

Report from Paris by Katherine Kanter and Sophie Tanapura

Sykes-Picot revisited

The consistency behind Foreign Minister Cheysson's apparent flipflops is a new alliance with Great Britain.

Many here were astounded when they were informed over the radio waves or by the newspapers Dec. 11 that Foreign Affairs Minister Claude Cheysson had declared France's intention to normalize relations with Libya, only one day after President Reagan had asked his allies to support him in his campaign against Libya and Colonel Qaddafi's involvement in terrorism and the assassination attempt against the American President.

All the more surprising, the average citizen must have said to himself, since on Dec. 9 Claude Cheysson had affirmed his full support for the Israeli cause and disavowed the European Community's Venice declaration supporting Palestinian self-determination.

Could it be that France's best allies are at the same time Israel and Libya?

In fact, an in-depth analysis of these events demonstrates that French foreign policy is not as incoherent as it first appears, and that it stems from England's Middle East policy.

Claude Cheysson already made it onto the front pages of the international press with his revolting statement in the wake of the assassination of President Sadat when he dared say that the death of the Egyptian President eliminated an obstacle to peace in the region.

But the statements made after his trip to Israel were even more revolting: as long as the current

government stays in power, he explained, there will be no new peace initiative for the Middle East coming from France or the European Community. The EC's Venice declaration wasn't worth anything, he explained, because it goes against the Camp David agreements which, on the other hand, made real progress.

He also aroused great enthusiasm in Israel when he declared that the embargo decreed by de Gaulle in 1967 on weapons shipments to belligerent countries in the Middle East would be lifted, and that France was ready to sell weapons to the Israeli state. The West German press even reported that the French secret service may have "facilitated" Israeli Foreign Minister Itzhak Shamir's tour of Africa.

Following this visit, Shamir expressed his pleasure at seeing "a new era in relations between France and Israel" open up, while American sources estimated that the position of Prime Minister Menachem Begin was "considerably reinforced" by Cheysson's statements, which, according to one of these sources, "could be interpreted by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon as a green light for an Israeli intervention into Lebanon." Indeed, a new intervention has been expected for weeks now, intended to once and for all destroy the Fahd plan and force the United States to come to Israel's aid, at the risk of a superpower confrontation.

While the British press displays its indignation over Cheysson's rejection of official joint European policy towards the Middle East, high-level British sources confide that Franco-British relations will not suffer unduly from these statements.

On the contrary, it seems clear that the subject of the twice-weekly telephone conversations between Cheysson and Foreign Minister Lord Carrington revolves around a resurrection of the old Sykes-Picot accords for sharing power in the Middle East.

Those secret Franco-British accords of 1916 stipulated that each country would keep out of the other's sphere of influence, and Syria and Lebanon would remain under French influence, while Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine would be considered part of British territory. France's aggressively pro-Israeli behavior is intended to push Arab countries like Iraq into the arms of her gracious majesty.

This Franco-British alliance is also intended to weaken U.S. Middle East policy.

The British fear that President Reagan, after his congressional victory on the AWACS, which has assured him the sympathy and support of the Saudis, would now open talks with the Soviets to finally resolve the Middle East crisis.

Wasn't it a British official who, upon his return from the United States, declared that Washington "had had enough of Begin"?

London wants to force the White House to stick—come what may—to the Camp David accords and reject any possibility of Soviet-American dialogue, the only chance for a negotiated peace in the Middle East.