

FRANCE AFTER THE GULF WAR

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With the memory of its military role in Iraq fading, and facing an uncomfortable domestic agenda, France is moving away from its Gaullist legacy as it approaches European integration.

### FACING DOMESTIC STRAINS

Several highly publicized cases of corruption have nudged a public already skeptical about its politicians toward outright cynicism about politics. The media have widely covered what is called the sleaze factor. This is also undercutting trust in government.

President Mitterrand, after a display of leadership in aligning the National Assembly and his country with the United States and the coalition against Iraq, once again appears distracted by recalcitrant domestic issues. Traditionally master of France's foreign affairs agenda, he faces a mixture of difficult challenges--the need for France to remain competitive in the growing single market of the European Community (EC), the apprehension of what the French call the political class about Germany's strength and direction, and the concern of the French foreign policy establishment that Gorbachev may not survive the growing tumult in the Soviet Union.

### Political Malaise

There is a feeling in Paris of drift, accentuated by what critical observers--of which, as always, Paris has an ample supply--view as missteps in relations with Eastern Europe. To many observers, Foreign Minister Dumas's visit to Qaddafi seemed self-serving. Few expect Mitterrand not to serve out the four years of his remaining term. According to speculation, he is still looking to make his mark on history.

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Former Prime Minister Rocard, who held this post longer than expected, is now free to join the growing Socialist Party competition for the eventual succession to Mitterrand. Former Defense Minister Chevenement, who did not support the effort in the Gulf war, is seeking a political comeback.

### **Economic Problems**

The malaise in domestic politics is reinforced on the economic front. Published figures show that the growth of the GNP slowed to 2.6 percent in 1990, from 4.3 percent in 1989. The March trade deficit was three times that of March 1990. Unemployment, while lower than two years ago, jumped 1.8 percent in February. Trade in industrial and military goods fell in March. The energy deficit persists. Countering the European Community trend toward a free market economy, the government is contemplating a bailout of Bull, the ailing electronics giant.

### **Challenges of Social Policy**

In social policy, attempts to reform health and hospital care have produced a stalemate between the Prime Minister and the National Assembly. But in education, the government is making a determined attempt--against strong opposition of the teachers' unions--to adapt secondary education to the new circumstances in which a growing number of students--now easily a majority--still face a traditional system of baccalaureate exams increasingly viewed as elitist and out of touch with the modern world.

### **Reappraisal of Defense Policy**

The defense establishment is mulling over some of the lessons learned in the Gulf, where French forces faced superior equipment, operated with only rudimentary intelligence capabilities, were short on airlift, and found themselves uncomfortably dependent on the U.S. military. The Defense Ministry is now planning to acquire C-17s, and also Airbus aircraft, as part of a European military air transport consortium.

## **BENDING TO NEW FACTORS ABROAD**

France has not given up the ambition to be at the center of Europe. But there are signs it is recognizing change and aligning French policies and actions accordingly.

### **Toward the European Community**

The unilateral option, long a tenet of Gaullist thinking, now looks less attractive. The collapse of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe has removed one of the reference points of French eastern policy. German unification underlines the importance of working with Bonn, if not to provide leadership, then at least to exercise some influence over German thinking and policies.

With increasing economic interdependence among the EC countries, France now favors a transfer of governmental competence to the EC. The presence of a strong Frenchman, Delors, as the Commission's president is facilitating this transition. France sees its future as a part of the European Community, and Paris would like to see strengthened Community institutions before proceeding to the inevitable enlargement of the EC.

### **Away from Gaullism**

The willingness of French policymakers to engage in lateral thinking beyond the bounds of the Jacobin tradition, and their groping away from traditional Gaullist mindsets, was illustrated and reinforced by the recent references of Foreign Minister Dumas to the need to let go of "Gaullist myths and illusions."

On the current issue of European security, French experts are coming to a more flexible view, with less stress on independence and a greater recognition of European and transatlantic interdependence. Paris wants U.S. forces to remain in Europe, where it sees their presence as a counterweight to Soviet forces, a complement to German power, and a contribution to European stability.

French permission for U.S. tankers to use French bases in the Gulf war was a highly visible sign that military cooperation enjoys broad support. The leadership of the French military savored cooperating with

U.S. forces in the Gulf war. Admiral Lanxade, who has just moved from the post of military adviser to President Mitterrand to that of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, will reportedly retain his direct link to General Scowcroft at the U.S. National Security Council.

### **The French-German Nexus**

While French thinking on a European security identity has not crystallized, what is striking is the degree to which it perceives the German and French approaches as running along the same lines, especially about a future European defense identity centered around the European Community. Indeed, French experts posit the existence of a French-German consensus as the kernel of the evolution of such a European security identity.

This confidence in Paris contrasts with a much more tentative German view, which seeks to accommodate stated U.S. preferences for maintaining NATO as the center of European security dialogue. The Germans also tend to see the Paris-Bonn relationship as being on uneasy hold while both capitals sort out the contradiction between the European wish, particularly post-Gulf, for an independent European security identity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the absence of anything remotely resembling such a state of affairs.

Meanwhile, the bloom has gone off the French-German brigade. Germans and many French reject Mitterrand's decision to pull French forces out of Germany. The French, moreover, must face the issue of their nuclear Hades, which can reach only Germany or, at best, the new democracies in the East. Observers in Paris also point to the residue of discomfort many older French retain with respect to their German neighbors.

### **The Soviet Union**

French policymakers are watching the evolution in the Soviet Union with fascination mixed with a sense that they cannot affect the outcome. Commentators point out that France has little information on what is happening in the Soviet Union, and note that what information the

government enjoys often gets caught in continuing bureaucratic, interservice competition.

The assessment in Paris is that the Soviet Union is disintegrating. Gorbachev never captured the personal popularity in France that he enjoyed elsewhere, and the French feel less of a personal stake in him than do, say, the Americans. The French foreign policy establishment views the future of the Soviet Union with unease, strengthened by an awareness that France has little leverage on the outcome.

On the margins of the debate among Soviet watchers, one hears suggestions that Paris should start dealing with Yeltsin and the republics. For now, however, the Elysee continues to look to Gorbachev for indications of where the Soviet Union is heading.

### **Eastern Europe**

French policy with respect to Eastern Europe has been sporadic. The recent treaty with the Poles satisfied Walesa's desire for another visible Western connection but may have touched German sensitivities. Mitterrand's visit to Romania raised questions of judgment and timing, given the lack of progress toward political reform. On two issues of primary significance--bringing the new German states of the Federal Republic up to EC standards and the impending breakup of Yugoslavia--France has not been heard from.

### **The American Connection**

Relations between the United States and France appear excellent and smooth at the presidential level. But observers believe that it is less strong between the foreign ministers. A change of the guard in the office of the political director at the Quai d'Orsay will require a new breaking-in period in the various fora where France, the United States, and others work out foreign policy at that level.

On the military side, top-level relations promise to remain in good repair. Impressed by the U.S. performance in the Gulf, the French show a renewed disposition to work with Americans, and Europe is seen as a way for France to get closer to the United States. But a residue of







