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DE GAULLE: UNDER THE HERO'S ARMOUR

(Summary)

In his long political life: since he was the leader of the Free French Forces; during the time he was the Prime Minister of the Provisional government of the French Republic; in opposition as the leader of the Rally of the French People, and during the eleven years of his presidency, Charles de Gaulle received heavy blows from various sides that made him think more than once to retire to private life.

On 18th June 1940 de Gaulle appealed to his nation to continue the war to the victorious end fighting side by side with their British allies. But between 3rd and 8th July the same year the Royal Navy killed within a week more French mariners than the enemy German navy killed during the entire war. The attack against the Algerian port Mers-El-Kebir which took the lives of 1327 people infuriated the nation. Almost all French people who were in the United Kingdom left the country and went back to the parent state. After that drama de Gaulle wondered whether to go on leading the Free French Forces, based on The Island or to withdraw from the political life all together and go to Canada.

The general realized that in order to represent his country's interests both in front of the allies and the French in the parent state he had to establish a government which should have its headquarters on independent French land. Dakar could ensure such a base and he defined the city as "the capital of the Empire during the war". The Gaullian-British expedition from 23rd to 26th September 1940, whose aim was to conquer Dakar, was a *débâcle*. The failure

was so humiliating that de Gaulle as he himself confided had thoughts of suicide.

From a completely unknown savior the General became “The Liberator of the territory”. In August 1944 he was welcomed with indescribable admiration everywhere he went. In spite of his incredible prestige he did not have a stable political majority. The three largest parties in the National Constituent Assembly – communists, socialists and the Mouvement républicain populaire had complete control over the public opinion. The strongest of them – FCP laid down a term: to receive one of the defense and law enforcement ministries in his Cabinet. De Gaulle rejected any requirements. He believed that party interests could not be put above France’s interests. On 20th January 1946 he resigned as Prime Minister because he thought he had accomplished the mission he had defined and deprecated “the regime of the parties” which had been regenerated again.

After the adoption of the new constitution, there was inflation in France, furious strikes, corruption scandals, and the colonial system was shaking all over. It was again time for the General to enter the political fight. On 7th April 1947 he announced the establishment of the Rally of the French People (RFP), said to be the commencement of “second Resistance” against the parliamentary system. In the beginning his followers multiplied but their leader’s inclination to reject all compromises and unions resulted in his complete political isolation. One by one a number of deputies even from the RFP group left him and those who voted in his favour became fewer and fewer. On May 6th, 1953 de Gaulle gave back the freedom of his members of Parliament and announced that RFP’s goals were not achieved.

After all his successes on the behalf of France a time came when students sent him to “old people’s home”. In May or June 1968 it started to become clear that a new generation had appeared – people who not only did not appreciate Gaullian acts of heroism and symbols, but even bitterly mocked at them. Late that year and at the beginning of the next one the French people gradually realized that they could do without the General. On 27th April 1969 a Constitutional referendum was held about reforms that would have led to government decentralization and changes to the Senate but it was rejected by 53% of the voters. That led to de Gaulle’s immediate resignation as President. The General never thought he had to stay in power for the sake of power itself. He really kept his resignation letter in his pocket and turned it in two times.