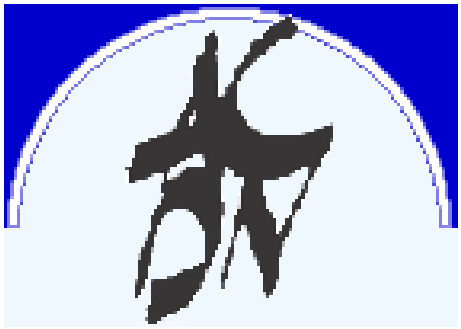
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WORLD PEACE FORUM in Vancouver

The four-handed game of French nuclear policy

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The World Peace Forum opened on Friday, 23 June, in Vancouver, with a general session followed by a March for Peace through the city. More than 4,000 people are gathering there from all around the world. They are continuing their works and exchanges until 28 June.

A workshop sponsored by ACDN took place on Monday, June26. It was moderated by Alfred Webre (Institute for Cooperation in Space). After having heard Mike Wallace, professor of Political Science at the University of British Columbia, on the origins of the French nuclear forces, the audience heard Jean-Marie Matagne, PhD, president of ACDN, who pronounced the following exposé

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I thank you for coming and showing that you are still interested in the proud little nation called France. In the 17th century one in four Europeans were French; today France represents only one human being in a hundred. Fifty years ago she had a vast empire on which the sun never set; now all she retains is scattered fragments called Overseas Territories or Départements. Nevertheless she still claims to play the role of a "great power".

How can France claim to do so? In various ways. But above all by remaining one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, with veto rights, because, through the actions of General de Gaulle and the French Resistance, she counted among the victors of the Second World War. But also by raising as a sort of scarecrow her nuclear weapons, those that General de Gaulle in a less inspired moment secured for her in the early 1960s by pushing through the work of France's Atomic Energy Commissariat (CEA).

So, consciously or not, French nuclear policy - both military and civilian - serves the ambitions of France's leaders. On the other hand, without any doubt, it is the worst gift that French governments have given to humankind or to the French population - which has never had a chance of giving its opinion either on the military or the civilian uses of atomic energy. This poisoned gift, along with that of the other nuclear states, helps to rot the lives of the species *homo sapiens sapiens* and particularly of its French variety, *homo gallicus.*

One may well ask what is *« sapiens »* about the French. In my opinion, not much, as long as we continue to swallow the twaddle dished up by our leaders. I call it twaddle because it consists of lies intended to justify - by means of glorious or reassuring myths - some realities which are directly contrary to their pseudo-justifications.

"France" (taken to mean her principal political and economic leaders, her decision-makers) ... France is playing a double game on two adjacent fields: civilian nuclear technology and nuclear weapons. That is the "four-handed game" mentioned in the title of this exposé. One could equally talk of double and quadruple language: on the one hand beautiful words, on the other trivial deeds and sordid interests.

So, let us confront the words with the realities, starting at the beginning, that is, with the founding lie: the lie which, ever since the origins of French atomic research, has enabled this research to pass as a servant of disinterested science, or as science only interested in showering its benefits on society.

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A civilian and military double game

In October 1945, when France's Atomic Energy Commissariat (CEA) was created by de Gaulle's provisional government, this institution was officially intended to conduct basic research and civilian applications. In reality, General de Gaulle already had military uses in mind. He had been convinced of the strategic and political value of atomic weapons since July 1944, when three French scientists exiled in Canada, Bertrand Goldschmidt, Jules Guéron and Pierre Auger, came to see him in Ottawa and revealed the existence of the « Manhattan Project » which they were associated with. This military orientation of the CEA became secretly even stronger under successive French governments up until May 1958 when General de Gaulle, who had stood aside in January 1946, returned to power at the time of the Algerian Crisis, and gave the final impetus to the nuclear programme.

Thus the first lie, « Atoms for Peace », was never the truth in France, except in public speeches and the deluded hopes of a few naïve scientists. Proof of this is that the first application of the "French atom" was a bomb. It exploded in the Sahara on 13 February 1960. In fact, this "first test" named operation « Gerboise Bleue » was apparently preceded in late 1959 by one or two tests that still remain secret. By contrast, the building of France's series of nuclear power plants did not begin until the mid-70s and the "second oil shock".

An industrial double game: the lies of civilian nuclearism

Today France has 58 powerful reactors spread around 19 sites. Her small area is dotted with them, which makes her the most nuclearised country per capita (roughly one reactor per million people). What can one say of the other lies that justify this situation, in the non-military sphere?

Nuclear power is claimed to be *"the guarantee of our energy independence".* This is false, of course, since all of the uranium used in our plants comes from abroad.

Nuclear power is claimed to be *"sustainable energy"*. This is false, since at the current rate of uranium consumption, the known resources will be gone in 50 years or less. Everyone here knows this, but hardly any French people do.

Nuclear power is claimed to be *"healthy energy",* protecting us from the greenhouse effect. This is false - I won't labour the point, but they try to make the French believe it.

Nuclear power is claimed to be *"the cheapest energy".* This is false, if you take account of

- the cost of research paid for by the state, that is by the taxpayers.
- the cost of decommissioning plants when they cease to be usable, and this is virtually ignored by the price per kilowatt/hour; yet it proves to be exorbitant, judging by the current dismantling of the Brennilis plant in Brittany.
- the cost of the perpetual management of the nuclear waste;
- the predictable increase in the price of uranium as the resources decrease;
- the human, environmental and financial cost of a Chernobyl-type accident - a cost so high that the lawmakers have made placed a ridiculously low limit on the liability of those responsible in such an occurrence.

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But fortunately, a Chernobyl cannot occur in France! The nuclear technology of our corporations EDF and AREVA is *the safest in the world.* Alas, that pretty sales pitch is also a "beautiful lie", as Plato used to say. It ignores the fact that the Nuclear Safety Authority (the ASN) records every year over a hundred "functioning incidents", one every three days on average, some harmless some serious.

The worst of all those accidents was on 27 December 1999 at the plant at Blaye near Bordeaux. That day a major storm caused the Gironde river to rise higher than ever predicted. More than 100 000 cubic metres of water burst the stopbanks, entered without authorization one of the production units, flooded the basements, caused short-circuits and knocked out several of the reactor's emergency cooling pumps. According to the director's account, it came close to being a "major accident". After water comes fire: last year a fire ravaged part of the same plant, although it is recent and modern (it uses MOX). Anti-nuclear campaigners call it « Chernoblaye ». But most French people know nothing of that, because EDF and AREVA have excellent PR people, and the press and other media love the publicity they pay for.

One could go on listing the lies or the silences of this official propaganda which is used to "sell" nuclear energy to the French public as to other countries. That would be nitpicking and we have too little time.

I turn therefore to France's double game in the military sphere, to speak first of the so-called nuclear deterrence strategy, and then of France's claims to be making efforts for disarmament.

A military double game: the rhetoric and realities of nuclear deterrence.

Until 19 January this year (a date I will return to), the nuclear weapons were officially intended to never be used. Their role was purely deterrence. They would deter a potential enemy from attacking and invading France as occurred in 1870, 1914 and 1940. « If you attack our vital interests, we will make you pay by destroying your cities": this "anti-cities strategy" seemed simple. In reality it was not.

For one thing, the "vital interests" were never defined, nobody knew where they started - at which river, the Oder-Neisse line, the Neckar, the Rhine, the Marne, the Seine? Perhaps the Gironde? For another thing, the designated enemy during the Cold War possessed much more numerous and more powerful nuclear weapons; if we wiped out one or more of his cities, he would not fail to retaliate, only more brutally. This *"deterrence by the weak against the strong",* founded on the principle of a *massive first strike,* thus condemned France to physical destruction in the name of political survival. What a strange conception of our "vital interests"!

To circumvent this absurdity, they invented the concept of the *« final warning »,* and the arms that go with it: before attacking the enemy's cities, we would politely warn him by firing one or more missiles on his troops. Here too it was *a first use* nuclear strike.

But in early 1975 when the French army obtained Pluto missiles, the then Prime Minister, a certain Jacques Chirac, indicated that to make them really "deterrent", the army should prepare to actually use them on the battlefield, and that the Head of State should not hesitate to order this in such an occurrence. It's only a small step from there to view them as usable weapons intended to counterbalance an enemy advance - a small step quickly taken by the strategists. Why deprive ourselves of the benefits of these weapons when we have them? They began to talk of "tactical missiles".

But this "final warning" concept and these tactical weapons, could they work? To gain clarity, President Giscard d'Estaing organised military manoeuvres in May 1980 in the zone of Germany still occupied by France. The high command then saw what was plain and obvious: if the Blue army (of France) used its tactical weapons to stop the

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enemy tanks, the Red army (the war-game Soviets) would hit back with theirs, only more brutally. Therefore it was best not to use them and to retreat into French territory in the hope of continuing the fight there with conventional arms.

President Giscard draw an even more radical conclusion, which he hid in his conscience before revealing it in his Memoirs: so as not to provoke the destruction of France, he resolved to never make first use of any nuclear weapons, strategic or tactical. Since their deterrence function rested on this *first use,* he was actually prepared to surrender if France were defeated by conventional arms - he pointed out rightly that France had recovered from more than one occupation in her history, but would never recover from being annihilated.

Thus the deterrence role which France's nuclear arms were supposed to have was always *nothing but a myth.* It is false to claim they are "weapons of peace" intended never to be used, since on the contrary the strategy was for them to be used first. It is equally false that they protected France from invasion by Soviet aggression, since they would not have been usable without provoking the catastrophe they were meant to prevent. In short, not only has French deterrence never had a historic opportunity to work, but if it had, it would not have been able to succeed.

For this reason we can say that France's strike force is the "Maginot Line" of the nuclear era, a line of defense which would not only fail to stop a very hypothetical aggressor from invading France, but would even incite him to destroy her.

This "Maginot Line" is hugely expensive, not at all comparable with the original "Maginot Line" of concrete and bunkers. Between 1945 and 1998 this one will have cost us more than 1500 billion francs (at their 1997 value) or over 225 billion Euros or 280 billion dollars at the current rate. It has cost us "an arm and a leg" and more besides. Bruno Barrillot in his *"Atomic Audit"* succeeded in publishing this precise cost, though it remains lower than the reality because the modernisation budget adopted since then exceeds the forecasts he used. He recalls in this matter some words of Pierre Messmer, a former Defense Minister of General de Gaulle: *"There are military secrets which are expressed in budgetary silences. Nowhere in the military budget will you find the means to calculate the exact cost of our atomic weaponry. This is deliberate."* To illustrate the real cost of these arms, Bruno Barrillot suggests the following image: "If you placed 100-franc notes end to end, the grand total spent on France's nuclear weapons would make a ribbon 2 500 000 kilometres long, which is over 6 times the distance from the Earth to the Moon or 60 times the Earth's circumference!"

To simplify that, convert those French notes in 20 dollar bills and you will get an idea of the literally *astronomical* costs of France's "nuclear Maginot Line".

The nuclear weapons then only had one military function, the only one that President Giscard could see for them, when he looked inside himself: to avenge France in the case of a nuclear attack. They were thus not weapons of deterrence but arms of vengeance. However, the risk was that they might provoke that first strike attack from a nuclear-armed enemy who would logically wish to neutralise in advance the ground-based and airborne components of France's strike-force. Besides, a retaliation launched from a submarine in such a case would merely result in making the nuclear destruction of France more complete. It is therefore not certain even that these weapons can work as arms of vengeance.

So what use have they been? What use are they now? Certainly not to ensure France's defense, as the official speeches claim, but for playing and holding the role of "Great Power", no more no less. If you want to be at the Top Table, you need the Bomb. Therefore, if you have it, there's no way you'll part with it. This leads us to France's final double game: her alleged commitment to disarmament.

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A diplomatic double game: disarmament and proliferation

France's Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affaires circulated during the 7th NPT Revision Conference a brochure entitled: « The Struggle against Proliferation, the Mastery of Armaments and Disarmament: the Action of France ». If you read this superb bilingual brochure, you will be gobsmacked: it makes France out to be a champion of all categories of disarmament.

Admittedly, the facts reported are not all false. It is true that France played a positive role in the banning of chemical weapons and of landmines. But in the matter of nuclear disarmament, the art lies in presenting some facts and omitting others. Never, ever, has France intended to renounce her nuclear weapons, not even after finally signed the NPT in 1992, and thus accepting this obligation which is placed on all the nuclear powers.

Most of the measures presented as disarmament gestures were motivated by quite different considerations. Thus, the reduction in the number of warhead (from 500 to 348) is justified by the honourable concept of "strict sufficiency": France disarming and only keeping the weapons she absolutely needs. In reality, this reduction resulted from a concern for economy and the delayed realization that some of those weapons had no conceivable usefulness, neither the strategic weapons on the Albion plateau nor the Pluto and Hades tactical weapons. With the decision came the command: "no reduction vigilance".

Similarly in June 1995, when "France", that is the new president Jacques Chirac « announced the decision to carry out a final series of nuclear tests, before the concluding of the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty), the reason was her intention to retain her weapons without doing any testing after signing the treaty. Another reason - which was carefully not given - was the plan to replace the Pacific Testing Centre with that at Le Barp, near Bordeaux, where the MegaJoule Laser would be preparing the weapons of the future, the famous pure-fusion « mininukes » suitable for use as battlefield weapons. This is something the French do not know and which the government denies. In short, the purpose was to maintain, modernise and enlarge her arsenal, not to abandon it!

To permit discussion, I will say no more on that matter, or on the exceedingly proliferating role that France has played and continues to play, both by her doctrine called "deterrence of the weak to the strong" (e.g. of North Korea to the USA) and by her exports of so-called "civilian" nuclear technologies. The fact is that France's civilian nuclear programme, after providing an alibi for military research, has also been a Trojan Horse for the weapons of others. This is very much a four-handed game, where the majority hand pretends not to know what the minority hand is doing. But the game is so well polished that nobody notices the grating noises in it.

Before concluding, I would like to return briefly to the date 19 January 2006 and the speech given that day by Jacques Chirac at the Ile Longue nuclear submarine base in Brittany. It is extremely important.

Chirac's drifting from 1975 to 2006

This speech, quite in keeping with Chirac's mentality as displaying in his remarks on the use of Pluto missiles and in his previous strategic speech of 8 June 2001, brings to France's defense doctrine some striking innovations. For the first time a President of France, the sole captain of the ship save God, specifies what he means by "vital interests". For M. Chirac, our nuclear weapons can be used, as the Gaullist doctrine said, against a state attacking French territory, but also, if the president so judges it, against a state presumed to be an accomplice of terrorist attacks, a state suspected to be on the point of using weapons of mass destruction, a state committing aggression against "our allies" or one of them, and a state threatening our "strategic provisioning" (presumably uranium and oil). They can be used in retaliation but also "pre-emptively". In short, they can be used at any time on any pretext, and against any enemy - only provided he could not retaliate with the same weapons... This is not "comprehensive defense" any

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more, it is comprehensive attack. It is whatever you feel like. The traditional strategy was already incoherent. What can one say of this? That it pushes incoherence to its logical conclusion: nuclear weapons have no defensive uses, they are nothing but a means of imposing one's will on someone else who is weaker.

Nevertheless, in order for the threat to remain credible and vaguely moral, M. Chirac states that our nuclear weapons are fitted to the nature of the target: to aim at the enemy's "decision centres" - and nothing else, apparently. The hinted message is that we don't want to hurt the population. That is another lie. Indeed, this implies a limited explosive power, which none of France's 348 declared warheads can offer, since the weakest of them yield 100 kilotonnes, which is 7 or 8 times the Hiroshima bomb (and the most powerful, three times more). Collateral damage, here we come!

That lie implies others. They can't have it both ways. Either France lacks the means for her new strategy and M. Chirac is bluffing while he waits to acquire it. In that case, he is lying and his Ministry of Defense also is lying when it claims that the Mega Joule Laser and its simulation programmes serve only to maintain existing weapons. Or else France already has these smaller weapons, in violation of her declarations and the laws passed by Parliament. In either case, there's enough there to bring M. Chirac before the High Court of Justice.

Yet this humanist says he is a convinced supporter of abolishing the death penalty! Let him begin by abolishing his nuclear weapons and his threats of mass murder.

Conclusion

Only one thing is certain: this strategic delirium has nothing to do with defending France. Nuclear weapons are above all an instrument of political power. There is a need to make France a formidable power, and to make her Head of State a Monsieur to whom the world listens. « The Redoubtable », « The Terrible », « The Thunderer », « The Lightningflash », « The Triumphant » those are the names of our nuclear submarines. That is the mentality of that France, a France of criminals, murderers, liars, fools or imbeciles. The France that wants to be terrifying, and exploits this to sell arms and atoms, is not our France. We cannot believe that it is the France of the French people, who are as individuals no more intelligent, stupid or nasty than the human average.

That is why ACDN is demanding that candidates for the 2007 parliamentary and presidential elections should commit themselves to consulting the French people by referendum on this vital question of nuclear disarmament which affects everyone, well beyond France's own frontiers.

I thank you for your attention, and for your support, I hope, for the action we are taking. *****

Jean-Marie Matagne

***** Please see below and print the letter intended for candidates to the next French elections. Thank you for signing on it and returning it to:

ACDN, 31 Rue du Cormier - 17100 - SAINTES (FRANCE)

Fax: ++ 33 5 46 74 08 60

To Whom It May Concern

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Dear Madam/Sir

We the Undersigned,

Participating with several thousand people in the World Peace Forum held in Vancouver, Canada, from 23 to 28 June 2006,

Deeply concerned by the current French nuclear policies,

Informed of the opportunity that these policies be changed by the future government of France after the next presidential and legislative elections in 2007,

Having considered the following question:

"Do you wish France to ask all nuclear states, whether or not signatories to the Non Proliferation Treaty, to negotiate and adopt by 2010 at the latest a calendar for implementing the elimination of all nuclear arsenals under strict and effective international control, to suspend her programme for new nuclear arms up to and including 2010, and to divert these budgets to satisfying other needs - social, health, cultural, educational, environmental or humanitarian?"

- ANSWER "YES" to this question and ENDORSE it,
- ASK YOU for giving a positive answer to it,
- URGE YOU to commit yourself to demanding, organizing or supporting a consultation of the French people by a referendum on this question as soon as possible following the next French presidential election.
- THANK YOU for all your personal efforts aimed to the controlled elimination of all nuclear weapons, including the French ones.

Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

NAME

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