

An aerial 3D topographic map of France, showing the country's terrain in shades of green, yellow, and brown. A semi-transparent French flag is overlaid on the map, with the blue, white, and red vertical stripes clearly visible. The background shows the surrounding seas and islands.

The Geopolitics of France

theGeopolity

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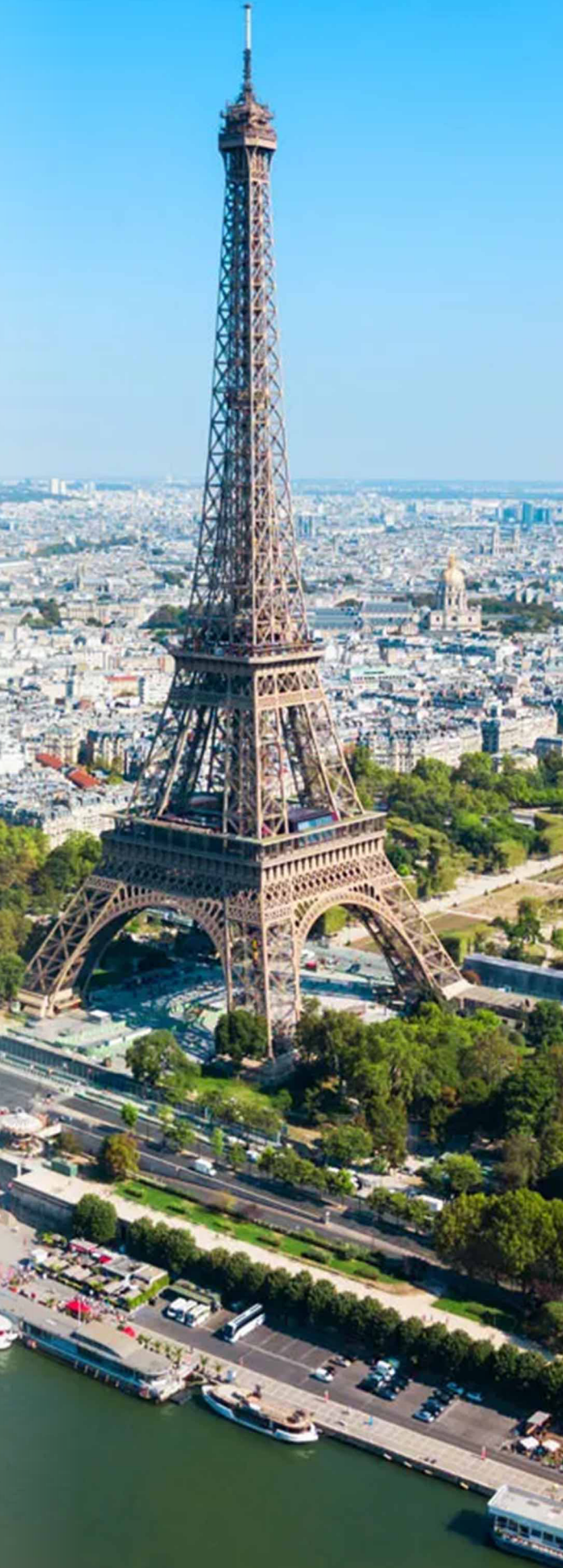
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What are France's Geopolitical imperatives?

The nation we know as France is the product of a centuries-long evolution, during which a complex of regional societies was welded together by political action, by the desire for territorial expansion, by a succession of monarchs, ministers and soldiers.

What we know about France is what we have received from the Romans who occupied France from the 2nd century until the collapse of Western Roman Empire in 476 AD. The Frankish Kingdom emerged after the collapse of the Roman Empire. This kingdom consolidated power and expanded territorially, becoming known as "France." During the 8th century, the Kingdom of the Franks recreated the Western Roman Empire under Charlemagne. Charlemagne saw himself as a continuation of the Roman Empire and split his empire between his sons after he passed away in 814, these became the eventual borders of France.

The French people have a long history of wars. Their first contact with Muslims was in the 8th century when the Franks, who were the dominant christian kingdom in Europe ruled over France. The Umayyad Caliphate had conquered the Iberian Peninsula (modern day Spain) and turned their attention to the Pyrenees for the conquest of the Franks. The Muslim armies conquered Barcelona and Septemaina in Southern France and used this as a base to press

north. In the Battle of Tours in 732, the Muslim army was defeated, and the Franks led by Charles Martel and his son went on to push the Muslims back over the Pyrenees which acted as a buffer and brought to an end the Islamic expansion into Western Europe. The Muslim armies were only 200 miles from Paris. The French would play a prominent role in the crusades to restore christian access to the Holy Land in the 12th century.

The French fought wars over land with English monarchs, including the Hundred Years War, then against the Habsburgs, especially after the latter inherited Spain and appeared to surround France. French royal power reached its peak with the reign of Louis XIV (1642–1715), known as the Sun King when French culture dominated Europe.

France is in the middle of Europe and sits on the north European plain. It has coasts on both the Mediterranean and English Channel. It must develop an army, since it must defend itself from any nation that becomes powerful enough to challenge it on the continent. After centuries of history, French imperatives are maintaining the French identity, defending the French core Beauce region, protecting Eastern France, where most of its invasions have come from and engaging beyond Europe for wealth and economics.



What was the Context in Pre-Revolutionary France?

The first leader to make himself king of all the Franks was Clovis I of the Merovingian Dynasty in 481 when he routed the last forces of the Roman governors. Clovis was baptised a Christian after his victory against the Visigoths in Southern France in 508. The Merovingians were the first ruling dynasty in France. Like much of Europe the monarchy gave privileges to a faction of society in the form of land ownership. This created France's feudal society and in turn the aristocracy that supported the monarchy and served as a key pillar of royal authority.

France, like much of Europe, remained a feudal nation for over a millennia. France had successive monarchs who believed they were appointed by the grace of God. The nobility held a privileged status and enjoyed substantial political, legal, and social privileges. They were landowners and formed the highest key pillar of French society. The aristocracy along with the clergy enjoyed considerable privileges and wealth too. They owned vast estates and held positions of power and authority. They were exempt from many taxes and often lived in luxury, with elegant residences, fine clothing, and access to education and cultural opportunities. The nobility engaged in hunting, social gatherings, and courtly activities, while the clergy had significant influence over religious and educational matters. The nobility was divided into two: the nobility of the sword (*noblesse d'épée*), which consisted of the old feudal aristocracy and the nobility of the

robe (*noblesse de robe*), which comprised nobles who gained their status through service to the king or by purchasing noble titles.

Most French people for over the millennia lived as peasants and formed over 80% of the population. French peasants lived in rural areas and worked as agricultural labourers. They faced heavy taxation, feudal obligations to the nobility and economic hardships. Peasants typically lived in small, overcrowded cottages and endured difficult living conditions. They were subject to feudal dues, tithes to the Church, and other obligations that significantly affected their livelihoods.

The French monarchy also faced persistent threats from powerful feudal lords and the nobility. These noble families often held significant regional power as France was for much of its history decentralised. The monarchy had to navigate complex relationships with the nobility, striking a balance between asserting its authority and accommodating their privileges and interests.

The context prior to the French revolution was one of social inequality and virtually no chance for social mobility. The wealth and privileges of the nobility and clergy contrasted sharply with the hardships faced by the vast majority of the population. As the 18th century was coming to an end the status quo was struggling for survival.



Did France Establish a Colonial Empire?

The French like their European counterparts were searching for a route to the East and whilst the Portuguese and Spanish landed in the Caribbean and proceeded to colonise South America, the French like the British were searching for a route to the Pacific. Francis I, king of France in 1524, funded the Italian Giovanni da Verrazzano to explore the region between Florida and Newfoundland for a route to the Pacific Ocean. Verrazzano gave the names Francesca and Nova Gall to the land between New Spain and English Newfoundland. In 1605 the French established their first permanent settlement in North America in Acadia in North America, in what is now Nova Scotia, Canada. A few years later Quebec was established.

Through alliances with various Native American tribes, the French were able to exert a loose control over much of the North American continent. The French by 1699 expanded their territorial claims down to the Gulf of Mexico with the foundation of Louisiana in the basin of the Mississippi River.

As the French empire in North America grew, the French also began claiming territory in the West Indies. The first settlement along the South American coast in what is today French Guiana began in 1624.

The current isle of the Commonwealth of Dominica in the eastern Caribbean saw French settlement from the early 1630s. Following this, colonies in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint Lucia were established. The food-producing plantations of these colonies were built and sustained through slavery, with the supply of slave's dependent on the African slave trade. France's most important Caribbean colonial possession was established in 1664, when the colony of Saint-Domingue (today's Haiti) was founded on the western half of the Spanish island of Hispaniola. In the 18th century, Saint-Domingue grew to be the richest sugar colony in the Caribbean.

King Henry IV encouraged various enterprises to establish trade with the African and Asian continents. In 1604, he issued letters patent to merchants to form a company, giving them exclusive rights to Asian trade for 15 years. This led to colonies being established in India's Chandernagore in 1673 and Pondichéry in the southeast in 1674.

Although initial French colonisation primarily occurred in the Americas and in Asia, the French also began to colonise Africa from 1626 with the French presence in Senegal. Initial French colonial projects, partially administered by the French East India

Company, prioritised plantation economies and slave labour. This gave the French access to natural resources including gum arabic, groundnuts (peanuts) and other raw materials. These economies were based on forced African labour, poor living conditions, famines, and disease made enslaved labour conditions particularly lethal across French colonies.

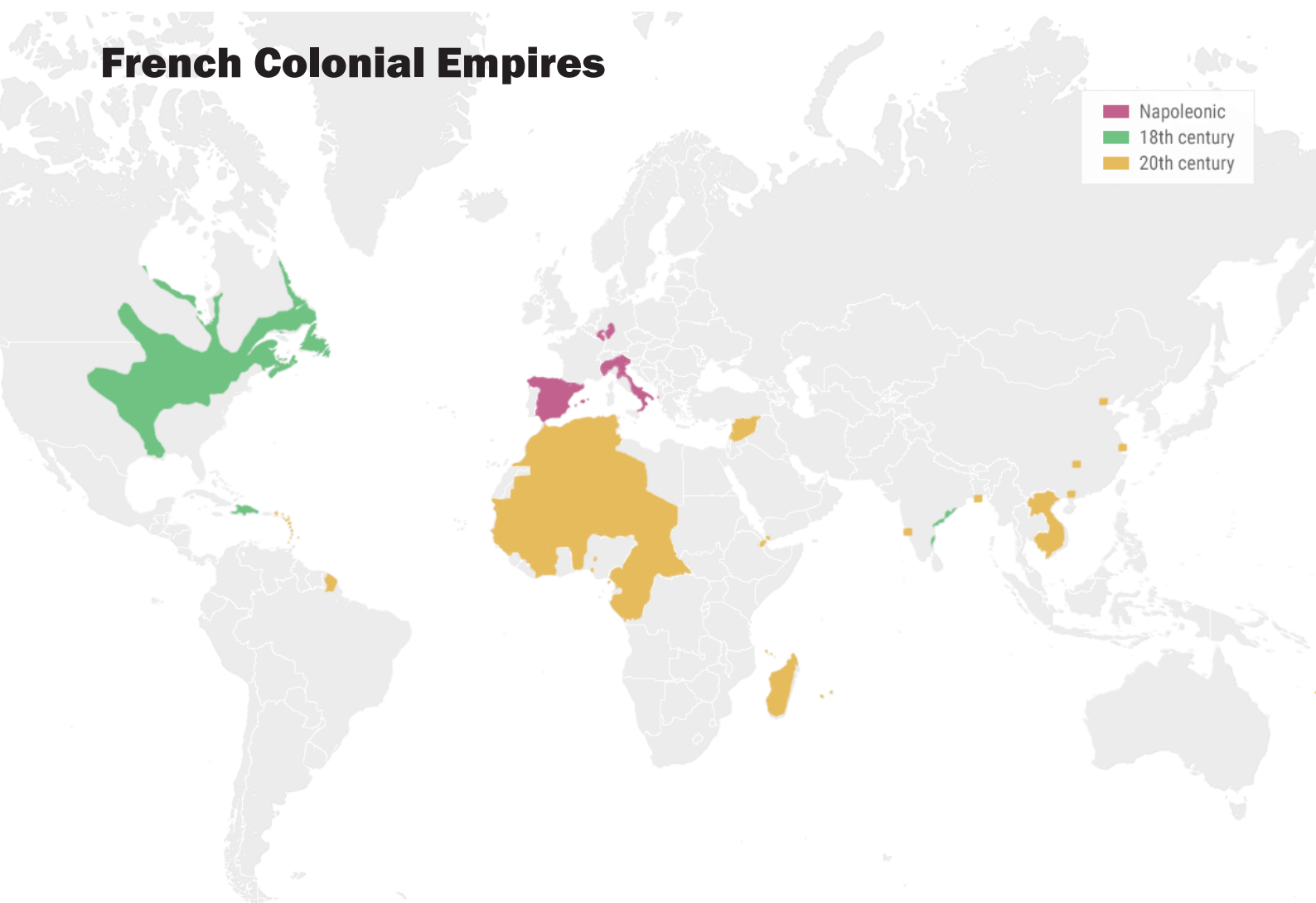
One of the goals of the French colonial project was the Mission Civilisatrice or 'Civilising Mission' intended to 'Civilising' the populations of colonies through the spreading of the French language and Catholicism. In 1884, the Prime Minister of France, Jules Ferry, declared: "*The higher races have a right over the lower races, they have a duty to civilise the inferior races.*"

The French colonial empire comprised overseas colonies and protectorates that came under French rule from the 16th century onwards. A distinction is made between the 'First French Colonial Empire,' that existed until 1814, by which time most of it had been lost or sold, and the 'Second French Colonial Empire,' which began with the conquest of Algiers in 1830.

By the middle of the 18th century, the competition between France and Britain led to a series of colonial conflicts, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of most of the first French colonial empire and the near-complete expulsion of France from the Americas. The Seven Years' War between 1756-1763 was a major global conflict that involved several European powers and their colonial possessions. It's considered the first true world war with the Kingdom of Great Britain, the Kingdom of Prussia, and their allies on one side against France, the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, and their allies.

France's colonial empire was exhausting the nation as the 18th century was drawing to a close. The numerous global military entanglements of the 18th century bankrupted the state, severely infringing on Paris' ability to maintain internal coherence and defend the North European Plain. The depleted treasury was leading to a general breakdown in internal order within France, which many consider one of the main reasons that caused the French Revolution of 1789.

French Colonial Empires



Why Did France Have a Revolution?



The French revolution is considered a seminal event in European history. It sent shockwaves across the continent which was still dominated by monarchies and feudal systems. This architecture was struggling for survival as Europe's population was growing and many wanted political rights and came to see the political landscape as outdated. The overthrow of the French monarchy and order that had lasted centuries was particularly violent during the French revolution and came to be seen by many at the time as the method to bring real change. French citizens radically altered their political landscape, uprooting centuries old institutions. The upheaval saw the execution of King Louis XVI, and his wife Marie Antoinette. The revolution eventually degenerated into a bloodbath, however for many the French Revolution showed the power inherent in the will of the people.

By 1789, the French monarchy Under the inept King Louis XVI was bankrupt due to numerous wars and the monarch's lavish spending. In an effort to raise money to reduce the national debt and deficit the King summoned the ancient parliament and eventually the Estates-General, which represented the clergy, the aristocracy, and the Third Estate (the commoners). The King proposed increasing tax on the privileged classes, who refused to take responsibility for the King's excesses. The Third Estate wanted far reaching reforms, which the King refused leading to the Third Estate to declare themselves the National

Assembly that represented all of France.

The National Assembly attacked the symbol of royal power, the Bastille which was a prison used by French monarchs to imprison their enemies. The storming of the Bastille on the 14th of July 1789, is now the French national day. The annual celebration is considered the oldest and largest military parade in Europe. The Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (*Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*), a statement of democratic principles based on the philosophical and political ideas of Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The document proclaimed the Assembly's commitment to replace the *ancien régime* with a system based on equal opportunity, freedom of speech, popular sovereignty and representative government. Drafting a formal constitution proved much more of a challenge for the National Assembly. Its members wrestled with fundamental questions about the shape and expanse of France's new political landscape as well as the authority of the King. The King didn't help himself when he tried to flee to Austria and raise an army to regain his throne. On the 3rd of September 1791, France's first written constitution echoed more moderate voices in the National Assembly, establishing a constitutional monarchy in which the king enjoyed royal veto power and the ability to appoint ministers. This compromise did not sit well with more radical voices.

In 1792, the new Assembly declared war on Austria and Prussia, who they believed were building counter-revolutionary alliances. French forces would be sent further afield to spread these new liberal values and help those oppressed by their monarchies. Domestically, the radicals in the assembly who believed the revolution didn't go far enough carried out a wave of violence massacring hundreds of accused counter-revolutionaries. They then attacked the royal residence in Paris and arrested the King. The King was sent to the guillotine after five months for high treason and crimes against the state. His wife Marie Antoinette suffered the same fate too. The National Assembly was replaced by the National Convention, which proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the French republic.

Rather than bringing stability, the French Revolution encouraged violence as radicals in the National Convention unleashed a bloody Reign of Terror against suspected enemies of the revolution who were guillotined by the thousands. The moderate forces in the National Convention turned more and more to army generals to maintain their authority and had ceded much of their power to the generals.

On the 9th of November 1799, frustration with the leadership of the National Convention was at fever pitch, Napoleon Bonaparte staged a coup d'état, abolishing the National Convention leadership and appointed himself France's "first consul" and eventually emperor. This was the beginning of the Napoleonic era.



The July Column monument, Paris. It stands in the center of the Place de la Bastille where the prison once was

Napoleon: The Man of Destiny

No discussion about France is complete without the mention of Napoleon Bonaparte. Born into relative obscurity in Corsica, he was lifted by merit to become a military general who conquered Europe and became emperor of France. He consistently defeated his enemies with innovative military tactics when they gathered multiple coalitions against him. But after his defeat in 1815 his empire would be buried with him, though his legacy and fame endures.

The French revolution had descended into chaos as the architecture that emerged after the overthrow of the monarchy was beset by problems that ranged from corruption, unrest, a weak economy and ongoing conflicts between revolutionaries. On the 9th of November, 1799, Napoleon backed by the army overthrew the National Assembly and gave birth to the Napoleonic era.

Napoleon declared he embodied the spirit of the French Revolution through his rule, but had no patience with those who demanded greater liberty. He crushed those who spoke out against him, making a sham of parliament and free elections. He oversaw the codification of a new system of laws – the Civil Code – which abolished the old feudal privileges and established the equality of every man before the law. Although he began handing out titles of nobility to his loyal friends and family as his empire expanded across continental Europe.

Within three years of coming to power, Napoleon completely reorganised France. He set in place a strong, centralised government with a tightly structured bureaucracy. He built new parks, bridges and quays as well as canals, reservoirs, and roads. He founded the Bank of France, which assured French businessmen credit. He signed an agreement with the Pope, making Catholicism the official religion of France. He had no personal use for religion, but he understood its political value. Napoleon signed the Treaty of Mortefontaine with the US and sold the Louisiana Territory to Thomas Jefferson's government. In 1802, he convinced England to sign the Treaty of Amiens, temporarily ending war between them.

Over the next decade, Napoleon consolidated his reputation as he led France in a series of military victories across much of Europe, declaring himself emperor of France in 1804. Napoleon's conquest of Europe spread French revolutionary ideas throughout the European continent, while further destabilis-



ing the influence of the Holy Roman Empire, which would eventually collapse in 1806. This sowed the seeds for later revolts in 1830 and 1849 across Europe, loosening and ending the monarchical rule that would lead to the creation of modern-day Germany and Italy later in the century, as well as sow the seeds for the Franco-Prussian war and, later, World War One.

Defeating numerous military coalitions, the powers of Europe threw at him, Napoleon won battle after battle. He built a vast empire of dependent states and forced Czar Alexander I to ally with him in 1807, leading to Emperor Napoleon controlling nearly all of Europe. Everywhere he went he spread the reforms and influence of the French Revolution. Just about the only blemish on his record during the first decade of the 19th century was a stunning naval loss to Britain at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Seeking to undermine British sea power, Napoleon issued the Berlin Decree in 1806, imposing the Continental System on Europe, which was meant to stop European countries from trading with Britain.

When the Russians withdrew from the Continental System, Napoleon in 1812 led an army of up to 600,000 soldiers into Russia to overthrow the Czar Alexander I. But rather than engaging the huge French force in a full-scale battle, the Russians adopted a strategy of retreating into Russia's interior whenever Napoleon's forces attempted to attack. Napoleon's troops trekked deeper into Russia and as summer turned into the freezing winter Napoleon's forces were exposed for being completely ill-prepared for an extended campaign. Napoleon arrived in Moscow with around 100,000 of his original force who discovered almost the entire population had been evacuated. The series of long marches, extreme weather conditions, disease and hunger saw Napoleon lose over half his forces. Retreating Russians set fires across the city in an effort to deprive enemy troops of supplies. Faced with the onset of the Russian winter and after waiting for a surrender that never came, Napoleon was forced to order his starving, exhausted army out of Moscow. Of Napoleon's 600,000 troops who began the campaign, only

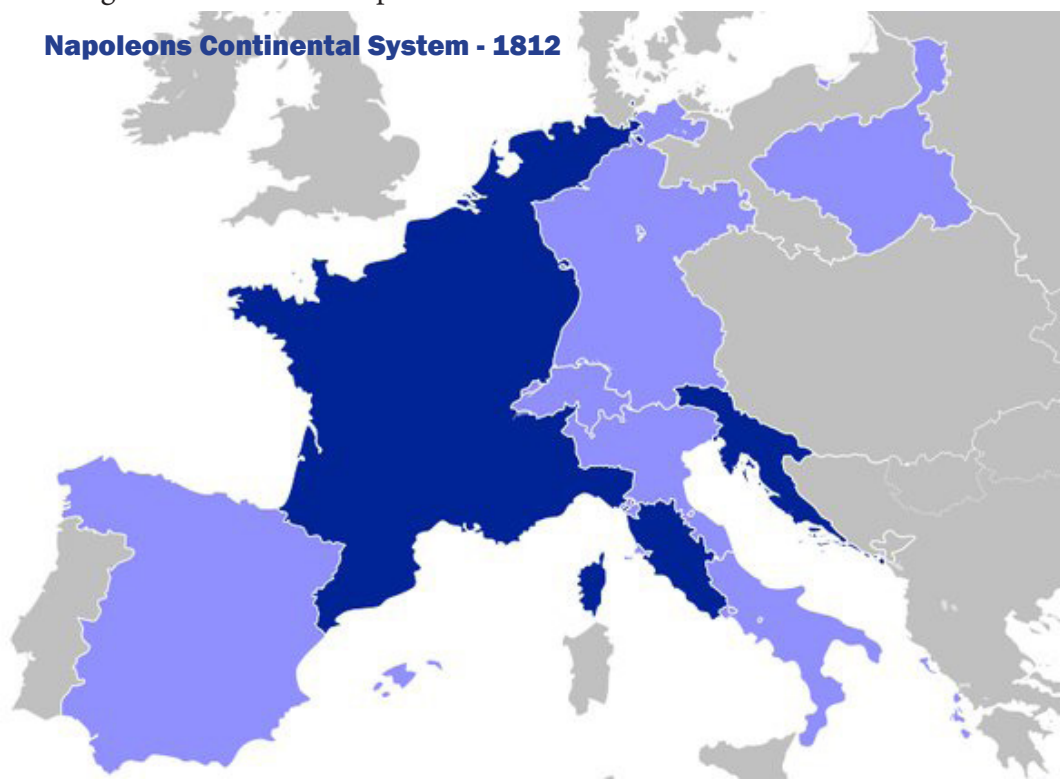
an estimated 100,000 made it to Moscow, and out of these only 10,000 ever made it home due to Russian attacks on Napoleon's retreating army. Napoleon's invincibility was finally crushed.

Prussia and Austria joined Russian forces in a coalition against France, which later defeated Napoleon. The coalition invaded France and captured Paris, forcing Napoleon to abdicate in 1814. He was exiled to the island of Elba. When Napoleon escaped in 1815 and retook control of France a coalition of all the European powers went to war with France and Napoleon was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. Napoleon was then exiled to the remote Island of Saint Helena in the Atlantic, where he died six years later at the age of 51.

Under Napoleon, a new emphasis towards the destruction and not just outmanoeuvring of enemy armies emerged. Invasions of enemy territory occurred over broader fronts which made wars costlier and more decisive. This also meant the political effect of war increased and a defeat for a European power meant more than the loss of isolated enclaves. With national mobilisation came the intensification of the revolutionary phenomenon of total warfare.

The chaotic Europe left behind by nearly two decades of war was reorganised at the Congress of Vienna. The major powers negotiated a new settlement in Vienna that created a new balance of power in the concert of Europe. This framework would last for a century until the outbreak of World War One in 1914. Napoleon's empire did not outlast him but he left his mark and legacy on France for the 15 years he was emperor.

Napoleons Continental System - 1812



Why are The French Obsessed With Secularism?



The French people consider their nation as the glittering centre of European enlightenment. It was in the eighteenth century the centre of the intellectual world, and until the first part of the twentieth century French was the language of civilised discourse, the language that all educated people spoke. The emergence of a group of French thinkers, the philosophes, with their writings sought to give the Enlightenment everywhere both a rationale and an agenda. Many of the heavyweights of the enlightenment were French, from René Descartes to Voltaire and from Montesquieu to Denis Diderot. As far as the French are concerned, they led change in Europe.

When the idea of separating church and state first gained ground the idea was to have a peaceful coexistence of all religions under a neutral state. Laïcité or secularism came to define the most ferociously contested battle lines in France. The term came to express a uniquely French insistence that religion, along with religious symbols and dress, should be absent from the public sphere. No other country in Europe followed this path. The word itself derives from the ancient Greek term for “the people,” or “the laity,” as opposed to the priestly class. Laïcité is not the same as freedom of religion. What it sometimes means is freedom from religion.

The desire to remove the Roman Catholic church out of the corridors of power came to a head during the

French revolution. Contrary to popular belief, that separation was brief. In 1801, Napoleon restored the church to power, making all clergy salaried staff of the state. For the entire 19th century France continued to be guided by Rome. With the emergence of workers’ rights and socialism, however, the church - its power threatened for a second time - attempted to repress republican ideals. There was a long, bitter, and at times bloody battle. The result was the famous law of 1905, which permanently separated church and state. Church property was confiscated, the clergy lost their state incomes, and many thousands of monks and nuns were forced out of their monasteries. Rome retaliated by excommunicating all those who had voted for the law.

The 1905 law, originally represented the victory of anti-clerical republicanism, which, ever since the 1789 French Revolution, had stigmatised the Roman Catholic Church as a bastion of reaction, ignorance and superstition. In concrete terms, the 1905 law dramatically limited the power of the Church by enshrining three key principles: strict separation of Church and State, freedom of conscience and freedom to exercise any faith. State schools became religious-free zones. Education was about the inculcation of enlightenment principles as well as allegiance to the French nation. These foundations of the Republic were non-negotiable, albeit with significant caveats. The 1905 law did not apply in Algeria, in

theory an integral part of France, because with 4.5 million Muslims the French state did not want to relinquish control of them. Significantly, secularism was a centrepiece of the 1946 Fourth Republic Constitution, the ideological defeat of the pro-Nazi Vichy regime that had reinstated the public role of the Roman Catholic Church.

In contemporary France, the conflict with the Roman Catholic Church is long dead. Consequently secularism has come to stand for something else; managing ethnic differences in society that are diametrically opposed to the community-based approach advocated by Britain and the US (the two are usually lumped together by French defenders of secular principles as les Anglo-Saxons). According to this modern schema, secularism is about avoiding Anglo-Saxon style ghettos; coming together as citizens; and transcending narrow religious differences. This is the justifica-

tion for banning conspicuous religious symbols in state schools. This is why the French state does not categorise people according to their ethnic origins when it comes to census data. Equally, this is why in the days following the Charlie-Hebdo attacks demonstrators flocked to the huge statue of Marianne on Place de République, a symbol of a secular sensibility. Marianne's base was adorned with copies of Voltaire's 1763 Treatise on Tolerance.

The problem with France today is its understanding of secularism and its imposition of this upon immigrants and their lack of adoption. Immigrants, especially from Muslim nations see a fundamental contradiction between the symbols that emanated from the 1789 French Revolution and their beliefs and they have held onto their beliefs over French values of liberty, equality and fraternity.





Why Has Germany Always Been a Problem for France?

The French nation evolved over centuries and its final borders provided it with the security it needed to survive. France is protected from Spain with the Pyrenees Mountain range, whilst in the north, despite many wars with England the English Channel provided France with some degree of security. To France's South is the Mediterranean and to its East is the Alps that protect France's eastern flank.

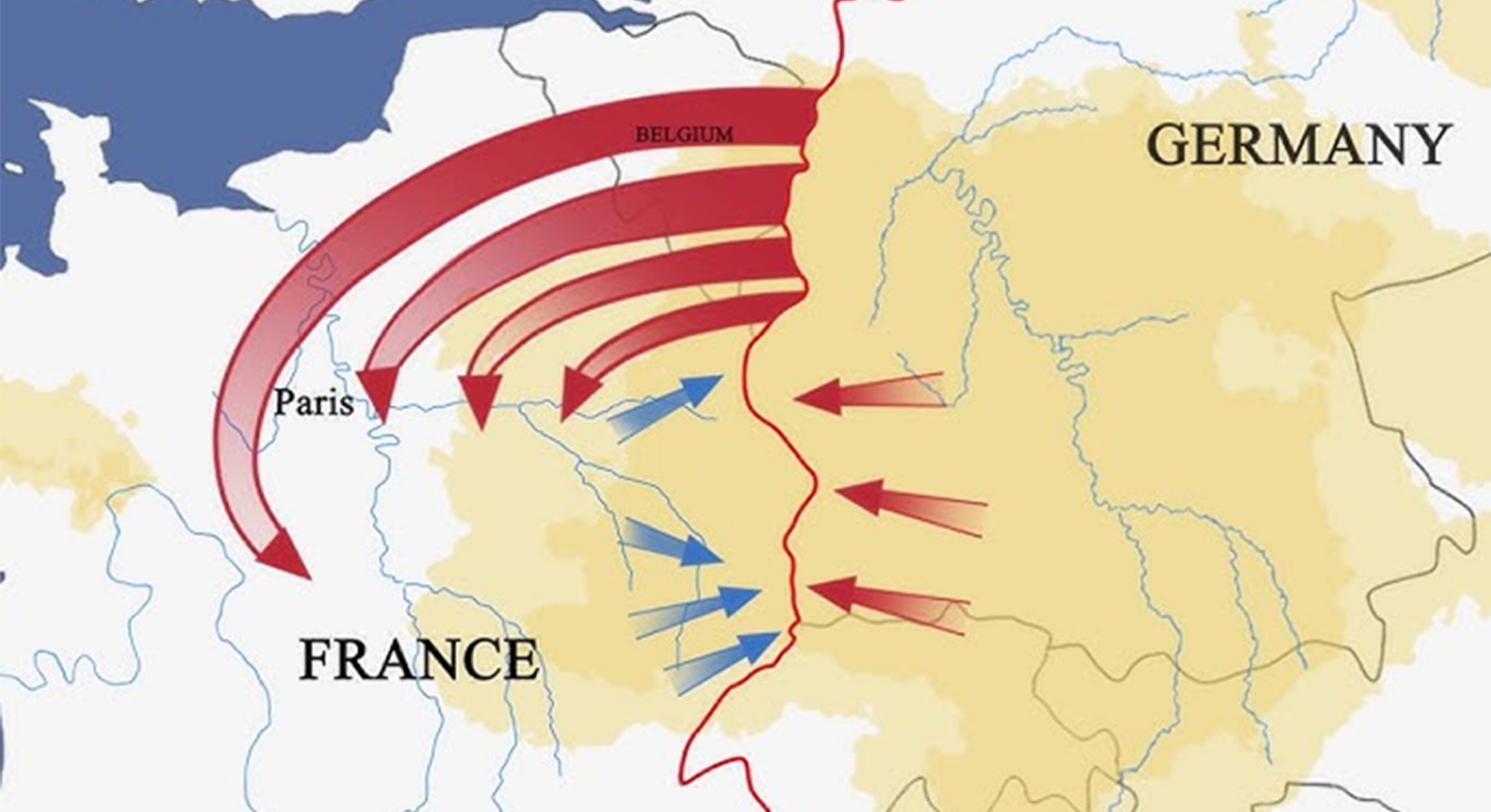
The Northern European plain, the expansive lowland that runs through the north of France leaves the northeast of France exposed. For most of French history this was never a problem as the area to France's northeast for centuries consisted of smaller states and territories that were constantly at war with each other. France literally played these territories off each other and against each other. But this all changed in 1871 when Prussia's iron president Otto von Bismarck oversaw the unification of the German speaking territories into a unified German nation at the centre of Europe.

During the unification of Germany, Spain's Queen Isabella was deposed, and the Spanish government reorganised itself as a constitutional monarchy, but the Spanish were in need of a monarch. They secretly appealed to Prince Leopold of the house of Hohenzollern, a distant cousin of Prussian king Wilhelm. When the French learned of the negotiations, they feared being surrounded by the Hohenzollerns; they had fought such possibilities since the time of the Holy Roman Empire. The French secured the withdrawal of Prussian support for Leopold and pushed the demand that no future claimant would ever come from the Hohenzollern dynasty. Bismarck doctored

the telegram sent to him of this and made it appear that the French were rude to the Prussian King. When this provoked French public opinion to the point of war, the French leadership complied.

The French were no match for the Prussians. They were unified for the first time in their history. They had superior numbers, training, and leadership and made more effective use of modern technology, particularly railways and artillery. In September 1870 in the Siege of Metz and the Battle of Sedan the French were decisively defeated and 100,000 French soldiers including the French emperor surrendered. Germany, now unified, laid siege to Paris for four months until it also surrendered. The final treaty forced France to pay unified Germany 5 billion francs. Germany occupied France for 3 years until this was paid. France was also forced to give up most of Alsace and parts of Lorraine, which became the Imperial Territory of Alsace-Lorraine.

After its defeat, France had to accept not only a loss of territory to Germany but also the presence of a united power on its northeastern frontier. This would be the first of many wars France and Germany would fight, to devastating effect. From 1871 France's strategic problem until today remains Germany. By hastening German unification, the 1871 war significantly altered the balance of power in Europe; with the new German state supplanting France as the dominant continental European land power. The days were numbered for the Concert of Europe that was created in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna.



Why Did France Fail to Defeat Germany in World War One?

At the turn of the 20th century France continued to burn for revenge. The French burned to avenge itself after its humiliating defeat to the Germans. The poor performance of the French in 1871, the humiliation of paying reparations to Germany, and the loss of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine was too much for the country that brought the enlightenment to Europe.

The French began preparing for the next war with Germany and reformed its military by imitating the German General Staff concept of command. The French also laid plans for a decisive attack against Germany at some point in the future. What the French came up with was Plan XVII, which was a military strategy that focused on a massive and rapid invasion of German territory through the Alsace-Lorraine region. The plan was based on the belief that the French soldiers' *élan* – spirit, would lead to a swift and decisive victory. The plan gave little consideration for the possibility of a German counter offensive.

France signed an agreement with Russia and allied with the UK creating the Triple Entente and effectively encircled Germany. Germany didn't sit idle while France was making these preparations. If France could create allies around Germany, then she could strengthen herself in the middle of Europe by

allying with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then with Italy, creating the Triple Alliance.

By 1914 both France and Germany seemed to be waiting for an excuse to go to war, one for power and the other for revenge. The assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand on the 28th of June 1914 by Serb nationalists became the excuse. Germany supported severe Austrian demands on Serbia, which they believed knew of or participated in the assassination. If Serbia went to war, its main supporter would be Russia; Germany would honour treaty commitments to Austria-Hungary through the Triple Alliance. Thus, Germany would have the excuse to fight Russia. When the Serbians did not give in to Austrian demands by the 28th of July, World War One had begun.

On the 1st of August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia and on the 3rd of August it declared war on France. Germany immediately launched an attack on Belgium to get to Paris which brought Britain into the war because she had a longstanding defence treaty with Belgium. Both Italy and the Ottomans would eventually join Germany in the war.

The French armies along the frontier with Germany attacked but made little headway. This was because the German forces, primarily positioned in the north



of France and Belgium, launched a massive right-wheeling movement. They swung through Belgium and northern France to encircle and outflank the French forces along the Franco-German border.

The French General Staff, realising that Plan XVII had failed, attempted to relocate its armies from the frontier to defend Paris at the Marne River, northeast of Paris. The German forces were just 43 miles from the capital. General Joseph Joffre called on Parisians to rally and taxi drivers ferried to the Marne River, the hastily formed units who threw together a defensive line around Paris. The German forces attempted a flanking move and the attempts by each side to outflank the other and keep from being outflanked, led to the offensive and defensive lines to stretch from the English Channel all the way to Switzerland.

Unable to move, the two sides began to dig in, and the Western Front was created. Most of World War One was fought in the trench lines of northern France, where neither German nor French planners ever expected the war to be. What was to have been a quick war degenerated into a stalemate and slaughter unlike anyone had seen since the Mongol invasions. Between the 6th of September and the 14th of September, 1914, there were about a half-million casualties on the Western Front alone. In France, four years of mud, barbed wire, poison gas, and millions of casualties were the results.

The deadlock on the Western Front was broken in 1918 when Russia withdrew from the war and the American forces arrived at the same time. It became apparent to the German command the war was lost

and armistice negotiations began in late October 1918, with Germany surrendering on the 11th of November, 1918.

The war devastated the French countryside, as well as the psyches of a whole generation of French. 30% of the French troops that were mobilised either died or were crippled. Plan XVII proved to be outdated and ill-suited for the realities of the first industrial war. It didn't consider new technology and new weapons such as machine guns and artillery. It didn't take into account the mass production of these due to industrialisation. It also failed to account for nationalism where the nation-state could motivate troops to fight in the face of slaughter.

The French were able to wreak some vengeance on Germany at the Versailles Treaty of 1919 were the Germans were forced to pay reparations. With the US returning to the US continent after the war and not partaking in the League of Nations, Britain and France were able to construct the post-World War One order. They gave themselves mandates via the league of nations giving themselves much of the Ottoman's territories in the Middle East. This was already agreed by both nations in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, a secret understanding defining their respective spheres of post-World War One influence and control in the Middle East. Britain and France concluded a secret oil bargain agreeing in effect to monopolise the whole future output of Middle Eastern oil between them. This new global set up would not last long, in two decades, much of the terms agreed at the end of World War One would be the cause of World War Two.



World War Two: France Capitulates in 44 days

In the two decades after the end of World War One, Germany went through both political and economic collapse and this eventually led to the emergence of the National Socialists - Nazis. In 1933, their leader Adolf Hitler became chancellor and soon assumed dictatorial powers. He immediately set in motion putting right the wrongs of World War One through massive German rearmament.

When Hitler invaded Poland on the 1st of September 1939 France and Britain declared war against Germany; World War 2 had begun. While the Nazis were fighting in the Nordic region in March 1940 Hitler directed his attention to France. After 22 years, France's biggest nightmare was on its doorstep, again.

The humiliation of 1871 and the fact the French came within a hair's breadth of being humiliated in World War One brought about a resolve to be fully prepared for any future German aggression. This manifested itself in the construction of the Maginot Line, a string of fortresses guarding the Franco-German frontier. The Maginot Line was universally regarded as impregnable. This defence, coupled with a large air force and an army equipped with lots of tanks, made France feel secure despite the military successes scored by Hitler from 1938.

Hitler surprised the French on the 10th of May 1940 (day 1) by the decision to disregard the neutrality not only of Belgium but also of Holland. Hitler launched an assault of these nations in order to control the coastline completely. By the time the Germans were making their way through Belgium, allied defensive plans began to be implemented, French forces were sent to blunt the German advance through Belgium and the bulk of allied forces were eventually committed to the French border with Belgium.

What the French and the allied forces didn't account for was the fact that was not the main Nazi assault. The northern thrust was to draw allied forces away from the main assault which was to be through the town of Sedan. The French were unprepared for this. The Germans aimed their thrust through the Ardennes Forest, just north of the final Maginot Line defences in an area held only by reservists. By the 12th of May 1940 (day 2) the Germans had reached Sedan with only light resistance and after a devastating aerial attack, they captured the high ground west of the Meuse River. With the bulk of the French and all the British and Belgian armies to the north, the pathway was open for the blitzkrieg towards Paris, 143 miles away. While in World War One the battle over the Meuse River was the longest and costliest in

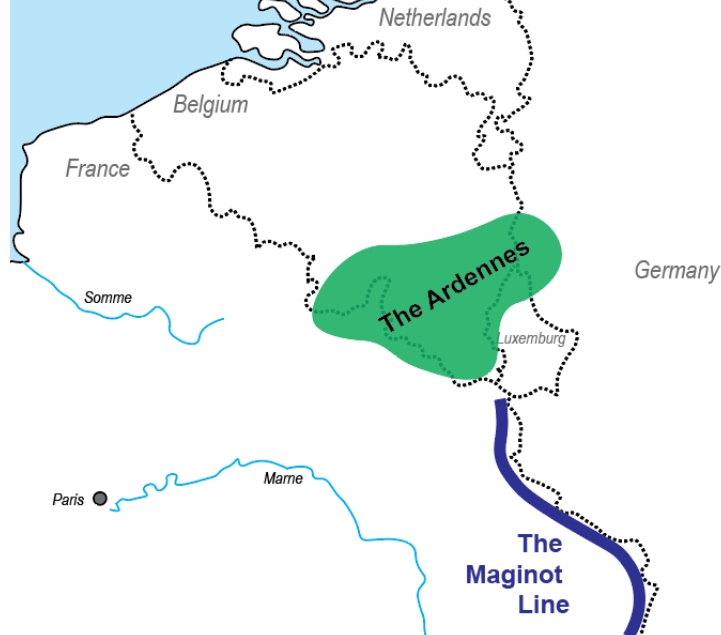
warfare history, the Nazis on this occasion achieved success in just two days.

The Maginot line proved to be a failure because the string of forts did not stretch all the way across the French border due to the prohibitive cost of construction and therefore failed to protect France completely. German Blitzkrieg tactics was something both the French and British were unprepared for and were unable to handle. The lightning speed of the Nazis meant they were always fighting to adapt and they remained steeped in the lessons of defence learned from World War One.

Once past the Ardennes, German tank units raced northwestward for the Channel. They reached St. Quentin, the halfway point, on the 18th of May (day 8), the same day the Belgian city of Antwerp fell. The French government had already been considering the consequences. On the 16th of May, the French met with new UK prime Minister Winston Churchill and admitted they had no strategic reserve and could no longer mount an active defence. The French begged Churchill for as many troops and aircraft as he could spare, a request he ultimately denied as he could see that France were falling, and a further commitment of British resources would make the defence of his own country that much more difficult.

During the remainder of May 1940, the Allied forces in Belgium slowly crumbled under the weight of the German advance. By the end of May 1940, the British had been forced to the coastal city of Dunkirk, where they began a major withdrawal across the ocean with every yacht, pleasure craft, and ferry boat along the southeast coast of England pressed into service to aid in the evacuation. Belgium unconditionally surrendered on the 28th of May 1940, (day 18), the French were now doomed.

German forces attacked southward along a broad front and overcame and bypassed most of the French opposition. Threatened by imminent encirclement, on the 11th of June, (day 32) the commander of the French forces in Paris declared it an open city, and the Germans entered it three days later. On the 16th of June, a new French government was formed under the leadership of World War One hero Marshal Philippe Petain, and the next day he ordered the French to stop fighting. An armistice was signed on the 22nd of June 1940 and 400,000 French soldiers surrendered. The French had capitulated to the Nazis in just 44 days!



The Germans offered lenient terms, which the French were glad to accept, especially when they remembered the cost of defeat at German hands in 1871. German occupation forces did little pillaging or looting, and even left the southern half of France unoccupied. The “unoccupied” section was under the authority of a French government in Vichy led by Petain, and became a puppet government. The Vichy regime gave the impression of independence for the sake of France’s overseas possessions. The Germans hoped that the French possessions would continue to take orders from home, orders that would actually come from Germany. The only resistance to this came from a young French general named Charles de Gaulle. He had escaped France when the British left, and in London formed a French government-in-exile. He would lead the French resistance that would ultimately free his country. He ordered French possessions around the world to ignore the Vichy government and resist their orders. Most French people, both inside and outside France, had no idea who de Gaulle was, whereas everyone knew who Petain was: the hero of the great battle of Verdun in World War One.

Whilst the Soviets absorbed the Nazis on the Eastern Front, the Western Front only changed with the Normandy landings which was the largest seaborne invasion in history. The operation by the US and Britain to liberate France and defeat the Nazis laid the foundations of the Allied victory on the Western Front. On the 8th of May, 1945 Germany surrendered unconditionally, bringing an end to World War Two in Europe.

Postwar France, like postwar Britain, found itself a second-rate power. The humiliation of being conquered in just 44 days as well as the long occupation, France had little but faded glory to fall back on.



What Was the Gaullism Era?

In the aftermath of World War Two, France built its national strategy on three pillars which came to be known as Gaullism, named after Charles de Gaulle, who led the French resistance during World War Two from London. The first was to develop a strong alliance with Germany, securing peace on the continent. Conditions were ripe for accomplishing this goal. Germany was occupied and divided. Britain was exhausted by its war efforts, and the US was pumping money into Europe and pushing for greater political and economic cooperation among European nations as the Cold War was beginning. France had its own postwar reconstruction and a crumbling colonial empire to contend with, but with Germany defeated France now had a secure northeastern border.

France's second priority was to protect the independence of its foreign policy. As the political realities of the Cold War evolved, President Charles de Gaulle wanted to secure the most leeway possible for Paris. Following this premise, France sought to forge its own relationship with Russia, build its own nuclear arsenal, and protect its interests in the Muslim world and its former colonies. At the same time, de Gaulle mistrusted international organisations. Under his rule, France left NATO's military command and

opposed British membership in the European Economic Community.

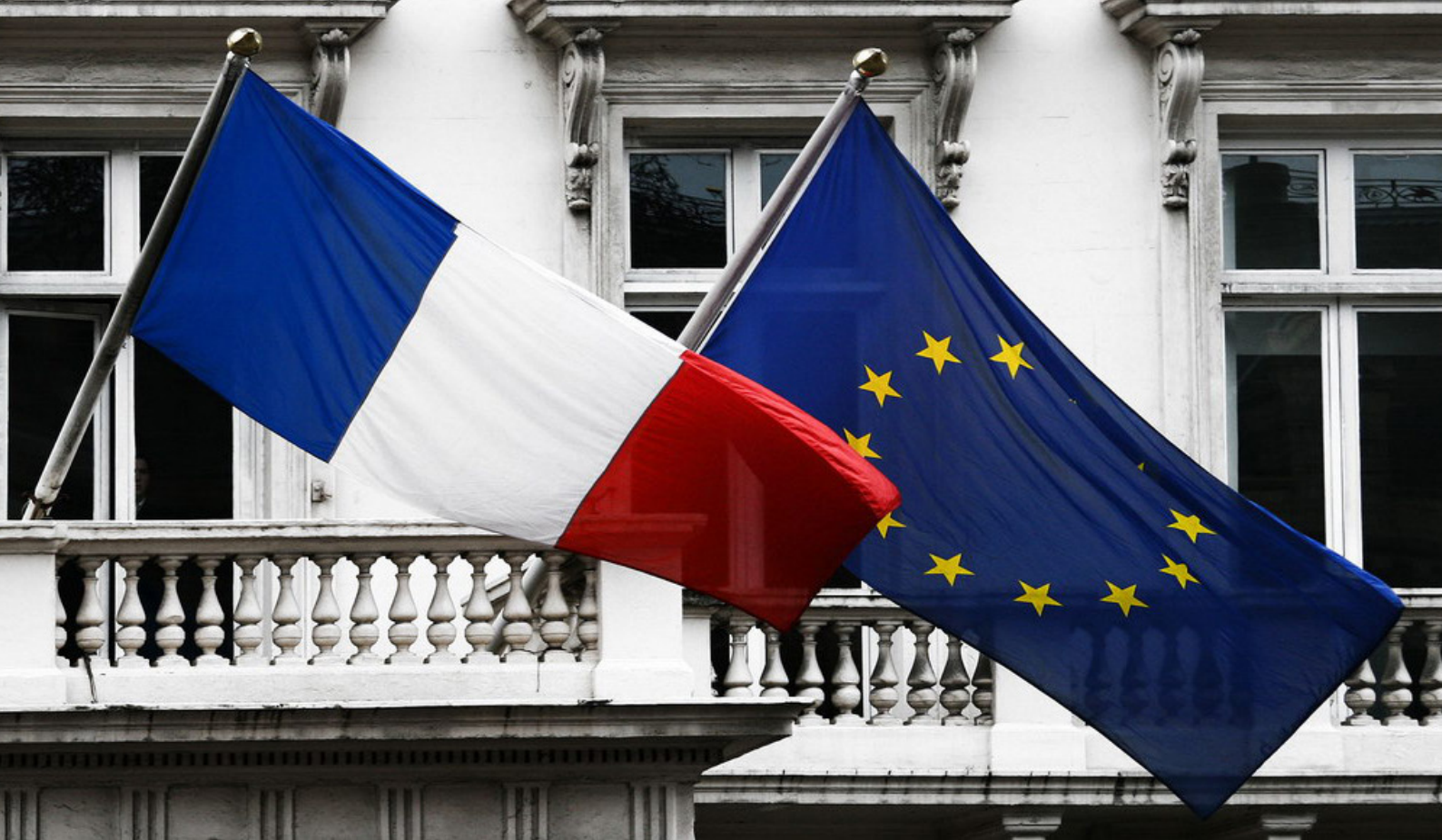
Thirdly, France aimed to build a strong republic with power centralised. For almost a century, fragile coalitions, weak executive power and short-lived governments characterised the French parliamentary system. In 1958, as decolonisation in Africa and Asia strained the French political system, de Gaulle pushed for reform, introducing a semi-presidential system in which strong presidents were elected for seven-year terms (the term was eventually reduced to five years). The resulting structure featured a two-round voting system whose main goals were to ensure that the president had robust democratic legitimacy and to prevent fringe political parties from attaining power. This is the same system which keeps Marine Le Pen from power today. The system also relied on infinite layers of public administration and a constant attribute of the French state.

Throughout the postwar years France guarded its national sovereignty. Despite the European Economic Community's progress, when barriers to trade were lifted and an internal market was created, French leaders remained sceptical of initiatives that could weaken France's autonomy on non-economic issues.

For instance, in 1954, the French Parliament rejected (and thus halted) a plan to create a European Defence Community. De Gaulle was not convinced of the American guarantees because he didn't see them as rational. The US had an interest in Europe, but it was not an existential interest. De Gaulle did not believe an American president would risk a nuclear counterattack on the US to save Germany or France. De Gaulle believed that if Western Europe simply relied on American hegemony without an independent European force, Europe would ultimately fall to the Soviets. He never regarded the American guarantees as credible.

All subsequent French leaders who witnessed the humiliation of World War Two followed this Gaullist approach to foreign and strategic policy. France's first president born after World War Two entered office in 2007. When Nicholas Sarkozy became French president he grew much closer to Washington, ending France's Gaullist era. French leaders always viewed German economic power as a threat to France's ability to be a European power. Sarkozy saw this best addressed by becoming America's key ally on the continent, thereby assuring that Germany and other possible competitors would not be able to challenge France's relevance or security.





Why Did France Establish the European Union?

When World War Two ended in 1945 Europe was completely devastated and the US worried Europe would be vulnerable to the power of the communist parties with the emergence of the Soviet Union. The Cold War was beginning in earnest and as the Soviet borders went all the way to Berlin, the Marshall plan on its own would not be enough. The US needed Europe to be a bulwark against any Soviet advance. To achieve this Europe needed reconstruction and economic development and the US was prepared to provide supplies and reinforcements, but not US troops to fight the Cold War. It wanted and needed Europe to do this. None of this was possible as Europe was devastated and needed to revive economic development. What the US proposed was economic integration and even a European economic federation.

The Europeans welcomed American aid, but they were not comfortable with American plans for European economic integration. Britain wanted to maintain its empire and so was dubious about the idea. The French were equally dubious about cooperation, particularly if it involved the Germans. After three wars, the French were not interested in Germany's recovery. The US was focused on defending Europe against the Soviets, and the map decreed that West Germany be the bulwark. The French saw the logic

but were understandably frightened by the idea of Germany's rearmament and reconstruction, and the resurrection of the Franco-German flashpoint.

With Britain opting out of integration, France was the leading power in Europe. It was better to lead the process than reluctantly following. The French realised over time, if it was to be the leading force, shaping an increasingly integrated Europe, then it needed to lead it. In 1947 the Europeans met in Paris and created the Committee on European Economic Cooperation. It was a forum for independent states to discuss joint projects, but it later became an integrated approach to Europe's economic development. In 1950 the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed a community to integrate the coal and steel industries of Europe - two elements necessary to make weapons of war. France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, West Germany and Luxembourg signed the Treaty of Paris in 1951 creating the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the origins of the European Union. Schuman envisaged a United States of Europe, though De Gaulle had no interest in that. Rather, he was interested in France using Europe for its own ends. European integration was nevertheless born and would eventually become the European Union.



Why Did France Embrace Social Democracy?

France, like several European nations after World War Two embraced social democracy which was a form of capitalism that was distinctly different from the capitalism of America. Social democracy can trace its roots to the Industrial Revolution. The process of industrialisation and urbanisation created poor working conditions and low standards of living for workers in a system where capitalists controlled wealth and political power. Socialist ideology took hold in the mid-19th century as labour organised and pushed back against unfair political and economic systems. Over time, Europe's social democrats shed their revolutionary elements, and by the middle of the 20th century, they were no longer campaigning to replace the capitalist system, but only to correct its abuses and to distribute wealth more equally.

France, much like the rest of Europe, faced immense challenges after World War Two. The nation was dev-

astated, its economy was devastated, and it had little wealth to change this in the short term. Afraid many French would find communism attractive in this environment, the French state embraced social democracy and directly controlled many sectors of the economy, especially the sectors that provided social services to the people such as health and education. The state also took direct control of the large companies that employed large numbers of people such as in mining and steel production as well companies in key sectors such as oil and gas, aerospace and the automobile sector. The state also introduced regulation that limited economic freedom of companies to make redundancies and gave employee councils a veto right on the board of directors of companies. France also introduced policies that aimed at wealth redistribution. Like other social democratic nations France implemented a high taxation system that was levied on companies to finance this elaborate welfare system.

By the 1980s the nations that implemented social democratic systems incurred large debts and struggled with economic development. Whilst in the American free market economy the US citizen was buying their first home and car, in places like France unemployment was high. By the beginning of the 1990s European politics took a new direction "The Third Way" as politicians such as Tony Blair in the UK, Gerhard Schroeder in Germany and Wim Kok in the Netherlands embraced neoliberalism and campaigned against social democracy arguing it held economic development back.

Neoliberalism became the mantra of the 1990s and with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this undermined what faith remained in socialist systems. With western intellectuals, politicians and western media trumpeting the superiority of capitalism, they heralded the end of the hybrid models of capitalism and socialism that took root in Western Europe. Neoliberalism was the solution to the economic stagnation of social democracy and France like much of Europe shifted towards capitalist laissez faire economics.

Despite this liberalisation, the French state still continues to play a significant role in the economy. Government spending as a percentage of GDP is 58%, the highest in Europe. Labour conditions and wages remain highly regulated despite reforms. The French state continues to own shares in corporations in several sectors, including energy.



Does France Still Have Colonies?

At the end of World War Two, France had a significant number of colonies and territories scattered across the world. This included French Indochina which was a major colonial entity in Southeast Asia, consisting of modern-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. There was French West Africa, which was a federation of French territories in West Africa that included present-day Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mauritania amongst others. There was French Equatorial Africa in Central Africa that encompassed present-day Chad, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and Cameroon. France also possessed Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco in Africa. France also possessed Madagascar, which was an island colony in the Indian Ocean. In Polynesia France possessed a collection of islands in the South Pacific, including Tahiti and its surrounding islands, as well as New Caledonia. In Latin America France possessed Guiana, whilst in the Caribbean she had Guadeloupe and Martinique.

The French planned to use the resources and labour of the colonies to revive its economy after World War Two, but there were many obstacles to this. Various nationalist movements arose seeking independence in the colonies and were often inspired by the strug-

gle for independence in other parts of the world and by the ideals of freedom and self-determination. The United Nations, the US and the Soviet Union all pushed for the end of European colonial empires. As decolonisation gained momentum France was going to have to give up its empire.

What France did was give independence to its colonies, but it ensured it maintained privileged access to them through economic and military agreements. France created the French Colonies of Africa (CFA) franc which was an exploitative system that gave France monetary control over 14 sub-Saharan African countries. The CFA system required nations to deposit initially 100%, then 50% of their reserves in France's Treasury. Between 1945 and the introduction of the euro in 1999, French authorities devalued the CFA franc against the French franc by 99.9 percent, increasing French purchasing power against African nations. Today 135 million people use the West African CFA franc and the Central African CFA franc.

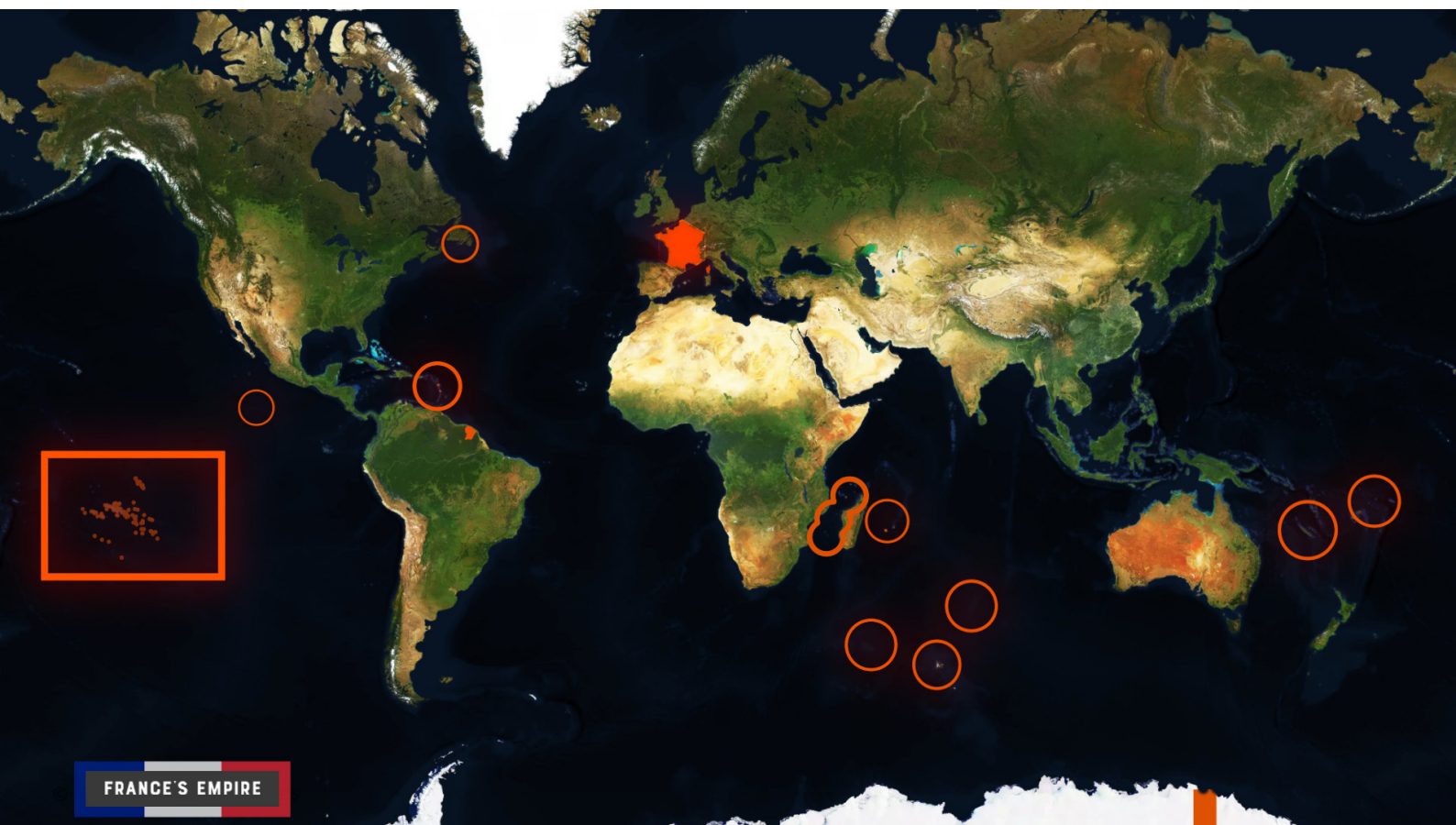
France retained its overseas territories in the Pacific and Indian Ocean which granted it an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that encompasses more than 10% of the Indian Ocean. France today has the second

largest EEZ in the world after the US. It is the only EU member with territories in the Indo-Pacific. Possessing EEZs gives France exclusive rights to natural resources within 200 nautical miles of its coastline. France has the exclusive right to explore and exploit natural resources within them, including fishing, mining, and oil and gas. France can build and use artificial islands or other structures such as oil and gas platforms, lighthouses or weather stations. Any state navigating through or flying over another's EEZ must respect the laws of the managing state. The EEZ owner can also award or deny permits to other states to lay submarine cables or pipelines through their zone.

In order to gain independence France signed secret

national defence agreements with many of its African colonies. The agreements, which have never been made public, allow France to retain a physical presence in the countries in exchange for defending their national sovereignty. France further cemented its clout in its former colonies by maintaining critical economic infrastructure, disbursing development aid and building influential social networks and institutions.

To discourage any external or domestic challenges to its primacy, France orchestrated coups and interventions. The list of Francophone African leaders who tried — and failed — to defy or reduce French authority is long.





Why Does France Have a Bitter Legacy in Algeria?

No discussion is complete about the French Colonial Empire without highlighting the French colonisation of Algeria. Algerian-French relations will never be normal as Algeria as a nation remains traumatised by the historical memory of 132 years of French occupation.

France had intended to occupy Algeria since the time of Napoleon Bonaparte, but plans were put on hold after Napoleon's disastrous defeat in the 1812 Russian campaign. Following a diplomatic incident in 1827, the French blockaded the port of Algiers and in 1830, King Charles X ordered an invasion of Algeria. The French occupation lasted from 1830 to 1962 and was the most prolonged and heinous colonial occupation in modern history because the French sought to wipe out the country's culture and dismantle its society through genocide.

France implemented draconian policies toward the indigenous population that included impoverishment by seizing arable land and giving it to the French colonialists. As well as the displacement, bloodshed and the monopolisation of Algeria's markets, France forced the Algerians to use French instead of Arabic. The colonial forces also made use of chemical weapons, mass executions of prisoners and civilians, concentration camps and other atrocities to put down numerous uprisings.

The first European settlement in Algeria was in 1836, and by the end of the 19th century there were 1 million settlers in Algeria. France was keen on strengthening Europe's presence in Algeria and on eradicating its Arab and Islamic identity in favour of Christianising the country. French-colonised Algeria provided all means of livelihood for the new settlers from France and the rest of Europe, entitling them to own Algeria's most fertile land and steal natural resources like oil and gas. France came to use Algeria as a springboard to the rest of North Africa, the Sahel and Africa's Atlantic territories. Algeria's importance can be seen from the fact France considered it a part of mainland France, although she ruled it as a colony.

The French were unable to seize Algeria quickly due to the fierce resistance put up by the people of Algeria. As a result, the French army carried out a number of genocidal massacres in order to subdue the country. The first of these involved reducing the population of Algeria so that it could no longer threaten the French forces. Between 1830 and 1870, the local population decreased by a million people due to war, massacres, disease and famine. In 2020 France returned to Algiers the skulls of 24 Algerian fighters killed and beheaded by the French army during the battle of Zaatcha in 1849. The French army sent the skulls to Paris as war trophies. For Algerians, the skulls - part of the Museum of Mankind's 18,000-skull collection attested to French colonial

barbarism and fascination with decapitations.

In 1904, the French governor-general of Algeria issued a decree banning the opening of Arabic-language schools without a licence from the military authority. The licence stipulated allegiance to France and a pledge to refrain from teaching about Islam or the history of Algeria and the Arab world. However, France failed to erase the Islamic identity of the Algerian people despite the intensity of missionary activity and its fight against the Arabic language, prompting exasperated French lawmakers to accuse the Algerians of living on the margins of history.

The French promised the Algerians self-rule if they fought alongside them in World War Two. The number of Algerian soldiers who fought with the Free French Forces in World War Two reached 175,000, of whom 26,000 died during the war. Algerian soldiers were always in the first ranks of the war, forming shields for the French troops. When the war ended, the Algerians protested peacefully to express their joy, hoping France would keep its promises. Instead, the French military and pied-noir settlers killed at least 45,000 Algerians in the Setif and Guelma demonstrations on the 8th of May 1945. France reneged on its promises, paving the way for the 1954 Algerian War of Independence.

Algeria hoped they would gain independence after World War Two, something implicitly promised when France fell to the Nazis. When France reneged on this a mass uprising occurred in 1945 in the town of Setif, during which Algerian demonstrators demanded greater political rights and the end of colonial rule. The French response was ruthless, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Algerians. This fuelled nationalist sentiments and in 1954 led to the beginning of the Algerian War of Independence with the National Liberation Front (FLN), launching a series of coordinated attacks against French military and civilian targets across Algeria. In 1961, the French police committed a massacre by order of the Paris police chief against Algerians who participated in a peaceful demonstration, killing at least 200 demonstrators. More than 800 others disappeared, and reports claim that the police officers threw them into the sewers and the Seine River. Although Charles de Gaulle knew what happened, he kept the officers responsible for the massacre in their positions. After 8 years of Algeria's war of independence, France struggling with domestic economic problems and with the cost of maintaining Algeria skyrocketing,

Algeria gained independence on the 3rd of July 1962, bringing to an end 132 years of a bloody and brutal occupation.

France committed untold systematic killings, torture and crimes against the Algerian people in order to pacify them. France even conducted its first 17 nuclear tests in southern Algeria. Charles-André Julien outlined in Foreign Affairs in 1940: *“The capture of Algiers in 1830 marked a significant departure in the expansionist policy of France, for North Africa was quite unlike older French colonial possessions in the Caribbean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The French soon discovered that North Africa did not produce tropical goods and that the native population could neither be destroyed to make way for European colonists nor enslaved to work for them. They also found that Islam provided the natives with a religious and a cultural ideal which they would stubbornly defend. France had not been fitted by experience to understand and govern an Islamic people”*





In the post World War Two world, the French presented themselves as a military power. As a nuclear power France believed it's a military power to be reckoned with. But with the economic challenges France has faced since World War Two this has had a major impact on French military capabilities.

The French defence posture underwent a fundamental shift from its Cold War paradigm to a much smaller, mobile and robust posture which was much cheaper to maintain and focused on the threats France faced in the 21st century rather than the threats of the Cold War. Throughout the Cold War the French military doctrine was influenced by Charles De Gaulle, where France viewed itself as a power in the world, independent from either side during the Cold War. The French military was postured for state-to-state warfare, large formations were maintained, and weapons systems were designed for conventional warfare. The French navy and air force were also designed primarily for defence against conventional attack. Central to this was the development of nuclear weapons, which was the ultimate security guarantee for the French. The end of the Cold War did not see the end of this Cold War posture and it was carried on into the 21st century.

When Nicolas Sarkozy assumed the French presidency, he shifted the Cold War doctrine away from the Gaullist attitude Paris has held since the end of World War Two. Following the publication of the white paper on French defence and security policy in 2008, Sarkozy reversed decades of French security policy, which had focused on a Cold War-style invasion scenario as the nation's primary challenge. He moved to return France to NATO's integrated military command structure, from which de Gaulle withdrew in 1966. He also deployed additional troops to Afghanistan and made overtures to the US, emblematic of a French shift toward a more cooperative role in global military affairs. The military structure was refined and its disposition which included reduced armour and artillery units, which were closely associated with the Cold War paradigm. The French military doctrine made counterterrorism, intelligence and European security its main concerns.

The French industrial base developed several platforms that range from Mistral-class amphibious ships to Dassault Mirage fighter aircraft. The French nuclear deterrent rests on nuclear-armed submarines and strike planes with more than 300 warheads. But the French nuclear capability fundamentally rests

upon its small nuclear submarine fleet, just barely large enough to sustain a continually patrolling presence of one boat. Successive French administrations have long chosen to maintain legacy nuclear arsenals, despite the substantial cost.

The biggest problem the French forces face, though their soldiers are numerous, is struggling with a 45-year-old refuelling aircraft, 28-year-old armoured vehicles, 30-year-old helicopters and a fleet of tanks of which as few as 50% are actually in working order. Whilst the French defence industry provides a wide range of weaponry and capabilities, these are often limited in number and increasing in age. Whilst the French military makes many of its own platforms it lacks the quality due to the cost to acquire them.

This is why French generals have long complained that the military would struggle with global operations as they have a force that cannot fulfil the nation's political ambitions. The French defence minister, Le Drian, said after meeting US secretary of defence Chuck Hagel at the Pentagon in May 2013: *"It's incredible that a country like France, with its technological, aeronautical, and electronic knowhow and companies able to produce its own drones, hasn't done so. But it hasn't, and we've got to have surveillance of our theatre of operations. What else could I do? Wait another ten years for somebody to make French drones?"* Despite France's industrial base it lacks the economy to sustain this, and this is having a knock on effect on French global ambitions.





Les Misérables:

Why are the French so Miserable?

France established a strong state in the centre of Europe in 1789. The French governmental structure, previously a monarchy with feudal privileges for the aristocracy and Catholic clergy, underwent radical change to form a nation state based on the Enlightenment. France at the dawn of Capitalism was leading change in Europe. Many French philosophers and intellectuals gained social, political and philosophical influence on a global scale. Voltaire, Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, all described the separation of powers and were all catalysts for government and societal reform throughout Europe. But with two brutal occupations in both world wars, France ceased to be a key power in the world and has been on a downward trajectory ever since. This has created an insecure France who is very pessimistic about the future of its nation. For decades, Europeans agonised over the power and role of Germany, the so-called German question, given its importance to European stability and prosperity. But now Europe talks about *“the French question,”* with Der Spiegel, one of Europe’s largest news magazines in 2014 calling France the *“...sick man of Europe.”*

France’s dwindling influence in the world has had an adverse effect on French society. Successive surveys

of the French people continue to reveal a population frustrated with the new status quo. At the turn of the century, Time magazine declared French culture was ‘dying’. France, once famous for its *joie de vivre* (joy of living), is suffering from existential gloom; Claudia Senik, a professor at the famous Sorbonne University concluded the French were now culturally miserable. Her studies of the French malaise, she believes, dating back to the 1970s: *“It’s linked to the way the French view the world and their place in it. They have high expectations about the quality of life, freedoms and many values driven by the French Revolution and this sets a high benchmark for satisfaction.”* Senik says the French: *“...look back at a golden age when France made the rules of the game, and now we are just another smallish country forced to accept and adapt to rules.”*

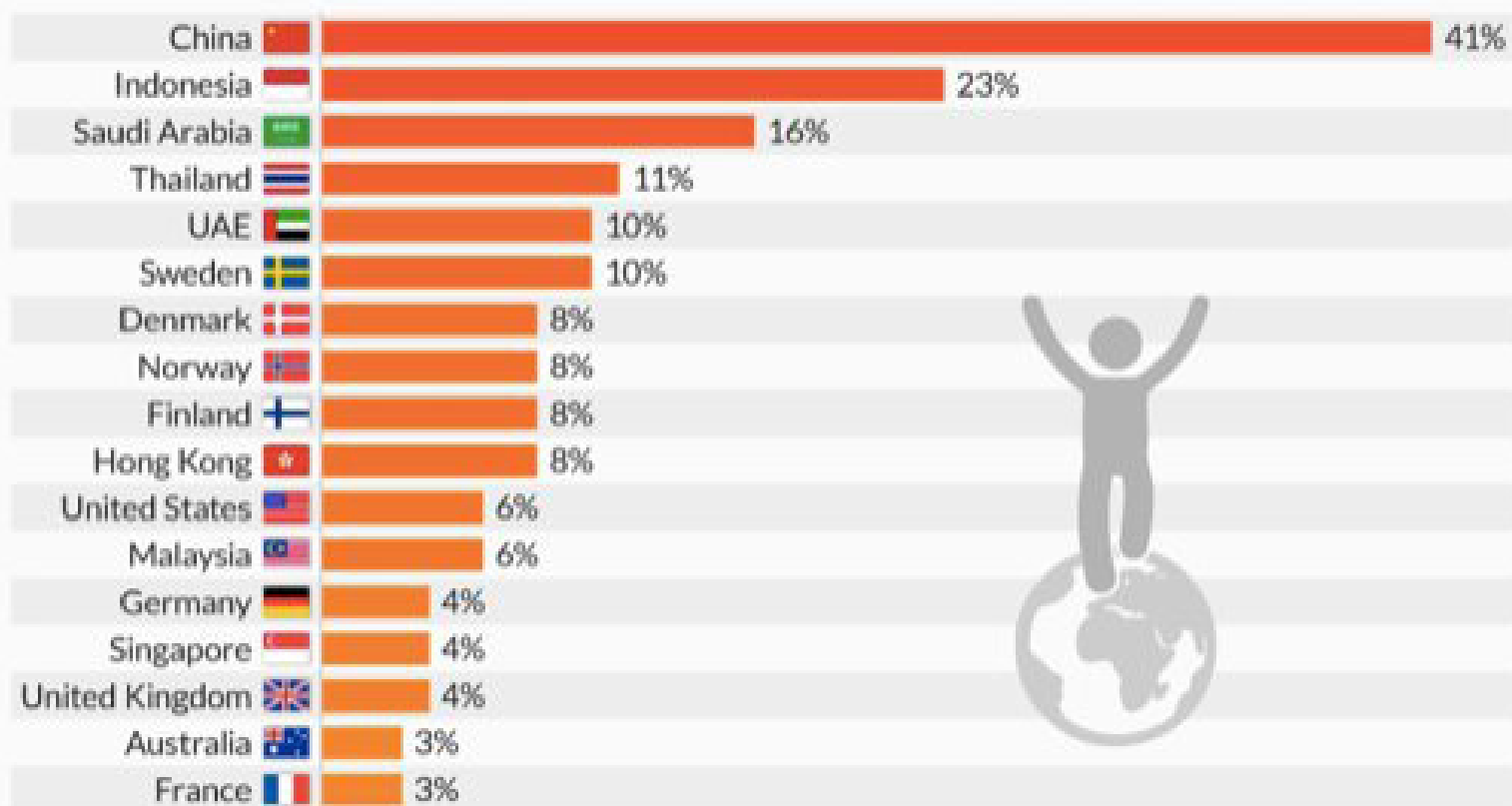
Whilst the French believe they have superior values, these values are failing to solve the myriad of problems the country is facing. On the economic front the French Social Democratic model, where the government plays a large role in the economy, hides the country’s huge inequality. The richest 10% of the country own 55% of the nation’s wealth and income inequality is far worse. The French social security system had for long been the solution to this, but


it is now the cause of a national debt exceeding the nation's GDP. Individualism in France has for long been promoted as a French value but it has resulted in France having Europe's highest rate of use of mood-altering drugs, and one of the highest rates of suicide. France is now regularly found in the top ranks of European consumers of tranquillisers and alcohol. The French have been found in many polls to be one of the most unhappy people in the world. Liberty, equality and fraternity may be the French motto but they have done little to deal with inequality, divisions and abuse of power in France.

France regularly tops surveys on the level of misery and the lack of hope in the future. The Yellow vest protests are the most modern sign of this. Freedom has become synonymous with social problems such as family breakdowns, depression and loneliness. Secularism separated church and state but money and politics has poisoned the political systems across the west, systems that have failed to deliver for the people. Whilst French politicians blame immigrants and Muslims for France's ills, the reality is these foreigners are only a mere 7 million people out of a total population of 67 million! French misery is much deeper than foreigners coming to France.

The world's most optimistic countries

% of people who think the world is getting better'



A photograph showing a woman wearing a grey and purple niqab being escorted by several police officers in blue uniforms. The woman is looking down, and the officers are surrounding her, with one officer in the foreground looking towards her. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be an outdoor setting.

What is France's Problem with Immigrants?

Not a day goes by without accusations thrown at immigrants for not being French enough and not integrating into French culture. France's troubled relationship with immigrants has only got worse in the 21st century, especially with the spate of terrorist attacks. As far as the French are concerned the problem is squarely the fault of immigrants. The benchmark is the French, their culture, language and values and not adopting this is causing political, economic and social problems for France.

As France joined the Industrial Revolution the pace of industrial growth attracted millions of European immigrants from the middle of the 1800s. But most of this wave of immigration was from surrounding nations such as Poland, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and Spain. In the wake of the First World War, where France suffered six million casualties (20% of its population), significant numbers of workers from French colonies came. Similarly, after World War Two the French open borders policy was economically motivated.

France's open immigration policy started changing during the 1970s, after the country was severely hit by the 1973 oil crisis. The economic downturn helped catapult far right forces such as Jean Marie Le Pen's National Front to the fore. As unemployment spiked French immigration policy began to impose more controls over immigrants. The main targets of the anti-immigrant policies were people of North African and non-European descent, who were either told to leave France or stopped from entering the country. As a result, after the 1980s, a huge dip was recorded in the legal immigration of non-Europeans to France. Christophe Bertossi of the Centre for Migration and Citizenship highlighted in a 2020 report, that *"...immigration was only linked to integration, not when immigration was increasing but when it was stabilising as a proportion of the overall population. It was here the votes for the National Front increased considerably. The breakthrough of the National Front on the electoral scene put pressure on the debate about immigration. As a result, the traditional political parties were jostled by the extreme right wing and as a result the issue of immigration changed from being an economic issue of jobs and housing to one of identity."*

The French right-wing successfully made secularism the lens immigrants and Muslims should be viewed from rather than just economics. 'Laicite' means secularism, but in a way deeply rooted in French history.

It refers to the long struggle in the 19th century to establish a separation between the church and state. The struggle eventually resulted in a 1905 law that legally defined Laïcité as the neutrality of the state in religious matters, freedom and equality. It also excluded the church from any political and administrative power and, in particular from the organisation of education.

The political redefinition of secularism took place from 2002 when President Jacques Chirac set up the Stasi commission to look at the state of secularism in France. The context at the time was the differences amongst the right-wing regarding which candidate to support. Amongst the commission's many recommendations, only one was adopted, the banning of religious symbols, passed in 2004 to a broad consensus between the political parties both on the left and right. This politicisation of secularism is what led to the shifting of the definition from the separation of church and state to the status of Muslims and Islam in France.

Prior to this on two occasions in 1989 and 1993, the council of state was questioned on the wearing of the veil by Muslim school girls. The response of the highest court in France was there was no contradiction in principle between secularism and wearing the veil at schools as long as it didn't amount to preaching. What took precedence was the religious freedom granted to pupils. After 2004 the legislature

overturned this trade-off between religious freedom and religious neutrality and made prohibition the principle of secularism in schools.

From here the debate moved beyond schools to hospitals and universities. In 2010 the full-face veils were banned. Eventually the debate extended to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and Islam itself. The political debate today has gone far beyond the framework and laws that came to define French secularism in the early 20th century. These laws imposed neutrality when it came to religion upon the state whilst it granted religious freedom to everyone else. But the state is now banning parts of Islam, despite giving citizens the freedom to express themselves; the French version of secularism now excludes public expressions of Islam.

The central role of immigration and Muslims in political debates is outsized compared to the demographic reality, which has led to a public misperception of the size and growth of the immigrant and Muslim population. According to the French national institute of statistics INSEE, the 2021 census counted nearly 7 million immigrants (foreign-born people) in France, representing 10.3% of the total population of 67 million. This is a decrease from INSEE statistics in 2018 in which there were 9 million immigrants in France, which at the time represented 14% of the country's total population.



Is France a global power?

France since it emerged as a nation and since the French revolution has viewed itself as a power. Despite the events of World War One and World War Two France saw itself as a global power in the post war era. Whilst French power took a major hit after World War Two with the emergence of the US and the Soviet Union, France saw itself as global power that should be taken seriously.

Post-war French policy has centred on European integration, and this is how it dealt with Germany. By integrating Germany into an alliance structure France believes it can control the nation that's been its historical nemesis. Today, France has developed close ties with reunified Germany to become the most influential driving force of the EU.

France, like Britain, has been a key player in European history and politics, its policies for decades has been centred on creating influence across the world through its colonies, French culture and through its economic strength.

France maintains economic dominance over many of its former African colonies and has whilst in other places France created a French who form the ruling structure in these nations. France continues to have influence in Algeria, Tunisia and Lebanon due to the presence in these states of many people educated with French culture,

Politically, France dominates the European Union and has used it as a tool to further French interests. Despite declining economic and military capabilities, the French view themselves as a power that should be taken seriously in the world.





Is Germany an Enemy or Ally?

The most important relationship for France is its relationship with Germany. Relations with Germany are critical due to France's geopolitical imperative of protecting itself on the North European plain.

For most of history the Franco-German relationship was defined by a mutual fear of invasion. This led to a number of military conflicts, beginning in the mid-17th century and culminating with the Nazi occupation during World War Two. After the war, France turned to a strategy of political and economic integration with Germany as a form of protection in order to neutralise its rival through shared continental leadership.

In 1963 the Elysee Treaty was established with West Germany in order to increase their political, economic, military and cultural cooperation. France viewed the treaty as a means to enhance Europe's autonomy from the US at a time when West Germany was pursuing close cooperation with the White

House. West Germany was also backing the United Kingdom's accession to the EEC in the face of French scepticism.

Franco-German cooperation has deepened substantially over the past six decades, to the extent that the two countries now share the same currency, a development that would have scarcely seemed possible in 1963.

After the 2008 global economic crisis Germany took a leading role in dealing with the crisis with bank bailouts and fiscal reforms. So long as Germany remains within the EU, France's decision making power will continue to determine the political direction of the union. Germany is today the economic guarantor of the EU and as long as Germany views its EU membership as essential to its survival. France will continue to contain German hegemonic inclinations.



Does France View the US as a Competitor or Ally?

France has always viewed the US as a competitor. Ever since the US emerged the global superpower after World War Two France has had to deal with its declining capabilities in the face of US global interests.

After World War Two, de Gaulle saw the US as a power that could make the French irrelevant. De Gaulle never took American security guarantees seriously, despite the fact Europe needed these guarantees. The US wanted to see all European colonies given independence after World War Two, but France refused to, and when it did do so, France ensured they remained linked to Paris through economic and security agreements. The regular feature of French-US relations has been one of discord with the odd occasions of cooperation.

France sided with the US in the first war with Iraq in 1991, but stood against the US in its invasion in 2003. France led the nations that stood against the US invasion as she saw this as the US expanding its influence. These frosty relations continued until Nicolas Sarkozy became the President of France in 2007. In his speech delivered before Congress in 2007 Sarkozy shifted France's antagonistic relationship with the US to becoming America's key ally in Europe. As a result, France returned to the integrated command of NATO.

But the normal competitive relationship returned in 2011 with the British and the French overthrowing

Gaddafi in Libya and working to establish a regime with Gaddafi era officials. Due to the lack of military capabilities France and Britain turned to the US to provide air and logistical cover in Libya, but they restricted the US to this military component only, despite the fact the US wanted to establish a new presence in the country. From here a number of conflicting standpoints emerged and broadened between France and the US. When Trump took office in 2017 matters reached rock bottom between the US and France. Trump ridiculed president Emanuel Macron and France for being irrelevant as Macron criticised the US troop withdrawal from Syria. Macron also called NATO an organisation of the past. France criticised US meddling in the dispute between Greece and Turkey over the Mediterranean borders and energy and America's exit from Afghanistan in 2021. France also opposed US demands for Europe to take an aggressive position towards China. France sees relations with China as essential for the European Union, which angered the US.

With France openly criticising the US on various international issues the US responded by firstly signing a nuclear submarine deal with Australia and the UK, AUKUS, which saw Australia abandon its naval agreements with France. The US also carried out military coups in West Africa. Since 2020, 8 military coups have taken place in places such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea. All of these were conducted by US trained soldiers who overthrew leaders France had put into power.

Despite the odd occasion of cooperation, France views the US as a competitor, and they do not see eye-to-eye on most issues and are actively in competition. Whether France can sustain this and withstand US political plans remains to be seen.



'Our Most Dear Enemies'

France and the UK have a long history of competition, conquest, rivalry and cooperation. After World War Two, despite the help Charles de-Gaulle received from the UK, he didn't trust the UK and stood against its application to join the European Economic Community. It was not until de Gaulle's death in 1970 that the UK was able to join. But both nations have had differing views on the direction of the Union and have consistently clashed.

The French and British have cooperated on a range of foreign policy issues where the US has threatened their positions. In North Africa from Libya to Tunisia both nations have worked together to maintain the regime and push back against the US. Similarly in Lebanon, France with Britain helped use the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005 to push for the departure of Syrian forces from the country. The US supported the Syrian entry, two decades earlier in Lebanon as a way to interfere in the country that had for long been influenced by France.

Following Britain's departure from the EU in 2020 relations have deteriorated, with disagreements surrounding Brexit and the English Channel migrant crisis. The French refused to give Brexit terms that the UK wanted, and this caused tension between them. After this Britain sent warships to the island of Jersey in order to prevent French fishermen from entering British water areas now that it had left the EU. To make matters worse Britain was part of the AUKUS defence agreement with Australia and the US that saw Australia abandon its military relations with France.

France and Britain are historic rivals, despite occasions of cooperation. They have had an ever-lasting competition. The French author José-Alain Fralon characterised the relationship between the countries by describing the British as "our most dear enemies."





Remaining Relevant in the Middle East

France and Britain established many of the nations in the Middle East after World War One and due to this France still maintains influence in the Middle East and North Africa. In Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya France maintains influence. Whilst in Lebanon France established much of the political architecture that still remains.

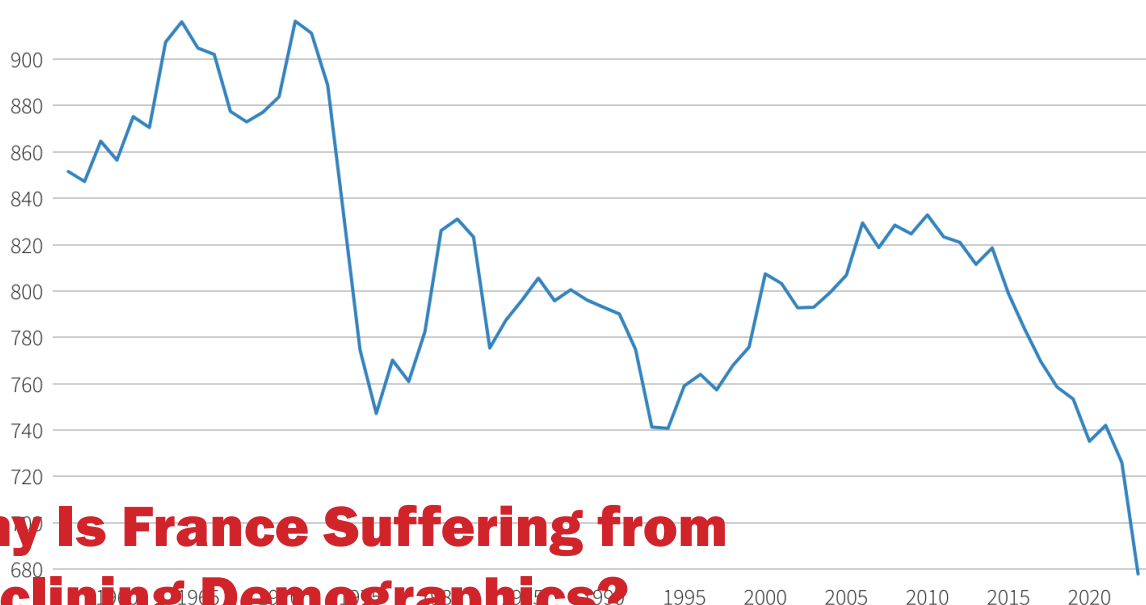
The Middle East for France is key to proving its credentials as an international power, punching above its weight and demonstrating the independence that is so important to the French sense of place in the world.

France has been heavily involved in the region's key political issues. France was part of the nations that established the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action over Iran's nuclear programme. In Syria, France deployed troops and took part in the various talks to end the civil war. France has been strengthening relations with Egypt and the UAE with military sales and in Libya France established a new regime after overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi.

France has been largely eclipsed by the US in the Middle East, but it's trying to maintain the influence it has and utilises the region's pro-French rulers to counter the US. French influence is on a diminishing trajectory, and it remains to be seen if France can reverse this.

French births at post-war low

Thousands of births per year



Why Is France Suffering from Declining Demographics?

France was once Europe's superpower, thanks above all to its enormous population. Its decline coincided with a collapse in its birth rate. The demographic report for the year 2022 of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) revealed that there has been a worrying drop in the birth rate in France. In 2022, 723,000 babies were born in France, 19,000 less than the previous year. The birth rate is "...historically low..." and "...the lowest since 1946..." according to INSEE. The number of children per woman was 1.80, well below the replacement rate of 2.1 needed to maintain a stable population. The average age of childbearing continues to rise. On average, women had their first child at age 31 in 2022, whereas they had it at age 29 twenty years earlier.

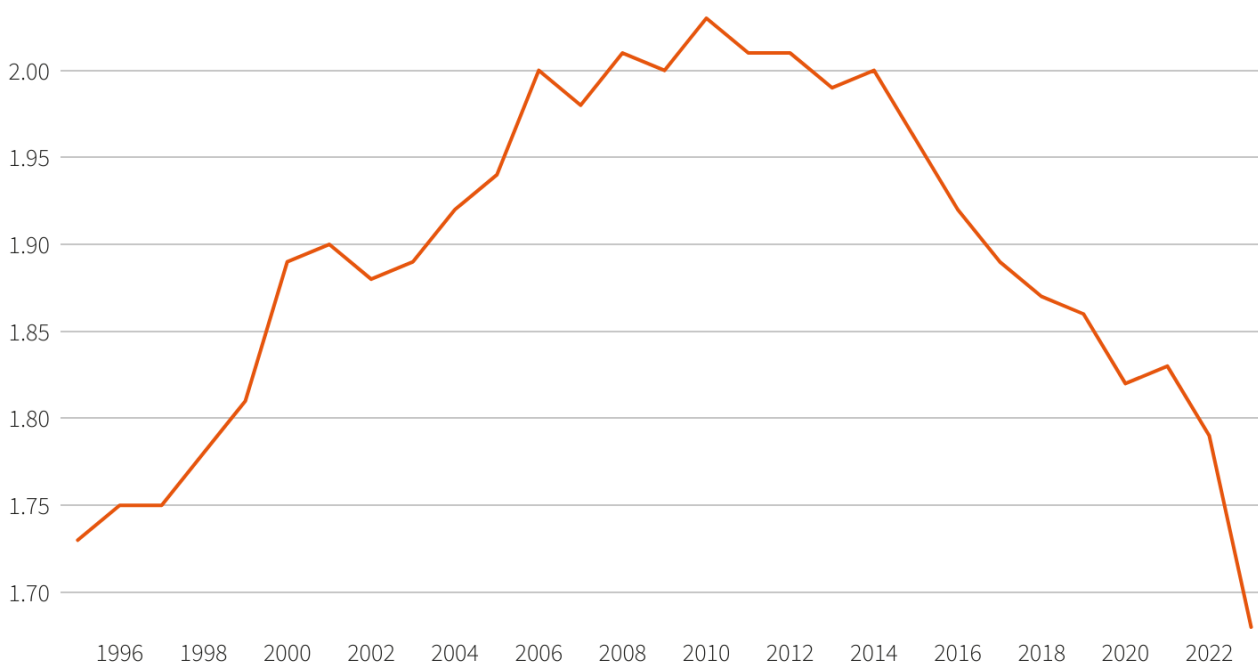
In France, 21.3% of the inhabitants are aged 65 or over. This proportion has been increasing for more than thirty years and the ageing of the population has accelerated since the mid-2010s, as the numerous baby-boom generation arrives at this age level.

For years the government has tried to encourage births by offering family allowances and heavily subsidised childcare, while also providing bigger tax breaks for larger families.

At a time when pension reform is provoking strong social unrest in France, the cessation of a pro-nationalist policy, the ageing of the population, and the reduction in assets in relation to retirees that this cessation has brought about, weighs heavily on the future

French birth rate in steady decline

Births per female



National debt is Out of Control



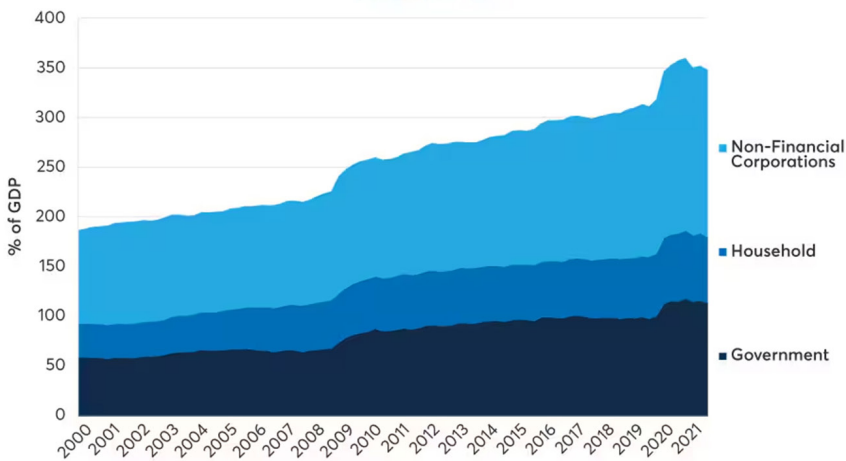
in 2027. France's debt is the third largest national debt in the world, after the US and Japan.

The fact that France does not have its own national currency and outsourced monetary policy to the European Central Bank (ECB) means France lacks the key tools that could tackle this ticking time bomb. Successive French governments have been issuing Sovereign Bonds in order to repay the interest which has only seen the debt burden balloon. With the French government playing a central role in infrastructure development and funding the country's extensive social welfare programme much of this has all been funded by debt which is becoming unsustainable.

With France's ageing population and people living longer, this will only increase pressure on the pension systems and healthcare services, leading to higher government expenditures, all of which need to be funded. This will leave less and less money for all the things that make a nation a power such as defence spending and therefore the national debt possesses a huge challenge to the French in the medium and long term.

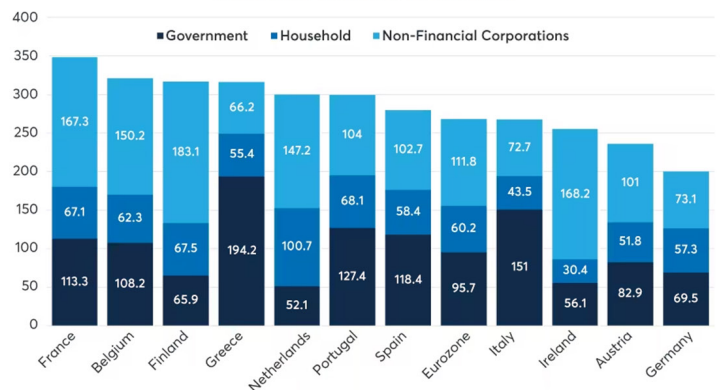
In April 2023, the credit ratings agency Fitch downgraded France's debt, the first major de-rating of a developed economy in years. French national debt passed the €3 trillion euro mark and is more than the country's GDP and is expected to exceed €4 trillion

French Debt



Source: Bank for International Settlements (BIS), <http://www.bis.org/statistics/totcredit.htm>

Eurozone Debt As of Q4 2021



Source: Bank for International Settlements (BIS), Total Credit to the Non-Financial Sector, Q4 2021

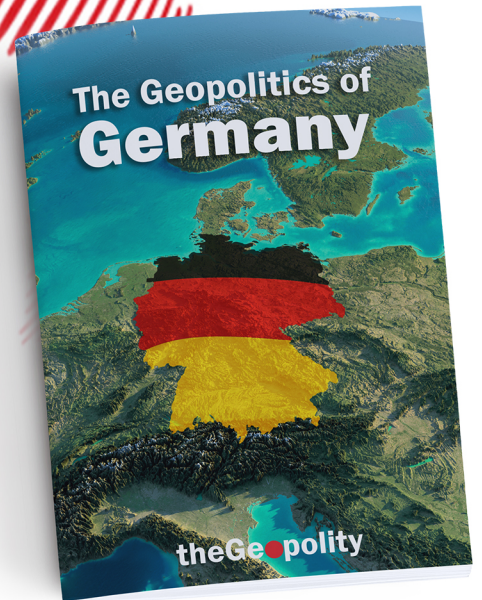
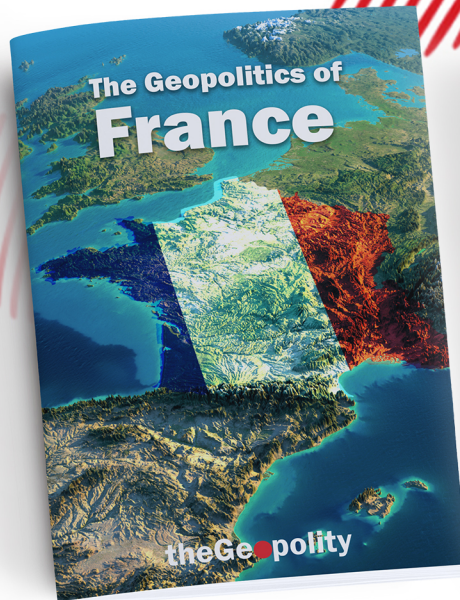
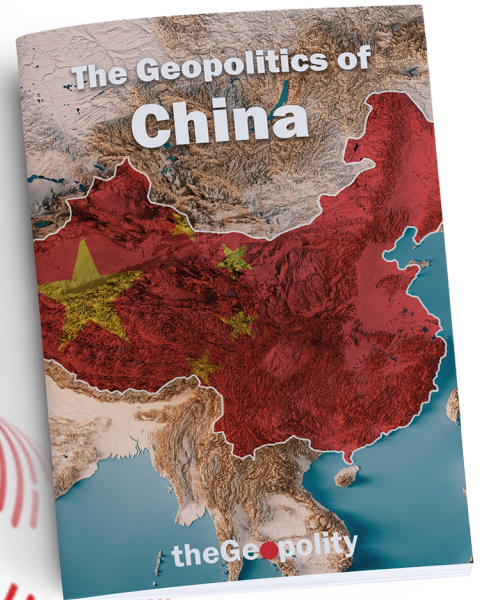
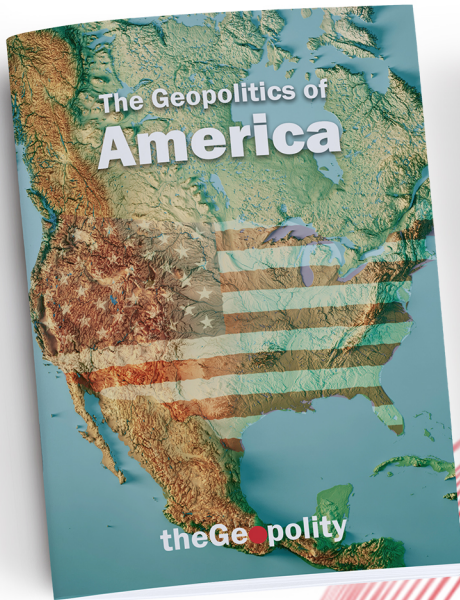
A photograph of Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz. Emmanuel Macron is on the left, looking slightly to his right with a serious expression. Olaf Scholz is on the right, looking down with a serious expression. They are both wearing dark suits and white shirts. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The German Question

The Franco-German relationship is the cornerstone of Europe. For the French it allowed them to integrate the aggressive German nation into agreements and a union that ensured Germany could never be a threat again. But with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 the European political landscape is changing.

Germany has now cut its energy ties with Russia and is rearming again. On all the previous occasions Germany rearmed there was a war soon after on the continent. France for long kept German military development linked to an independent EU defence force, but with the German economy larger than France's GDP and with German industry being larger than French industry we may very well be seeing the Franco-German alliance shift towards Berlin.

Germany has tried to mitigate French fears by talking about its rearmament strategy as part of the EU's defence strategy, but strategic EU policies are now coming from Berlin and not Paris. France once again faces the German question, where Germany is increasing its power and geopolitically has always viewed France as a challenger.



Our Mission

The world is a complex place with daily political events taking place which affect us all in different ways. The sheer number of events happening makes making sense of the world even more complex.

Geopolity.com aims to help in making sense of this complex world.

At geopolity.com we look at the world through the lens of power and ideology. We see forces such as geography, politics, economics and military capability constrain world leaders and nations. Through understanding these forces, we believe we can make sense of what nations are attempting to achieve. We also believe by determining the ideology nations embrace we can appreciate why the US is interested in the Middle East and why much of the world worries about Pakistan's nuclear capability.

This allows us to filter out all the noise and focus on the important political actions, moves and developments.

Who are we? Geopolity has no office as we believe it is people and ideas that are key, not offices and buildings. We are individuals who believe the world should be a better place for all and this can be understood by understanding the world around us. We are a non-profit-making organisation and so have no shareholders to satisfy. We believe the more people can understand the world, the better the world would be.

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