

Report from Paris by Yves Messer

Chirac supports beam defense

While Mitterrand continues to push his "Eureka" defense hoax, some politicians are breaking out of the trap.

Jacques Chirac, the leader of the French opposition party, the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République), has for the first time taken a public position in favor of European cooperation with the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). His statement was published in the May 16 issue of the regional newspaper *Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*.

While strongly defending the Franco-German alliance, he attacked President François Mitterrand's role at the recent summit meeting of Western leaders in Bonn, where Mitterrand blocked allied endorsement of the SDI. Chirac charged that Mitterrand was thereby acting simultaneously against the United States and the Western Alliance, and against European unity.

Chirac's statement is the first sign that something is moving to break the political "consensus" in France, which insists that international issues are not for public discussion.

Chirac declared: "We have to see things as they are. The Soviets are in the race. So are the Americans. Can the Europeans be left behind? Surely not. That is why saying 'no' outright just makes no sense. This is an irresponsible attitude. . . . By taking a spectacularly negative attitude, we are in fact playing the Soviets' game; we're choosing the wrong adversary. What we need, is for the Europeans to discuss the matter and try to reach agreement, before discussing it further with their allied and American friends. There has to be possibility of agreement. On condition, of course, that what the Americans propose does not

lead to increased dependence of Europe upon the U.S."

This is the opposite of what the other French opposition leader, Raymond Barre, is pushing. Asked in an interview in the current issue of the French magazine *Politique Internationale*, whether the SDI would affect the British and French nuclear deterrents, Barre answered: "Frankly, no! . . . The Europeans have . . . to underline that the space-based defense systems won't prevent, and will even give rise to, the development of offensive weapons. They must always recall that, given the complex menace that threatens Western Europe, there is no substitute for nuclear deterrence."

Barre gave full support to Mitterrand's "Eureka" project for European research in laser and particle beams—a ploy to preempt European cooperation with the SDI. Chirac attacked this scheme head-on: "Eureka is not a true response to the present challenges. It is not serious. The Eureka is first and foremost a political operation. . . . It has another shortcoming: It is merely a civilian project. When it comes to mastering space, everything is tied together, the civilian and the military aspects."

The debate continues in the French press. The May 18-19 issue of *Le Figaro* newspaper published the first article yet supporting the creation of a European component for the SDI ("Tactical Defense Initiative"), written by François Heisbourg, a former adviser on international questions to Defense Minister Charles Hernu. The SDI has its own dynamic, he argued,

and Europe has to participate by building a "Tactical Anti-Missile" system, to defend against short- and medium-range missiles.

Yet such statements are the exception in France today. France faces the same problem that it did in the 1930s, when all political forces made a secret pact to do nothing to oppose the fascists.

This is why Chirac's statement was not echoed by the national media. Still, there is no doubt that it echoed the position on the SDI of Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats and Franz Josef Strauss's Christian Social Union in Germany.

The anti-SDI pact joins such seemingly diverse forces as self-proclaimed Gaullist mouthpiece Raymond Barre and the Socialist Mitterrand/Regis Debray gang. The two groups have two points in common: They are anti-communists and they support Henry Kissinger's ABM Treaty.

Even Regis Debray, Mitterrand's adviser who was formerly an aide to the revolutionary Che Guevara, supports the neutron bomb in his most recent book, *The Empires against Europe*, and calls for an improved classical European defense from Warsaw Pact troops—at the same time that he claims the Soviet Empire is crumbling. The same goes for Pierre Lellouche, a member of the French affiliate of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, the IFRI, whose book, *The Future of War*,

supports the defense of West Germany on the Elbe border with the East, with the aid of the nuclear weapons of five French military divisions.

Both schemes are intended to court the French military and the Germans, to build an independent Europea; neither is a serious proposal for European defense.