



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Is a small cohabitation in the area of foreign policy and defence enough for Macron?



Will NATO colleagues meet a new Emmanuel Macron at this week's summit in Washington? It will definitely be the old Macron, a strong supporter of NATO unity as well as strong ties within the EU, where his country is one of the leaders.

But if the jubilee NATO summit had taken place just a few months later, they might have noticed a difference in his foreign policy.

The cohabitation that Macron will embark on after Sunday's election will be the fourth in the history of the Fifth Republic, after the two led by François Mitterrand (1986–1988 and 1993–1995) and one by Jacques Chirac (1997–2002).

Macron's cohabitation with political rivals, with whom he must now forge coalition agreements to form a government, will **require** adjustments to his foreign policy, one of the most crucial pillars of his presidency.

Foreign policy and defence are constitutionally the responsibility of the president, placing him among the most influential statesmen globally. However, the sharing of political power will force him to make certain adjustments.

Whether these adjustments will be smaller or larger, and, above all, in which areas of foreign policy they will take place, depends on the composition of the future French government, which is not yet in sight.

## Minimal corrections in foreign policy

From a foreign policy perspective and the Macron presidency's ambitions to increase France's global presence, Sunday's results could go hand in hand with the president's desire to make as few, if any, adjustments to his foreign policy as possible.

The distribution of power in parliament is such that the three blocs have a fairly equal influence, suggesting that the power of the new (coalition) majority and the resulting

government will not be particularly great.

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The balance of power in the parliament indicates that internal conflicts among the three dominant blocs will diminish its influence, leaving less energy for influencing the president.

Macron can be satisfied with how the citizens have shared power through different political options, as this will make cohabitation easier and make his partner (the government) less aggressive.

## A loss of leadership authority

At the same time, however, the complicated domestic situation will weaken Macron's leadership role on the foreign front, as his undisputed authority to represent France independently will be reduced.

It would be sufficient if international partners had such a perception, and the global (particularly European) arena would perceive Macron as less influential than in the previous seven years.

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There will be a multitude of reasons for such a perception. Regardless of who the partner in the new French government will be, their foreign policy views are already sharply at odds with those of Macron.

If it is the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP),

which surprisingly won the most seats in Sunday's elections, Macron will feel uncomfortable for a long time to come, as this grouping focuses on internal social and economic reforms, much less on defence and foreign policy.

## Leftists disinterested in global affairs

This grouping, for example, does not even mention NATO in its **programme** because of the major differences between them.

This is understandable given that opinions range from advocating for France to withdraw from the NATO joint command, then possibly also in favour of leaving the Alliance, advocated by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of France Unbowed, the largest party of the left bloc, to advocating for NATO's complete dissolution, which the Communists, also members of the NFP, are calling for.

Among them are socialists who hold similar positions to Macron. They are in favour of France remaining in the Alliance and improving defence cooperation within the EU.

The representative of France's strong security policy ties with the EU is the last Socialist President, Francois Hollande (2012–2017), who won a parliamentary mandate in Sunday's elections.

With regard to Ukraine, the situation is somewhat easier for Macron, as the left condemns Russian aggression in its joint programme and supports Ukrainian defence and all measures that contribute to ending the aggression, including the supply of weapons and the freezing of the assets of Russian oligarchs.



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However, there remains a reservation about their actual implementation of these shared principles, as many recall Mr Mélenchon's somewhat patronising attitude towards Putin's actions. For instance, he stated that "the fear of Russia is absurd" following the Russian annexation of Crimea and prior to the invasion of Ukraine.

The biggest disputes if the left becomes part of the next French government will undoubtedly revolve around relations within the EU, particularly with Germany.

The legacy of the bloc strongly criticises German influence in the EU, claiming it aims for hegemony and harms French economic and social interests.

Considering that France is present at all global points and wants to increase this influence under Macron, there are still many big unknowns about its positioning in the Middle East, for example, or in Central Africa, as the potential participants in the future government do not have a clear policy on these issues.

Given the extremely wide differences within the left-wing NFP, Macron will likely look for ways to preserve his previous foreign policy strategies by using some ministerial solutions, particularly in the areas of foreign policy and defence.

The French constitution does not even begin

to define relations between partners in a state of cohabitation. It therefore leaves ample room for political agreements and, above all, for agreements at a personal level on policy implementation.

In the forthcoming government formation, it will be of the utmost importance to Macron, who takes over the defence and diplomacy departments, as they directly affect his constitutional powers.

If he does not manage to achieve a fully functional "large" cohabitation with the new government as a whole, a "small" cohabitation in the area of foreign and defence policy will be sufficient for Macron to continue the current course on European and global issues over the next three years of his term of office.