
France and Africa And Realignment with The U.S. on the Iranian Question

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To analyze the French agenda in the Security Council in 2009 and 2010, certain aspects had to be taken into account, mainly peacekeeping and international security, with an emphasis on security in Africa, as well as nuclear non-proliferation, international disarmament, and the peaceful use of atomic energy, with special emphasis on the Iranian question.

France has voted for nearly 28 resolutions in favor of renewing peacekeeping missions in countries like Somalia, Chad, the Central African Republic, Nepal, the Ivory Coast,¹ Djibouti, Eritrea, the Sudan, Liberia, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, and the Western Sahara. Given the im-

portance of its commercial fishing and phosphates agreements with the kingdom of Morocco, it has never stopped defending it on the issue of the UN statements about applying the legendary referendum on self-determination.²

The French backing of this agenda has to do with its interest in safeguarding the stability of its political allies and looking after its oil supply on the continent, given the hike in oil exports from some African countries to the European Union, China, and the United States. In exchange, France has been promising to foster Africa's presence in the world, evidenced when it said there was the possibility of increasing the number of non-permanent seats in the Security Council. It mentioned this last May at the 25th Africa-France Summit in Nice, where Nicolas Sarkozy hosted 38 African

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presidents and almost 250 businessmen. France has gone even further, putting forward the possibility of creating an African seat that would give its occupant the status of permanent member.³

FRENCH REALIGNMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES ON THE IRANIAN QUESTION

Keeping its relationship with Africa firm —and along with it, its quota of oil— is the French imperative, complemented by keeping the use of atomic energy under Western supervision and using its technology. With quite marked diplomatic ethics, France has decided to join forces with the United States to impose economic sanctions on Iran and force it to suspend its nuclear program.⁴ France's position on Iran is absolutely unwavering; it has stated that it would be good news if Iran accepted an international inspection of its nuclear activities. Otherwise, it will have to assume the consequences.⁵

France's interest in going this way has to do with its role as a supplier of nuclear energy, since it is one of the few powers with the technology for building the latest generation of nuclear reactors. For this reason, the Sarkozy government has promoted the sale of this kind of infrastructure through the French company Areva, one of the world leaders in the field, and is moving through the Middle East, Latin America, and all of Africa to open up the market for the European pressurized reactor (EPR), one of the newest third-generation nuclear reactors.⁶

While France does this kind of business around the world, its speeches in the Security Council are clearly aligned with the United States in fostering sanctions against Iran, seemingly attempting to ensure that it does not achieve a level of nuclear technology that would make it self-sufficient in this field and able to compete in the region by supplying this kind of energy.⁷

FINAL THOUGHTS

The scarcity of oil and the quest to control nuclear energy may be big motivators in France's behavior inside and outside the Security Council. Keeping Africa as its main area of influence ensures its flow of oil, but the possible replacement of crude by uranium has pushed France to join forces with the United States and support sanctions against Iran, in contrast



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with its stance on the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when France roundly opposed the initiation of hostilities.⁸

France's alignment with the United States in the Security Council can be explained by two things: the need to block competition, sustainability, and self-sufficiency in nuclear energy generation by the Middle East, which would come about if Iran's nuclear project were successful, and making sure Iran is dissuaded from dealing with regional geopolitical events like the reconstruction of Iraq, the stability of Israel, and the area's economic subjection to the will of the West.

Iran's response to the sanctions last June did not discard the possibility of using rhetorical maneuvering to accuse the West of the disastrous economic situation it finds itself in, and it will not hesitate to toughen its attitude toward the West emphasizing the agreement it signed with Turkey and Brazil to obscure its clear lack of willingness to cooperate. This could lead to two opposite results: the country's fragmentation into

the groups affected by the sanctions, which will try to take advantage of the situation by cooperating with the West on their own, or the emergence of a new internal alignment in which the Iranian opposition would close ranks with the government, as happened in the case of the Islamic Revolution against the Shah and of Saddam Hussein.

Along these same lines, given the risk that the June sanctions could be counterproductive in the future, a better way of bringing Iran closer to the West to finally bring the matter to a close, that is, to avoid nuclear proliferation in the world and the channeling of nuclear programs for military ends, would be to go back to the idea of making the Middle East a nuclear-arms-free zone. This would be the best way to put an end to the winds of war and the difficulties of the negotiations with the Islamic republic. However, despite the fact that this is part of France's ethical discourse in the Security Council, what it has actually done in these last two years has been another step toward joining forces with the United States, which is more than necessary for the big powers to be able to deal with Iran. ■■■

FURTHER READING

- European Union, "Updating Position 2001/931/CFSP on the Application of Specific Measures to Combat Terrorism and Repealing Common Position 2008/586/CFSP," *Official Journal of the European Union*, January 26, 2009, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:023:0037:0042:EN:PDF>, accessed August 5, 2010.
- GlobalEconStats, "The Top Oil Suppliers of China", October 26, 2009, <http://globaleconstats.com/wp/2009/10/26/the-top-oil-suppliers-of-china/>, accessed June 3, 2010.
- U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "U.S. Imports by Region 1986-2010," http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet_move_impcus_a2_nus_ep00_im0_mbb1_m.htm, accessed June 1, 2010.

NOTES

- ¹ Based on Resolutions S/RES/1865/ (voted January 27, 2009) and S/RES/1880 (voted July 30, 2009), France sent troops to back up the Blue Berets.
- ² In Resolution S/RES/1871 (2009), the French refused to include a paragraph that Mexico, then president of the Security Council, argued in favor of respect for human rights in the conflict. This refusal was with full knowledge that for several years the Moroccans have used inhumane tactics against the Sahrawis in the occupied territories. Despite this, the document, published April 30, 2009, was not backed by the French and was voted without including the paragraph Mexico proposed. The text only mentions its recognition of "the human dimension of the conflict," a far cry from recognizing the violation of human rights.
- ³ In the African press, the main candidates for occupying this seat were Morocco and South Africa because they are regional powers. However, Egypt was also mentioned because of its extensive diplomatic experience, as was Ethiopia because it is the headquarters for most of the continent's international organizations.

⁴ Historically, France has assumed that it has the moral stature necessary to criticize aspects of international security. It does this based on its participation in the creation of various international instruments, like Resolution 1540, passed April 28, 2004, which states that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems constitute a threat for international peace and security. It is also a contributor to Resolution 1887, adopted unanimously by the Security Council at the September 24, 2009 summit on disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the General Assembly's First Commission on international disarmament and international security, and to the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC), as well as a signatory of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Complete Prohibition of Nuclear Testing, among others.

⁵ Europa Press, "Sarkozy asegura que Irán deberá atenerse a las consecuencias si no colabora con la AIEA," <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-francia-sarkozy-asegura-iran-debera-atenerse-consecuencias-si-no-colabora-aiea-20091016033015.html>, accessed August 7, 2010.

⁶ Broadly speaking, the difference between conventional reactors and this new technology is that the third-generation reactors produce 50 percent more energy in a shorter time. For years, France has sold electricity to European neighbors like Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. In fact, with Italy, it has reactivated a trans-Alp nuclear program, discontinued in 1987. It is now renewing nuclear energy production thanks to an agreement signed by Silvio Berlusconi and Sarkozy. Coincidentally, the European Commission has promised "to stimulate investment in more efficient energy infrastructure," which France has channeled into agreements signed with different nations, mainly in Africa: Libya, Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco are on the list. For more on this topic, see Pueblo en Línea Agencia de Noticias, "Areva construirá la tercera parte de nuevos reactores en el mundo," December 21, 2007, <http://spanish.peopledaily.com.cn/31620/6325191.html>, accessed July 2, 2010, and European Union, "Nuclear Energy," *Revista de la Investigación Europea* no. 40, http://ec.europa.eu/research/rtdinfo/40/01/article_496_en.html, February 2004, accessed August 6, 2010.

⁷ France's influence in this matter has been manifest not only in the Security Council, but also outside it. One clear example has been its indirect support for the Mujahedin-e Khalq Movement (MEK), the main opposition to Iran's Islamic regime, who were removed from the European Union's list of terrorist organizations in January 2009 with France's backing, after their counterpart in the Iranian army (the Pasdaran) were put on the U.S. blacklist in September 2006. See the 2009 list at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:023:0037:0042:EN:PDF>, accessed August 5, 2010.

⁸ The last round of sanctions, proposed by the United States on May 18 and passed by the council last June, also includes the ban of the sale of tanks and other heavy weaponry to Iran. In addition, it is important to point out that the international press published this draft as a "consensus reached by Russia and China," when two days later, the United States would raise the sanctions imposed on the three Russian institutions (Rosoboronexport, the Moscow Aviation Institute, and the D. Mendeleyev University of Chemical Technology) accused of selling weapons of mass destruction technology to third countries in 1994. The announcement was a surprise not only because of Russia's approval, previously reticent to sanction Iran, but above all because it came just 24 hours after the accord reached by Brazil, Turkey, and Iran, in which the Islamic republic committed to sending uranium to Istanbul to be enriched to 20 percent. See Parisa Hafezi, "Irán, Brasil y Turquía firman acuerdo de intercambio nuclear," Reuters, May 17, 2010, http://lta.reuters.com/article/topNews/idLTA_SIE64G05120100517, accessed May 21, 2010. "Brazil: Agreement with Iran Is Still Possible". See the original at http://aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B4407AEC-ED63-47CF-AE34-FDF670E94EB9.htm?wbc_purpose=Basic&WBCMODE=PresentationUnpublished, PresentationUnpublished, accessed May 22, 2010.