
Review

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Samuel B. H. Faure, *Avec ou sans l'Europe: Le dilemme de la politique française d'armement* [With or without Europe: The dilemma of the French armament policy], Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2020, 199 p., ISBN : 280041717X.

How does a state develop armament policies? What factors drive the acquisition of military capabilities? Under which conditions does a state choose national production or international (multilateral and bilateral) cooperation to equip its armies? In his book *Avec ou sans l'Europe : Le dilemme de la politique française d'armement*, Samuel B. H. Faure provides detailed answers to these essential questions while building on a sociological exploration of the French State's armament policies. Using impressive empirical material, composed of more than 160 interviews and ethnographic observations conducted in the defence sector, Faure recreates the decision-making process that structures the acquisition of military capabilities by the French state. The book is a major contribution to understanding the socio-political making of armaments programs, which are central components of international security.

Avec ou sans l'Europe mainly argues that the politics of French military procurement result from the struggles and cooperation among the 'armament elites' (*élites de l'armement*) of the state bureaucracy (Direction générale de l'armement, minister's cabinet, administration, military staff, etc.) and of industrial groups (Thales, Dassault, EADS, Airbus, etc.). The book's main purpose is to identify and investigate the results in terms of armaments' policy outcomes of various power configurations in the state-industries networks. In this perspective, Chapter 2 analyses the choice of European cooperation for the acquisition of the transportation aircraft A-400M. While Chapter 3 explores the choice for national production ('*Made in France*') in the construction of the combat aircraft Rafale, Chapter 4 investigates the choice for the off-the-shelf procurement option in the case of the drone Reaper's purchase by France from the United States. Each of these decisions, which involved different options of (inter)national procurements, is the result of specific power relations among the key state and industrial players of the French armament sector.

Faure's book makes two major contributions to the debates in international security researches, particularly in the field of armaments development studies. The first contribution is theoretical while the second is methodological.

The book's first theoretical added value, as previously explained, is that the demonstration is based on a sociological framework through which the author analyses the struggles among the French armament elites. The conceptual armature of the book is inspired by Norbert Elias' notion of 'configuration',

an approach close to Pierre Bourdieu's 'field' concept, that is defined as a structured set of conflictual relations and interdependences between certain types of actors (pp. 34–35). According to Faure, the different outcomes in terms of military acquisition resulting from the French decision-making process are embedded in tensions between different professional configurations. For instance, the 'exclusive configuration' (*'configuration exclusive'*) and the 'disembodied configuration' (*'configuration désencastrée'*) are composed of strongly Europeanized armament elites, which explain why, when these systems of interdependences dominate the decision-making process, they result in the decision to acquire military capabilities through European cooperation. This was the case for the A-400 M program. As Faure notices, Europe's choice in the development of a French transportation aircraft was far from obvious. Before the 1990s, the transportation aircraft sector was dominated by the 'amalgamated configuration' (*'configuration amalgamée'* – characterised by a low-level of Europeanisation of its elites and organic relations between the State and the industries), which promoted the option of national production. The 'disembodied configuration' became dominant only in the 1990s. The significant Europeanisation of the French armament elite led to the development of the A-400 M in a European framework. Meanwhile, the *Made in France* choice approved for the Rafale resulted from the domination of the 'amalgamated configuration' in the late-1970s–1980s. Composed of strong and exclusive relations between the Direction générale de l'armement, the Armée de l'Air, Dassault aviation and the Snecma, the 'amalgamated configuration' supplanted the rival's 'disembodied configuration', promoting the acquisition of the Eurofighter Typhoon.

Faure's configurational framework has three theoretical added values. First, this sociological armature is a stimulating alternative to the classical, and still dominant, interpretations of armament development in security studies. Indeed, armament development is often seen as an objective and rational response from states to their permanent 'security dilemma' fuelled by the anarchical international system.¹ The global balance of power or the need to acquire equipment in the context of new transnational threats, such as terrorism or piracy, are often seen as key motivations for domestic defence expenditures. Faure's sociological approach provides a strong critique of these dominant theses. Arguing that armaments programs are merely the product of bureaucratic struggles between different professional and corporate interests, the book shows that spending money on new military equipment is a highly

¹ Glaser, 'When arms races are dangerous?', pp. 44–84; Tang, 'The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis', pp. 587–623.

political decision that cannot be reduced to a purely rational policy guided by the international environment.

Faure's second theoretical added value is an original alternative to the 'military-industrial complex' (MIC) theory, which explains the politics of military acquisition by a solid and permanent collusion of interests among the military, politicians and defence contractors.² Faure shows that the homogeneity of the armament sector in the MIC theory is 'overestimated',³ while he paints a remarkable picture of the heterogeneity of the armament elites. Defence projects are not monopolised by a single, monolithic political-military-industrial clique, but result rather from the clashing between multiple interests of various state-industrial networks and alliances. A configuration of actors might be dominant in one situation, but dominated in another, as it is the case with the 'disembodied configuration': its Europeanized elites were preeminent in the A-400 M decision-making process but supplanted by nationally based networks in the Rafale program. This is one of the main strengths of Faure's configurational analysis: the politics of military capabilities acquisition is to be understood as the product of complex *social relations*. In other words, *Avec ou sans l'Europe* advances the analysis of military public policies from the restricted, substantialised conception of power, seen as captured by a monolithic group, to a relational model, which embraces the contingency and unpredictability of power relations.⁴

Thirdly, Faure's analytical model can be generalised and adapted to other empirical contexts. The social spaces, or configurations, in which armament policies are forged are objectified in the book through, at least, two very clear criteria: the degree of internationalisation of the elites and the degree of autonomy or interdependence between the state and the industrial players. Those dynamics can be perfectly transposed and adapted to the study of military procurement choices of other countries as well.

The second core-originality of *Avec ou sans l'Europe* is methodological. The book is an excellent example of how a qualitative research methodology can be conducted in the defence sector. Armament programs are one of the most sensitive domains of public policies, and secrecy is a central aspect of their existence. As such, deconstructing the decision-making process of military procurement is far from being an easy task, especially in France, which is one of

2 Moskos, 'The Concept of the Military-Industrial Complex: Radical Critique or Liberal Bogey?', pp. 498–512; Thorpe, *The American Warfare State: The Domestic Politics of Military Spending*.

3 Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

4 Joana and Smith, 'Changing French Military Procurement Policy: The State, Industry and 'Europe' in the Case of the A400M', pp. 70–89; Hoeffler and Mérand, 'Avions de combat: pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas d'européanisation?', pp. 52–80.

the biggest powers in terms of defence expenditure.⁵ But the empirical material used in the book is rich, dense and serves the purpose of understanding the complexity of the power relations among French armament elites. Therefore, Faure's book shows the empirical precision to which a sociological study of armament policies might pretend and, as such, nourishes the on-going discussions on the use of qualitative methods in security studies.⁶ Indeed, due to their restricted access, the worlds of security, such as diplomacy, military institutions and defence industries, are often portrayed as hostile to social sciences and to sociological enquiries.⁷ *Avec ou sans l'Europe* strikingly shows the contrary: through the elaboration of an efficient methodological armature, Faure got access to and conducted in-depth interviews with high-ranked military officers and key actors in the political, administrative and industrial spheres. By doing so, the book contributes to demystifying the secrecy of the security and defence sectors, both in terms of access to the field and to information.

Avec ou sans l'Europe is a fascinating immersion into the French politics of armament programs and reveals the complexity and heterogeneity of defence policies. Therefore, Samuel B. H. Faure's research also gives us the opportunity to interrogate under a new light the use of state violence on the international scene. The armaments Faure studies are used in contemporary conflicts. Both the Rafale and the drone Reaper have been deployed in the recent global counterterrorist campaigns conducted by the Western powers in the Middle East, Africa and beyond. Consequently, Faure's demonstration can also contribute to building bridges between the analysis of the institutional environment underpinning armament procurement and the study of the effects of technological innovation on the historical and late-modern evolution of war and violence.⁸ *Avec ou sans l'Europe*, therefore, can be a starting point for developing a cross-fertilizing agenda in security studies: the decision to generate new armaments being intrinsically related to warfare and the question of how social interactions involved in defence programs shape the fate of organized violence is a stimulating path that needs further exploration.

5 Faure, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–45.

6 De Goede, Bosma and Pallister-Wilkins (eds.), *Secrecy and Methods in Security Research: A Guide to Qualitative Fieldwork*; Harald and Lie, 'Challenging Anthropology: Anthropological Reflections on the Ethnographic Turn in International Relations', pp. 201–220; Daho, Guittet and Pomarède (eds), 'Les territoires du secret: Confidentialité et enquête dans les mondes pluriels de la sécurité'.

7 Vrsti, 'The Strange Case of Ethnography and International Relations', pp. 279–301.

8 Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network*; Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*; Bousquet, *The Eye of War: Military perception from the Telescope to the Drone*.

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