

# Macron's Political Bet Could Backfire with France One Step Closer to Leaving NATO

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Global Research, June 19, 2024

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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*NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg, although claiming he would not comment on France's ongoing domestic crisis, said that "I strongly believe it is in the interest of France, and all the allies, to keep NATO strong, because we live in a more dangerous world."*

France is right now facing a political crisis – maybe the wildest one in decades, as Arnaud Bertrand, businessman and commentator, [writes](#).

French President Emmanuel Macron dissolved his country's parliament and decided to gamble on a snap election, as a reaction against the rise of the so-called "far-right." The problem is that the populist party National Rally (Rassemblement National), formerly known as the National Front, is projected to win 31.5 percent of the vote, which is over twice the 14.7 percent projected for Macron's Renaissance party.

Bardella, who is the president of the National Rally's party since 2022, and also currently a member of the European Parliament, and who is a likely next Prime Minister for France, has pledged to maintain Paris within NATO at least as long as the conflict in Ukraine keeps going: "The proposal we've always advocated ... did not factor in war... You don't change treaties in wartime." Hence, Stoltenberg "warning".

There is of course a catch in such a commitment: for one thing, Ukraine has never declared war against Russia to this day. In fact, on April, retired general Igor Romanenko, a former deputy chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, said that doing so would go against Ukraine's interests: "If we went to a state of war, then assistance for weapons and equipment would cease not only from the United States, but also from most of the allies."

This could be just a legal technicality, but it does make it hard to draw the line about when

exactly a “war” ended or started. For instance, Ukraine has been bombing the Donbass region since 2014. Even with a Russian de facto victory, Kyiv could just claim Crimea and Donbass indefinitely, and all the Ukrainian far-right militias can make sure that some sort of low-level or frozen conflict (with provocations and terror attacks) goes on for many years. On the other hand, this very ambiguity may give room to a hypothetical National Rally presidency in future France to deem that the war in Ukraine is “over” whenever it sees fit – and then proceed to withdraw from NATO. One should bear in mind that Bardella has only made this caveat with regards to an ongoing “war” in the Eastern European country. Other than that, he does claim that leaving NATO has always been his party’s proposal. As recently as 2022, French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen (who is a member of Bardella’s party) [promised to pull France out of NATO’s military command structure](#). One should also keep in mind that France did withdraw from the Atlantic Alliance’s integrated military structure in 1966, albeit not completely leaving the NATO Treaty, and even expelled all of its units and headquarters on French territory back then. The country’s “estrangement” from the Atlantic organization only ended in 2009 with then President Nicolas Sarkozy, which means it took no less than 43 years for France to change its course.

Today’s French Fifth Republic is a semi-presidentialism system, in which the French President (the executive Head of State) has more powers with regards to foreign policy, also being the commander-in-chief of the French Armed Forces. The Prime Minister, in turn, being the head of government, mostly occupies oneself with domestic issues. Of course, a National Rally government, if politically successful, could pave the way for a future National Rally presidency. Moreover, the French government, led by its Prime Minister, controls the budget and could therefore hamper military aid to Ukraine in a number of ways – this, by the way, would be a very popular measure in France, considering that just recently, in March 2023, Macron imposed a very unpopular bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 years old by unusually invoking a special constitutional powers and basically shunning parliament.

Even former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in his recent [interview](#), has described Macron’s latest decision to dissolve the parliament as a “major risk for the country.” He added that the “endless enlargement of Europe towards Ukraine” is a mistake against which he “warned”: “I even dared to make a comparison, and I was widely criticized for, asserting that Ukraine risked becoming, for President Macron, what Turkey had been for President Chirac... Enlargement towards Ukraine is a contradiction, [it takes place] while the Balkan countries, which are European, have been waiting for so long.”

In France, the President names the Prime Minister, but in practice is forced to make a choice that would be able to get the support of a majority in the assembly, because the French National Assembly can dismiss the Prime Minister government.

Therefore, Macron has indeed placed himself in a very difficult and risky position. He has vowed to remain in the presidency regardless of the results of parliamentary elections (on July 7) he himself convoked. He thus might have to name a far-right government, depending on the results. Such results are to come a few days before the NATO summit in Washington, which Macron is of course expected to attend. In such a scenario, he would arrive there in a completely demoralized position.

Marine Le Pen’s 2022 proposal (to leave NATO) was just following the steps of Charles de Gaulle. Le Pen (who is the “far-right” most famous politician in France) is, truth be told,

basically a Republican conservative. She supports left-wing economic policies, is pro-abortion, and is a vocal critic of the current “open-borders” migration policy.

For years, the “far-right” label has been the most feared political weapon in Europe and, more broadly, in the West. Far from being merely an accurate description of (very real) neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi groups, it has long been an umbrella concept that also includes all sorts of hardline nationalists and populists. On different occasions, this bogeyman enlarged concept (weaponized by both the left and the right) has served the purpose of setting up Establishment centrist coalitions everywhere.

Today’s mainstreamization of the so-called “far-right” thus serves justice – in a way. At the same time, it also opens the way for the rehabilitation of [real Fascists](#) – as long as they remain loyal to the European bloc and to the Atlantic alliance, as I [wrote](#) before. Part of the European center-right and conservative Establishment did hope to make good use of a co-opted and domesticated “far-right” – as seen with the [Meloni-Von der Leyen political Alliance](#). The ongoing French situation brings back the specter of a rising NATO sceptic (and EU sceptic) political alternative and basically short-circuits the system.

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*This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).*

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