
Conference Report

French military strategy returns to gunboat diplomacy aimed at South

by Christine Bierre

The recent Franco-Algerian crisis has exposed a radical change in French military and strategic thinking.

Politically this dispute rings the death knell of a preferential alliance which, despite the typical love-hate relationship between colony and colonist, had united France with its former colony since the latter's independence. The fact that it was Foreign Minister Roland Dumas who went to Beijing to demand that China explain its nuclear cooperation with Algeria, doubtless on behalf of the new troika of France, the United States, and Great Britain, really does constitute treason against the traditional Franco-Algerian cooperation.

Roland Dumas's demarche confirms what France's participation in the Gulf war had already made obvious: that France has abandoned its "Arab" policy. But it would be false to think that the new French strategy is solely anti-Arab. France is, henceforth, turning against all developing sector countries, thereby abandoning General de Gaulle's remarkably generous posture toward the poor countries that wanted to progress.

This overturning of the values of Gaullist France lays bare an ugliness, a racism that one had gotten used to seeing only in the faces of the friends of Mr. Le Pen, but which, today, is spreading throughout the French political class. How else could one interpret the statements of Dep. François Fillon, "Gaullist" by extension, in the May 2 *Quotidien de Paris*, explaining that, in order to stop countries like Algeria from obtaining with civilian or military nuclear power, "we must set a limit on the export of expertise"?

Wars against the South

Even more disturbing are the speeches that have been given by a number of military figures since the Gulf war, which indicate that a whole military strategy is being put into place to confront the new menace from the South. That was precisely the evaluation of many think-tankers and strategists. Such views were expressed by a certain number of participants in the major military strategy colloquium that was organized in April by the War College in Paris, and which brought together more than 100 foreign dignitaries to discuss "Which Security for Europe at the Dawn of the 21st Century?"

"For 40 years, for the people of Western Europe, the threat

of war was from the East," wrote Yves Lacoste, director of the magazine *Herodote*, in one of the discussion documents distributed by the organizers of the April Forum. "But, now, when euphoria should be general" following the collapse of communism, "new dangers are appearing: not only in the East, where the difficulties of post-communist societies are more and more disturbing, but also in the South, that is, south of the European continent, in the Arab world and more broadly the Muslim world. The Kuwait affair is a living example."

The end of Yalta, with all the control that the superpowers used to exercise over their Third World allies, opens up a new period of instability in the Third World, according to these strategists, wrote Paul Marie de la Gorce, director of the *Revue de la Défense Nationale*, in another conference paper. This is especially true, he says, in the "Arc of Crisis . . . which goes from the northwest of Africa to the Indian Ocean, from Morocco to Pakistan, from the Atlantic to Central Asia."

We are moving, in the language of the experts at the French International Institute for Foreign Affairs (IFRI), from a world in which we had to deal with only one, very well-defined enemy, organized into a bloc, to a world in which the threat is multiple and found in the former East bloc countries, and above all in the South.

But how could this army of poor people constitute such a threat against us? This was explained for us by Maj. Gilles Martin, in his paper, "The Appearance of a Threat to Southern Europe."

Militarily, he says, this threat exists because we cannot appeal to nuclear deterrence against developing sector countries. Now, Southern Europe is already within striking range of the Arab countries. Italy, Greece, and Spain can be reached by Scud class missiles, while new, better performing missiles, which Libya, Syria, and Egypt are in the process of obtaining, would allow them to strike the south of France. These countries are also able to extend the range of missiles, eventually to equip them with chemical warheads, and deploy—for some of them—long-range planes like the MiG-27. As for tanks, countries like Egypt and Syria have three times as many as France.

Even though these countries deploy several systems

allowing them to reach some European countries, Martin acknowledges that these countries do not have an in-depth military capacity to really challenge Europe. With the Mediterranean in the middle, putting a halt to any land-based assault, Martin says the "Arab" menace in fact, is limited both now and for some time to come to a strategy of blind "terrorist bombings."

However little credibility the military threat may have, "the future seems heavy with uncertainty," says Martin, who envisages the building up of opposition—especially by "demographic, economic, and religious orders." Therefore, the threat consists of starving hordes, turned into religious fanatics. First there is the demographic factor: "The contrast between a rich Europe where population is stagnating or regressing, and a Maghreb in a permanent economic crisis, whose demography is taking off, can only be aggravated." Then the economic factor: "The Arab people blame the Westerners for their economic misery." On the religious factor: "Islamic integrism is spreading throughout and opposes Western values." Finally, there is geopolitics: "The two coasts of the Mediterranean create two confederations of states . . . the EC in the North, and the Union of the Maghreb in the South. . . . Having two great powers next to each other, populated by 200 or 300 million inhabitants, often gives rise to rivalries and war. These rivalries are all the more probable when they stem from differences in religion, ethnic differences, standards of living, democracy, demography."

Deploying against weapons of the poor

What to do in the face of this threat? Major Martin made a feeble and scarcely convincing call at the end of his paper in favor of European aid to these countries. Others, more candid, laid out the necessary military strategies to be on the scene for fighting those countries that would dare to develop the same advanced technologies, civilian or military, that we deploy.

Col. Jean-Louis Dufour put forward the following ideas: "From now on, future interventions will be all and altogether be linked in France to limited wars, however misnamed. These will take place . . . within Europe as well as outside the old continent. Overseas action, which formerly for the French Army used to be ancillary . . . even an embarrassing parasite, a bother that used to distract it from being preoccupied with Central Europe, the only noble engagement, will become the rule and the cardinal point of its efforts. Suffice it to say that a new army is indispensable."

Colonel Dufour went on to propose a top to bottom reform of the army, maintaining nuclear deterrence, but creating the conditions for rapid interventions, "as much in the East as in the South." He favors a coast guard, because "our naval forces will never have enough ships to be everywhere." "The land army is going to suffer" the most, but will be reconstituted around a rapid deployment force, considerably reinforced. The air force, will also be changed, in the "more

distant" future. Fewer fighter and intercept planes will be needed, but more very long distance transports.

What will be done with nuclear-armed nations? "What will we do, if the United States, being the dominant power, asked us to aid them in the circumstances leading to a conflict between India and Pakistan, for example? Will we remain seated on our rear ends, contemplating these things and saying, 'This isn't in our interests'?" asked former head of the General Secretariat for National Defense General de Barry, in the discussion that followed the presentation by Colonel Dufour. After being reminded by another participant that the United States would have nothing to do with such a conflict, de Barry acknowledged in effect that such an intervention would be undertaken in the name of the U.N. and the new world order, and not under the American aegis. Then he shouted out: "We need a new Metternich and a new Congress of Vienna, and it's not tomorrow that we need it!" Colonel Dufour added that, nuclear proliferation being what it is, there is a strong probability that "on the threshold of the year 2000, a certain number of regional conflicts, such as that between India and Pakistan . . . will be nuclear ones. The deployment of these weapons is eminently probable. It is only more probable, fortunately, that it may take place in the South than in the North!"

Declare war on the Anglo-American interests

What is the real situation in these countries of the South that Colonel Dufour is declaring the new enemy? In Africa, where the good colonel proposes to have Zaire and Morocco become the gendarmes for France, 29 million will die of hunger in the Horn of Africa, while, according to the latest World Health Organization figures, 6 million are infected with AIDS. Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco are regularly rocked by food riots, brought about by the austerity policies of the IMF; Algeria has been falling into poverty for 10 years. What do these strategists fear: famished hordes, armies of poor, armies of sick, who will demand payment for the misery that's been imposed upon them?

In 1974, when the National Security Council was led by Henry Kissinger, an NSC document denounced development in Third World countries as a threat to the security of the United States. Since then, the manipulation to lower the prices of raw materials on the London, New York, and Chicago exchanges and IMF "structural adjustment" policies have ended up destroying the majority of the countries of the South that make up a "threat" to the United States, creating the "hungry hordes" that now worry the French strategists.

As for Islamic integrism: In Algeria, it was Saudi Arabia, the unconditional ally of the Americans, that financed the Front Islamique de Salut party; and in Iran, thanks to British Petroleum and Royal Dutch Shell, and to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Khomeini was put into power, and, from the beginning, it was the British intelligence services that fanned the flames of Islamic integrism.