

Mitterrand disrupts Moscow's Mideast game

by Mark Burdman in Wiesbaden

The government of French President François Mitterrand has launched a broad diplomatic offensive in the Middle East which is impeding the efforts of London and its U.S. State Department allies to impose a "New Yalta." This New Yalta scheme, associated with Lord Carrington, envisions an Anglo-Soviet "spheres of influence" agreement dividing the region.

An anxious British press has begun to comment on the consolidation of a new Paris-Baghdad-Cairo axis. Paris has become the venue for negotiations between Egyptian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Butros Ghali and Iraqi Vice President Aariq Aziz on the resumption of bilateral relations, which were broken after Egypt signed the Camp David Treaty with Israel in 1979. Also negotiated were protocols for expanded Egyptian-Iraqi military cooperation against the British-created Khomeini regime in Iran, with which Iraq has been at war since late 1980.

Mitterrand's bid to strengthen France's political and economic position in the Arab world is a fight for survival for France. The French economy is to a great extent leveraged on its growing trade with the Arab world. Not only that, but surplus oil-producing states like Saudi Arabia have extended billions of dollars in credits to France, most recently a \$4 billion Saudi loan enabling France to defend the franc on the currency markets.

The Mitterrand government has been discussing with Iraq a proposal to sell upwards of \$20 billion in military hardware. France is accepting partial payment for arms purchases in oil. But Paris is also reportedly working on a "global plan" to finance these arms purchases, establishing an open credit line to Iraq.

Financial aid for Iraq was also reportedly discussed by Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, leader of the RPR opposition, during his just-concluded trip to Washington and New York.

A related element in the French Gulf diplomacy was revealed Jan. 17 by a Kuwaiti general, who announced that Kuwait (a traditional British stronghold) had just concluded a large deal for the purchase of French jet fighters, possibly preparatory to a purchase of shares in the future production

of Mirage-2000 aircraft. The faction in the Kuwaiti leadership pushing for a "French connection" is closely allied to Saudi Arabia and is believed to be responsible for breaking the story in November 1982 on Lord Carrington's and Henry Kissinger's involvement in illegal land purchases on the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Within 24 hours of a Saudi-led Arab boycott of a mid-January visit by British Foreign Minister Francis Pym, French Defense Minister Charles Hernu was visiting the Gulf state, Oman, and French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson touched down in Bahrain. Oman and Bahrain are heavily influenced by London.

Battle for Lebanon

In Lebanon, the Mitterrand government is using its established influence along with the United States to keep the Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon from carving up Lebanon between Israel and Syria, and thereby consolidating control over one of the world's most lucrative centers of illegal drugs and gun-running. France has contributed a contingent of troops to the multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon which is all that presently guarantees the unity of that war torn state. The Mitterrand government is also showing its preference for Israel's President Yitzhak Navon should he decide to become a candidate for Prime Minister in opposition to Menachem Begin. Less than one week after Navon made a 10-day visit to the United States and talked with President Reagan, Mitterrand issued an invitation to Navon to visit France.

Within days after Tariq Aziz and Butros Ghali left France, the Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas turned up in Paris for a week of official talks. Since the Henry Kissinger orchestrated outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, Syrian-French relations have badly deteriorated. The regime of Syrian President Hafez Assad has come under the control of Kissinger and his British paymasters.

But now Assad is worried that London is preparing his ouster, in order to bring in an Islamic-Marxist leadership as part of the projected "New Yalta" Anglo-Soviet deal. Assad is said to fear a military coup, and for that reason is keeping his troops "busy in Lebanon." There is speculation among European diplomats that Assad may be looking for new friends in Europe, starting with France.

France needs Washington

As vigorous as French Middle East diplomacy is these days, France alone does not have the muscle to undermine the New Yalta plan which Carrington and his allies in Moscow are plotting. If the White House does not intervene into the Middle East to bring about a peace agreement and restrain Israel, those uneasy collaborators, London and Moscow, can take control of the region and the oil it exports, giving them a stronghold over the world economy . . . something France is now fighting to prevent.