

Report from Paris by Joëlle Leconte

The old carrot and stick

Moscow is offering economic deals to Mitterrand while it increases its geopolitical pressures.

While Soviet First Deputy Prime Minister Ivan Arkhipov was in Paris for important economic discussions on Jan. 29-Feb. 2, the Soviets were backing provocative actions by their Libyan asset Muammar Qaddafi in Chad, actions which have already killed one French pilot. The terrorist group Action Directe emerged again and bombed two military-linked companies in Paris, Panhard-Levassor and SNIAS, in retaliation for France's "imperialist behavior" in Chad.

A column of Libyan-supported rebel troops crossed over the "red line" Jan. 24. The French army had established the line in December on the 15th parallel in the middle of Chad in order to stop the fighting. While withdrawing to the north, the column was attacked by French planes and shot down a Jaguar, killing the pilot. The column was armed with anti-aircraft weaponry, which indicates the Libyans were prepared to clash with French forces, and wanted to challenge the French troops at a moment when the French are "stuck" in Lebanon and will presumably do everything to avoid a similar situation in Chad.

French relations with the United States are the target of the Soviet operations, and French maintenance of the peacekeeping force in Lebanon in conjunction with the United States is a particular target.

Then came the appearance of a Soviet cruiser in the Hammamet gulf, near Tunisia, a warning of Moscow's determination to back Qaddafi. TASS has violently denounced "French in-

terference in Chadian affairs" and announced that the "GUNT [Goukouni's rebel force] has the means to retaliate . . . and to fight American and French imperialism."

Given this appeasement outlook, one must not expect the French government to do anything effective against Qaddafi in Chad—though it would be easy militarily. It is exactly the French government's willingness to defend Chad that the Soviets want to test. But Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson went to Tripoli on Feb. 1 to meet with Qaddafi and try to "negotiate a compromise" on Chad.

The increase of Soviet military pressure while Arkhipov is on his mission to sign economic deals which will be very welcome to the hard-pressed French economy is the classic soft-cop/hard-cop approach.

The Soviets are offering France important new trade openings while she is in a dire economic situation—with current U.S. financial policies exacerbating the crisis. The Soviets have mounted quite an effort to relaunch French-Soviet relations through economic exchanges. French Trade Minister Edith Cresson was in Moscow last November, and Transport Minister Charles Fiterman in December. Cheysson had a two-hour talk with his counterpart Andrei Gromyko during the January meeting on European security and cooperation in Stockholm. High-level civil service delegations have traveled one after the other to Moscow.

The employers' organization spent

some time in Moscow in December, and in January a colloquium took place in Paris, organized by the Soviet Institute of the World Economic and International Relations (IMEMO) and the French foreign ministry, on scientific and technological transfers,

First Deputy Prime Minister Arkhipov, an economic specialist, offered to buy 7 to 10 billion francs' worth of French capital goods and food products. It is likely that he will offer to buy nuclear plants from France—ironically enough, to allow France to reestablish the deficit of her trade balance with the U.S.S.R. The French deficit will double in 1984 due to the import of the Soviet gas that she does not need, but is under contract to buy.

The increasing Soviet-French economic deals are feeding the perception of some leading French strata that East-West relations hit their low point during December when the Soviets walked out on the START and other arms-control talks with the West, but now tension is decreasing.

The line is that since Andropov has disappeared, the Soviet Union is led by a collegium and will not be able to move decisively; thus, if Europeans are patient, everything will finally fall back in place. Therefore, let's re-open channels and economic relations without second thoughts. President François Mitterrand and the mainstream of the Socialist Party apparently made the same judgment and are conducting a policy of "appeasement."

Claude Estier, editor-in-chief of the Socialist weekly *L'Unité*, wrote recently that Moscow has been careful in all its attacks against the Western world not to say anything against France. This reflects the hope of President Mitterrand that he can enter a "dialogue" with Soviet Union, a hope he has stressed many times since his mid-December trip to Yugoslavia.