

## The Venice summit splits over Camp David

by Robert Dreyfuss

A badly divided European Economic Community, split between a Franco-German bloc and a London-centered grouping that included the troubled Italian government of Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga, met in Venice June 12-13 to hammer out a resolution billed as the EEC's inaugural effort to intervene into Middle East diplomacy. The result, as evidenced by the communiqué issued June 13, was a bit anticlimactic, for it sought to bridge an almost unbridgeable gap between the two factions of the EEC. After months of publicity that the EEC was preparing to state that the Camp David accords—the prized accomplishment of the Carter administration—were bankrupt and ought to be replaced, the EEC did no such thing.

Instead the EEC declared that it supports “self-determination” for the Palestinians and called for a “comprehensive settlement in a system of concrete and binding international guarantees.” In the crucial section of the statement, the EEC declared that the “Palestine Liberation Organization . . . will have to be associated with the negotiations.” But, contrary to some predictions, the EEC did not directly challenge the Carter administration by calling for a new peace conference nor by proposing that the United Nations Security Council consider inviting the PLO to become involved in the talks. In fact, in the weeks before the EEC summit the Carter administration had issued what amounted to a series of ultimatums to Europe that Washington would not tolerate European “interference” in the Camp David accords, which President Carter called “sacred.”

What actually occurred in Venice, and the reactions

to that declaration from the EEC, provide interesting insights into the confrontation that is expected when President Carter and the leaders of Japan and Canada travel to Venice on June 22 for an expanded summit of the leading industrial countries.

Going into the meeting last week in Venice, two distinct policy perspectives were evident.

On one hand, Chancellor Schmidt of West Germany and President Giscard d'Estaing of France viewed the crisis in the Middle East as the gravest threat to world peace and security, and they considered a comprehensive peace settlement a necessary part of an overall war-avoidance policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. For Giscard—who held a surprise meeting with U.S.S.R. President Brezhnev last month—as for Schmidt, who travels to Moscow on June 30, the Middle East settlement is part of a package that ought to include, in their view, the neutralization of Afghanistan and the eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from that country, the establishment of a European arms accord that could see the reversal of the December 1979 NATO decision to station cruise missiles and Pershing missiles in Western Europe, and the reviving of a climate of overall detente.

In this context, the French and the West Germans are already far advanced in working out a triangular series of economic and trade agreements involving the EEC, the Arab world—especially Saudi Arabia and Iraq—and the socialist countries. Privately, both Giscard and Schmidt are known to consider the Egyptian-Israeli pact as a dead end and even an obstacle to the realization of closer ties with the Arab world and a stable oil supply, as



*West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher arrive June 12 at the Venice summit meeting of European Community government leaders.*

well as creating a strategic threat to vital Soviet interests in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the British and their allies in Europe, though they favor Palestinian "self-determination," view the idea primarily as a tool for rallying the Arab world and the Islamic countries in a loose alliance with Israel and China, using Afghanistan as a rallying point for a strategic alliance against the Soviet Union. In addition, the British are determined to block the advancement of the Paris-Bonn axis' ties with Saudi Arabia and the other Arab oil-producing countries.

According to European sources in Venice, the conference split down the middle along these lines. Reportedly, the French, with the quiet support of the West Germans, wanted to confront Carter and the Camp David partners with the *fait accompli* of a European initiative, in which the PLO would be recognized officially by the EEC as representative of the Palestinian people. Privately, the French delegates said that if they could not get a strong statement reflecting this view, then they would prefer to have no statement at all. In a Venice press conference, an official spokesman for the French delegation declared just before the vote, "The French will do their best to achieve a common position as the EEC, and we will manage. But if this position does not satisfy France, France is prepared to adopt independent positions."

On the British side, Prime Minister Thatcher and aristocratic Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington were very careful not to divulge the actual British position. It was learned, however, that behind closed doors the British argued against any mention of the PLO as a govern-

ment. Instead, the British advocated a general declaration, vague as to specifics of how a comprehensive settlement would be achieved.

During the conference itself, among the many bilateral talks that took place over the three days that the European leaders were in Venice, two patterns emerged. On both Thursday and Friday, Giscard and Schmidt help private consultations over lunch, while Thatcher and Cossiga did the same. In the end, a bad compromise was reached, as stated above. Nevertheless, the EEC statement can be said to represent a significant step beyond previous positions adopted by Europe, putting the EEC on record that the PLO is a necessary partner in any settlement and that "self-determination" — widely recognized to mean the establishment of a state — must be recognized as a "legitimate right of the Palestinian people."

### **Aftermath**

As soon as the communiqué was released, both Thatcher and Cossiga rushed out to the press in a desperate attempt to soften the impact of the statement. At a hastily convened news conference, Thatcher declared, "What we're doing here is supplementing the U.S. efforts," and she described the EEC communiqué as not contradictory to the Camp David accords. Echoing Thatcher, Italy's Cossiga said bluntly, "We don't want to compete with Carter." Across the ocean, Secretary of State Edmund Muskie measured his words carefully. The EEC showed a "sense of restraint" in its Middle East statement, he noted, and added condescendingly that "as

a European effort to be helpful in the Middle East situation . . . I don't see anything on the face that challenged the Camp David process or seeks to divert the parties to the Camp David process from their work."

Added Muskie, "The EEC doesn't have to be as concerned with [policy toward the PLO] as we have to be, because we are involved in the negotiations and they [the EEC] are not." Several hours later, a self-satisfied President Carter declared that "we've made good progress in staying the European allies" from interference with Camp David.

But the Thatcher-Cossiga account of the EEC statement and the surprisingly mild Carter-Muskie response did not hide the obvious fact that the French and the Germans had succeeded in at least getting the ball rolling toward a real peace initiative. French columnist Paul Marie de la Gorce, writing in *Le Figaro*, was explicit. Said de la Gorce—who often reflects official French thinking—"the EEC statement is a rather timid formula in appearance, but it will set into motion a momentum that will be difficult to stop." The next step, he implied, would be a diplomatic effort at the United Nations General Assembly, where the U.S. has no veto power.

By the same token, the EEC also decided to send a fact-finding team to the Middle East and to other interested parties to sound them out on the possibility of an entirely new initiative. Among those parties, it is said, will be the Soviet Union, and the visit to Moscow by Chancellor Schmidt on June 30 looms large in that respect.

For that reason, the reaction among unofficial Anglo-American circles—and, of course, from the hysterical Israelis—was far from statesmanlike.

### Anglo-Zionist freakout

The *New York Times*, typically, led the way. In an editorial entitled "A Minor-League Mideast Game," the *Times* declared: "As a declaration of independence from American diplomacy in the Middle East, the European allies' pronouncement in Venice Friday was merely pathetic," and it complained that the EEC used "code language for a denunciation of Camp David." It continued: "As a declaration of strategic purpose, their doctrine was absurd," reducing European diplomacy to an allegedly base greed-motivated design, or, as the *Times* put it: "We need oil and Arab trade so badly that we cannot wait any longer for America, Egypt, and Israel."

From Israel, the regime of Prime Minister Menachem Begin broke all bounds of diplomatic protocol and compared Western Europe to the pro-Hitler appeasement faction of pre-World War II diplomacy. "Nothing will remain from the Venice resolution but its bitter memory," read an official communiqué of the Israeli Cabinet. "The resolution calls upon us to include in the peace process the SS called the Palestine Liberation Organization." Calling the PLO an "organization of murder-

ers," the Israeli statement compared the position of the EEC to the policy that handed the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany at Munich in 1938.

According to the Israeli press, Begin had sought to include in the communiqué a specific reference attacking France and West Germany for the reference to the PLO, but he was dissuaded at the last moment from doing so by Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir. The Israeli Cabinet did decide, however, that it would not receive the EEC fact-finding delegation when it arrived in Israel, a motion that was introduced by Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel's leading extremist general. In a private statement, Shamir stated that "the French delegation gained the upper hand during the EEC summit."

In the two weeks before the Venice meeting, Shamir visited England, Italy, Holland, Denmark, and Belgium to demand that the EEC not endorse the PLO, while studiously avoiding France, West Germany, and Italy. Dozens of Israelis had criss-crossed Europe to pressure against the declaration, often colluding with Zionist and Anglo-American political factions inside West European countries, such as West Germany's Franz Josef Strauss and French Socialist leader Francois Mitterrand.

### Soviets, Arabs warn Europe

If the Israelis and the Anglo-Americans sought to pressure the Europeans to abandon their initiative, the Soviet Union and most of the Arabs—taking due note of the American pressure on Europe—took the opportunity to warn the Europeans that the overriding strategic issues would not wait for France and West Germany to overcome British-led resistance to a peace initiative.

The message from Moscow and various Arab capitals to Europe is that, at the EEC Venice summit, they had a chance to voice their opinion that the Camp David agreement must be scrapped—and they did not.

*Pravda*, the Soviet daily, entitled its commentary "The Mountain Gave Birth to a Mouse." It noted "sharp threats by Carter and the internal contradictions among the members of the EEC," but passed judgment that "once again, the session of the European Council confirmed the truth that the attempts of the West European countries to show 'autonomy' in approaching important problems . . . suffered a failure under the dictate of Washington." On June 17, a *Pravda* commentary rounded up opinion in the Middle East concerning the EEC statement, noting that only the Egyptians received it "positively," while the rest of the Arabs were either cool or attacked it for its vague formulations.

Exemplary is a comment in the Jordanian press, as recorded by *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*. "It has become clear that at the current stage at least the Europeans will not call for an international conference to tackle the crisis of the Israeli occupation. . ." wrote *Al-Akhbar*. "All this indicates is that the Washington-London line has triumphed over the Paris-Bonn axis."

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## The Arab response

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### 'Mideast is focus of a great war danger'

*Syrian Foreign Minister Abdulhalim Khaddam, in a June 15 speech before the Peoples' Assembly in Damascus, stated that the Middle East has become the focus of an international war danger that requires stronger action from Europe if it is to be avoided. Khaddam's sophisticated perception of the world situation coincides with reported Soviet intelligence estimates. He lists four causes of the threat of world war:*

1. The international imbalance caused by the Camp David accords. . . . The United States has moved from being a supporter of Israel to being a partner and principal party to the conflict in the area. It participates in the decision-making and has a military presence, represented in the military bases in Egypt and Oman. . . .
2. The NATO decision to modernize arms in Europe and to put the Soviet Union under the NATO nuclear umbrella. This greatly upset the strategic equilibrium created after the signing of SALT II.
3. Western cooperation with China and the attempt to deepen the conflict between the Soviet Union and China, so that the latter will be the Soviet Union's main problem, thus exhausting the Soviet Union's resources and upsetting the balance in favor of the West.
4. The international economic crisis and its impact on the Western economic order. . . .

### 'It is consistent with Camp David'

*The following are excerpts from a statement by a Syrian Foreign Ministry official on the EEC Mideast statement:*

The statement speaks about the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. . . . While the same paragraph gives Israel the right to existence and security, it denies this right to the Palestinian people by the general terms it uses, just as the Camp David accords do. . . .

It does not provide for the PLO's complete participation in the negotiation for a solution. It just links the PLO to the negotiation. There is a big difference of course between linkage and participation. Linkage means the following: 1) The non-recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian

Arab people; 2) The PLO's role would be indirect; and 3) The PLO is not the only Palestinian party. . . .

Last but not least, the statement's reference to the Camp David accords means that these accords were taken into consideration. Therefore, the general sense of the statement does not conflict with the accords.

*The most ebullient praise for the EEC statement came from the government of Egypt. The following account is from Cairo Domestic Service, June 13.*

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Butros Ghali has said that the EEC statement issued this afternoon has affirmed the principles and goals which were recorded in the Camp David accords, which Egyptian diplomacy is seeking to achieve. Hence, it is certain that there is no contradiction between the Egyptian and EEC moves. He added that the European initiative was in line with Egyptian efforts for bringing about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

### 'The Europeans must be more independent'

*Following the Venice summit, the PLO Executive Committee issued a formal rejection of the EEC Middle East statement. While welcoming the EEC stand, the PLO criticized the Europeans for succumbing to U.S. "pressures and blackmail" and not going far enough.*

*The PLO statement begins with a detailed preamble mentioning point by point the positive aspects of the EEC statement. Following this comes the PLO's critique. Excerpts appear below.*

The statement ignores the fundamental factors for the establishment of a just peace in the area and the essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, the statement includes a great deal of contradictions and it is vague.

1. The statement ignores the fact that the core of the conflict in the Middle East is the Palestine issue and the need to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their national inalienable rights of returning and of self-determination, without external intervention, and to establish their independent state. . . .

2. The statement fails to recognize that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and that the PLO is a basic factor in the Middle East crisis. . . . The reference in the statement to the PLO and its role has not reflected these matters.

3. The statement affirmed that the EEC states adhere to the UN Security Council Resolution 242, which was rejected by the Palestinian people. . . .

4. The statement made the exercise of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination conditional on the

direct means specified by the framework of a comprehensive settlement, whereas the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, to return to their homeland and to exercise sovereignty are inalienable rights. . . .

5. The statement ignored the need for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem. . . .

6. The statement adopts the course and concept of the Camp David agreements and the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, particularly in regard to the normalization of relations, with all that this entails in impairment of Arab sovereignty. . . .

7. The statement did not reject the autonomy conspiracy, which is provided for in the Camp David accords. . . .

8. In its sum total, the statement is largely a clear response to the U.S. will and pressures, which are based on an attempt to impose U.S. hegemony upon the Arab area and to liquidate the Palestinian issue. . . .

Since the beginning, the PLO has entertained no illusions about the size of the European role in view of the fact that this role has so far been associated with the U.S. strategy. . . .

The PLO greets the EEC stand. However, it calls on the European states to take more independent stances and to free themselves of the pressures and blackmail of U.S. policy.

*During the EEC summit in Venice, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat made the following statement:*

The EEC leaders are now meeting in Venice in order to throw a bone to us, hoping to preoccupy us. By God, then they claim that there are divergent French, British, Danish and Finnish views. I tell them outright: The Palestinian people are absolutely not waiting for a political paper, a political statement or a political initiative emanating from Venice to determine the Palestinian people's fate.

## 'Giscard will see that de Gaulle was right'

*The following interview with Fatah Central Committee member Hani al-Hasan appeared in the Beirut weekly Monday Morning just prior to the Venice summit. Excerpts appear below.*

**Q:** What was your reaction to President Carter's warning to Western Europe not to launch a Middle East peace initiative and his threat to use the U.S. veto to block any attempt to amend or supplement Resolution 242?

**A:** This didn't come as a surprise, of course, because it is well-known that American foreign policy is now governed by two major considerations.

The first is President Carter's election interests. . . . The second major consideration governing American foreign policy is Washington's hostility toward the Palestinian revolution and the Palestinian people in general. This hostility has increased with the defeat of the Cyrus Vance line and the rise of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the man who once said, "Bye-bye, PLO."

So we in the PLO and Fatah are not at all surprised by Carter's position. It can be said, however, that we have begun to achieve a major political victory by precipitating an American-European rift on the Palestinian question. . . .

At any rate, who can show me one constant in American foreign policy over which there are no differences in Washington? America is in a mess today.

**Q:** . . . To what extent do you think Europe can be independent of the United States?

**A:** I believe that Giscard d'Estaing will now begin to understand what Charles de Gaulle wanted 15 years ago. Giscard d'Estaing came to change the direction of de Gaulle's France and return to the alliance with the United States. Now he will realize that de Gaulle was right in adopting the position he adopted.

## 'The triumph of London and Washington'

*The following is an excerpt from a commentary on the European Mideast initiative by the Jordanian daily Al-Akhbar:*

It has become clear that at the current stage at least, the European group will not call for an international conference to tackle the crisis of the Israeli occupation, as was previously reiterated. It has also become clear that the European group has put aside the project to amend UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the subject of the PLO's recognition. All of this demonstrates that the Washington-London line has triumphed over the Paris-Bonn axis. In other words, U.S. policy in Europe has triumphed. . . .

The British act of yielding to U.S. and Zionist pressures might have been somewhat justified had it come from another European state, one that does not have such a black history of involvement in the Palestinian people's issue and tragedy. However, for it to come from Britain, the formulator of the Balfour Declaration and the first supporter of the Zionist invasion of Palestine, is something that cannot be understood by any mind or conscience that believes in justice in the world.