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How the Mitterrand regime has begun to destroy France

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During a visit to London soon after his election as President of France, François Mitterrand chose to characterize the central feature of his foreign policy as the reestablishment of an "entente cordiale" between Britain and France. Hardly accidental, Mitterrand's reference to the 1904 treaty which served as prelude to World War I revealed his thinking and implied the qualitative shift French policy was about to undergo: 1) the privileged Franco-German relationship, cornerstone of French foreign policy under de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard d'Estaing, was to be replaced by a privileged Anglo-French policy, and 2) a global redefinition of French Third World policy was about to occur and a more colonial policy styled on the Fourth Republic would replace the nation-state orientation of the first three Presidents of the Fifth Republic.

Socialist France has apparently found in the Malvinas war the ideal conditions to unite these two policies. France has recently given spectacular diplomatic support to Britain, was unequivocal when others in Europe were equivocal and sought vainly to restrain the spread of conflict.

Nonetheless the key to the Mitterrand Regime's foreign policy lies not in its Anglophilia—which is an inevitable, almost hereditary, feature of Fourth Republic politicians—but in the reflection of its own colonial desires it sees in Great Britain's policies. How else can one understand the reference to 1904 entente which had a crucial and lasting influence in Third World history? Under the entente, strategic areas of influence were defined for both colonial powers: Morocco was "given" to France while England "took" Egypt. Ultimately this framework of accords led to the secret wartime Sykes-Picot accord which carved up the entire Mideast between France and England. This second expansionist effort put Syria and what is now Lebanon under French rule whereas Palestine and what was then Mesopotamia were made part of the British Empire which then controlled both the western and eastern access to the Suez Canal.

Mitterrand, unlike many of the younger Socialist technocrats who inhabit



Henri Bureau/Sygma

The scene on Paris's Rue Marboeuf after the April 23 fire-bombing in front of the Lebanese weekly Al-Watan Al-Arabi. Terrorism has joined unemployment and inflation on the list of France's domestic problems under the Socialists.

Paris ministries today, is a pure product of the Fourth Republic. He was 11 times minister in varying functions over the same number of years, and participated at times in a very direct way, in the violent colonial crisis of the Fourth Republic: Indochina, Madagascar, and Algeria primarily. His then-famous war cry over Algeria, "the only negotiation is war," characterized his policy outlook at the time.

The Socialists and the Third World

Thus, the first and since-then reconfirmed reaction of France to the Malvinas affair was to see in Argentina's action a threat to its own various properties, possessions, and protectorates throughout the world. The nostalgia for lost colonial power, coupled with the condescension toward developing-sector populations of the colonial class, has become an evident, central feature of French Socialist policy. Pierre Mendes-France, Mitterrand's mentor, expressed this in a background discussion as the motivating feature of France's Third World policy. Although moderate by Fourth Republic standards, Mendes-France believes today that the developing sector is largely incapable of autonomous industrialization efforts even when given the opportunities to do so. The emergence of new nations as independent powers has, in his view, led to incalculability in international affairs. France's response to this instability of developing sector areas must, in his view, be flexible but capable of military action when required.

If anything, Mendes-France is more careful, more of

a realist, than the Socialist regime which he did so much to foster. French foreign ministry and development officials have unambiguously opted for an end to the transfer of any technology of value to Africa, the bastion of French influence in the developing sector, while choosing at the same time to maintain, if not reinforce, France's military apparatus on the continent. A certain form of triage is already in operation: credits are being cut down, appropriate technologies alone are under discussion. Africa is, increasingly, a mere zone of raw-materials extraction and proxy conflicts. Socialist policy toward Central America has been based on similar outlooks where the military help and funding provided to the guerilla movements there has been part of an effort to weaken American power in the area in favor of a rural ethic which would leave Central America in continuing immiseration.

When the U.S. government, in a burst of Haigian activity, decided to reopen intelligence exchanges strangely interrupted since the 1960s, and began to see in France a new battering ram against Russia, it had fundamentally misevaluated the nature of the new regime, whose policy was and is simultaneously anti-American and anti-Soviet. Mitterrand and his Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson have reiterated time and time again, in public and in private, that the central strategic preoccupation of the Socialist regime is to act to avoid a "new Yalta," a global accord which would bypass French interests in the developing sector. In Paris ministries these days one hears senior officials seriously

espousing the view that French Socialist efforts to heat up Central America are counterbalanced by equally destabilizing anti-Soviet efforts in Eastern Europe and in Poland in particular.

The contrasts to Gaullism

Mitterrand's foreign policy thus represents a complete break with the strategic policies pursued by France over the past 23 years, and a return to those of the Fourth Republic. Interior Minister Gaston Defferre made a point of this recently when he declared that the Fourth Republic was, in his wise opinion, far more successful than the Fifth.

The broad lines of de Gaulle's foreign policy outlook, largely followed by his two successors, were premised on the notion of an entente among sovereign nations in the East-West field as well as in North-South relations. As his speech to the Academy of Science of Buenos Aires in 1964 demonstrates, his central preoccupation was that developing-sector nations, freed from colonialism in the aftermath of World War II, would accede to the technological means and scientific know-how required to master their own destinies.

European nations, emerging from the devastation of the war, would in turn have to define a commonality of interest without renouncing their national sovereignties if Europe held any chance to exert influence in the postwar world. De Gaulle understood that the rapid industrial modernization of Europe would then be of effective value for the nations of the developing sector. Europe's power itself would radiate out from a cemented Franco-German relationship.

By the end of the 1960s, as the international monetary system established at Bretton Woods began to unravel, de Gaulle and his adviser, the celebrated economist Jacques Rueff, were the first to demand a new international monetary order. Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, and Gaullist France's development perspectives were largely identical in their formulation and outlook. Although never written down in one single document, the idea of world development characterizes all of de Gaulle's works.

From his wartime and postwar experience, de Gaulle understood England: Churchill was as bitter an "ally" as could be found.

The conflict between London and de Gaulle in the immediate postwar period over the Levant region (Lebanon and Syria) is paradigmatic of this fact. De Gaulle in his collected works has noted that he would have declared war on England in 1946 over British Mideast policy had France been capable of doing so. During the war and in its immediate aftermath, Britain had hoped to subdue France. Jean Monnet, working against de Gaulle, provides insight into the problem with his proposal for a merger of France into the British empire.

Concrete realities of British strategic policy led de Gaulle to keep them out of the European Community.

The sweeping contrast of Fourth Republic policies and those of de Gaulle could not have been greater. The Suez Canal expedition of 1956 demonstrated that France had become "a cock-boat in the wake of a British man of war." The repeated efforts towards supranational institutions had made France into a tertiary power, at best, fatally diseased by colonial wars.

De Gaulle and Rueff left Georges Pompidou an economy in full expansion, a strategic defense capability of real value and a development design. With minor changes, Pompidou pursued de Gaulle's policies and though, in a moment of hesitation, he relented on the question of British entry into the EC, he was the first to recognize at the end of his term (which was shortened by an early death) that he had been in error.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was elected in 1974 in a world situation characterized by aggravated monetary and strategic crisis. The crucial strategic decision taken in the early years of his term to launch a massive nuclear program protected the otherwise fragile French economy from the violent effects of the successive oil crises. Not a traditional Gaullist, Giscard in 1976, when faced with the incalculable strategic problems caused by the election of Jimmy Carter in the United States, made a thorough return to traditional Gaullist policies in foreign affairs. He and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, both allies of the United States, saw in Carter a mutual danger, which enhanced Franco-German cooperation. The vastly aggravated international payments crisis after 1974 also led to the reintroduction of the debate of a gold monetary system which itself brought about the creation of the European Monetary System and the idea of the European Monetary Fund.

Consequences of Mitterrand's victory

With the defeat of Giscard d'Estaing France is, once again, becoming a tertiary power, a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing factor in world affairs. Liberation theology and colonial inspiration have replaced a design for development and stability.

Worst of all, continental Europe has been profoundly weakened by the anglophile penchants of the new regime, whose domestic instability matches the incoherence of its foreign policy. What policy does France have today toward the Soviet Union? No one really knows—perhaps the government itself doesn't know. France no longer has a war-avoidance policy, but rather a policy of disturbing the possibility of a feared new Yalta.

Ironically, the Mitterrand government, weakening France's world position and hence that of Europe as a whole, has made necessary what it fears most: a super-power understanding if peace is to be maintained in the 1980s.