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MIPT (NOT TO ALL) AND MY TELNO 618: SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

1. TO SUM UP RECENT REPORTING, IT MAY BE USEFUL TO OUTLINE THE RESPECTIVE POSITIONS OF THE QUAI, ELYSEE AND MATIGNON, WHICH ALL HAVE THEIR EFFECT ON FRENCH POLICY.

THE ELYSEE [Mitterrand]

2. UNDER THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THE IMPETUS ON POLICY TOWARDS SOUTH AFRICA CAME FROM THE PRIME MINISTER, FABIUS. MITTERRAND WAS CONTENT TO LET HIM PROCEED. A SIMILAR RELATIONSHIP IS APPARENT NOW, EVEN THOUGH POLICY HAS CHANGED. MITTERRAND WAS CONSULTED AND AGREED TO THE SENDING BACK OF THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO PRETORIA: BUT THE SOCIALIST PARTY WAS FAR FROM HAPPY WITH THIS DECISION AND WOULD CLEARLY EXPECT MITTERRAND TO INTERVENE IF THE NEW GOVERNMENT TRIED TO CHANGE COURSE TOO RADICALLY. SOCIALIST LEADERS, AND PARTICULARLY FABIUS, HAVE PUBLICLY CRITICISED THE CHIRAC GOVERNMENT FOR NOT TAKING THE LEAD IN INTRODUCING NEW SANCTIONS. THE LEFT-WING PRESS IS UNANIMOUS IN CALLING FOR MORE VIGOROUS ACTION BY WESTERN POWERS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. MME MITTERRAND TOOK PART IN A RECENT ANTI-APARTHEID MEETING IN SENEGAL HOSTED BY DIOUF. DIOUF ALSO MET MITTERRAND LAST WEEK AND WAS ABLE TO TALK OF A CLOSE SIMILARITY OF VIEWS. ELYSEE OFFICIALS PRIVATELY EXPRESS SATISFACTION THAT SO FAR, IN THEIR VIEW, IT IS CHIRAC RATHER THAN MITTERRAND WHO HAS BEEN FORCED TO MODIFY HIS POSITION, AS A RESULT, MITTERRAND HAS NOT FELT ANY NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE HIMSELF PUBLICLY FROM THE GOVERNMENT LINE: BUT HE HAS VARIOUS WEAPONS AT HIS DISPOSAL IF HE CHOSSES TO DO SO.

THE MATIGNON [Chirac]

3. CHIRAC CONDEMNS APRTHEID, BUT IS APPOSED TO SANCTIONS. WHAT HE SEEKS IS AN EVOLUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA TOWARDS A MODERATE AND STABLE BLACK GOVERNMENT. HE IS NERVOUS OF THE COMMUNIST INFLUENCE WITHIN THE ANC AND ATTRACTED BY INTERLOCUTORS LIKE BUTHELEZI. WHEN HE AND HIS PARTY CAME TO POWER, THEY SPOKE PRIVATLY OF REVERSING FABIUS' POLICY. THE FIRST CONCRETE SIGN OF THAT WAS THE RETURN OF THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO HIS POST. SOUTH AFRICA, CHIRAC ARGUED, POSED ESSENTIALLY A PROBLEM OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND IN THAT CONTEXT WAS FAR FROM BEING THE WORST OFFENDER IN THE WORLD. ALTHOUGH A PROPOSED

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VISIT BY P W BOTHA IN JUNE, EMBARRASSING BECAUSE OF ITS TIMING (SOWETO ANNIVERSARY, UN SANCTIONS CONFERENCE), WAS POSTPONED, CHIRAC IMPLIED THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO RECEIVE BOTHA IN PARIS LATER IN THE YEAR.

4. THIS POLICY HAS COME UNDER PRESSURE FROM TWO MAIN DIRECTIONS. FIRST IS CONCERN ABOUT THE EXTERNAL CONSEQUENCES OF A SHARP CHANGE OF POLICY. THE QUAI HAS ARGUED THAT FOR EXAMPLE TO VETO SANCTIONS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL, GIVEN FRANCE'S PREVIOUS VOTING PATTERN, WOULD CAUSE UNACCEPTABLE DAMAGE IN THE THIRD WORLD AND FRANCOPHONE AFRICA. THE MATIGNON HAS GONE ALONG WITH THIS, BUT OFFICIALS THERE STILL SAY IN PRIVATE THAT THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICANS ARE NOT A REAL PROBLEM: THEY TAKE A MUCH MORE UNDERSTANDING LINE IN PRIVATE THAN THEY SOMETIMES HAVE TO IN PUBLIC. THE MATIGNON IS CONFIDENT THAT THE INTIMACY OF FRENCH RELATIONS WITH THE KEY AFRICAN STATES IS NOT REALLY THREATENED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN PROBLEM.

5. MORE DIFFICULT HAS BEEN THE SECOND FACTOR - DOMESTIC FRENCH POLITICS. WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION, THE MATIGNON IS CONSTRAINED BY THE NEED TO FIND A MODUS VIVENDI WITH THE ELYSEE AND BY QUAI PRESSURE FOR BROAD CONTINUITY OF POLICY. AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC, THE ISSUE OF SOUTH AFRICA HAS BECOME OF MUCH GREATER INTEREST THAN HITHERTO. THANKS LARGELY TO EXTENSIVE TV COVERAGE. MOREOVER, IT IS BOUND UP IN THE PUBLIC MIND WITH OTHER SUBJECTS - IMMIGRATION, CRIME, RACISM - WHICH ARE OF MAJOR POLITICAL IMPORTANCE (AS THE RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT FRONT NATIONAL HAS SHOWN). CHIRAC IS BRINGING IN TOUGH NEW MEASURES TO HALT ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, TO INCREASE ROUTINE IDENTITIY CHECKS AND GENERALLY TO ENCOURAGE MORE VIGOROUS POLICE ACTION. HE IS ALREADY CRITICISED FOR THE REPRESSIVE NATURE OF THESE PROPSOALS, AND CANNOT AFFORD TO BECOME TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE DEFENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REGIME AS WELL.

6. NEVERTHELESS. THE MATIGNON CONTINUES TO TALK OF A GRADUAL PROCESS OF MODIFYING FRENCH POLICY ON SOUTH AFRICA. THEY WONDER HOW THE WEST CAN GET AWAY FROM WHAT THEY SEE AS THE FALSE DEBATE OVER SANCTIONS. THIS LIES BEHIND THE NEW FRENCH EMPHASIS ON POSITIVE MEASURES. THEY CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT SANCTIONS ARE NOT THE ANSWER, AND TO HOPE THAT THE UK AND US GOVERNMENTS WILL HOLD OUT AGAINST THEM. - but not themselves!

THE QUAI

[Raimond]  
7. DURING COHABITATION, THE QUAI HAS OFTEN COME TO PLAY A MODERATING ROLE BETWEEN THE ELYSEE AND MATIGNON. BUT IN THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA, THE QUAI ALSO CONTRIBUTES ITS OWN APPRECIATION OF FRENCH INTERESTS. AS MENTIONED ABOVE, IT ATTACHES PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE TO PRESERVING FRANCE'S CREDIT IN THE THIRD WORLD. QUAI OFFICIALS DO NOT SHARE THE MATIGNON VIEW THAT THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICANS ARE NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE ISSUE. THEY DRAW ATTENTION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMPATY WITH BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE QUAI (LIKE OTHER MINISTRIES) HAS NEVER CARED FOR MANDATORY SANCTIONS. IT ARGUED AGAINST THEM UNDER FABIVS - ALTHOUGH IT WAS ALWAYS CONTENT TO DEPEND ON THE US AND UK ACTUALLY TO VETO THEM. 2

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8. THE QUAI HAS THEREFORE HELPED TO DEVELOP THE MEDIAN LINE OF CURRENT FRENCH POLICY, WHICH IS:-

- (A) PRESERVATION OF THE ACQUIS (IE THE SANCTIONS ALREADY ADOPTED, THE PAST PATTERN OF UN VOTING).
- (B) OPPOSITION OF PRINCIPLE TO MANDATORY SANCTIONS.
- (C) GENERAL READINESS TO TAKE LIMITED NEW VOLUNTARY MEASURES (WITHOUT BEING MASOCHISTIC ABOUT IT).
- (D) SUPPORT FOR POSITIVE MEASURES.
- (E) CONCERN NOT TO CAUSE DIFFICULTY FOR THE US OR UK, COUPLED WITH A DESIRE ALWAYS TO REMAIN ON STEP AHEAD OF THEM IN SATISFYING THE AFRICANS.

9. THIS IS NOT A GLORIOUS MIXTURE BUT IT IS A GREAT DEAL BETTER THAN WE COULD HAVE EXPECTED HAD FABIUS STILL BEEN AT THE MATIGNON.

FRETWELL

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