

## The Mistake and Its Punishment: In 2025, Macron Will Reap the Political Storm He Sowed Last Year

Yaron Gamburg and Rémi Daniel | No. 1941 | February 4, 2025

**France is in the midst of a deep political crisis, exacerbated by President Emmanuel Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly. Without a clear parliamentary majority, the French political system is now mired in unprecedented instability, with no resolution in sight. This crisis comes at a time when the French economy is showing signs of weakness and social polarization is worsening, strengthening movements at both ends of the political spectrum. Facing domestic challenges, Macron has intensified his international engagements, although without substantial achievements. In the context of the war in Gaza, the president has been both inconsistent and confrontational toward Israel. Jerusalem should prepare for further shifts in French politics and update its network of connections in Paris to mitigate potential difficulties arising from Macron's policies.**

The year 2024 will be remembered for its prolonged political crisis—one of the most severe in modern French history. Four governments have come and gone, and snap elections were held for the National Assembly, further deepening France's political paralysis. Despite President Emmanuel Macron's impressive accomplishments in his two flagship projects—the exemplary hosting of the Olympic Games and reopening the restored Notre-Dame Cathedral on schedule—the political upheavals of 2024 have undermined the government's ability to cope with the challenges threatening France's economic and social stability and have weakened its international standing.

The crisis worsened due to President Macron's surprising decision to dissolve parliament after his party's defeat in the European Parliament election and to hold snap elections in the summer of 2024. His expectation was that the ruling coalition would secure a parliamentary majority, which the 2022 election results did not allow. However, the move ended in a major setback for centrist parties associated with Macron; a significant strengthening of the left-wing bloc, the New Popular Front (NFP), led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the far-left France Unbowed party; and the transformation of Marine Le Pen's far-right party, the National Rally, into the largest faction in the French parliament.

In its new composition, the National Assembly consists of three political blocs, none of which holds a majority. Macron has the authority to appoint a government without parliamentary approval, but the National Assembly can topple it if the opposition parties unite. This is precisely what happened to the government led by Michel Barnier, which was appointed at the end of the summer and collapsed over the vote on the 2025 budget just three months after taking office. While Barnier's successor, François Bayrou, announced the formation of a

new government before Christmas, there is no sign that the political crisis will be resolved anytime soon.

On the one hand, lacking parliamentary support, the new government will struggle to function and may fall, like its predecessor, if it fails to meet the demands of the opposition. Their demands currently focus on repealing the pension reform that raises the retirement age to 64 and maintaining the purchasing power of lower-income groups. The first major test will be securing approval for the 2025 state budget. On the other hand, the French constitution prohibits the president from dissolving parliament again for at least a year following the previous dissolution. This means the political deadlock could persist for at least another six months. With the government paralyzed and no clear alternatives in sight, Marine Le Pen has already declared that “Macron is finished” and announced preparations for an early presidential election. Similar calls are emerging from the left as well.

France’s severe political crisis is unfolding under particularly difficult economic and social conditions. In 2024, France climbed to 11th place globally in terms of national debt-to-GDP ratio, reaching 112%—significantly higher than the European average of 81%. Unemployment rose throughout 2024 and stabilized at 7.6% after years of decline, which had been considered one of President Macron’s major achievements. The French government had previously provided substantial financial support to businesses and households to maintain purchasing power amid the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine. However, drastic cuts in government spending are now required. Added to these economic difficulties is widespread dissatisfaction among lower-income groups over economic reforms. The deteriorating economic situation is fueling the rise of extremist forces in French politics—both on the left and the right—who are united in their opposition to Macron’s economic policies.

In addition to the economic crisis, the results of the 2024 snap parliamentary elections reflected citizens’ concerns about their personal security and the growing societal polarization over France’s identity—particularly its secularism, a fundamental value of the Republic—and immigration issues. Marine Le Pen, leader of the *National Rally*, has capitalized on the missteps of her opponents. On one side, Macron and his allies appear powerless in the face of worsening social crises. Their tactical decision to form an alliance with the left to block Le Pen in the July elections, followed by an attempt to form a government in cooperation with the moderate right, has eroded public trust in the president. On the other side, Jean-Luc Mélenchon has adopted a hardline stance on societal issues, facing little pushback from his more moderate left-wing partners. Mirroring trends in other Western European countries, his party has embraced a controversial position on French national identity and the role of Islam—partly to appeal to Muslim voters, who have become a significant support base for Mélenchon.

In contrast, this stance has alarmed many French voters, particularly in the wake of a series of terrorist attacks in recent years. Against this backdrop, Le Pen’s political platform has become increasingly convincing to a growing segment of the French public, especially as she persistently distances herself from the racist and antisemitic ideology of her father, seeking to make her party more “mainstream.” Her positions have influenced government policy, with

Minister of the Interior Bruno Retailleau—known for his hardline stance on immigration—emerging as a central figure in the government, retaining his position despite the recent political turmoil.

Moreover, the *National Rally* has successfully portrayed itself as a responsible party willing to cooperate with the government to safeguard national interests, while Mélenchon's representatives have behaved violently in parliament, which is perceived as contrary to France's political traditions. The alliance between Macron's centrist bloc and the left in the summer 2024 elections has allowed Le Pen to position herself as the true alternative to the current leadership, making her, for now, the main beneficiary of the ongoing political crisis.

With the start of the new year, France's political system has entered a new phase of crisis, with the ability of the government to function being questionable—a situation that could lead to a constitutional crisis. In this environment of political and economic instability, there is a risk that Macron will resort to further reckless decisions, as seen in the summer of 2024. Under these circumstances, social polarization is likely to deepen, further empowering the extremes of the political spectrum.

The events in the Middle East since October 7, 2023, have significantly affected French society and politics. The stance of Mélenchon's party highlights the shifts within the French left. Its representatives have refused to recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization or condemn the wave of antisemitism that swept France after October 7, which was largely driven by young Muslims from immigrant neighborhoods. Rather, they have emphasized that their primary concern is the rise of Islamophobia. At the same time, they have adopted an even more radical position toward Israel—accusing it of apartheid and genocide, calling for immediate recognition of a Palestinian state, and advocating for the arrest of Israeli soldiers who hold French citizenship.

In contrast, Marine Le Pen and her party have leveraged the events in the Middle East to reaffirm their support for Israel and the Jewish community. She and other senior party members participated in an anti-antisemitism rally, condemned Hamas, and expressed support for Israel's right to self-defense. Furthermore, the French right has framed the rhetoric and actions of the French left and segments of the Muslim community as evidence of their claims that these groups threaten France's republican model.

President Macron's position on Israel has reflected his complex domestic political situation and his need to appease the country's Muslim population. According to French political tradition, foreign and security affairs are the exclusive domain of the president, even when he lacks a parliamentary majority. Macron's predecessors sought to leverage the international stage to rehabilitate their image in the eyes of French voters. Macron, too, has been highly active—and often vocal—on foreign policy matters over the past two years; yet his achievements have been relatively modest. In addition to strained relations with Germany and the European Commission, France's position on the war in Ukraine—including recent calls for deploying Western troops on Ukrainian soil—has not garnered support from other nations and has been characterized by inconsistencies that have frustrated France's allies.

Furthermore, France has suffered a series of diplomatic setbacks in Africa, in countries that were once considered part of its historic sphere of influence.

Macron's response to Israel's war against Hamas has also been contradictory, confrontational, and, at times, outright hostile. Officially, France continues to emphasize Israel's right to self-defense and calls for the release of hostages. However, Macron's initial proposal to establish an international coalition against Hamas was quickly abandoned in favor of a call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza—directly contradicting Israel's position. Although France participated in the efforts of the international coalition to thwart the first Iranian attack on Israel in April, as the war in Gaza dragged on, the French government barred an Israeli delegation from participating in the Eurosatory international arms exhibition. Moreover, in October 2024, Macron called for an arms embargo on Israel, citing the IDF's operations in Lebanon—a country of significant symbolic importance to the French. Adding to the diplomatic rift, the French president made controversial statements regarding Israel's history, prompting strong condemnations not only from the Israeli prime minister but also from France's leading Jewish organizations and members of Macron's own ruling party.

France's hardening stance against Israel has recently complicated its mediation efforts between Israel and Lebanon. It was reported that as a condition for France's involvement in the ceasefire mechanisms, Israel demanded that Paris withdraw its support for the International Criminal Court's decision to issue arrest warrants against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. France subsequently retracted its backing of the ICC's move—a reversal seen once again as evidence of inconsistency in French foreign policy.

If France continues its confrontational approach toward Israel, its influence over developments in the Middle East is likely to diminish, without yielding significant political gains at home. Similarly, France's ability to shape events in Syria appears limited—partly due to Turkey's dominant role in the region. In recent years, France's relationship with Turkey has deteriorated over disputes in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa, France's support for Armenia in its conflict with Azerbaijan, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's criticism of French secularism.

Jerusalem has limited ability to mitigate tensions with Paris, especially given that France's increasingly adversarial policy toward Israel is being driven by President Macron himself. However, there is an important gap between the public rhetoric of French and Israeli leaders and the more constructive and productive engagements occurring behind the scenes between institutional and non-governmental actors in both countries. Israel should maintain and strengthen these diplomatic and strategic channels. Israel also continues to enjoy significant public support in key sectors of French society. Macron's approach to Israel has faced significant pushback, including from senior figures within his own party. Amid these internal divisions, Israeli lawmakers and politicians should strengthen their ties with pro-Israel factions in France's ruling coalition and new government.

Moreover, the persistent terrorist threat in France naturally provides a strong basis for expanding bilateral security cooperation. At the same time, Israel must prepare for potential

political shifts in Paris and engage in open dialogue with all major political parties, ranging from the Socialist Party on the left to the *National Rally* on the right—excluding Mélenchon’s party. Taking these steps will help Israel counter anti-Israel initiatives from the Macron administration and navigate the diplomatic challenges posed by France’s ongoing political instability.

\* This article is part of a series of articles analyzing the crises in Germany, France, and the European Union, the connection between them, and their implications for Israel.

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