

FRENCH PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC

REPLY OF M. PAUL QUILES, MINISTER OF DEFENCE,
TO A PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION *
(NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 2 OCTOBER 1985)

IT IS CORRECT THAT A FLOTILLA OF FIVE VESSELS BELONGING TO THE GREENPEACE ORGANIZATION IS CURRENTLY SAILING TOWARDS THE MURUROA ATOLL.

THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CLEARLY CANNOT TOLERATE ANY ATTEMPT TO ENTER BY FORCE, IN VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND FRENCH LAW, A MILITARY AREA WHERE WE ARE CONDUCTING SECRET OPERATION. NONE OF THE FIVE NUCLEAR POWERS IN THE WORLD HAS IN FACT EVER TOLERATED ACTION OF THIS KIND.

THE GREENPEACE ORGANIZATION MAKES NO SECRET OF THE FACT THAT IT WISHES TO MAKE US ABANDON OUR NUCLEAR DETERRENT BY TRYING TO DISTURB OUR RESEARCH. I PERSONALLY HAVE NO OBJECTION TO THAT ASSOCIATION'S ACTIVITIES WHEN THEY ARE AIMED AT DEFENDING WHALES AND BABY SEALS, BUT I CANNOT PUT UP, ANY MORE THAN THE GOVERNMENT CAN, WITH AN INTENTION ON ITS PART TO DICTATE OUR COUNTRY'S MILITARY POLICY. I NOTE, IN FACT, WITH SOME SURPRISE THAT IT IS CONCENTRATING ITS ACTION AGAINST FRANCE. I HAVE HEARD NO REPORTS OF SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS NEAR RUSSIAN SECRET BASES OR IN THE AMERICAN DESERTS.

MAY I MAKE A POINT OF SAYING AGAIN THAT OUR NUCLEAR TESTS ARE FREE FROM ALL RISKS. OF THE FIVE NUCLEAR POWERS IN THE WORLD, FRANCE IS THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE LET AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF EXPERTS GO TO THE SITE AND MAKE A THOROUGH STUDY OF THE QUESTION. THOSE EXPERTS FOUND THAT THE RADIO-ACTIVITY WAS NOT ONLY VERY SLIGHT, BUT THAT ITS LEVEL WAS EVEN LOWER THAN IN PARIS, FOR INSTANCE.

I WOULD POINT OUT, TOO, THAT ACCESS TO CERTAIN AUSTRALIAN ZONES CONTAMINATED MANY YEARS AGO BY THE BRITISH ATMOSPHERIC NUCLEAR TESTS IS STILL TOTALLY FORBIDDEN. I AM PUZZLED, LIKE YOU, I EXPECT, BY THE SURPRISING DIFFERENCES OF ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF CERTAIN SOUTH-PACIFIC COUNTRIES, DEPENDING ON WHETHER THE COUNTRY CONCERNED IS FRANCE OR ONE OF THE OTHER NUCLEAR POWERS...

MURUROA, I WOULD RECALL, IS 4,800 KILOMETRES FROM NEW ZEALAND, WHEREAS THE AMERICAN NEVADA CENTRE IS 100 KILOMETRES FROM LAS VEGAS AND 500 KILOMETRES FROM SAN FRANCISCO. THE SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN CENTRE IS A FEW HUNDRED KILOMETRES FROM THREE MAJOR CONURBATIONS. WITHIN A THOUSAND KILOMETRES OF THESE SITES, THERE ARE 5,000 INHABITANTS IN THE CASE OF THE MURUROA ZONE, 4 MILLION IN THAT OF THE SOVIET SITE AND 37 MILLION IN THAT OF THE AMERICAN SITE.

*[This document was made available by the embassy of France Canberra, ACT and is contained in Press Release 54/85.]

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WE MEAN, OF COURSE, TO CONTINUE OUR TESTS. WHO COULD IN FACT BLAME US ? THE OBJECT IS TO TEST THE QUALITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE NUCLEAR WARHEADS ON OUR MISSILES. THE FIVE NUCLEAR POWERS IN THE WORLD ARE CONDUCTING THIS KIND OF TEST AND WILL GO ON DOING SO, AND I REPEAT THAT THERE IS NO ENVIRONMENTAL RISK WHATSOEVER.

WHAT IS THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT GOING TO DO ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY YOU REFERRED TO JUST NOW ? IN ACCORDANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW - IN PARTICULAR THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA OF 10 DECEMBER 1982 - AS WELL AS WITH FRENCH LAW AND WITH THE REGULATIONS ISSUED IN THE PAST AND RECENTLY UPDATED BY THE GOVERNMENT, WE SHALL NOT ALLOW OUR SOVEREIGNTY TO BE VIOLATED THINGS MUST BE MADE QUITE CLEAR.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, IF A GREENPEACE VESSEL ENTERS OUR TERRITORIAL WATERS, IT WILL BE SEIZED BY THE FRENCH NAVY AND THE OFFENDERS WILL BE SANCTIONED BY OUR JUDICIARY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC.

IN THE EVENT OF A BOAT BEING LAUNCHED FROM ONE OF THOSE VESSELS OUTSIDE TERRITORIAL WATERS AND TRYING TO REACH THE SHORE - THIS POSSIBILITY HAS BEEN RAISED - I HAVE GIVEN THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS : IF THE BOAT CAN BE STOPPED AT SEA WITHOUT RISK OF INJURY TO ITS CREW, THE NAVY DO SO ■ IF IT IS FOUND THAT SUCH ACTION MAY CAUSE INJURY, THE NAVY WILL LET THE BOAT PROCEED TO THE SHORE AND THE GENDARMERIE WILL ARREST THE CREW MEMBERS AS THEY LAND LASTLY, ANY VESSEL THAT SENDS A BOAT INTO OUR TERRITORIAL WATERS WILL BE SEIZED BY THE FRENCH NAVY AND THE PERSONS IN CHARGE OF IT WILL BE PUNISHED ACCORDING TO THE LAW.

REGARDING THE TIMETABLE FOR OUR TESTS, MY REPLY WILL BE CLEAR AND SIMPLE. FRANCE HAS NEVER ACCEPTED AND NEVER WILL ACCEPT THAT ANY ORGANIZATION OR COUNTRY WHATSOEVER SHOULD BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE HER DEFENCE POLICY. THAT IS PARTICULARLY PLAIN IN THE NUCLEAR SPHERE WHICH, AS YOU KNOW, IS THE ULTIMATE GUARANTEE OF OUR INDEPENDENCE.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE DIRECTIVES OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, I HAVE GIVEN CATEGORICAL INSTRUCTIONS. WE SHALL NOT POSTPONE THE NEXT NUCLEAR TEST, OR INDEED THE SUBSEQUENT ONE, BY ONE WEEK, BY ONE DAY, BY ONE HOUR. THE TIMETABLES HAVE BEEN FIXED, THEY WILL BE SCRUPULOUSLY ADHERED TO. I SHALL SHORTLY GO TO THE SITE IN PERSON TO ATTEND A TEST, AND I WOULD LIKE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FROM ALL POLITICAL GROUPS TO ACCOMPANY ME ON THIS TRIP, SO THAT THE SOLIDITY OF THE FRENCH CONSENSUS OVER OUR NUCLEAR DETERRENCE POLICY MAY BE SOLEMNLY REAFFIRMED ./

FIJI : VISITS OF NUCLEAR POWERED SHIPS*

In July 1983 our Cabinet examined the policy which it had determined in 1980, and decided that prohibition of nuclear powered ships visiting our ports was not altogether compatible with the requirements of international law. As you would be aware under international law, the Law of the Sea Convention and our Marine Spaces Order of 1981 Fiji is obliged to give a guaranteed right of passage to all vessels including those which are nuclear powered or which carry nuclear weapons, provided such vessels traversed expeditiously through our waters. Indeed, foreign nuclear powered submarines may already be traversing our territorial sea.

Quite apart from the lack of realism in our previous policy, we share strategic and security concerns of our South Pacific neighbours and their allies, and felt an obligation to shift closer to their position.

However, I must emphasise that relaxation on port calls to Fiji is not exclusively for United States warships. Ships are allowed to enter our ports on the basis of individual application.

* [This is an extract of a letter to the News from Mr A. Prasad, First Secretary, Fiji High Commission, Canberra]