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DEFENCE INTELLIGENCE DECLASSIFIED

NEW (CIVILIAN) DIRECTOR GENERAL EXTERNAL SECURITY IN FRANCE

FOR-01-28

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CLAUDE SILBERZATH

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NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR THE DGSE

1. Claude SILBERZAHN (54 years old) has just been appointed to succeed General Francois MERMET as Director General of the French "secret service".
2. SILBERZAHN was born on 18 March 1935 in Mulhouse. He has a degree in Law and is an old student of the French National School of the Overseas Territories.
3. Having been intergrated into the Corps of Civil Administrators in 1966 he was the Secretary General of Martinique from 1967 to 1970. After this appointment his carreer developed as follows :
 - h. 1985 - 1986. Commisinner of the Republic of the Region Haute-Normandie and of the Department of Seine-Maritime.
 - j. 1986 - 1989. Prefect of the Region Franche-Comte and of the Department of Doubs since October 1986.
4. For the first time the DGSE is to be directed by a civilian who will be the sixth person to occupy this position since May 1981. This appears to be a clear indication of government concern at excessive militarisation of the service and irritation at the low morale and inefficiency reigning at "La Piscine" (local slang for the HQ of the DGSE on Boulevard Mortier).
5. In commentary by the local press to this appointment the following important factors emerge :
 - a. Silberzahn is not hostile to the present (Socialist) government.
 - b. His appointment has been prepared for some time with two persons particularly involved viz Pierre Joxe, the Minister of the Interior and Prefect Gilles Ménage, Chef de Cabinet of François Mitterrand.
 - c. Silberzahn and Laurent Fabius were apparently not of the same opinion regarding the Greenpeace affair with Fabius adopting an extremely "hard line" against the DGSE at the time.

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d. The government need not fear a negative political attitude from the DGSE in future, they have appointed a loyal supporter at the head of the organisation.

5. General François MERMET has been promoted to Général d'Armée Aérienne (five star general) and has been appointed as a "special military advisor" to the government. The local press feels however that he has been fired, at the insistence of the President and give two main reasons for this action:

a. The DGSE was not aware of the true state of affairs regarding ~~the government/Presidency of the true facts.~~ ~~the government/Presidency of the true facts.~~

b. The poor quality of briefing notes prepared by the DGSE for President Mitterrands recent visits to East Bloc countries eg Bulgaria.

6. Comment. At first sight it would appear as if the appointment of Claude Silberzahn is "bad news" for MID. The support he apparently has from Pierre Joxe, the Marxist Minister of the Interior, is particularly significant in this respect. If Silberzahn is however serious about recreating a sound and effective service, he will have to accept that co-operation with the SADF (MID) is essential. It is therefore too early to determine what long term effect this appointment will have on our future relations with the French Services (which have recently been excellent) I will plan my first meeting with Claude Silberzahn very carefully and request special support from Genl Thirion and his staff in preparing an up-to-date briefing paper (with graphics) of the present military/political situation in Southern Africa for this purpose (in English to be handed over on conclusion of the meeting/briefing).

7. Recommendations

a. Letters to be sent by (old and new) CSI to congratulate Général MERMET on his promotion and to thank him for his co-operation and encouragement of our service to service relationship since January 1988.

b. Letters to be sent by CSI to the new Director-General, Claude Silberzahn, to congratulate him on his appointment and to assure him of the intention to maintain the close and friendly co-operation of the past. Note. These letters to be despatched in the dipbag of 4 April 1989 for prompt delivery. If not, the delay would prove to be embarrassing.

c. The preparation of a briefing by DMI to be given to the new DG by Mr Oelschig ASP but in any case before 14 April 1989. Refer to para 6 above.

8. The photo of Claude Silberzahn is the best we could come across for the moment.