

Report from Paris by Joëlle Leconte

New leverage for the 'decouplers'

Mitterrand in Moscow made a dangerous concession to the Soviets, calling for a moratorium on space-based defense.

Although French President François Mitterrand's trip to Moscow at the end of June did not give off the same stench of appeasement as recent pilgrimages there by other West European leaders, the results of the visit must nevertheless be judged a gain for those seeking to decouple Europe from the United States.

Mitterrand told his Soviet hosts that France has introduced a resolution on peace in space to the Geneva U.N. Disarmament Commission, calling for, among other measures, a five-year moratorium on deployment of space-based beam-weapon defense. Mitterrand declared that rapid progress in the field of disarmament is possible on such issues as "the non-first-use of force, the banning of chemical weapons, nuclear non-proliferation, and preventing the space arms race."

Mitterrand's concession to Moscow's bid to prevent the West from developing a beam-defense system is the result of a dangerous balancing act that he is playing among rival political factions in France. On the one side, a powerful faction centered among old Resistance fighters and the armed forces is demanding full French support for the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative and for large-scale production of the neutron bomb for defense of Europe against a Soviet ground attack. With an eye to this audience, Mitterrand made it clear to his Soviet interlocutors that he would not allow the French strategic nuclear forces to be included in any arms-control dis-

cussions between the superpowers.

But Mitterrand is also under heavy pressure from the Communist Party, which holds four posts in his government, and from the "conservative" anti-beam-weapon lobby centered around Industry Minister Laurent Fabius. Fabius, who is linked to the Washington, D.C. Heritage Foundation, insisted on national television at the end of June that beam-defense is out of the question, since if only 5% of incoming missiles could penetrate the defensive shield, a massive technological arms race would ensue. The superpowers would gear up to develop enough missiles to saturate one another's defenses, he said, increasing the nuclear threat.

This incompetent argument bears the pawprints of Henry Kissinger and Lt. Gen. Danny Graham's "High Frontier." In fact, nuclear missiles traveling at 20,000 feet per second would be no match for laser beams traveling at the speed of light, particularly as part of a multi-layered anti-ballistic-missile defense system.

The Mitterrand government may believe that its call for a moratorium on space weaponry is merely a tactical posture and a play for time. It may delude itself that by postponing the superpowers' deployment of a beam-weapon system, France could catch up in its own secret research and development efforts. What this "clever" argument overlooks is that the Soviet call for a freeze on weapons in space is directed solely against a potential

U.S. system. The Soviet Union has violated all previous arms-control agreements, and will forge ahead with its own laser program, no matter what paper agreements exist.

It is the Reagan administration's toleration of Kissinger et al. which has left Mitterrand teething on his tightrope. France is the country in Western Europe where support for beam defense is strongest; France's laser industry is among the most advanced in the world; French nationalism, the heritage of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, is a potent force against Russian domination, provided it is allied with the United States. Were President Reagan to move against Kissinger and actively seek French support for his program, he would find a willing ally.

Despite his concessions to the arms controllers, Mitterrand did make "undiplomatic" interventions in Moscow on the questions of human rights violations in the Soviet Union, and the issues of Poland and Afghanistan.

He also attempted to counter vitriolic Soviet propaganda against West German "revanchism," the scare-campaign about a revival of Nazism in the Federal Republic of Germany, which military analysts say could provide the pretext for a Soviet invasion. Mitterrand traveled to Stalingrad (now called Volgograd) on June 23, where he gave a speech saluting the courage and military capability of the forces on both sides who died in the famous battle there. He emphasized that the German people fully deserved their place in the postwar reconstruction of Europe, which, he said, was based on the historic reconciliation of France and Germany.

This did not make his Soviet hosts very happy. But Mitterrand's sentiments will do nothing to deter the Russians' adventurism; an alliance based on beam defense will.