



France

Rift widens as Giscard calls Carter's bluff

by Vivian Freyre Zoakos

France's response to a shoddy Washington manipulation of a European-U.S. foreign ministers summit has led to a publicly acknowledged rift in the Western alliance which even the U.S. State Department is no longer capable of concealing.

In a highly unusual display of public disagreement, the State Department was forced to openly chastise France—notwithstanding U.S. government policy of maintaining a united Western posture if at all possible—over French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet's refusal to attend a Western foreign ministers meeting in Bonn. The meeting had been organized by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance for this past week and was intended to impose economic and political sanctions on the Soviet Union.

Consultation, but no confrontation

"France is entirely in agreement with a meeting for consultation but not with a meeting for confrontation," said a spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry. When West Germany followed suit, Vance opted for bilateral meetings.

State Department spokesmen responded by voicing fears that the French action would "give the Russians the impression that there was no allied unity on the invasion of Afghanistan."

Vance, hoping to present the French with a fait accompli, had first lined up the attendance of the West German, Canadian, Australian, and Italian foreign ministers before informing France of the scheduled conference. No official communication from Washington was received by the French government.

"If that's the way the Americans want to test us," said one French official, "we'll answer in the same way. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." Another official denounced Washington's "imperial conception of leadership," while a spokesman for the presidency told the *Washington Post*, "For two months

you people told us how essential those sanctions were against Iran, and we went along and did everything possible. But the day you change your minds, you don't even bother to call us. So why be surprised that we won't attend a meeting on sanctions for Russia that everyone already knows we oppose?"

The official response came from Foreign Minister François-Poncet: "France is not America's barnyard!"

French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing spelled out France's policy in detail during a press conference Feb. 6. "In the event of foreign confrontation, we belong to an alliance. But it is precisely to avoid this foreign confrontation that initiatives and efforts have to be made. We consider that it is important to keep the dialogue with the Soviet Union going in order to define the conditions of a Soviet withdrawal [from Afghanistan]."

A dialogue for detente

"The Soviets have exposed at length, through diplomatic channels, the motives for their intervention and their intention to withdraw their forces. We must make them detail the conditions of this withdrawal. We must pursue the dialogue, and the dialogue will be pursued." We oppose the "reconstitution of the system of blocs that increase tension on the one hand and on the other eliminate the margin for maneuver and the influence of France's foreign policy. ... Any meeting that would result in a bloc approach to the current situation will not win French participation."

A front-page article in the daily *Le Figaro*, Feb. 11, by parliamentarian Balladour—a spokesman for French industry—echoed Giscard in setting out the policy basis for the Euro-American split. Balladour attacked Washington and London's "mismanagement" for leading to problems in detente, especially the Anglo-American tack of keeping economic cooperation with Moscow on the back burner—as opposed to the French and German policy of using economic cooperation to strengthen peace. Balladour concluded: "It is most probable that after the Afghanistan parenthesis, detente will take off again; it is in the mutual interest of both sides that it do so."

It is perfectly evident that the West German government of Helmut Schmidt agrees with the French position. Minister Hans Apel repeatedly called for a return to detente at the recent Wehrkunde meeting (see West Germany). The present, open disagreements between Paris and Washington thus throw new light on the Franco-German summit talks between Schmidt and Giscard earlier this month, whose most notable feature at the time appeared to be a denunciation of Soviet policy in Afghanistan.