

Chirac Flanks U.S. War Drive—in Africa

by David Cherry

French President Jacques Chirac arrived in Algeria on March 2 to a hero's welcome, as his open-top motorcade, travelling the nine miles from the airport to downtown Algiers, was greeted by cheering, confetti-throwing crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

The meaning of his visit was not lost on London and Washington. Chirac "is leading the diplomatic campaign against a U.S.-led war in Iraq" and his visit to Algeria "is expected further to strengthen his standing in Africa and the Middle East," wrote the British *Financial Times* on March 3. "He seeks to prove that France remains a global power, . . . and is an alternative voice to Washington," said London's *Daily Telegraph* on March 4.

In an interview on Algerian TV on March 1, Chirac had said that he hoped to establish close relations between the two countries like those between France and Germany.

Moroccan sociologist Mohammed Tozy told the French newspaper *Libération* that "everyone is talking about . . . American hegemony, and the Europe-U.S. confrontation. It's as if the Arab world were uniting behind the French and German duo and that the Arab hero were Chirac."

There is potential for more than political realignment in Chirac's move. If war cannot be avoided, and France and Germany break from the free-trade and globalization strait-jacket to defend themselves against the ensuing economic chaos (see *EIR* Feb. 21, p. 4), they will require a relationship with the developing sector much more favorable to both sides.

Addressing both houses of the Algerian Parliament on March 3, Chirac spoke of his vision of an "exceptional partnership." He referred to the bitter Franco-Algerian war of 1954-62, by which Algeria eventually obtained its independence, as "a tragedy whose name, these many years, we did not wish to speak," but which "we must neither deny nor forget." But, he said, "a vast new vista is opening before us. . . . The destinies of Algeria and France are deeply intertwined. . . ." He expressed his "esteem and respect" for an "Islam open to the world."

Chirac called upon Iraq to "cooperate more fully" with UN weapons inspectors, adding that "We must maintain strong pressure" on Saddam Hussein "to reach together and in peace, our established objective of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction." His 30-minute address received a prolonged, standing ovation.

Chirac presented Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika with the silver seal of the last Dey of Algiers—seized by

French forces when they took over the city in 1830—calling it a symbol of Algerian sovereignty. In a moving gesture, President Chirac shook hands with two leading Algerian fighters in the renowned Battle of Algiers, and laid a wreath at a tomb for those who died fighting for independence. Chirac himself had fought against independence as an army lieutenant.

Chirac led a delegation of 80, including five Cabinet ministers, many political figures, artists, and business and industrial leaders. He visited Oran, Algeria's second largest city, addressed Algerian youth at al-Senyah University, and visited the newly reopened Michelin tire factory in Algiers before ending his three-day visit on March 4.

Bouteflika, on French radio, said Chirac deserved the Nobel Peace Prize if he could prevent a war against Iraq.

France's New Partnership With Africa

Chirac's Algerian move gave punch to his declaration, at the 22nd Franco-African summit in Paris on Feb. 20-21, that France and Africa have entered a new phase of equal partnership, that "extends from development issues, such as fighting AIDS and improving agriculture and education, to fighting terrorism and organized crime." "France will encourage African development, but not dictate what to do," Chirac said, adding that France would serve as Africa's "advocate" before international organizations.

The Algerian visit, however, is only the latest, most spectacular of the steps Chirac is taking to implement the declaration. At the summit itself, Chirac violated globalization's free-market principles by speaking of the need to raise the prices of raw materials, and proposed at least ten years of favorable trade terms for Africa. He did not say how that should be done. He reversed existing French policy by urging developed countries to suspend subsidies for agricultural exports to African countries temporarily, pointing out that cheap imports into Africa were undercutting African production. How farmers in the developed sector would be ensured parity prices, he did not say. But while the European Union is the biggest exporter to Africa, only 3% of EU farm exports go to Africa.

Stepping into English-speaking Africa—which the Anglo-American powers think is their turf—Chirac offered to help the governments of South Africa, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe find solutions to problems of democracy, justice, and landownership in Zimbabwe; his proposal has been accepted by all three. South African President Thabo Mbeki said on Feb. 21, that Chirac insisted, "if there is a problem, let's discuss it and let's find a solution. And if there are things that need to be done that might require resources . . . let's see what we can do."

Beginning Feb. 8, France, South Africa, and India held a week of joint military exercises in Gwalior, India. French ties with South Africa are "visibly warming," the South African Broadcasting Corporation reported Feb. 21.