

Scandal, murder, power struggles target French republican system

by Jacques Cheminade

A succession of scandals and mafia-style murders is shaking the very foundations of power in France, even if the elites still claim they are keeping the effects under some kind of control. These last weeks, the two main developments are the police raids against Roland Dumas's offices and homes, and the murder of Claude Erignac.

Dumas is the head of the Constitutional Council, the French equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court, and the number-two man in the Republic. Two judges, in an unprecedented move, have jailed his former mistress, Christine Deviers-Joncour, who is accused of stealing millions in public funds. Dumas, appointed head of the Constitutional Council by President François Mitterrand a few months before Mitterrand's death in 1995, is suspected, in his former position of Foreign Minister, of having received kickbacks in the 1990 sale and delivery of six frigates produced by the national company Thomson CSF, to the Taiwan government. Indeed, Dumas, who first opposed the contract, suddenly turned against his own administration and supported it.

Claude Erignac, the French Prefect (head of the regional administration) on the Mediterranean island province of Corsica, was murdered in cold blood while walking alone in the capital Ajaccio, on his way to meet his wife at a concert. Two hypotheses are raised on the cause of such a murder: It was either an act of revenge by Corsican "nationalists," or a mafia hit against an honest man who was trying to prevent the mafia from taking over the island.

At first glance, the two events seem unconnected, and are said to be so. But a first observation has to be made: The two bear the prints of a period of exceptional developments. For the first time since its creation in 1958, the head of the Constitutional Council has been suspected of criminal behavior. And, for the first time since World War II, a French Prefect has been killed in the city in which he resides.

Let's first look at the Dumas case. Two questions come to mind: How could such a man be appointed to such a position; and, how could he be destabilized to such an extent?

Dumas, since the early 1950s, had been the best friend, fundraiser, and accomplice of the late President Mitterrand. Educated at the London School of Economics, involved in

the resistance against the Nazis, both with British and pro-Communist networks, he was highly secretive and always protected. "Everybody seemed to both respect and suspect him even before knowing him," as journalist Amette commented in the newspaper *Le Point* of Feb. 7. Or, put more bluntly by a prominent Paris lawyer, "He has the best blackmail information of anyone in Paris." Of a "Metternichian elegance," Dumas shared with the President a taste for rare books, works of art, and tender flesh. Such a "man of power," covered with honors and women, thought of himself as invulnerable, a sort of aging *Titanic*.

Dumas was many times accused, but never caught, in many deals, such as the illegal financing of an electoral campaign by another of his lovers, Nahed Ojjeh, the daughter of Syrian Defense Minister Gen. Mustafa Tlas, the protector of Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner. He is also said (by journalist Jean Montaldo) to have been a key man in the infamous "Josephine Affair," involving an international private loan negotiated by France with Saudi Arabia in 1983, with a commission of at least 6 billion francs (more than \$1 billion), which went to the "men of government" in those years.

If we look at Deviers-Joncour, an interesting aspect of her life is that this mistress of Dumas was the former wife of Jean-Jacques de Perretti, later an RPR Deputy and former Prime Minister Alain Juppé's Overseas Minister. Here appears a first connection of the Mitterrand people with RPR proto-Gaullists involved in overseas deals. But there is more to it: In 1987, Deviers-Joncour had created a communications firm, Kairos, and then another one in 1990, Archimedia. Customers of these firms included both Socialist Roland Dumas and conservative RPR leader Charles Pasqua.

The Pasqua-Dumas connection

The Pasqua-Dumas acquaintance is key to understanding what is happening in France. The two men represent different, even opposing networks, which are nonetheless involved in the same business. A sizable part of their dealings involves casinos in Africa and France, controlled at the middle level by Corsican and Syrian-Lebanese operatives. The "African pie" was shared by the two men. Evidence of this, is the oil

company Elf, used by the French as an intelligence base for their operations in Africa. In it, there was a “Socialist side,” around swindler Alfred Sirven, who is close to Dumas and the patron of Deviers-Joncour. Sirven, presently an exile in Switzerland, arranged the deal for the frigate sale to Taiwan, which also produced juicy commissions for the Mitterrand gang. But there was also an RPR “proto-Gaullist side” to Elf, with André Tarallo, “Mr. Africa” of France’s current President, Jacques Chirac. One can therefore speak of an incestuous body controlling French politics. This body is now exposed. Moreover, Pasqua’s friend Daniel Leandri and Deviers-Joncour had free access to Elf’s credit cards for “business expenses,” on which they ran up tabs in the order of 200,000 francs per month. Tarallo, the proto-Gaullist, had signed the contract hiring Deviers-Joncour, Dumas’s mistress!

All Paris is now awash with rumors that the Socialists and the proto-Gaullists, including the two last Presidents, shared the same women.

Erignac vs. the mafia

Let’s go now back to Erignac, to breathe fresher air. His murderers are without doubt at the intersection of Corsican “nationalist” terrorism and the mafia. For the first time in the French administration in Corsica, he had tried to clean out the Augean stables. He first tried to prevent people from carrying weapons, and to make them pay taxes, but he also went beyond this. He had ordered inquiries into two very dirty “tourist investments,” on the Bonifacio peninsula and on Cavallo island.

The Cavallo operation involved a big, mafia-style chaneling of dirty money. The Compagnie des Iles Lavezzi vastly over-valued the infrastructure built by the Italian firm Eucalyptus. The financial charges on those investments siphoned off large amounts of money from French tax revenues, whose destination Erignac was investigating. On the Bonifacio peninsula, military land in an exceptionally beautiful setting, was about to be sold dirt-cheap to a firm headed by an Italo-American from Miami, or to certain other dubious interests, when Prefect Erignac ordered the operations stopped.

Well-informed sources on Corsica present the following analysis: The Prefect did not know quite whose corns he was treading on. His assassination bears the same markings as the earlier murder of Yan Piat, in the Toulon area: She had exposed the takeover of southern France by dirty money and shady sales of military land. Like Erignac, she was murdered by two young people in what was clearly a mafia-style contract. “Look at Corsica,” said one source. “It was controlled by an old mafia, which had all its interests in traditional swindles and lived in symbiosis with French political parties, right and left. The nationalists were nothing but a blackmail force of the families. Now comes a new mafia, which wants to invest in casinos, tourism, drugs. Guess who has been negotiating with them? Isn’t former Interior Minister Pasqua a Cor-

sican? And look into the Socialist camp. Who has negotiated with the Corsican *Giovani* [new mafia]? Wasn’t it former Interior Minister Pierre Joxe, from the Mitterrand palace guard, and who was very well acquainted with Dumas? Look at the whole thing from above, in perspective, and you may understand what is happening in Corsica as a symptom of what is happening in France.”

Indeed, the atmosphere reeks of the fall of an *Ancien Régime*. What a few cognoscenti only used to comment on in whispers, is now being blared in the press. How could it be that a man like Dumas is now exposed? How is it that his bank accounts at Crédit Lyonnais, showing illegal cash deposits in the millions—the tip of the iceberg—can be thrown to the mercy of public opinion?

An answer to those questions cannot be given from a purely internal French standpoint. What is happening in France is connected to the international financial and monetary implosion, and to the British games in Europe and beyond.

In such a situation, there are some who want to clean up the mess made by 17 years of rule by Mitterrand and his imitators. Dumas labels them “the virtuous left” — virtue obviously being, in his mind, a dirty word. But, unfortunately, the virtuous left and virtuous right put together would not be enough, these days, to destabilize the likes of Dumas and Pasqua. There has to be more to it.

Similar to what the new mafia is doing in Corsica at a low level, there is a new mafia that wants to use the cases of Dumas, Pasqua, and others, to destabilize at the national level, what is left of the French republican tradition typified by Charles de Gaulle. Those people are saying: Look, the reason why such Dumas and Pasqua could get away with doing such terrible things, is because of the authoritarian elements embedded in the Constitution of the Fifth Republic. The time has come, they say (striking the posture of a self-righteous Tony Blair), to bury the Fifth Republic once and for all. We, the “clean” people, are going to do it.

As a sign of this, the self-proclaimed virtuous Pierre Joxe has just written a book, called *A Propos de la France (About France)*. In it, posing as a “wise man,” this scoundrel, who made his entire career on the coat-tails of President Mitterrand, now denounces the “Presidential bias” of French institutions. “We have to go through with dropping the ill-fated reform of 1962 [initiated by de Gaulle]. It is dangerous to have somebody directly elected by the people, with great power, who could be reelected for a potentially unlimited term,” says Joxe. “The dichotomy between a President and a Prime Minister hampers the good functioning of French society. . . . It is the basis for a dramatization of political life and for excessive bipolarization.” He calls for a return to the parliamentary system, as “better suited to European standards.”

The dirty British nose is poking out openly in Joxe’s sermonizing. It deserves to be made bloody.