

Rainbow Warrior incident

It was, as France's abashed President Francois Mitterrand said, "a stupid, absurd act." After two months of denials and prevarication, France has finally admitted that its intelligence agents sank the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland, New Zealand.

As everyone by now knows, Greenpeace, the publicity-hungry, leftist environmental group, sent the *Rainbow Warrior* to the Pacific in an effort to interrupt French nuclear testing. Which senior minister authorized the sinking of the irksome ship remains unclear. French intelligence agents, and freelance *barbouzes*, have often been loose cannon, noted for rash, sometimes murderous actions.

France's reputation has been blighted; its socialist government profoundly embarrassed — socialists aren't supposed to do such nasty acts. Charles Hernu, the extremely able defence minister, was forced to resign; Admiral Lacoste, head of the DGSE, was fired. Hernu was the best French defence chief in many years, a man who encouraged his nation to maintain its large armed forces. He was also a fine man and a patriot. It was Hernu — solid, honest, a genuine man of the people — who strengthened France's backbone in standing up to Soviet military might.

In counterpoint to Hernu's fall and France's discomfort, New Zealand's pinkish Prime Minister David Lange — a sort of South Sea NDPer, is basking in the hot sun of triumph. Not only has he ruptured the ANZUS alliance with the United States, Lange has now brought the miscreant French to heel. Greenpeace received a bonanza of free publicity and anti-nuclear sentiment has mushroomed.

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"He's decent enough, but intellectually, we're worlds apart."

ERIC
MARGOLIS



Just about everyone is heaping abuse on France's bowed head. It is precisely when a friend commits a stupid act and is in deep trouble that we need to show our support. Having been saddened and upset by *l'affaire Greenpeace*, I would like to say a few words in defence of the French.

Yes, it was stupid, absurd and counterproductive to sink the *Rainbow Warrior*. But France was acting, however foolishly, to prevent its nuclear tests being interrupted. We should be aware that France was planning to test its new neutron bomb, a weapon whose sole purpose is to stop dead onrushing Soviet tank armies. The N-Bomb kills tank crews by radiation without destroying buildings.

The Soviets have mounted a huge, worldwide propaganda campaign against the neutron bomb. This campaign has even succeeded in preventing the U.S. from deploying the weapon in Europe. Why so much Soviet concern? Because the Soviets and the Europeans know that no one will use regular nuclear weapons to stop Russian tanks: Doing so would also destroy Europe's cities. The neutron bomb, however, will spare cities.

France, to her credit, had the guts to go ahead and develop the neutron bomb. And, under Hernu, she restructured her army so that it could move more quickly into West Germany in the event of a Soviet invasion. France, unlike many other European nations, has refused to cower before Russia's military bullying.

The disasters of World War II have made many forget France's glorious military tradition. But the Russians, with long memories, still remember the *furia francese*. On the attack, there are no finer or braver troops anywhere than the French.

Before absolutely condemning France, recall that French soldiers do much to defend our western democracies; that French nuclear weapons help hold back Russia's vast armies; that a strong France is the robust heart of Europe. It is an awesome, expensive responsibility that most of its carping critics shun.

New Zealand's Lange, for good example, sleeps sound thanks to the very American and French nuclear weapons that he denounces. So, for that matter, does Canada.

It is also worth recalling that the French are more than a nation of dressmakers, perfumers and cooks. A generation ago, France was a world power; today, it still rules or influences sizable areas of Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

There are a lot of tough Legionnaires, paratroopers and, as we just saw, frogmen who are not convinced that France's day is past. People who provoke the proud French may be in for more than diplomatic notes.