite the efforts of the French media to hide this reality, by speaking only about the total number of deaths.

No tests, no masks. In the weeks following, this important information the French government could not hide, and it had a disastrous effect on the population's morale, like going to war with too few guns and missing ammunition. Perhaps it's understandable, though annoying, that an "average" country is not ready to face a pandemic. But it's a humiliation, in a country which prides itself on its healthcare, to appear so helpless. Especially at a time when the authority of the State is already low and lacks legitimacy, just a year after the Yellow Vest crisis, in which the regime already seemed on the verge of collapse.

In addition, the French economy will be one of the most affected by the consequences of the coronavirus – experts expect GDP to drop by more than 10 %, and a million French workers will probably lose their jobs within a year. A ten-fold Yellow Vest crisis is expected to come about.

What Will This New National Revolution Look Like?

Historionomy can help us to draw a sort of cone of possibilities. Here's the method: We have to re-examine the cases of national revolutions and avenger-imperialists in French History (Revolutionary and Imperial France, the Paris Commune and the Boulangist crisis, the defeat of 1940, and the de Gaulle presidency) in order to figure out the main common stages and the variables causing the variance between the different cases. Then we will be able to compare this model with other main cases mentioned previously (the German revolution of 1918 and the Third Reich; the Russian revolutions of 1917 and 1991) to ensure its reliability. Then we will use this model to predict how the political and institutional situation in France could evolve in the next years.

Here's the table summarizing the French case:



It is to be noted that the Revolution-Empire cycle lasted 26 years (1788-1815), the Paris Commune-Boulangist crisis cycle lasted 19 years (but it was aborted), and the 1940 defeat-de Gaulle presidency lasted 29 years (1940-1969).

Here's the table summarizing the Russian case:



And, lastly, here's the table summarizing the German case:



Before trying to figure out the future of the French Republic, a few remarks must first be made.

The French Revolution-Empire case, the first Russian case and the German case are about a first national revolution, not a replica, and show a greater degree of revolutionary fervor, with much more violent consequences concerning the number of victims and geopolitical upheaval. Replicas, in France as in Russia, despite a similar path, show a much less tragic outcome on these points, probably because ideology was less influential: Jacobinism, Bolshevism, Nazism were very powerful ideologies. Nothing like these is visible in the other cases.

Besides, there are two factors that are quite new and could affect the development of the scheme. On one hand, the ethnic situation of the country, after half a century of mass immigration that led to the appearance of large ethnic and religious minorities, especially Muslims from North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the regime collapse could degenerate towards a 1990s Yugoslavia-like scenario, with episodes of racial war and ethnic cleansing.

On the other hand, France is now a province of the American Empire, belonging to NATO, and its stability is of strategic concern for Washington. One could wonder how America would react to a collapse of the French Fifth Republic: Would it let the revolution go its way in a "wait-and-see" posture,

or intervene immediately to ensure the stability of Europe? In case of a plunge into the chaos of an interethnic conflict, will America act like it did against the Serbs in the Bosnian War, or accuse the French people of genocide, if the conflict results in the expulsion of some populations recently immigrated?

These are questions I did not incorporate in my projection, because the model says nothing about them, but it must be said that they can, at any stage, influence the chain of events.

That being said, here is the projection resulting from the application of our model:



Philippe Fabry is a lawyer and a theorist of history. His approach to history is found in a [recent interview with the Postil](#). He is the author of [Rome, From Libertarianism to Socialism](#), [A History of the Century to Come](#), and [The Structure of History](#). His personal website is: <https://www.historionomie.net>.

The [image](#) shows Antoine de Boissy d'Anglas being presented the head of Deputy Jean Feraud by Jacobins in 1795. The painting, by Auguste Vinchon was completed in 1831.

