

France lashes Iraqi national sovereignty

by Katherine Notley

While the U.S. and Great Britain take the point for United Nations-sanctioned acts of war against Iraq, the government of French President François Mitterrand has been working hard behind the scenes to rewrite international law to give cover for Anglo-American imperialism. Using the excuse of providing emergency aid to the Iraqi Kurds, the French government presented a resolution to the U.N. Security Council condemning "repression of Iraqi civilian populations . . . including most recently in the Kurdish populated areas" and insisting that "Iraq permit immediate access by international humanitarian organizations to all those who need assistance in all parts of Iraq." Resolution 688 passed the Security Council April 5 (see *EIR*, April 19 for full text). The resolution and its motivation put a fine point on geopolitical cynicism: Both President Mitterrand and his Foreign Minister Roland Dumas have unrelentingly made clear that their purpose is to sanctify the "duty for humanitarian intervention" as international law. Mitterrand even went so far, at one point, as to insist that France would undertake this "duty" alone, if the U.N. Security Council balked.

Worse, the resolution itself forces the Iraqi government to admit that it has committed repression as a condition for obtaining aid for its own Kurdish citizens.

Perfidious Mitterrand

The April 10 issue of the liberal daily *Le Monde*, praising the success of Mitterrand and Dumas, emphasized the principle of intervention behind the "humanitarian" cover: "Such an intervention presupposes . . . the passing of the sacrosanct independence of the state, the iron law of international life. As Mr. Mitterrand underlined [April 8] in a subtle distinction, the sovereignty of Iraq is not being called into question in principle, but only in its 'practice.' "

A press statement the same day from France's Washington embassy calls Resolution 688 "an important event on the international scene: For the first time it puts the role of the national sovereignty of states in balance with the basic rights of individuals and ethnic groups," and goes on to quote Dumas's April 6 remarks, "I hope this will create a precedent." Dumas continued, "Of course, we must respect the rights of states to manage their own domestic affairs. But at the same time, the international community cannot remain indifferent when a blatant crime is committed against a population. The

notion of crimes against humanity became a legal principle after World War II. Now is a good time to reap the consequences of this."

If this last sounds like a swipe at France's newly united German neighbor, whose reluctance to join the Desert Storm-troopers infuriated other NATO allies, consider that France also called for an emergency session of the Western European Union, the defense organization of nine of the European Community's members, which France now chairs. At the April 8 session, France called for the WEU to "coordinate the logistics of the Community's aid to Iraqi civilians," i.e., continue NATO military out-of-area deployments under a different guise. The effect on Germany, which is struggling to stabilize the economy of its looted eastern states, is obvious.

While he was happy to deploy the WEU's resources on behalf of "humanitarian interventionism," Mitterrand told the *Ecole de Guerre* on April 11 that such intervention would not be possible to solve the problems of every ethnic group in Eastern Europe.

'Endangered peoples'

The term "duty for humanitarian intervention" was first coined in September 1988 by French Secretary of State for Humanitarian Action Bernard Kouchner, after Iran made charges that Iraq had gassed the Kurds. (Dr. Kouchner is a founding member of both private groups *Médecins du Monde* and *Médecins sans Frontières*.) It was given currency in Mitterrand's speech that month to the U.N. General Assembly. The concept was given greater force on Dec. 8, 1988, when France successfully sought a U.N. resolution ostensibly on behalf of the Armenian earthquake victims. It was at that same General Assembly session, on Dec. 7 that Mikhail Gorbachov called for a "new world order" based on international environmentalist law.

The French government boasts the right to intervene into a nation's internal affairs to protect "endangered peoples" going back to a Jan. 26, 1987 speech of Mitterrand's, in which he declared, "The first human right is the right to life, and the first duty is to provide assistance to a person in danger, a population threatened by perils." This remark was elaborated in *Le Monde* of April 7-8: "Meantime, from the revolution in Romania to the famine in Sudan, the idea of the right to assistance for endangered peoples, transcending the sovereignty of states, became more familiar to all."

Clearly there's little to stop France from mobilizing to save any of its "endangered peoples" of the day, although, for the moment, "there has been a special concern in France for the Kurdish people, which has often been denied the elementary rights of existence as a community." The April 10 press statement continues, "A person who has repeatedly intervened on behalf of these people is Mrs. Danièle Mitterrand . . . in her quality as president of the Foundation 'France-Libertés.' "