

# Bomb Scandal Highlights French Testing

*The sinking of an environmentalist group's vessel has hardened attitudes both for and against France's weapons testing*

Paris. Whatever the domestic political fallout from the sinking last month of the Greenpeace organization's boat "Rainbow Warrior" in Auckland harbor, the affair has hardened attitudes on both sides to the continued testing of nuclear weapons by the French government on the South Pacific Island of Mururoa. The Greenpeace vessel, which is widely reported to have been sunk by French secret service agents, was about to set sail for the test site to monitor a series of underground explosions.

An investigation of the bombing, conducted at the personal request of President François Mitterrand, has concluded that although agents of the Direction Générale de Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE)—the French equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency—were sent to New Zealand to infiltrate the Greenpeace organization, there is no convincing evidence that they were responsible for the attack. Bernard Tricot, who conducted the investigation, said in a television interview that "too much evidence" pointing to French involvement was left lying about to be credible. Tricot said "I simply do not know" who was responsible for the bombing.

As far as the mass media have been concerned, a lengthy story of false identities, hastily abandoned telltale evidence and hints of a political coverup has carried all the hallmarks of a French Watergate. Yet apart from some embarrassment on the international scene, the political damage to the Mitterrand government is expected to be minimal, largely because of the widespread public support for France's independent nuclear deterrent—and thus for the testing program required to keep this under constant improvement.

Members of the Greenpeace organization are describing the row over the sinking of the "Rainbow Warrior," and the subsequent reports about the involvement of members of the DGSE, as one of their most successful publicity campaigns ever. "At the very least, many more people now know that France is testing nuclear weapons in the South Pacific," Greenpeace organizer Cornelia Durrent said last week.

The organization's president, Canadian David McTaggart, told a press conference in Paris that the attack, in which Greenpeace photographer Fernando Per-

eira was killed, has only strengthened its determination to mount a major protest against the next series of nuclear tests, due to take place on Mururoa in the middle of September. A new vessel, named simply "Greenpeace," set off from Amsterdam last week and is expected in the South Pacific soon after the tests are scheduled to start. "The ending of all French tests in the Pacific is the only act that will stop our campaign," McTaggart said.

President Mitterrand, however, has made it equally clear that there will be no concession to the protesters, and that

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any attempt to interfere with the tests will be met by force. "The French tests will continue as long as they are judged necessary for the defense of the country by the French authorities, and by these authorities alone," he said in a strongly worded statement issued by the Elysée Palace.

Mururoa has been used for testing nuclear devices since the early 1970's, replacing testing sites in French-controlled parts of the Sahara, and all tests have been carried out underground since 1975. During this period there are said to have been over 200 nuclear explosions on the atoll, although the precise number is a closely guarded secret.

The next series is said to represent the final development stage of the enhanced radiation weapon—the neutron bomb—and this is already planned to be followed by new experiments necessary for the continued refinement and upgrading of the "force de frappe," to which the government has recently committed itself.

The government maintains that, apart from some changes in the geological structure of the atoll, there has been virtually no environmental damage caused as a result of the tests. In particular, they say, the release of radioactivity,

and thus the danger to local marine life, has been minimal.

Although this conclusion was confirmed by an international scientific team that visited the area last year, it continues to be sharply contested by Greenpeace. One of the goals of the "Rainbow Warrior" was to have looked for evidence of claims that there was a significant leak of radioactivity after a 150-kiloton test on 8 May, and the new vessel, "Greenpeace," will carry even more sophisticated detection apparatus.

Behind its confrontation with the anti-nuclear organization is the French government's insistence—enshrined in its refusal to sign both the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1968 and, more recently, the regional treaty of Rarotonga declaring the South Pacific a "nuclear free zone"—that nuclear weapons remain the strongest guarantee of its political independence from the major superpowers (hence its concern that the Strategic Defense Initiative could undermine this stance).

Régis Debray, until recently a top foreign policy adviser to President Mitterrand, says that nuclear weapons are "truly democratic," and that "the power of the atom helps the weak since force is no longer a question of mass." France is only prepared to consider stopping its nuclear tests, says Debray, "once the overarmed states have agreed to reduce their strategic armories, perhaps to half their current levels."

There are a few signs of change. Michel Rocard, a fiercely independent—but highly popular—left-wing politician, suggested in a radio interview in May that "the time has come for France to sign the nonproliferation treaty." According to Rocard, three officials of the Atomic Energy Commission had attended the previous review conference (held in 1980) "disguised as journalists" to gather information, and France now had much to gain in assisting Third World countries in their search for peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

Elsewhere in France, however, there is little mood for compromise. Members of the secret service, embarrassed by a relentless barrage of news accounts detailing the elementary slips that their agents are supposed to have made (such as abandoning an easily traceable rubber dinghy and diving equipment), have

claimed the agents could only have been uncovered by tip-offs to the New Zealand government from the secret services of other countries, as a way of undermining the French nuclear testing program. Britain, the United States, and

the Soviet Union have each been mentioned.

And even conservative politicians, careful not to antagonize their relationships with the secret service, for which, after next year's general elections, they

are likely to take over responsibility, are being careful to aim their criticisms at the incompetence of individuals—and the interference of outside parties—rather than at the government's nuclear testing policies.—**DAVID DICKSON**

## U.S., Mexico Pledge Smelter Controls

In July, the United States and Mexico pledged to control pollution from three giant copper smelters located near the border between Arizona and Mexico. But Western politicians and environmentalists have serious doubts about whether the promises can be kept because several problems are unsolved.

The matter is likely to gain increased political attention as a result of a recent report that demonstrates for the first time a link between smelter emissions in the Southwest and acid rain hundreds of miles away to the north. The report, which was published last week in *Science*,\* presents evidence that changes in smelter emissions were proportional to changes in acid rain in Colorado, Utah, and Idaho.

One of the smelters is located in Douglas, Arizona, and is owned by Phelps Dodge. It is an old smelter that chugs out an average of 950 tons of sulfur dioxide a day. The other two are located in Mexico about 50 miles away. One is an existing smelter in Cananea whose plant capacity has been expanded; the other is a new smelter in Nacozari, which is not yet operating, but poses the greatest concern. Once it starts up, the Nacozari plant without pollution controls will emit even more sulfur dioxide than the Phelps Dodge smelter. According to the *Science* paper, prevailing winds around the border area carry the pollution from existing smelters to the Colorado Rockies and beyond.

In the July agreement, the United States and Mexico exchanged "firm commitments" that each country would regulate the smelters. The U.S. promised that by 1988 the Phelps Dodge smelter would be in compliance with U.S. federal air pollution regulations. The Mexicans said that the Nacozari plant will have controls in place by 1988.

But there are significant hurdles that the Mexicans must cross before the controls can be put in place. The Mexican government currently has no statutory authority to enforce smelter controls and says that the laws are "still being completed." In addition, the Nacozari plant, which is 44 percent owned by the state and the remainder by private interests, has not yet found financing for the pollution controls, which are estimated to cost between \$50 million and \$65 million and will take at least 18 months to build. Mexico, whose economy is in dire straits, has told the United States that it will have to raise part of the money by first starting up the plant and funneling some of the revenues into emission controls.

Western government officials and others are nervous that Mexico may not be able to follow through. David Steele, a staff aide to Senator Dennis deConcini (D-Ariz.) in Tucson, says the commitment between the two countries "is an agreement. That's all there is. It's not binding." Michael Oppenheimer, a scientist at the Environmental Defense Fund who is a coauthor of the recent report correlating smelter emissions with acid rain in the West,

remarks that there is little incentive for Mexico to retrofit the Nacozari plant once it is operating.

The United States has little, if any, leverage over its southern neighbor. Arizona governor Bruce Babbitt is pressing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to impose controls on the Phelps Dodge plant as soon as possible, hoping that the action will set an example for Mexico. Under the Clean Air Act, the company is supposed to have controls installed by next year.

But Phelps Dodge has asked EPA for a waiver that would give it a 2-year reprieve. According to EPA regulations, a waiver can be granted if the company can prove it will suffer a net loss of revenues if the controls are installed. According to David Solomon of EPA, the agency is still conducting an economic evaluation, but expects to make a decision within the next 2 months. Babbitt last week asked EPA to deny the waiver.

Solomon and others at EPA say there is no reason to doubt that Mexico will keep its word. Solomon says, "Mexico has done nothing to demonstrate that they are not acting in good faith." To show its concern, Mexico in the July agreement promised to accelerate the installation of the Nacozari controls by 6 months, from mid-1988 to January, 1988.

The U.S. negotiations with Mexico put the Reagan Administration in a delicate position in light of its acid rain policy with states in the Northeast and with Canada. With them, the Administration has maintained that there is insufficient evidence that controls on emissions from Midwestern utilities will significantly reduce acid rain to the

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north. The new acid rain study, however, provides more ammunition to proponents of stricter controls.

As a result of increasing data that acid rain is a regional problem in the West, the dynamics of the national debate about the acid rain problem in the Northeast and Canada may shift. Western states in the past have opposed federal controls on acid rain because they felt the problem was not theirs. In July, Representative Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo.) held separate field hearings focusing on acid rain in the West. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) is planning acid rain hearings this fall in his home state. Babbitt has led other Western governors to press for strong controls on the smelters. If a Western coalition eventually forms on the issue, the Administration would have a tougher time blocking acid rain legislation.

—**MARJORIE SUN**

\*M. Oppenheimer et al., *Science* 229, 859 (1985).