

France and the Crisis of the Modern State: When Protest Reaches the School Gates

(Translated)

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France did not need a new protest to prove it is living through a deep civilizational crisis, but it perhaps needed a sign more telling than any previous one: that the anger would reach the doors of the schools, and that pupils themselves would take to the streets to protest against institutions no longer capable of providing what is supposed to be the most basic promise of the modern state: a teacher who is present, a classroom fit for learning, a suitable building, and a future that can be trusted.

Since late September 2026, a wave of protests has begun in Parisian schools after the issue of teacher shortages ignited the spark of anger. It then spread within days to hundreds of schools across France. Pupils demanded an end to teacher shortages, a limit on classroom overcrowding—which in some cases reaches around 35 pupils—the repair of dilapidated buildings and facilities, and a reduction in academic pressure and the anxiety accompanying the transition to university through the Parcoursup web portal. The protests affected approximately 30% of French secondary schools, according to estimates published by the French newspaper, Le Monde.

These escalating movements could not pass without igniting a new crisis, because the state is dealing with them on a highly flammable social and political ground, hoping to prevent gatherings and quell a student movement that might threaten the course of the upcoming presidential elections. This led some demonstrations to turn into confrontations and acts of sabotage, to which the police responded by pouring oil on the fire. The matter was not limited to repression and the use of violence; the number of detainees exceeded 5,000 people, 87% of whom were minors according to figures from the Ministry of Justice on October 5; while more than 1,800 people were referred for prosecution. Injuries even reached an extremely serious level when a fifteen-year-old pupil lost his hand after a grenade exploded during a police intervention, prompting the General Inspectorate of the National Police to open ten investigations into incidents involving injuries or the use of force. In turn, the authorities announced that hundreds of police officers were injured and that assaults, sabotage, and arson had occurred at a number of sites.

However, the significance of these events lies not in the scale of the accompanying chaos, but in the fact that France's crisis has reached a new generation that has itself become opposed to the state's official policies. It was preceded by the Yellow Vests, pension reform protests, farmers' protests, and waves of strikes and unrest linked to the high cost of living and austerity policies. What unites these movements, despite their different participants and demands, is a growing feeling that the state is demanding more sacrifice from society while its ability to deliver what were once considered constants of the French model is declining: a strong school system, effective public health, broad social protection, and rising economic opportunities.

Here, Macron appears as a necessary facade for a system older than himself, not as an agent of its entrenchment and deepening. France's public debt has risen from levels approaching 60% of GDP at the start of this century to 119% in the second quarter of 2026, when it reached approximately 3.596 trillion euros. France is entering this phase with a high deficit and increasing debt servicing costs, while the government attempts to achieve massive savings in the 2027 budget in the face of a deeply divided parliament and a society that no longer readily accepts austerity prescriptions.

On the other side of the equation stands France, attempting to restore a military strength commensurate with its growing geopolitical ambitions in the face of the increasing threats confronting Europe. The military budget has nearly doubled between 2017 and 2027; defense allocations, excluding pensions, reached 57.1 billion euros in 2026, an increase of

6.7 billion in a single year, with the state planning to reach 76.3 billion by 2030. Furthermore, an additional 36 billion euros were added to the military programming law for the period between 2026-2030, on top of the 413 billion originally allocated for 2024-2030, with an increasing focus on munitions, drones, air defense, space, and the capabilities required for high-intensity warfare.

This expenditure cannot be reduced to merely purchasing weapons. It is an attempt to rebuild the foundation of French power: modernizing the nuclear deterrent, developing aircraft, submarines, ships, and missiles, and expanding the industrial and military capacity to wage a protracted war. The war in Ukraine has imposed a harsh realization on the whole of Europe: the post-Cold War decades, during which armies were downsized while benefiting from a “peace dividend,” have ended. Therefore, the rearmament of France is not an invention of Macron, even though it has accelerated significantly during his tenure.

And herein lies the paradox that gives France’s crisis its historical dimension, its civilizational depth, and its ideological roots linked to the doctrine of separating religion from life. The state wants to remain a global nuclear power, to possess an army capable of independent action, to play a leading role in Europe, to maneuver on issues like Ukraine, the Middle East, and migration, while simultaneously maintaining an extensive welfare state, a strong public school system, and costly public services. Yet these ambitions converge atop an economy that has suffered for years from sluggish productivity, accumulating debt, and deficits. Thus, the gap has widened between the image France wishes to project in the world and what its institutions can actually provide for its children at home, producing France in its current, shaky form.

Therefore, the image of the French student standing before their dilapidated school appears more expressive of the crisis than many political speeches. France, which wants to be an independent strategic power in a turbulent world, faces a generation asking it about a teacher who didn’t show up, an overcrowded classroom, a crumbling building, and a future they see as insecure. In the background, the rot of its corrupt principle eats away, as crises of identity, migration, and *laïcité* (French secularism) accumulate, political polarization deepens, fragile governments follow one another, the extreme right feeds from the swamp of political mediocrity, and society becomes increasingly convinced that the political elites are no longer capable of producing a convincing compromise between what the state promises and what it can actually afford to pay for.

From this, the existence of a deep-rooted, civilizational crisis shaking the foundations of France becomes clear. It is true that it is a state with nuclear power, advanced industry, established institutions, and a central position in Europe. However, civilizations are not measured solely by the size of their armies or their ability to produce weapons; they are also measured by their capacity to renew trust between the state and society, and to convince the new generation that the future it is asked to defend is worth believing in.

This is where France’s crisis reaches its deepest layers, when it fails to establish the economic and social foundation that would make its ambitions viable, and when its faltering capitalist model weakens its ability to produce solutions for crises of its own making. For the decaying capitalist state can finance the latest missiles and aircraft, yet it fails to convince a student that their school and their future are worth investing in. This strikes at the very core of the relationship between the state and society, between the present and the future, and between the illusory image France wishes to paint of itself and the reality its children see from within their schools and streets.

Thus, France flounders in the darkness of capitalism, and nothing will save it from this hell and its accumulated darkness except the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly-guided Caliphate), which will be established soon by the permission of Allah (swt). Allah (swt) said: **﴿قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى اللَّهَ بُنْيَانُهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّقْفُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَاهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾** **“Indeed, those before them plotted, but Allah struck at the foundation of their structure, and then the roof fell down upon them from above, and the punishment came upon them from where they did not perceive”** [TMQ Surah An-Nahl: 26].