

# French debate on war heats up with Debray letter to the Socialists

*Until the actual outbreak of war in the Gulf, opposition to the Anglo-American war policy was quite open and militant in France, especially within the ruling Socialist Party. Since Jan. 15, however, opponents have been effectively muzzled, with the notable exception of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who resigned as defense minister. Now Régis Debray, an "intellectual" who used to be a personal adviser of President François Mitterrand, has taken up arms against the appeasement policy of Mitterrand's government, and what he calls the logic of submission (to Washington). A Pax Americana, says Debray, will lead to 30 years of guerrilla warfare. From their first meeting, in support of President Salvador Allende of Chile, Debray says he worked with Mitterrand in the hopes that the Socialist leader would help bring about justice and economic progress in the Third World. By the mid-1980s, he nurtured no more illusions on that account. This latest indictment issued by Debray, published in the Feb. 14 issue of Le Nouvel Observateur, is conclusive. We publish extensive excerpts.*

Choices made by the President of the Republic commit our policy and our behavior. They cannot commit our consciences, nor prevent us from thinking for ourselves. It would be a tragedy for this country if it were to be said tomorrow that all left-wing men and women walked into this political, diplomatic, and strategic catastrophe, as hostages to the inevitable, and to the hopeless majority. . . . The fact that a majority of our citizens approve the decisions taken does not add or subtract anything from those decisions' legitimacy. . . . Three out of four Frenchmen are for this war. Three out of four were for Suez—and also for Daladier on his return from Munich. Four out of four were for the Algerian War in the beginning, and three and a half [out of four] for Pétain in 1940 and 1941. . . . A statesman is a man who is willing to precede public opinion and wait for it to catch up one year later.

[In France,] we do not defend the Republic, yet we launch a crusade overseas. . . . Everything can be explained by the logic of subservience, renamed logic of war for the occasion. . . . You want the law to triumph? You are going to bury it under the ruins of resentment. You are going to discredit

international law by giving the appearance of international legality to the umpteenth cynical imperialistic deal, just as in 1918. Be a bit more imaginative. What war has not been waged in the name of law? . . . It is only in France where the nice-sounding fiction of a "United Nations war" is still upheld, a stupidity which even Pérez de Cuellar has denied. This is a war decided upon last August by Washington, then legalized by the Security Council in an ambiguous resolution, with the participation of clients and satellites, not to mention buying off those who were hesitant. It sounds good to talk about the Allies—it gives the whole thing an air of D-Day and Normandy beaches, which is not unuseful for the masses. But in London, the media speak only of the "Anglo-American war" and in Washington, officialdom speaks of a "90% American war in the image of the international order which is to follow" (Brzezinski). When the Americans propose an unconditional cease-fire to Saddam, they do so with the Soviets and in their own right, without mentioning or consulting the U.N. They are the sovereigns of the war, not only because nine out of ten soldiers are theirs, but because the decision to stop it, like the one to start it, is in their hands alone.

. . . The carrot of a new world order is something the industrialized West didn't want to hear about when the Third World was proposing it. That new world order did not interest them, because it was economic. Now they bring it up again in a *juridical* form because it is safe and economical. Why should the U.N. resolutions on Palestine, those constant tripwires which have been rejected for more than 23 years by the isolated Israelis and the balanced Americans, be accepted tomorrow by those same powers, made still more intransigent, variously, through their "restraint" or through the blood they have shed? How can we prevent the American expeditionary force from being transformed into an occupation army with an Iraqi proconsul that would be a kind of Palestine raised to the tenth power. A Pax Americana—whatever its pseudonyms may be—means, with pauses and rebounds, 30 years of regional guerrilla warfare. With one complicating factor: disqualification of the U.N. as international arbiter of peace. . . . Countries of the South, where U.N. intervention would be the most important, may very well refuse in the future the mediation of a Security Council so obviously

aligned on a unilateral conception of law and on a single superpower, where the temporary members' votes are auctioned off, and the right to veto—except for China, which is diplomatically out of the picture for the moment—is monopolized by the white powers of the North. . . . And what if India, Nigeria, Japan, Germany, Brazil, are fed up tomorrow with the monopoly on the right to veto by the victorious powers? . . .

To cherish Westminster and *habeas corpus*, must we also forget that the English were the first to use gas in Iraq against

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insurgent Kurdish civilians in 1920 with "an excellent moral effect"? . . . You do not serve the cause of freedom and modernism in the Arab world by pretending it is embodied in a regressive religious dictatorship, where women are slaves, Jews are forbidden, and Christians are mortified (Saudi Arabia); or in an opportunistic, cynical minority dictatorship which is disowned by nine out of ten Syrians (the Syria of Hafez el Assad); or in a satellite, slightly democratic country where imprisonment is frequent and the Parliament is reduced to rubberstamping executive decisions (Egypt). Strange showcase for democracy. It is precisely those Arab countries that are opening up to a multi-party system and freedom of press—Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, etc.—that are rising up against your operation. . . . You are moving toward a North-South war. . . .

I don't think you can understand why the President, the only decision-maker in this matter, made such decisions without remembering François Mitterrand as minister in the 1950s, his apology for Suez before the Senate. Mitterrand, a center-rightist under the Fourth Republic, was never a colonialist in the traditional right-wing sense. But never an anti-colonialist, either. During the Algerian insurrection in 1954, he stated the law: "Algeria is France" . . . Then as interior minister, he adds, "The only negotiation is war," which was neither absurd nor reactionary. He calculated that reform of unjust colonial society was needed, but that first, "order had

to be reestablished."

. . . Don't you smell the odor of the Fourth Republic? The return of the lawyers, of niceties and circumlocutions? Of minds devoid of character, of tacticians with no strategy? The SFIO [the original name of the Socialist Party] is ready to go and beat up the Arabs for the third time. They are used to it: Ben Bella, Nasser, Saddam. I am not comparing them, I am just listing various "Hitlers" presented successively to us. . . . Mitterrand, as justice minister, compared Nasser's takeover of the [Suez] canal to the German Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia. . . . The West picks and chooses its Hitlers as it pleases, according to prevailing interests. . . .

Let's be precise. You have brought back the foreign policy of the Fourth Republic and put it into the domestic setting of the Fifth Republic. . . . We were bored to tears under de Gaulle, but at least France existed, and our journalists were not forced to read the Pentagon's communiqués under a palm tree in order to inform us about our own operations. Alienation. . . . Humiliation. We find ourselves reintegrated into NATO, at the same rank as Italy, without her Mediterranean policy, but with B-52s to boot.

Where does this demotion come from? This falling obediently into rank, albeit with an occasional leap to save our honor, or an occasional separate tune to be heard? Because we have adopted the Athenian posture, the posture of the Fourth Republic and the SFIO toward Washington: We have to stick close to Rome in order to be able to influence her from within. . . . The refrain of this tune: If we are not present in the Imperial Councils such as NATO, we will be marginalized, because the Emperor will not take into account our enlightened advice. . . .

Remember—I had forgotten it for a long time—that François Mitterrand was against leaving NATO in 1965, just like the Lecanuets and the Deniaus of that time, and the UDF of today. Had those people been in power in 1966, they would have sent a French regiment to fight in Vietnam, together with Johnson and Westmoreland. They hated and insulted de Gaulle for his speech on Phnom Penh. . . . Under the Fourth Republic [Socialists], there was a French regiment in Korea. . . .

I am told that to oppose the slide into submission and the abdication of our world role is to be nationalistic and isolationist. . . . I simply refuse to subordinate the world policy of Europe, which is a culture of time, to that of North America, which is a culture of space. Official America has no historical vision of human history. It is painful for them to admit that other memories, other histories outside of their own, exist. That results in a dramatically incompetent way of dealing with Third World crises. The nature of things escapes this kind of decision-maker. Their only obsession is "how." It would be awful if we Europeans were to become hostages to such proven incompetence. To defend oneself against a sword with an aircraft carrier is inefficient, in all cases. Islam can not be treated as one treats a "target," and we cannot solve a problem of civilization in technical terms.