

The Egg on Uncle Sam's Face

By C. L. SULZBERGER

PARIS—Who is doing what to whom and why in Madagascar is a question deeply disturbing to several capitals and especially to Washington which has been accused of fomenting a conspiracy against President Philibert Tsiranana. One consequence of this murky tale of plot and counter-plot is that U.S. Ambassador Anthony Marshall is being quietly withdrawn.

Originally Tsiranana, a hot-tempered man who has led his nation ever since it became independent in 1960, had demanded the recall as *persona non grata* of Marshall and several members of his embassy staff. Instead, Marshall was rapidly summoned home for consultation while friendly African leaders, especially Congolese President Mobutu, prevailed upon Tsiranana to cool things off.

It now appears that Marshall will return to Tananarive and then his transfer to another post will be announced, permitting him to pay official farewell calls. There is some hope that his embassy subordinates may be allowed to continue to serve in Madagascar.

Paris is normally well-informed about Malagasy affairs because the huge Indian Ocean island republic was previously a French colony. But if anybody around here really knows what has been happening in Madagascar I haven't met him. Under France's policy-making system the Ministry of Foreign Affairs theoretically handles Madagascar and sub-Saharan Africa.

In reality they are directly administered by President Pompidou through Jacques Foffart, Secretary General for African and Malagasy Affairs, who has an office across from

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the Elysée Palace. Foccart, a quiet man who keeps out of the public eye, was known for his devotion to General de Gaulle and was once charged with security and intelligence matters as well as Africa.

The Madagascar crisis exploded suddenly this month while Secretary of State Rogers was in Paris attending an international economic conference. Malagasy authorities claim to have uncovered a secret document to which Marshall's name is allegedly appended and which supposedly instructed U. S. officials on what to do in case of a political coup.

United States officials, professing to be astounded, denounced the document as a forgery. Some people say there was indeed an American conspiracy. Some say it was a French conspiracy designed to spoil U.S. relations with Madagascar. A French businessman residing in Tananarive assures me it was an Israeli conspiracy.

Why any of these countries should desire to disrupt the Malagasy Government is unclear. The French have gone out of their way to reassure the United States they played no role in this curious affair. About the only confirmable fact is that Vice President André Resampa, until recently regarded as Tsiranana's designated successor, has been arrested, accused of "collaborating" with a foreign power.

Resampa has sometimes been labeled as anti-French and pro-American. There were rumors that he had ambitions to accelerate his succession to

Tsiranana. The aging President has recently been ill.

I saw Tsiranana together with Marshall a month before the crisis and they seemed on cordial terms. The President was pleased a rebellion in the south had been squashed and its allegedly Maoist leader seized. He warned that "the Chinese have big ambitions here but they won't succeed" and said a South African general had secretly visited Madagascar to confer on "stopping Communism."

This theme certainly is not regarded with distaste by Washington. The French, who have a naval base at Diego Suarez plus Foreign Legion and paratroop units in Madagascar, aren't eager to facilitate Soviet or Chinese penetration. It is scarcely logical to imagine Israel might be working to bolster Communist interests.

Resampa was supposed to be rightist in his political inclinations although some French sources now say there was "connivance between Maoist leaders of the southern rebellion and Resampa's sympathizers."

Whatever occurred, previously excellent relations between the United States and Madagascar have been interrupted. Tsiranana was counting on American support in constructing a huge fort at Narinda Bay to service supertankers that carry oil from the Middle East and around the Cape to Europe.

An unexpected crisis has developed at a key spot just as Soviet naval units start making their presence in the Indian Ocean felt and Soviet diplomacy becomes active in the area. It is strange that these trends should coincide with the sudden splattering of egg on Uncle Sam's face in Madagascar.