

Report from Paris by Yves Messer

The opposition swings to the SDI

But while the leading politicians have endorsed the American program, the matter is not yet clear-cut.

Just before leaving for Washington for the International Democratic Union meeting, Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, also the chairman of the Gaullist RPR party, gave a July 23 press conference here, in which he stated: "I would hope that European states consult, in order to join the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative effort." He then attacked French President François Mitterrand's anti-SDI attitude, labelling it "very negative and very excessive."

Most opposition circles—with the exception of the shadowy Swiss-linked former prime minister, Raymond Barre—now agree on the necessity of joining America in the SDI, including former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. But this is the first time that a leader of the French opposition has been so unequivocal. Chirac is following the lead of his young adviser on defense questions, François Fillon, who has dared to contest doctrinal attachment to the old and obsolete deterrence concept dear to the Gaullists, which was once, in de Gaulle's time, the only appropriate policy for France, but which is not fit for today's or tomorrow's threats.

The Foundation of the Future, a think-tank headed by RPR member of parliament Jacques Baumel, had invited Edward Teller to address a Paris audience in late June on the SDI. Baumel himself, in a meeting between French and West German defense experts in West Berlin in mid-July, called for European participation in the SDI, as well as an extension of the French nuclear "umbrella" to West Germany.

In this meeting, he apparently got the tacit support of former Prime Minister Pierre Messmer, a defense minister under de Gaulle, and later, the architect of the French civilian nuclear program.

The opposition consensus is such that even the extreme right-wing demagogue, Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose previous defense position betrayed ridiculous incompetence, has come around to a sensible posture. In his bi-monthly *National*, he writes: "Our Pluton [short-range] missile launchers should at least partially be deployed in the territory of West Germany, that is, closer to the Iron Curtain; then, it is necessary to launch the production of the neutron bomb, the only means of stopping a massive tank aggression; and then, we should participate, not as sub-contractors, but as full partners, in the American Strategic Defense Initiative."

Meanwhile, "Eureka," Socialist President Mitterrand's pet civilian high-technology proposal—offered to Europe in order to counter the SDI—is so heavily listing that it might sink at any moment. At a recent meeting of various European countries' representatives on Eureka, France offered FF1 billion (a mere \$115 million), and everyone expressed "general agreement" with the blurry project. The Paris daily *Le Monde* quipped justly: "The agreement thus expressed reminds one of Woody Allen's famous joke: The answer is yes, but, by the way, what was the question exactly?"

Even Defense Minister Charles

Hernu, who was visiting West Germany, had to state publicly on July 21: "On top of participating in the SDI, Europe should also work out its own project. France, which will remain outside of the SDI, has been working for some time on anti-missiles technologies and has offered cooperation on that to its European neighbors." In other words, the civilian Eureka project is not taken seriously because it fails to offer strategic defense.

If the most important leaders of the opposition are now clearly in favor of the SDI, and the opposition is now breaking records in popularity (59% of the voters in recent opinion polls on the spring 1986 parliamentary elections), the matter is not yet clear-cut. First, there are still some politicians and power-brokers who, out of misguided conviction or foreign allegiance, strongly oppose the SDI and may seek to ally with the Socialists and the Communists on this account. The most obvious such case is Raymond Barre, who has no party machine, but retains powerful influence on 60 to 80 MPs. And then there is the foreign office. In this regard, a powerful clique at the Quai d'Orsay represents just about as dirty a network as the U.S. State Department.

Even Jacques Chirac's entourage is not clear-cut. On his trip to Washington for the International Democratic Union meeting, he took along two foreign policy advisers, Jean de Lipkowski and Kosciusko-Morizet, both of whom any French patriot would regard as suspect, to say the least. Sources report that Lipkowski, a Middle East expert, is most knowledgeable in the field of Lebanese casinos—something that makes some people vulnerable to certain forms of blackmail. As for Kosciusko-Morizet, his office is decorated by a large, autographed portrait of, not de Gaulle, but Henry Kissinger!