

French refusal to give U.S. overflight rights weakens Chirac government

by Philip Golub

The new French government's unfortunate decision to deny the United States the use of French airspace to carry out the punitive bombing raid of April 14 against Libyan terrorist training camps has created an unexpected strain in U.S.-French relations. The dyarchical French executive was informed of the United States' intent and request at the latest on April 12, and its decision to deny was presumably taken at the latest on the next day.

Security and intelligence-related cooperation between France and the United States was in the process of being upgraded before the raid, the French refusal, and the resulting strain. Anti-terrorist intelligence cooperation had been intensified, leading to the preventive arrest and expulsion of two Libyan "diplomats" and four North African and Arab accomplices who were planning a grenade and explosives attack on the U.S. consular office in Paris. This cooperation was referred to by President Reagan in his speech immediately following the bombing raid in Washington. Moreover, perspectives were being opened of greatly increased military and political cooperation in other areas, such as Africa and the Levant. As a result, however, of the mid-April events it is probable that much of this will be, albeit temporarily, put into question. Chirac now faces growing internal opposition coming from within those in his own ranks who warmly supported both the U.S. raid and a generally tougher anti-terrorist stance.

Leading military and anti-terrorist circles in France blame the French decision on the dual power situation which resulted from the recent March legislative elections. They are privately expressing their frustration and anger at the indecisiveness of the new government. In fact, there are two separate executive centers in France, one in the presidential palace under Socialist President François Mitterrand, the other around new Premier Jacques Chirac. This entirely novel constitutional and political situation under the Fifth Republic has forced both the President and the premier to compromise with each other on certain vital issues and in the administration of policy. While Chirac has been granted a virtual blank check to act on the internal security situation and has full powers to purge the police and engage in effective internal

anti-terror actions—this aspect of policy is led by Interior Minister Pasqua and Security Minister Pandraud—the reverse is true in the domain of both foreign affairs and, especially, defense affairs.

Constitutionally the President is both head of the Armed Forces and solely responsible for engaging France's military forces in war. Foreign intelligence information is now sent to both the presidential palace and the prime minister's office, and Mitterrand has the right to convoke any functionary he likes at any time, and still has oversight and decision rights over all secret and diplomatic aspects of foreign affairs. The narrowness of the victory of Chirac and his allies on March 16 has exacerbated their dependence on this power-sharing arrangement.

A history of appeasement

Over the past three years Mitterrand has persistently tried to accommodate or appease Libya's Colonel Qaddafi. In November 1984, Mitterrand scheduled an ill-fated meeting

Giscard: 'I approve the U.S. action'

In the National Parliament on April 16, former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing endorsed the American bombing raid on Libya. Giscard declared, "I approve the U.S. action in Libya, which is justified by the repeated acts of aggression by Libya against the populations of Western democratic countries. In periods of tension ignited by acts of international terrorism, the West must above all demonstrate full solidarity. I would like to repeat that France was forced to intervene in Kolwezi to face up to a destabilization effort directed against Zaire, and that some of our troops were flown from Corsica and Zaire by American planes."

with Qaddafi in Crete to find a negotiated settlement with Libya over Chad. The French President proposed a mutual withdrawal of forces which had been committed to Chad in 1983. In 1983, the Islamic Legion of Qaddafi swarmed southward from the Aouzou strip in Northern Chad down toward the Chadian capital N'jamena.

Under intense pressure from other francophone black African regimes and his own military to act, Mitterrand committed French forces to defend the capital but rejected his own military command's suggestion to bomb out the Libyan armored columns and inflict a stinging defeat on Qaddafi. He contented himself with the worst solution, of fixed military positions. Following the Crete "summit," the Libyan regime immediately broke all of its verbal agreements with Mitterrand. France withdrew its troops, Qaddafi did not. Quite the contrary, he intensified troop presence, which has now reached 6,000, and used the intervening time to build up logistics for his air force and armored troops. Most recently, renewed Libyan-backed aggression against the Chadian government of Hissene Habre forced France to redeploy its forces once again in an operation code named "Epervier." Finally, in 1985, Mitterrand appointed the architect of his rapprochement with Libya, Eric Rouleau, ambassador to Tunisia, a move which was very badly received in Tunis.

Hence, it came as no surprise that Mitterrand would veto U.S. overflight requests. No one in the U.S. government seriously thought otherwise. Gen. Vernon Walters said as much on national American television on April 17. However, the question remains as to why the Chirac government, while powerless to change such a decision, did not distance itself clearly from Mitterrand. Chirac's representatives have made

repeated public and private statements representing a fundamental shift in policies toward Northern Africa, Africa, and the United States. There are two levels of explanations to this:

The first is that the government requires a few more months to implement the new electoral laws required to shift the balance of power in the country. In effect, an open and major conflict between Mitterrand and Chirac so early in the new situation could have led to parliamentary and governmental anarchy.

The second, which in no way contradicts, but rather supplements the first explanation, is that the traditional "Arabist lobby" within the diplomatic and foreign office apparatus of Chirac's RPR party still retains much influence and has never demonstrated any eagerness to fight Libya's leadership, any more than Syria's or Iran's. Nor have they ever been close to the policies followed by President Reagan. There are thus factions within the ruling coalition itself on strategic matters.

The French hostages in Lebanon only aggravate this dilemma. In time Chirac will have to clarify his own position which has been carefully balanced over the past days. This clarification becomes all the more urgent for the premier, who is truly concerned about international terrorism.

His Giscardian allies are very strongly supporting the U.S. action. Former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing on April 16 warmly endorsed the U.S. raid (see box), as did Jean Lecanuet, president of the UDF, the other party in Chirac's majority coalition. Latest developments indicate that this shift is already occurring: Interior Minister Pasqua and Chirac intimate Toubon have both made statements in the direction of an endorsement of the U.S. action.

How to finish off Colonel Qaddafi

On March 1, 1986, *EIR*'s European bureaus published a Special Report entitled, "Moscow's Terrorist Satrapy: The case study of Qaddafi's Libya." The report is based on the conviction that the world cannot tolerate Muammar Qaddafi and his regime.

To quote from the introduction: "The present report has several interlinked purposes: to provide the general public, as well as specialists, with the data necessary to understand the Qaddafi phenomenon, and to unveil the extensive network of his protectors, in the East as well as in the West.

"The report is an indictment of the Qaddafi regime and its accomplices, and if this proves to be the last report *EIR* is obliged to publish on this case, we will have succeeded in our aims."

Contents include:

- Libya and Qaddafi today. Includes the not-so-mys-

terious biography of the colonel, a profile of resistance to him, and charts of Libya's command structure, government, and military.

- The privileged relations between Libya and Moscow. How the Libyans came to be Moscow's "pet Muslims"; the East German connection; and a chronology of Libyan-Soviet relations since 1945.

- The Nazi-Communists behind Qaddafi. Including Swiss Nazi banker François Genoud, and the "left" terror outfits of Abu Nidal and "Carlos."

- Qaddafi's European friends. Sections on France, West Germany, and Italy detail Libya's links to the separatist gangs and the Green Party, but also the pro-Libyan lobby in business and government establishments. A chart shows Western Europe reliance on Libyan oil imports.

- The case of Armand Hammer, American oil billionaire, and perhaps the oldest living Soviet agent; his massive Libyan oil holdings; his connection to Israel.

The 75-page report, already in its second printing, is available for \$100. It can be ordered by writing to: Qaddafi Report, *EIR* News Service, P.O. Box 17390, Washington, D.C. 20041-0390.