
France

Chirac faces uphill battle for 1988

by Philip S. Golub

France inherited a strong presidency under the Fifth Republic of the late Charles de Gaulle, but after five years of foreign policy and domestic calamities under President François Mitterrand, the legislative elections last March brought in the leader of the opposition, Jacques Chirac, as prime minister, and with him, two parallel and contending centers of power and intelligence. One is ruled by Mitterrand at the Elysé Palace and his wing of the Socialist Party; the other by Chirac, the head of the RPR (neo-Gaullist) party.

The bitter internal struggle of recent weeks has made prospects for the 1988 presidential elections uncertain.

Forcibly attached to a motley group of center-right parties assembled in the UDF (Union of French Democracy), Premier Chirac and his RPR are caught between the permanent and sometimes insidious pressures of Socialist President Mitterrand, on the one hand, and the UDF centrists, on the other. Raymond Barre, a longstanding Trilateral Commissioner and honorary president of the Geneva Association of World Insurance Companies, nominally leads the latter group. The student demonstrations and violence of November-December made it clear that despite sometimes conflicting interests, the Barrists and Mitterrandists at least share a strong passion to bar the road to a Chirac presidency in 1988.

The contacts between the Barre crowd and President Mitterrand's Socialists have gone so far that leading RPR officials privately expressed concern over a "systematic destabilization campaign" against the premier and his interior minister, Charles Pasqua.

French security experts believe it no accident that France since March has become, with the Federal Republic of West Germany, the privileged target of irregular warfare (see page 49). France was victimized in September by one of the bloodiest bombing sprees in recent history, run by the Soviet and Syrian intelligence-linked FARE. Then the French military attaché in Beirut was murdered. The "Levantine" edge of this effort, though, has to be interpreted in the larger framework of 1) Libyan and Warsaw Pact-led intelligence operations against French military presence in the Pacific; 2) Cuban-Libyan and East German operations against the European Space Agency's Ariane launching pad installation in French Guiana; and 3) continuing subversion by Libyan and Soviet

proxy forces in north and sub-Saharan Africa.

During the Socialists' undivided rule in 1981-86, these external pressures existed, but the appearance of stability was bought at the price of serious losses of prestige and power on the world level.

Achievements in defense, foreign policy

The threat that France might reaffirm a strong defense and policy role in these sensitive areas of the globe is the real reason for the destabilization. In spite of routine misunderstandings, U.S.-French relations under Chirac have been the best in decades. The new government and the French defense establishment have pushed forward a bold military procurement program which, in time, will give France a nuclear retaliatory capability much larger than the present *force de dissuasion*, with an expanded and modernized MIRVed submarine ballistic missile fleet and mobile ICBM launchers.

Research is ongoing as part of both a European Tactical Defense Initiative and as an SDI-related effort. The medium-to long-term effects of these programs will be to enhance NATO security and that of the West's developing-sector allies. The Chirac government is also aware of the perils facing the friends of France and the West in northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the near East. The December visit of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to Paris is a good indicator of overall French intent: Stabilize the economies of Western-oriented governments in the developing sector, enhance their defense, and avoid the spread of fundamentalism.

In his sibylline fashion, President Mitterrand has exploited the political and economic splits in the government coalition, to impose short-term priorities on the government where long-term designs are required.

Yet, deep divisions also exist within the Socialist Party of France, exemplified by the violent power struggle that led to Defense Minister Herem's ouster during the Greenpeace affair of 1985. The nationalist, pro-defense elements of the Socialist Party, largely removed from power under the Fabius government that ruled just before Chirac, more naturally gravitate toward the RPR than toward their radical colleagues.

If Mitterrand does not run in 1988, the Socialist Party will be shaken up. The radical left-wing currents of the Socialists led by ex-interior minister Joxe and party chairman Jospin will not, without Mitterrand, be able to hold the party together. Rumors abound already that some elements around Michel Rocard—a constant competitor of Mitterrand—would rather live with Chirac than die in obscurity within the Socialist Party.

Nor would the Union of French Democracy survive united a process of reforming of French political life. The RPR, solidly unified and implanted throughout the country, would emerge as the single most powerful force in the country. The question remains: Can Chirac emerge out of this complex crisis to win in 1988?