

France to pay nearly a billion to Taiwan over frigate deal

By AURÉLIEN GIRARD
Epoch Times Staff

PARIS—When the French sold warships to Taiwan in 1991, they certainly did not expect that the money they paid in bribes (called “commissions”) along the way would come back to bite them.

Nor did French taxpayers anticipate that the bill would fall on their shoulders.

In 1991, the French military company Thales (at the time known as Thomson) sold six ultra-modern Lafayette frigates to Taiwan for a total of US\$2.8 billion. The 3,800-ton warships could detect submarines, and the “bravo” deal was accompanied by huge bribes of at least US\$500 million.

Several Taiwan political and military officials are alleged to have accepted the bribes, as well as some mainland Chinese officials who, in return, did not oppose the transaction.

In 2001, French justice was not authorized to investigate the existence of alleged “back bribes” sent to some politicians in France for their personal benefit or for financing political campaigns. Files from the Ministry of Defense were classified and not accessible to the judge in charge of the case.

In 2001, Taiwanese officials—not the same as those in 1991—pointed out that the contractual agreement between France and Taiwan forbade commissions. An international court of arbitration chosen by both parties took the case and on May 3 concluded that France was guilty and should pay Taiwan nearly US\$1 billion. Thales estimates a total of about 630 million euros, or about US\$810 million, including bank interest and legal costs, according to a press release from the company.

‘FALL’ FROM OPEN WINDOW
Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou praised the decision, as did Vice Defense Minister Chao Shih-



A Lafayette-class stealth destroyer berths in the Port de la Lune at Bordeaux 23 March 2001. Taiwan bought 13 of the warships from France in 1991 in a deal rife with bribery. DERRICK CEYRAC/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

chang, who told a news conference in Taipei that “Thales violated the contract by paying commissions,” according to eTaiwan News.

French officials declined to comment, and President Sarkozy is not taking questions from the press on the matter.

The frigate affair is politically sensitive as doubts still exist on the potential personal benefits indulged in by some high-ranking French officials. Additionally, a number of unusual deaths have been reported.

First, Taiwan Navy Captain Yin Ching-feng was murdered in 1993, his death becoming a prominent unsolved murder of the 1990s. He was believed to have been about to publicize the

payment of bribes in the frigate deal, according to eTaiwan.

Then in October 2000, Thierry Imbot, a former French intelligence agent operating in Taiwan, “fell from a window” of his apartment. He was followed in May 2001 by Jacques Morisson, a Thomson executive who had negotiated the contract, who also “fell from a window” to his death.

Thales announced it would appeal the decision and use “every means available, in particular filing request of nullity of the decision.” The company knows it could face similar repercussions in a submarine deal made with Pakistan and wants to avoid setting a legal precedent.

Most powerful states call for Middle East nuclear-free zone

By GENEVIEVE LONG
Epoch Times Staff

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday voiced their support for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. In a statement made during the 2010 review conference on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), the U.S., Russia, France, the U.K., and China reiterated the need for such a zone in the region.

“We are committed to a full implementation of the 1995 NPT resolution on the Middle East and we support all ongoing efforts to this end,” the permanent Security Council member states said in their statement. They added that they are “ready to consider all relevant proposals” to take concrete steps to that end.

The 1995 resolution called on all states in the Middle East to work toward establishing a verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems. It also said that the region should refrain from taking any action that would hamper such an objective in the future.

The resolution also urged all states, particularly the nuclear-weapon states, to support the implementation of a zone in the Middle East “free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and

their delivery systems.”

Wednesday’s statement by permanent members of the Security Council reiterated the impact that nuclear-weapon-free zones can have on global and regional security.

“[These zones] have made and continue to make an important contribution to the strengthening of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime in all its aspects, and to achieving nuclear disarmament and the ultimate objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control,” the statement said.

The permanent members said they are calling for new zones to be established, “where appropriate and in conformity with the wishes of regional states.” They added that they are ready and willing to diplomatically resolve outstanding issues on the zones.

The NPT is a significant international treaty that was created to stop nuclear weapons and weapons technology from spreading. It was ratified in 1970 and has 189 signatories, more than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement in the world. The NPT also aims to promote cooperation over peaceful uses for nuclear energy and hasten the goal of complete global nuclear disarmament.

The NPT is the only multilateral agreement of the nuclear weapon states aimed at disarmament.

Irish and Scottish airports closed, then opened

By ANDREY VOLKOV
Epoch Times Staff

A new ash cloud from Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull volcano shut down airports in Northern Ireland and Scotland on Wednesday, with dozens of flights cancelled and thousands of passengers marooned. Authorities later said that flights should be operational by Thursday morning.

Scotland’s Glasgow airport was closed, while its neighbour Edinburgh was operating at reduced capacity. Northern Ireland airports were also closed all afternoon.

In Ireland, regional airports Knock, Sligo, and Donegal were closed until 2 p.m. local time; Dublin airspace was closed during the day and in the evening local time.

British’s Civil Aviation Authority said on Wednesday the no-fly zone would continue to move south and west toward the U.K. overnight with the high-density area of the volcanic ash cloud.

“Ash is likely to continue to disrupt U.K. air travel for the foreseeable future,” Andrew Haines, CAA chief executive, said in a statement. “The situation for U.K. airspace, particularly over the North and Scotland, remains unprecedented.”

Scientists are tracking the movement of the ash cloud, but its location changes frequently depending on the strength of eruptions and prevailing winds.

Last month, as Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull volcano spewed plumes of ash that drifted over European airspace, over 100,000 flights were cancelled, more than 10 million passengers were affected, and billions of euros were lost by the aviation industry.

Somali pirates hijack Russian oil tanker

PIRATES CONTINUED FROM P1
Admiral Jan Thornqvist from Nav- for told reporters in Kenya that the 23 Russian crew members have locked themselves in the radar room. The Marshal Shaposhnikov was expected to arrive late Wednesday night, but the course of action upon arrival

remains uncertain.

The pirates warned that a rescue attempt would endanger the crew. Experts say an intervention could be dangerous to both vessel and crew, and are suggesting negotiations and ransom payment. The cargo aboard the 230-metre tanker is valued at \$52 million.

Indonesian defamation laws forbid criticism

By KRISTINA SKORBACH
Epoch Times Staff

Indonesians can be imprisoned for speaking critically about anything from hospital service to government corruption. According to a recent Human Rights Watch report on criminal defamation, Indonesia’s criminal code, in violation of constitutional rights, prohibits citizens from publicizing statements, even if true, that could potentially harm someone’s reputation.

The Indonesian Criminal Code can imprison individuals for defaming others—even if their statements are true—for up to 16 months, and if the defamed individual is a public official, the sentence extends to 18 months. An individual accused of defamation on the Internet, who breaks the Law Regarding Electronic Information and Transactions, or ITE law, can be subjected to six years in prison and a fine of Rp1 one billion (US\$106,000), according to the report.

Indonesia’s criminal code requires people to adhere to the defamation law

that forbids anyone to publicly express any comments that could defame an individual. The country adopted the criminal code from the Netherlands in 1918, where one can also go to jail for spreading information about someone with the intent to harm their reputation.

Gatot Dewa Broto, spokesman for the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, said that “the ITE law itself is good,” it’s just that the police and prosecutors are misusing it.

“Indonesians do not know limitations on their rights,” said Joe Saunders, Deputy Program Director at Human Rights Watch, adding that the “sheer arbitrariness” of defamation laws is what takes people by surprise when they find out all the restrictions.

A classic example that received worldwide publicity was the case of Priya Mulyasari. The 32-year-old mother of two small children was detained pre-trial and then imprisoned for three weeks for sending an email to her friends criticizing the treatment she received at a hospital in Jakarta.

“I sent a private email to friends about what really happened and suddenly I am made a criminal,” Mulyasari told Human Rights Watch.

Now that potential “whistleblowers” understand these restrictions, they are reluctant to pursue changes in legislation, explained Saunders. However, awareness is spreading in Indonesia as each case gets prominent coverage. Defamation cases have gone to trial not only in the capital, Jakarta, but also in Java and on small islands that surround the mainland.

After the trials are over, the convicted are faced with even more stress socially and personally. “People look at them differently,” Saunders said. The defamation law is particularly tough on journalists, who often find it hard to get work after being fired.

“Many in government think that the last 10 years of press freedom has been excessive, that the press has gone too far, and that there is chaos and a lack of respect for state officials,” said Leo Batubara, deputy chairman of the Press Council in October 2009.

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