

A New Momentum Seen In Diplomacy of France

by Christine Bierre

French diplomacy has been unfolding in a rather unexpected way since the re-election of President Jacques Chirac in May. While Chirac's "third worldist" intervention at the recent Johannesburg Earth Summit went largely unnoticed—suspected as a ploy by Chirac to take advantage of the absence of the United States at that summit and gain international popularity—all of the diplomatic initiatives taken since, point to a new and coherent drive of French diplomacy to create worldwide alternatives to the Bush Administration's unilateralism.

France's attitude towards the Anglo-American war drive against Iraq has been unusually Machiavellian, an approach that has, so far, succeeded in jamming up rapid progress towards that war. While the Germans surprised the world by rejecting any participation in the war drive even in the case of a favorable UN vote, the French also took a new, more balanced attitude towards the United States. By dropping a kind of systematic "anti-Americanism," and by not rejecting *a priori* participation in the war against Iraq, if it were proven that that country was threatening the world with its weapons of mass destruction, France strengthened its credibility at the international level, and among those who oppose the war in the Anglo-American world.

The international pressure brought to bear on the American government by France, Russia, and Germany, and internal American opposition to the war, has so far forced Bush to drop the imperial, unilateral warmongering demanded by his own hard-liners, and to negotiate at the United Nations. The debate at the UN Security Council is still raging. France and Russia have so far countered the Anglo-American attempt to have the Security Council adopt a resolution which would have automatically called for the use of force by the UN in the case of Iraqi non-compliance with the inspection regime.

As of Oct. 30, the Anglo-Americans have been forced to adopt a two-phase process: a new resolution clearly defining the tasks of the inspectors in Iraq; and in the case of non-compliance by Iraq, a second Security Council deliberation and decision on what to do. But the new draft resolution, which America and Britain were scheduled to present to the Council at the end of the last week in October, still contains ambiguities unacceptable to France and Russia. These could be used by the United States to justify war without a UN vote. Before the inspectors even go, the new draft mentions "patent violations" by Iraq, and, in the same paragraph, says that

"grave consequences" could ensue. France and Russia have rejected this new draft, and are still pressuring for the second vote on the use of force.

French Pressure on Sharon and His Friends

The French are also exploiting to the hilt other international forums. The Summit of the Francophone countries held in Beirut on Oct. 18 was a big success, with the participation of 55 countries. Signs of the success include the fact that nations such as Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic, which are not French-speaking, asked to participate as observers.

The International Organization of Francophone Countries emerged as the rallying point for those who oppose American unilateralism and want a multipolar world. Even though the summit was already scheduled to take place in Beirut last year, and had had to be postponed, the fact that it took place in an Arab capital contributed to turning this summit into a demonstration of force against U.S. policies in that area. Indeed, the official theme of the summit was "Towards a Dialogue of Cultures," and Chirac's introductory remarks underlined this concept: "Making it easier to share human experiences, the dialogue of cultures is the best antidote to the risk of a shock of civilizations. It will give us the foundations for creating a durable peace. But we must also act to bring an end to the present conflicts. . . . In Beirut, let us reaffirm this fundamental credo: In the modern world, the use of force cannot be but an ultimate and exceptional decision. It cannot be admitted except in cases of legitimate defense or by decision of the competent international institutions. . . . Whether it's a matter of forcing Iraq to respect its obligations, or of restarting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, or of settling conflicts in Africa, the same logic of law must inspire us all, because it is the only one which will keep us away from adventurous temptations."

The final resolution of the Francophone Organization refers to all the major conflicts occurring in the world. On Iraq, the resolution fully adopted the French and Arab view, stating, "We defend the primacy of international law and the primordial role of the UN." On the Middle East, the resolution states that the Saudis' "Abdullah Peace Plan," adopted at the Arab League's Beirut summit in March, is "the most appropriate framework to arrive at a just, durable, and global solution for the region." Finally, in closed-door sessions, the Francophone countries reviewed the crisis in Ivory Coast. The final resolution condemns "the attempted takeover of power by force and the attacks against the constitutional order in Ivory Coast." It supports the mission of the CEDEAO (The Organization of West African States) to "favor dialogue, the only road to durable reconciliation."

Franco-German Alliance Against Tony Blair

Perhaps one of the most unexpected, but important, aspects of this new French diplomacy, is the renewal of Franco-

German relations, which had been going from bad to worse since the times of François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin is known to be a strong supporter of the Franco-German alliance. But it is the folly of Anglo-American policies pushing the saner forces of the world to join arms.

The new strength of the Franco-German alliance became public fact when Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder rapidly found a compromise solution to their differences concerning the agricultural policies of the European Union, at the Paris summit on Oct. 24-25. A new episode of the Franco-German wars was expected, as at the recent Nice summit—France demanding that the present EU agricultural system, from which it benefits, remain unchanged, and Germany, the net contributor in this system, refusing to continue to pay. But Chirac and Schröder rapidly found a solution. They agreed that the agricultural budget adopted until 2006 should remain unchanged, but that agricultural expenditures would not increase beyond that level as ten new countries join the EU starting in 2004.

The British had been supporting the German position against France at the summit; but Chirac turned the tables and announced that France intended to put into question the “rebate” obtained by the British during the times of Mitterrand and Thatcher, which relieved Britain of payment of two-thirds of its financial contributions to the EU.

This Franco-German rapprochement provoked a freak-out from the British, as it mirrored the intense confrontation over support for the American warhawk faction. At the recent EU summit in Brussels, tensions had grown so much that Chirac blew up at Blair, shouting, “You have behaved badly. Nobody has ever talked to me like that before!” Tensions had been growing in the days before, Downing Street having leaked to the press that the French had manipulated the Germans and, that when Schröder’s advisers had been fully informed by their British counterparts of the consequences of what they had agreed to, they were furious. Later, Prime Minister Tony Blair took on Chirac directly, accusing him, according to the *Times* of London, of being obsessed with “protecting [France’s] farmers—bungling incompetents—with EU taxpayers’ money.” Blair raged at the “national egoism” of policies which harm Third World farmers, he said, who are unable to compete with EU subsidized products, “which are the result of France’s clinging to the present agricultural policies.”

Beyond the hard realities of EU budget questions, difficult to deal with in this economic crisis, it is the Iraq question envenoming relations between France and Germany on one hand, and America and Britain on the other. It has driven a



French President Jacques Chirac meets with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; their countries are both serious actors in “jamming up” the drive for war in Iraq. Chirac’s shouting match with Britain’s Tony Blair at the Paris EU summit was over agriculture policy, but reflected real confrontation over an Iraq war.

long-lasting wedge between the United States and Germany, and Schröder has no other choice than to strengthen German relations with France. Informed press reports indicate that Chirac was furious at Blair’s recent statements that Britain will join a U.S. military expedition against Iraq even if the UN does not agree on the use of force. The French daily *Le Figaro* of Oct. 29 noted that the Iraqi dossier between France and Britain is “overflowing with poison.” The Franco-British summit scheduled for Dec. 3 has been called off *sine die*.

Which Way for France?

These successes of French diplomacy point to the terrible need for a policy counter to the present Anglo-American imperial drive. Were France to inspire itself from its history, from Joan of Arc and Louis XI to Charles de Gaulle, it would definitely be able to fill that vacuum. What is required is more, however, than merely exploiting the self-destructiveness of the U.S. imperial faction. France must develop a global economic alternative to the policies which have led this entire system to the verge of a total collapse, and which really cause that faction’s flight forward.

But, will it be able to meet that challenge? Dominique de Villepin, sometimes known to be a daring patriot who wants to enhance the power of France in the world, would be well advised to inspire himself by the economic policies of Franklin Roosevelt, Jean Monnet, and Charles de Gaulle. The decision on whether to participate in the Anglo-American war against Iraq will be also a good indicator of how far France is willing to go to stop this world from going into global fascism and orienting it to a better course.