

Report from Paris by Claude Albert

Defense officials reject Soviet ploy

Warning of Gorbachov's "tremendous sleight of hand," the French pinpoint Russia's desire to stop European defense efforts.

Mikhail Gorbachov's latest offer to eliminate short and intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe, the "super zero option," would leave Europe deprived of its only weapons capable of countering Soviet conventional and chemical superiority: Such is the prevailing view in French defense circles. This is why Moscow is proposing to gradually eliminate these forces, military officials believe here, without, other than verbally, touching the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal and enormous conventional forces.

How could France and Britain long resist combined U.S. and Soviet pressures to eliminate their nuclear forces, once the superpowers have dismantled their intermediate and short-range weapons in Europe, military experts warn. "Mr. Gorbachov is a brilliant card sharp, who gives the impression he is flinging all of his game on the table, while he keeps, hidden in the other hand, some master trumps," a French Defense Ministry spokesman is quoted in *Le Monde* on April 18.

"France has nothing to negotiate," former Defense Minister Charles Hernu, a Socialist leader, points out in an interview to *Le Quotidien de Paris*, April 17. But "it is certain," he added, "that we will be subjected to pressures. France is going to be the point where the efforts of all the so-called 'pacifists,' anti-militarists, and anti-security will converge. This could even lay us open to terrorist actions."

Moscow's new proposals are "what I feared most," said the chairman of the National Defense Commis-

sion of the French Assembly, Gaullist François Fillon, to the same newspaper, since short-range weapons "are the weapons which forbid 'surprise,' massive attacks by the Soviet army." The French nuclear deterrent force might not be affected now by disarmament talks, but "this will inevitably be the next step," and "in France, numerous voices will call for a freeze, for non-modernization of our forces, and the present consensus on defense will fly into pieces," Fillon warned.

Were the Americans to be tempted to accept the Soviet proposals, "it would be a great folly," said Fillon, as "it would further accentuate the danger of a decoupling. One cannot bet Europe's security on Gorbachov's nice looks."

Gaullist deputy Jacques Baumel, vice chairman of the Defense Commission, interviewed by the same newspaper on April 18, called the Soviet offer a "tremendous sleight of hand" which would "leave Europe naked" and "in danger of death." The danger of Gorbachov's proposals, he stressed, lies in that "they appear as a contribution to peace while, in fact, they would result in dangerously weakening the Western Alliance and especially in reducing Europe's defense possibilities, while preserving the enormous superiority of the Soviet Union in terms of conventional forces."

No longer protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, "Germany, inevitably, will tend to drift toward a sort of active neutralism which will lead to its

finlandization, and, beyond, to that of Europe as a whole," Baumel said. Fillon stressed that "what must be achieved is a reinforced Franco-German axis"; former Minister Charles Hernu has similarly called for the "reinforcement of Franco-German defense pillar."

Obviously this idea is not to Mikhail Gorbachov's taste. French military circles, *Le Monde* reported, think that behind the latest proposals, the Soviets are racing to prevent, or at least slow down, efforts toward a European defense. In the next few years, according to a Defense Ministry spokesman, a "historic opportunity" could exist, due to the relative stability of West European governments, which would give those governments the basis to set up a European defense "pillar," standing by the American ally. Moscow's "piling on the pressure" is aimed at destroying such an opportunity, the spokesman said.

The current nuclear scare campaign in France, launched by various leftist quarters including the radical wing of the Socialist party (backed, curiously, by the right-wing extremist party National Front), after minor incidents in two nuclear plants, bears the hallmark of Soviet disinformation. Strangely enough, these incidents took place nearly at the same time, at the "Superphénix" fast-breeder site in Creys-Malville and at the Pierrelatte site, producing plutonium for military purposes; despite the fact they presented no danger, "voices" are rising to denounce the "corrosion of the whole nuclear circuit," targeting nuclear power in both its civilian and military applications. While such a campaign is not likely to have much effect on the French, largely supportive of nuclear energy, it is just what the Green and pacifist movement in West Germany needs to agitate against a Franco-German axis.