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In the continuing series: "Does history repeat itself?
No, it stutters."

France's new president planning to sell nuclear power plants to Algeria

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On 29 May 2007 the journalist Richard Arzt published on RTL Podcast an article entitled "Diplomacy and Sarkozy" which contains these noteworthy points:

"In foreign affairs, Nicolas Sarkozy is receiving accelerated practical training based on the most personal of propositions. His priority, since becoming France's president, is to give a push to new French intentions for the reform of European institutions. (...)

"There is another dossier receiving attention in the Elysee Palace: preparations for a presidential visit to Algeria. It is said that on principle Nicolas Sarkozy will make Algeria the first of several countries he will visit in the Arab world. The Moroccan leaders have already indicated their surprise: in 1995 Jacques Chirac visited them first. And he went again after stepping down, spending a few days there this month. But President Sarkozy thinks he should begin his project of Euro-Mediterranean union by improving relations with Alger. When Minister of the Interior, he established solid relations with the Algerian leaders who are experienced in fighting Islamist terrorism. In addition, cooperation could develop in the field of energy. **The new president is said to favour the sale of French nuclear power-plants to Algeria. Besides the commercial interest in that, France would be indicating that she would not practise ostracism but would accept the prospect of a non-military nuclear plant in a Muslim country.** (*Our emphasis.*) Two officials close to President Sarkozy will soon go to Alger to prepare for the president's visit and to gain assurances that the authorities there will not use the occasion to give prominence to denunciations of the dark days of colonisation."

Algeria has already built a nuclear research reactor with help from Argentina. Remember that it was through a research reactor of the same kind - a plutonium-producing one sold by France after a contract signed in 1975 between Saddam Hussein and France's then PM, Jacques Chirac - that Iraq began to materialise its efforts to obtain atomic weapons. That reactor, named Osirak, was destroyed in June 1981 by Israeli warplanes, but Saddam Hussein still continued his efforts until they were shattered by the "Gulf War" of 1991.

Remember also that future energy needs lie behind Iran's intention to build nuclear power-plants and to operate them by enriching the uranium deposits it has on its own territory. Nevertheless the international community suspects Iran of using this as a path towards atomic weapons, and the IAEA Director Mohammed ElBaradei, has himself emphasised the "dual nature" of nuclear technology, which can be used for military as well as peaceful purposes.

Like Iraq and Iran, Algeria has an urgent need of nuclear energy, because like them Algeria is so terribly short of gas and oil... No, apart from this sad point in common, any comparison with those other Muslim countries would be utterly incongruous because, as everyone knows, Algeria is totally free from any nationalist temptations and any risk of drifting into Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism does not exist there; if anyone ever glimpsed it there, that was only a bad dream. One wonders, then, why the Algerian leaders have become "experienced in fighting Islamist terrorism". Never mind that: henceforth that's what they are, so that France can sleep easy while selling them nuclear technologies, plants and materials with which they will pollute a little more Algerian territory, which was already polluted by the French military tests in Sahara. Indeed there is no reason why France alone should benefit from the marvels of nuclearism, and no reason why the AREVA corporation should not plug into such a splendid source of profits.

Nor is there any reason why Algeria, having regained independence and sovereignty should imitate the former colonial power and stupidly believe (as France does) that having nuclear weapons is the necessary means of ensuring independence, sovereignty and security - as France's president puts it. After all, bad examples are not

meant to be imitated!

Plus, France's handling of the Iran nuclear dossier, as one member of the "European trio", has so far been brilliant! The Iran question is virtually solved, so why should it be any different one day with the "Algerian nuclear dossier" or those of other Muslim countries crowding at our door, countries to which France might supply power-plants like Algeria's? No, of course there's no reason for France alone to profit from the European Pressure Reactor, no reason why AREVA shouldn't set up shop in the Islamic marketplace, offering its marvels of nuclear-power technology which (history proves it) has no connection whatever with nuclear weapons!

Let's sleep easy: "In foreign affairs, Nicolas Sarkozy is receiving accelerated practical training", and it is full of promise. Perhaps full of too many promises?

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