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FM PARIS

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MY TELNOS 935 AND 937 (NOT TO ALL): TERRORISM IN FRANCE

SUMMARY

1. NO MORE BOMBS SINCE 17 SEPTEMBER, BUT PUBLIC ANXIETY CONTINUES. COHERENCE OF FRENCH MIDDLE EAST POLICY QUESTIONED. CONTROVERSY OVER THE HISTORY OF NEGOTIATION WITH TERRORISTS (BY THIS GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS ITS PREDECESSORS). THE MEETING OF EC INTERIOR MINISTERS TOMORROW COULD BE USED TO TEST HOW FAR THE FRENCH ARE REALLY PREPARED TO MEND THEIR WAYS.

DETAIL

2. IN SPITE OF CONTINUED THREATS FROM THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPORT FOR MIDDLE EAST PRISONERS, THERE HAVE BEEN NO MORE INCIDENTS IN PARIS SINCE 17 SEPTEMBER. THE PRESS HOWEVER IS STILL FULL OF ARTICLES ON TERRORISM, AND PUBLIC ANXIETY HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATED BY REDUCED NUMBERS OF PEOPLE IN POTENTIAL TARGET AREAS SUCH AS THE CHAMPS ELYSEES AND EVEN THE CANCELLATION OF SOME PUBLIC EVENTS. WITH 2300 EXTRA POLICEMEN IN THE CAPITAL, SECURITY PRECAUTIONS ARE TIGHTER ALL ROUND.

3. THERE IS NO SIGN OF A POLICE BREAKTHROUGH. THEY HAVE FOUND ANOTHER ARMS CACHE, BUT NOT NECESSARILY CONNECTED WITH THE BOMBINGS. 8 OUT OF 9 FARL SUSPECTS WHOM THEY HAD NAMED HAVE SINCE TURNED UP IN LEBANON, BUT THE PRESS HAS GENERALLY REFRAINED FROM RIDICULING POLICE EFFORTS ON THIS ACCOUNT, AND THE POLICE HAVE BEEN BRIEFING EXTENSIVELY ON WHAT THEY KNOW OF THE PAST MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE 9, IN ORDER TO GIVE CREDENCE TO THEIR SUSPICIONS. MOST OBSERVERS NOW CONCLUDE THAT THE FARL WERE NOT OPERATING ALONE, BUT HAD THE SUPPORT OF ONE OR MORE MIDDLE EAST GOVERNMENTS, AND POSSIBLY MEMBERS OF ACTION DIRECTE. GIVEN THE FARL'S PAST LINKS WITH THE FPLP, THE FINGER IS POINTED PARTICULARLY AT SYRIA. (GEMAYEL ALMOST SAID AS MUCH IN A LE MONDE INTERVIEW YESTERDAY, BUT WITHOUT NAMING NAMES). THE ATTACKS ON UNIFIL HAVE CONTRIBUTED ALSO TO SUSPICION OF IRAN.

4. ALL THIS HAS RAISED SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE COHERENCE OF FRENCH POLICY TOWARD THE MIDDLE EAST, WITH SEASONED COMMENTATORS VOICING SOME TRENCANT CRITICISMS FROM BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT OF

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CENTRE: AND IMPLYING THAT SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS HAVE TRIED TO BE TOO CLEVER BY HALF IN THEIR ATTEMPTS TO KEEP ON GOOD TERMS WITH WARRING STATES AND CONFLICTING FACTIONS. UNLESS HIS SPEECH AT THE UN TODAY HAS SOMETHING NEW, THERE IS HOWEVER AT PRESENT NO SIGN THAT CHIRAC INTENDS TO CHANGE DIRECTION, EG OVER THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH IRAN. AS FOR SYRIA, CONTACTS CONTINUE: AURILLAC, MINISTER FOR COOPERATION WAS IN DAMASCUS YESTERDAY FOR TALKS WITH KHADDAM. BUT IT WOULD NOT BE ENTIRELY SURPRISING IF FRANCE WERE TO LEAN MORE TOWARD THE IDEA OF AN INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, AS MITTERRAND IS NOW REPORTED TO HAVE DONE FOLLOWING TALKS IN PARIS WITH JORDAN'S PRIME MINISTER YESTERDAY.

5. THE OTHER SUBJECT OF CRITICISM HAS BEEN THE HISTORY OF FRENCH GOVERNMENT DEALS WITH TERRORISTS. SOME NOW ARGUE THAT THIS HAS ENABLED THE TERRORISTS TO BUILD UP BASES IN FRANCE AND CONVINCED THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN BE BLACKMAILED. THERE ARE PERSISTENT STORIES THAT THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT PROMISED IN APRIL 1985 TO RELEASE ABDALLAH IN RETURN FOR PEYROLLES, A FRENCH OFFICIAL TAKEN HOSTAGE IN LEBANON. DUMAS HAS DENIED THIS. ONE FRENCH NEWSPAPER TODAY HOWEVER PUBLISHES A CIRCUMSTANTIAL ACCOUNT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS LEADING UP TO THE RELEASE OF PEYROLLES, IN WHICH THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT WAS DEEPLY INVOLVED. IT SUGGESTS THAT ABDALLAH WAS TO BE RELEASED AFTER COMPLETING A SHORT SENTENCE ON A MINOR CHARGE. THE DISCOVERY SOON AFTERWARDS OF EVIDENCE LINKING HIM TO THE MURDER OF AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT IN PARIS IN 1982 CAUSED COMPLICATIONS. NEVERTHELESS THAT EVIDENCE WAS NOT CONCLUSIVE, AND IT SEEMS THAT ABDALLAH WAS LIKELY NOT TO BE BROUGHT TO TRIAL ON THE MURDER CHARGE BUT TO BE RELEASED AFTER COMPLETING ONLY 2 YEARS IN PRISON. TODAY'S CANARD ENCHAINE (SATIRICAL WEEKLY) CLAIMS THAT CHIRAC TOO ORDERED CONTACTS WITH FARL REPRESENTATIVES IN MADRID IN MAY AND JUNE 1986 TO INFORM THEM OF THIS PLAN. A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF THE US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (DAVID EPSTEIN) IS SAID TO HAVE CALLED ON CHIRAC ON 21 JULY AND URGED HIM NOT TO LET ABDALLAH GO. THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT RUMOURS OF DIVISION OVER THIS ISSUE WITHIN CHIRAC'S GOVERNMENT DURING THE SUMMER, WITH PASQUA TEMPTED TO RELEASE ABDALLAH BUT OTHER MINISTERS ARGUING AGAINST. THERE IS STILL, HOWEVER, A CIVIL ACTION OUTSTANDING AGAINST ABDALLAH, RELATING TO THE ASSASSINATION IN 1982 OF THE U.S. DEFENCE ATTACHE.

6. FOR THE MOMENT THE RELEASE OF ABDALLAH SEEMS EXCLUDED BY EVENTS. PUBLIC OPINION EXPECTS THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE A FIRM LINE. CHIRAC'S MEASURES HAVE SO FAR BEEN WELL RECEIVED: BUT HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO GO FURTHER IF THERE WERE ANOTHER BOMBING AND NO ARRESTS. A DEMONSTRATION BY THE FRONT NATIONAL IN PARIS ON 22 SEPTEMBER WAS NOT VERY WELL ATTENDED, BUT THE GOVERNMENT IS VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE NEED NOT TO LET ITSELF BE OUTFLANKED ON THE RIGHT. THE SOCIALISTS SEEM LACKING IN DIRECTION. PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND A CAMPAIGN OF CRITICISM AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS NERVOUS THAT CHIRAC HAS SO OBVIOUSLY TAKEN OVER THE REINS OF POWER AND LEFT MITTERRAND ON THE SIDELINES. ONE FORMER MINISTER (BEREGOVY) HAS EVEN SPOKEN OF THE POSSIBLE USE OF THE PRESIDENT'S EMERGENCY POWERS UNDER ARTICLE XVI OF THE CONSTITUTION: BUT OTHERS (RIGHTLY) REGARD THIS AS EXCESSIVE. MEANWHILE MITTERRAND HAS RISEN IN THE OPINION POLLS TOGETHER WITH CHIRAC.

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7. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, THE MAIN FRENCH OBJECTIVE AT THE EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE EC INTERIOR MINISTERS TOMORROW IS PRESENTATIONAL - TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE ELECTORATE THAT FRANCE IS COOPERATING CLOSELY WITH HER EUROPEAN PARTNERS. IN SPITE OF REPEATED APPROACHES, THE FRENCH HAVE NOT COME UP WITH ANY SPECIFIC PROPOSALS WHICH THEY WANT TO SEE DISCUSSED. AND DESPITE THEIR TOUGH LANGUAGE WHEN THEY CAME INTO OFFICE, AND SOME PRACTICAL MEASURES SINCE THEN (EG THE EXPULSION OF SUSPECTED ETA TERRORISTS), THERE MUST REMAIN A QUESTION MARK OVER THIS GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO REJECT BACKSTAIRS DEALS WITH TERRORISTS AND GENUINELY TO COOPERATE IN COMMON ACTION AGAINST THEM. THE MEETING TOMORROW MAY OFFER AN OCCASION TO TEST WHETHER THEY ARE WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH MEASURES SUCH AS:-

- (A) THE RATIFICATION OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON THE SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM, ON WHICH THE SIGNALS HERE REMAIN AMBIGUOUS.
- (B) A CLEAR AGREEMENT BY ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO RESIST TERRORIST BLACKMAIL.
- (C) AN AGREEMENT NOT TO GIVE POLITICAL ASYLUM TO NATIONALS OF OTHER EC MEMBER STATES (PANDRAUD HIMSELF HAS SAID THAT SUCH ASYLUM CAN NO LONGER BE JUSTIFIED).
- (D) GREATER FLEXIBILITY OVER CONTACTS ON TERRORISM BETWEEN THE TWELVE AND THIRD COUNTRIES (ESPECIALLY THE US).
- (E) THE RAPID SWAPPING OF INFORMATION ABOUT SUSPECTED TERRORISTS.

IT MIGHT ALSO BE A SUITABLE OCCASION TO DISCOVER FRENCH INTENTIONS OVER SEARCHING DIPLOMATIC BAGS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS IN PARIS ABOUT WHICH THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT RUMOURS IN THE PRESS.

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