

Mideast: arena for EMS peace policy

Both Jordanian King Hussein and Palestine Liberation Organization Chief Yasser Arafat last week publicly called on France to take a greater role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. In remarks timed to coincide with Hussein's arrival in Paris, Arafat criticized French Mideast policy as being too much in the shadow of the United States.

Such statements reflect the coordination developing between leaders of the Arab world and the governments of France and West Germany to steer the Mideast negotiations back onto the Geneva track. The Euro-Arab political axis grows out of increasing displeasure in both sectors over the Camp David talks and U.S. Mideast policy. The necessity for a general Mideast peace settlement is recognized in Bonn and Paris as a critical precondition for heightened Euro-Arab economic relations through the European Monetary System and its sister financial institution, the newly inaugurated Arab Monetary Fund.

French President Giscard replied to the calls of Hussein and Arafat this week by taking time out from his talks with the Jordanian monarch to declare that "it is wrong to think that a global settlement can be reached in the Middle East through a partial peace." And one of Giscard's closest aides linked global instability to the threat of a separate Arab-Israeli settlement.

France is asserting its crucial role in the Mideast by calling on the European Community to adopt Giscard's stance on the need for an overall peace through the Geneva Mideast peace conference. A spokesman for the Economics Ministry of West Germany stressed that his country was in total harmony with France when it comes to the Mideast.

Ending the Lebanese crisis

France's pivotal role in Middle Eastern politics has been closely coordinated with the Soviet Union and the Vatican. King Hussein will conduct talks with the Pope immediately following his stay in Paris this week. Nowhere has French-Vatican cooperation been more pronounced than in the Lebanese crisis. France has exerted considerable diplomatic muscle in arranging for a government of national unity for Lebanon — a move designed to isolate extremist Maronite elements associated with Camille Chamoun and backed by Israel.

Late last month Lebanese President Elias Sarkis made an extended visit to the Elysee Palace for talks with Giscard and other top French government officials. No communique was issued from the talks as a result of some tough bargaining by the French. Giscard informed Sarkis that he would only receive badly needed French aid to

rebuild Lebanon's wartorn economy and military if Sarkis stopped appeasing the extremist Israeli-backed factions of the Lebanese Falange and the Chamounists.

Such a bargain is calculated to deprive Israel of one of its most valuable allies which Jerusalem has repeatedly used to throw Lebanon into chaos and threaten Mideast peace.

France's relations with Israel have never exactly been warm. But the commentary which accompanied the Foreign Ministry's declaration calling for the EC to adopt French Mideast policy stresses that in the future Israeli-French relations will get even chillier.

The Soviet connection

The visit of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to Paris last month signalled a new era of Franco-Soviet cooperation. France has sensitively geared its foreign policy with consideration to the detente which has taken a positive turn between the USSR and Europe since Brezhnev's trip to Bonn in May of this year.

In this connection, the two-day visit of Iraqi Vice President Saddam Hussein to Moscow this week was an important complement to the talks between Giscard and King Hussein. Iraq has since the Baghdad conference of Arab heads of states last month become a pivotal nation in wielding an unprecedented degree of unification within the Arab world. It is precisely such unity — which has united the so-called radical and conservative states — that is vital to stepped-up regionwide economic development.

The French press put it quite well, in commentaries on the Baghdad summit, by linking the meeting to the prospects of a full economic development plan for the fertile crescent. This orientation has been behind the recent political and economic coordination by Iraq, Syria, Jordan and the PLO. One of the key institutional links in a pan-Arab economic plan is the Arab arms industry which is being chiefly advised by the French.

The Saudi Arabian Defense Minister held talks with Giscard last month and confirmed that in the future France will play an unlimited role in the arms industry. In the past week Iraq has announced the purchases of French Mirage jets, and then proceeded to finalize stepped-up arms supplies from the Soviets.

Such developments portend the kind of global cooperation which can go into bringing peace and development to the Mideast if the policies which France and her European partners advocate succeed in becoming the basis of Mideast policy in Washington.

—Judith Wyer