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The relations between the military and the politics during periods of political uncertainty. The French case

In this paper, I propose to analyse the logics of recomposition of the relations between the military institution and the politics. My hypothesis is that professional armies can not be dominated yet by legitimate governments. A process of professionalization products an institution that becomes « like the others ». Charles Moskos (1977) describes this process in his books and articles. I think that the politics have to express more confidence in the military profession. The military and above all the General officers are representative of a more autonomous institution.

The public opinion, in France at least, has a very positive opinion of the armies. French people think they could trust the armies because this is now a professional institution that is doing its job properly. It is the ransom of professionalism. The gap between public opinion and the professional army is widening. The public opinion is more indifferent. But, to my mind, it is a « positive indifference ». The military institution has to accept that and to assume to be a professional institution « like the others ».

The specificities of the military profession erase in front of the professional values. That's why, the relations between the institution and the politics are changing. In France, for example, the commander in chief of the armies speaks publicly to explain how much the armies need means to

achieve their assignments. A professional public institution, like the armies, can use the political uncertainties (due to presidential elections for example) to emphasize their professional interests. Civilian and military officers can quarrel about the legitimacy to represent in public debates the interests of the institution and of the profession.

Indeed, this is a new challenge for democratic States to accord a new professional place to the armies in the society and in public sector. The evolution of law that accords in France the rights to the military to create professional association (since 2015) is very important to understand these progressive logics of recomposition of the civilian control of the armies. Now, the military can organize themselves in interests groups in the authorities of consultation.

In a first part, I propose to analyse this transformation process in France during specific periods : the three cohabitations. These periods would have been important periods of transformation of the institution due to the main political uncertainties. However, it does not give more power to the military.

So, we will compare, in a second part, these three periods with the last period in France (2008-2016) during which the two Presidents – Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande – were strong presidents. They have made decision in organizational structure of the armies to, for the first one, control directly the military (by putting aside the Ministry of defense) and to, for the second, give again power to the Ministry of defense.

1 : Civil-military relations during cohabitations

The first point is that there is one major reform per period of cohabitation.

- First cohabitation : A Military Programming Act (n°87-343 of 22 May 1987) relating to military equipment for the years 1987-1991. This law engages France for many new military equipment.
- Second cohabitation : A Military Programming Act (n°94-507 of 23 June 1994) on the lessons learned from the first Gulf War for the years 1995 to 2000. We should also note a new White Paper in 1994.
- Third cohabitation : The suspension of the military service and the professionalization of the armed forces (Law n°97-1019 of 28 October 1997 reforming the national service). But there is no new law of military programming during this cohabitation. The professionalization of the armies was in the presidential program of Jacques Chirac.

The second point to note is the wish to conduct of the process of internal and structural transformation of the armies during these three periods.

- After the first cohabitation, the new government has slowed down the process of transformation. Military spending has been reduced.
- The second cohabitation was, according to Louis Gauthier (1999), a period during which François Mitterrand has succeeded in preparing the political consensus of the reform of the armies by avoiding "the danger of a crisis of the military institution". The goal was to begin a "modernization of the forces that involves a smaller, more professional army, more compact nuclear deterrence and a moderate decline in defense policies".
- The third cohabitation was marked by a major administrative decision in 1999 about the responsibilities and the organization of the General Secretariat for the administration of the Ministry of Defense. This decision was the beginnings of a desire to share and rationalize jointly the administrative organization of the three armies.

The third point is that the periods of cohabitation are periods of experimentations.

- First cohabitation : Development of the participative innovation approach in the Ministry of Defense. An Admiral proposes this method to solve the problems on fighting ships.
- Second cohabitation : Political dispute over the question of the means to be devoted to nuclear deterrence. The question of the maintenance of underground explosions arises.
- Third cohabitation : The institution has to maintain means to ensure the system of computer-calculated explosions (after the end of underground explosions) and to finance the process of professionalization of the armies. The Minister of Defense must conduct the reform even though he has not wanted it.

These three periods of political cohabitation show that there is a global consensus on defense issues in France. Some experimentations have even been possible. However, these are periods in which the military is relatively absent from decisions. Of course there may be political uncertainties but they reinforce the power of politics over the military. Let us now see what it is in comparison with the most recent mandates.

2 : Comparison with the last two presidential mandates

There was a certain neutralization during the cohabitations of the structural reforms of the armed

forces. That's why it is interesting to compare these periods of political uncertainties with others periods which are more stables. I have choosen the two last presidential mandates because of the opposite decisions of the presidents Sarkozy and Hollande.

- During his mandate, the president Sarkozy has decided to reinforce the power of the commander in chief of the French armies. In 2009, an administrative decision (Decree 15 July 2009-869) considerably strengthens the powers of the Chief of the Defense Staff to the detriment of the Minister of Defense. The novelty is that the Chief of the Armed Forces, under the authority of the President of the Republic and the Government, "responsible for the employment of the forces, is in charge of military operations." The commander in chief gains a central role both in the organization of defense and in the definition of human resources management policy. In addition, the commander in chief now has full authority over the Chiefs of the National Navy, the Army and the Air Force, who advise and assist him. It seems clear from this decision that the supreme military authority becomes an immediate partner of the chief of the armed forces (the President of the Republic), thus accrediting the hypothesis of a rise in power and autonomy of the military in relation to politics.

- The President François Hollande has another vision of the distribution of the organizational power in the military field between politics and military. On September 2013, a new administrative decision (decree n°2013-816 on the powers of the Minister of Defense and the commander in chief of the Armed Forces) has again redistributed the cards. If the Minister of Defense "prepares and implements defense policy in accordance with the general guidelines of the Prime Minister", which has long been the case; the commander in chief "assists the Minister in his duties with respect to the use of forces. He is responsible for the operational use of forces." Henceforth, and again, it may be said, this decision makes of the commander in chief the assistant to the Minister of Defense. Obviously, then, politics seeks to staunch the power of professionals and to regain control on operations and on this institution at all levels.

These evolutions mean, I think, that the military professionnall group is more in reality dependant of a strong politics which can decide of the organization of the armies in function of his ideological line. But the military professional group is now more and more resistant. It was the case in France at many times when the commanders in chief spoke themselves in the press to recall the main issues of the Defense.

Conclusion

We conclude tentatively that when the political power is low, the military cannot express more their interests and their wishes ; like during the three cohabitations periods. When the political power is stronger, the military are more dependant on political decisions. But the professionalization of the armies have changed the relations in France between politics and military.

Furthermore, the multiplication of books on war and strategy, written or not by military, after operations in others countries contribute to speak about the institution even if the public opinion express about the armies a « positive indifference » due to the professional trust according to the military. Therefore, the professional military can now counterbalance the civilian and political control.

The military dare express themselves more. The commander in chief has a key role. But we can better explain the reforms of the armies with an economic look than a political look.

Bibliography

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