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U.S.-FRANCE ANALYSIS SERIES

May 2003

French Party Positions on Humanitarian Intervention

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The recent transatlantic controversy over whether and how to disarm Saddam Hussein seems to have confirmed long-held views, particularly in the United States, about the foreign policy approaches and interests of the three major European powers. In this view, all three remain on the same paths they took following the Second World War, making it possible to speak of a single cross-party British, French or German national position. According to these stereotypes, Britain is consistently loyal to the U.S.; Germany is instinctively pacifist; and France, unfailingly obstructionist. These approaches are often said to transcend partisan divides, so that the foreign policy views of a French Socialist have more in common with a member of the center-right *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) than a German Social Democrat.

Even to the extent that any such consensus prevailed in these countries during the Cold War (and there were certainly periods of fierce partisan debate), it has largely dissipated since the fall of the Soviet Union. For example, all three countries showed marked internal divisions along partisan lines about whether and how to use force to restore peace in the Balkans. Even in France, which at first glance appears to present the clearest example of a cross-party consensus on foreign policy, partisan divides are often severe. Only with a better grasp of what motivates different sections of the political spectrum in these countries can the U.S. develop effective strategies for gathering support within European countries for the policies it wants to pursue. France poses particular problems of comprehension for the U.S. policymaker due to the unique ideological landscape of its party system. These idiosyncrasies can be seen in sharper relief when France is compared to its European neighbors.

France's Unique Right

The left and right in France take pride in what they claim to be to an overarching agreement on the basic principles of their country's role in international affairs. All French parties, it is often maintained, are Gaullist, in the sense that they seek to maintain France's traditional standing as an independent power with a unique voice and influence in international affairs. On the issue of the Balkans, the French stood out from their European neighbors in that their main center-right party, then known as the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), was more committed than its counterparts in the U.S., Britain and Germany to intervene with force if necessary in the Balkans. Only the far right National Front argued explicitly that these operations were not in the national interest. Following its crushing defeat of the Socialists in the 1993 parliamentary elections, the RPR "co-habitated" with a socialist President, François Mitterrand. In contrast to

the firm control over foreign and defense policy President Mitterrand exercised under a Socialist majority, the new RPR government shared in decision-making over foreign affairs, and its influence grew as Mitterrand's health deteriorated after 1993.¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé pushed through two of the most important initiatives of the Bosnian War. He was responsible for the creation of the safe areas in 1993, and with the U.S. capitalized on the outrage following the 1994 Bosnian Serb bombing of the Sarajevo marketplace to force through a NATO ultimatum that eventually broke the siege of Sarajevo.

The French right's position was strikingly different from that of the British Conservatives. The Tory government of Prime Minister John Major sent 1800 troops to Bosnia in 1992 to protect convoys delivering humanitarian aid, but insisted throughout that the UN Protection Force, or UNPROFOR, had a purely peacekeeping role and lacked an enforcement mandate. Tory MPs rarely argued explicitly that Britain had no interest in trying to right humanitarian wrongs in Bosnia, but expressed their displeasure in other ways, claiming that the conflict was an intractable, civil war, in which all sides were morally culpable and no worse than others in the world. Unwilling to get further involved, the British government insisted that the wording of the UN resolution creating safe areas for Bosnian Muslims in 1993 state that UNPROFOR's mandate was to "deter against attacks" on the peacekeepers themselves rather than to "defend" the safe areas, the formulation that the French preferred. Although the British were certainly not singularly responsible, their behavior sent a demonstrative signal to the Bosnian Serbs of their lack of commitment to resolving the conflict and contributed to the latter's seizure of UN hostages in May 1995 and to the fall of the safe areas in July 1995. Although its commitment to organize a rapid reaction force of troops with heavy weapons seemed to indicate a new determination, the government undermined that impression by declaring publicly that the force was not there to fight and that Britain was even contemplating withdrawal.²

The French right's position in Bosnia also differed in important ways from that of the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany, though less in terms of policy outcomes than in terms of motivations. The German right did want to take part in Bosnia, but partly because it offered an opportunity to overcome constitutional restrictions and societal objections to deploying the military overseas. By gradually escalating the scale of participation in UN operations, particularly in Yugoslavia, it deliberately set out to change the German public's attitude on the use of force and create legal precedents that would expand the radius of military intervention. The defense minister's chief of staff, Hans-Joachim Falenski said of the German

¹ The President, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé and Minister of Defense François Léotard met weekly to direct policy, according to Mitterrand's close aide. See Hubert Védrine, *Les Mondes de François Mitterrand*, (Paris: Fayard, 1996). Balladur and Juppé both confirmed this arrangement. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Service, *Speeches and Statements*, No. 57 (29 April 1993); Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Service, *Statements*, No. 209 (8 December 1994).

² Major said in the House of Commons that although "It is difficult not to give a misleading impression by saying that it is there to add muscle... it is emphatically not there to fight--that point should be clear... The role of the rapid reaction corps is primarily to reinforce and protect." *Hansard* (19 June 1995), col. 24. Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind proclaimed, "[I]f a peacekeeping force does not receive a minimum degree of co-operation, to withdraw is in no way a humiliation." *Hansard* (12 July 1995), col. 965.

contribution to the Somalian intervention, "We would otherwise never have gone to Somalia because we knew from the beginning that the operation would fail. [Defense Minister Volker] R  he wanted it purely from the point of view of creating facts on the ground."³ In addition, to an extent not true in Britain and France, the peace operation in Bosnia could be (and was) said to be in the national interest due to the tens of thousands of refugees whose first destination was Germany.⁴ Now that this normalization quest is complete, however, the CDU has become quietly but increasingly more circumspect about taking part in humanitarian operations in places beyond the European periphery, such as East Timor where refugees to Germany are not an issue. In short, their lack of enthusiasm for humanitarian intervention has become very similar to that of British Conservatives.⁵

The unique position of the French right on the issue of humanitarian intervention in general and on its approach to Bosnia specifically stems in part from its vision of France's role in world affairs. The RPR government's activist diplomacy served to preserve France's standing as a major player in world affairs in a new security environment. Participation in UN operations served as a means to assert France's global importance as the world's most powerful and principled defender of human rights. Ministers continually repeated that France was the largest contributor both to the operation in the former Yugoslavia, but also to peacekeeping operations more generally.⁶ As De Gaulle had maintained, France's interests were said to be identical with that of humanity. "That is our vocation," said Prime Minister Edouard Balladur of France's "ambition...in the service of peace."⁷ France was the "homeland of human rights" and the

³ Interview with the author (2 February 2001).

⁴ Andreas Schockenhoff, a CDU member of the foreign affairs committee, argued that in comparison to the other European powers, "[W]e are more affected by instability in the Balkans and its consequences. We took in more refugees than any other country by far. We cannot say it is merely a humanitarian intervention that does not concern our strategic goals because instability in southern Europe is a strategic threat for Germany." Interview with the author (4 October 2000). The vice president of the CDU's parliamentary party, Karl-Heinz Hornhues, said the same: "We have to be concerned. It is in our interests in so far as our new strategic interest is not to be overwhelmed with refugees. In this way our strategic interests are different from the British, who took in a hundred times fewer refugees than us." This was a justification that the left could not use or accept, he added. Interview with the author (9 November 2000).

⁵ Hornhues said, "There was an intense discussion. We did not want to embarrass ourselves, but under our breath we said, 'Enough of this nonsense.'" Interview with the author (9 November 2000). Former Defense Minister R  he was also opposed, according to his chief-of-staff. "The caucus voted for it, even though we were against it. There was no real need for medical support by German soldiers. That could have been done by German medical and civilian organizations. Sometimes we have to say no." Interview with the author (2 February 2001).

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Service, *Speeches and Statements*, No. 57 (29 April 1993), No. 1 (12 January 1994), No. 25 (10 February 1994), No. 72 (12 April 1994), No. 85 (4 May 1995).

⁷ Edouard Balladur, *Journal Officiel* (11 May 1994), p. 1682. For references to France's pronounced efforts, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Service, *Speeches and Statements*, No. 57 (29 April 1993), No. 1 (12 January 1994), No. 25 (10 February 1994), No. 72 (12 April 1994), No. 85 (4 May 1995).

“bearer of ideals of liberty and solidarity” and would lose face if it compromised on those principles.⁸

This was also the center-right line in parliament. Richard Cazenave, an RPR parliamentarian, stressed that French soldiers were “defending the values of our civilization” and also noted that France had suffered the most casualties of those contributing troops in Bosnia.⁹ It is a point made privately as well. French Defense Minister François Léotard persistently noted in an interview with the author that France was the “premier contributor,” that it “served as an example for the international community in offering troops.”¹⁰ This often required pushing policy beyond what the President preferred. A senior French diplomat recalled the situation surrounding the Sarajevo ultimatum: “It was really Juppé convincing Mitterrand that enough was enough and to use that outrage to fight the Serbs.”¹¹

There are limits to the French Right's unique approach to humanitarian intervention, however. Center-right support for these types of missions was shallower than the Left's, which more directly stemmed from concerns for human rights. While the RPR government played its very public diplomatic role, it began immediately upon entering office to put an end to the increase of the French contingent in Bosnia, according to Balladur.¹² A third of the French forces in Bosnia left in May 1994 when roughly 1,500 troops left the enclave of Bihac. An adviser to Léotard explained, “From the beginning, there was the feeling in the right-wing government, especially on the part of the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, that UNPROFOR was really a trap, and the way to get out of the trap was to reduce the size of the contingent.”¹³ This policy interfered with other French initiatives. The Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, Admiral Jacques Lanxade, wanted the Prime Minister to deploy 5,000 additional troops that would allow UN forces to protect the safe areas, Balladur refused to countenance any additional contribution.¹⁴ According to Lanxade, the center-right government had made a decision in principle in spring 1995 to withdraw French forces from Bosnia.¹⁵

Only the strong leadership of Jacques Chirac prevented the French Right from abandoning the military mission in Bosnia. Elected in May 1995, the new President successfully played on Gaullist pride during the hostage and safe area crises, refusing to countenance the humiliation of

⁸ Edouard Balladur, “Une attitude exemplaire dans l'avenir,” *Le Monde*, April 7, 1995.

⁹ *Journal Officiel* (12 April 1994), p. 692.

¹⁰ Interview with the author (24 April 2001).

¹¹ Interview with the author (4 April 2001).

¹² Edouard Balladur, *Deux Ans à Matignon*, (Paris: Plon, 1995), p. 112.

¹³ Interview with the author (13 March 2001).

¹⁴ Balladur (1995), p. 112.

¹⁵ Interview with the author (18 April 2001).

French soldiers by the Bosnian Serbs. The Socialist head of the parliamentary defense committee, Jean-Michel Boucheron, later opined that the RPR needed something more for motivation than a humanitarian justification: "There was a difference in the response to the hostage situation. The parties on the right were very sensitive to the humiliation that the soldiers suffered."¹⁶ This was a constant justification for the dispatch of the additional troops in statements by the ministers and the President.¹⁷

Understanding the differences between the French position and more traditional center-right foreign policy inclinations in Europe is important for anticipating French policy. British Conservatives are unlikely to support humanitarian interventions, even in concert with the United States, if vital, strategic interests are not involved. Conflicts in Bosnia over the extent to which NATO airpower should be used were the nadir of US-British relations during the 1990s. The Tories were even willing to undermine NATO credibility during Kosovo by trying to pin down Blair's position on ground troops, knowing that such a public acknowledgement of his hawkish position would exacerbate serious rifts between his government and more reluctant alliance members. In contrast, the French center-right is more likely to be interested in undertaking high profile humanitarian missions. Cooperation in Bosnia was a pinnacle in recent U.S.-Franco relations. The debate over the postwar administration of Iraq will therefore be doubly charged in France. It will be not only the most prominent humanitarian project in recent memory, but also a challenge of key strategic and commercial importance. This suggests that the war in Iraq is just the beginning of continued diplomatic struggles with a France dominated by the center-right.

France's Common Left

Despite sharing the Right's general understanding of France's role in world, the French Left stood out less among European parties on the issue of the Balkans than did the French Right. The humanitarian aspects of the operations in the Balkans appealed greatly to French Socialists as they resonated with their egalitarian emphasis on fighting for minorities and the underprivileged. Thus, the Socialists very "un-leftist" commitment to French exceptionalism pointed in the same direction as the more general humanitarian impulse that it shared with the British and German leftist parties.

Both the French Socialists and British Labour Party were highly critical of their government's threats to withdraw from Bosnia, and pleaded that the UN honor its commitments to protect the

¹⁶ Interview with the author (24 April 2001).

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Service, *Statements*, No. 98 (28 May 1995), No. 102 (31 May 1995), No. 110 (7 June 1995), No. 128 (26 June 1995); Charles Millon, *Journal Officiel* (6 June 1995), p. 424. The three RPR deputies who spoke in the National Assembly during the debates following the hostage crisis all stressed the humiliation suffered by the French armed forces and the honor they displayed in retaking the Vrbanja bridge. So, too, did Léotard, when asked about the major shift in policy between his government and Chirac's. Christian Vaneste, *Journal Officiel* (31 May 1995), p. 379; François Guillaume, *Journal Officiel* (6 June 1995), p. 429; Jacques Boyon, *Journal Officiel* (6 June 1995), p. 435-6. Léotard said, "For us, it was the exasperation and the humiliation." Interview with the author (24 April 2001).

safe areas, not just the peacekeepers.¹⁸ Ironically, because it concerned the promotion of human rights and not narrower, selfish interests, the most strident supporters of more robust military action in Bosnia were often drawn from the far Left of these parties, usually some of the most vehement antimilitarists.¹⁹ Support for humanitarian interventions gradually gained a hold even on the deeply pacifist German left. Bosnia exposed the tension between support for human rights and non-violent methods of conflict resolution, and increasing numbers of leftist politicians, beginning with the centrists and foreign and defense policy experts, abandoned a complete pacifism for a more differentiated approach in which force could be used for humanitarian but not strategic purposes.

In France, however, the Socialists had extreme difficulty in pressing their views on Mitterrand. The President, although a Socialist himself stood apart from the mainstream of his party on the question of intervention and faced criticism from the head of the party, Laurent Fabius, the party organization, leading experts such as Gérard Fuchs and Jean-Michel Boucheron, cabinet officials like Bernard Kouchner and potential successors such as Michel Rocard.²⁰ However, France's strong Presidency, created by De Gaulle specifically to weaken partisan influence, accorded Mitterrand a high degree of autonomy, particularly on foreign policy.²¹

¹⁸ In the French parliament, Jean-Yves Le Deaut criticized Pierre Lellouche and other Gaullists who were expressing doubts about remaining in Bosnia, saying that such sentiments did not send a message of determination and found no adherents in the Socialist Party. Henri Emmanuelli, leader of the Socialist parliamentary group, repeated that critique, and sensed that such threats were not always used purely as levers of negotiation. In *Journal Officiel* see Jean-Yves Le Deaut, (12 April 1994), p. 699; Henri Emmanuelli (6 June 1995), p. 433.

¹⁹ In France, Julien Dray, a leader of the left wing, expressed his support for air strikes to neutralize artillery batteries, create security zones around besieged Bosnian cities as well as liberate the camps, claiming that conferences, embargoes and other "half-measures" were no longer enough. Julien Dray and Charles Millon, "Non à l'abandon!", *Le Monde* (22 December 1992); "Lettre ouverte à M. Mitterrand pour réclamer un ultimatum à la Serbie," *Agence France Presse* (22 December 1992). The Green party passed a resolution in favor of an armed intervention in Bosnia. Noël Mamère and Brice Lalonde, leading figures in the other green party, the Ecological Generation, also expressed their support for the use of force. Les réactions après les déclarations du ministre des affaires étrangères sur la libération des camps en Bosnie: Les Verts français favorables à une intervention militaire," *Le Monde* (13 January 1993); "Le débat en France sur une éventuelle intervention en Bosnie-Herzégovine," *Le Monde* (18 August 1992); "Lettre ouverte à M. Mitterrand pour réclamer un ultimatum à la Serbie," *Agence France Presse* (22 December 1992).

²⁰ "Le président Mitterrand exclut toute intervention autre que strictement humanitaire," *Agence France Presse* (13 August 1992); "À l'exception des communistes les partis politiques français jugent insuffisante une action humanitaire en Bosnie-Herzégovine," *Le Monde* (13 August 1992); "Tolle de l'opposition contre la 'non-intervention' française et silence du Parti socialiste," *Agence France Presse* (14 August 1992); "Le PS estime qu'en cas d'échec des négociations l'ONU devra 'imposer le droit,'" *Le Monde* (26 August 1992); Gérard Fuchs, "Pour une intervention en Bosnie-Herzégovine," *Le Monde* (23 November 1992); "Les réactions en France M. Rocard: l'action humanitaire ne suffit pas," *Le Monde* (29 August 1992); "M. Michel Rocard marque sa différence sur la Yougoslavie," *Agence France Presse* (27 August 1992); Michel Rocard, "Donnons-nous les moyens," *Le Monde* (25 December 1992); Bernard Kouchner, *Ce que je crois*, (Paris: Grasset, 1995); "Boucheron: il faut intervenir en Bosnie," *Ouest-France* (19 January 1993).

²¹ Anand Menon, "Domestic Constraints on French NATO Policy," *French Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 2000), p. 50.

In Kosovo, it was British Labour under Prime Minister Blair that led the charge for the European Left, but he was drawing largely from a script written years before by the French Socialists. The Labour government responded to Milosevic's massive ethnic cleansing operation following the onset of NATO air strikes with a keynote speech on a new "doctrine of international community" that articulated a general obligation to intervene in the internal affairs of states in cases of gross violations of human rights, making the war about more than just the Kosovars.²² Privately the government pledged half of Britain's standing army to a land operation at a secret meeting of NATO defense ministers in May 1999. The planning and increasingly public discussion of the ground campaign, instigated by Britain, is regarded as one of the most important factors in NATO's victory. This new doctrine, however, was only the most recent variation on the concepts of *droit d'ingerence* and *tiers-mondisme* pioneered by the "second left" in France. This group, whose more famous adherents are former Prime Minister Michel Rocard and health minister Bernard Kouchner, sought to explicitly link socialist values to their party's foreign policies towards the third world and was the first to maintain a right of interference in the internal affairs of other states to uphold basic rights.

Despite these similarities, the interaction of Gaullism and Leftist ideology make the French left more difficult to negotiate with than their counterparts in other countries. The German Social Democrats and even most of the Greens are willing to support the use of force for purposes that are primarily humanitarian. The 2002 German election gave many observers the impression that Germany was an innately pacifist but, as in Britain, the German left's attitude was not a fundamentally antimilitarist or anti-American one, but based on a belief that the Iraq intervention was not driven primarily by humanitarian motives. However, in France the adoption and internalization of Gaullist rhetoric by all parties in France has had the effect of enhancing suspicions of American motives and interests—a position towards which the left is already predisposed by its belief that the U.S. is inherently militaristic and unilateralist. Ironically, Gaullism makes the left more left by exacerbating its proclivities to distrust American motives. This creates problems even when U.S. motivations are genuinely and almost purely humanitarian as in Kosovo. In a case like Iraq, it might be almost insurmountable.

²² Tony Blair, "Doctrine of the International Community," Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago (27 April 1999).