

Barre And Carter: Polite Disagreement

On Just About Everything

“The French government admits that it expects practically no decision and no immediate results out of (Barre’s) trip” to Washington, warned the French wire-service *Agence France Presse* before French Prime Minister Raymond Barre’s departure for Washington, D.C., last week. Indeed Barre’s official three-day visit to Washington did not accomplish anything substantial beyond the traditional diplomatic mutual pledge of friendship between the two countries. As the Soviet paper *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* commented, “There does not exist a single problem between the two countries which does not create divergences. It is believed in France that Washington’s concern with non-proliferation of nuclear weapons stems primarily from the U.S.’s determination to keep its nuclear monopoly.”

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If anything, France’s continued, strong stand on nuclear energy and irrevocable commitment to its fast-breeder reactor program, despite relentless U.S. pressures to the contrary, emerged as the only positive feature of the talks the French Prime Minister had with various Carter Administration officials. While Barre confirmed France’s willingness to participate in the Washington Conference on nuclear nonproliferation Oct. 21 (an idea first raised by President Carter at last spring’s London summit meeting of the Western powers), he also insisted that, 1) the Soviet Union must be a full-fledged conference participant; 2) the conference must not impose any policy decisions on individual nations; and 3) the Europeans must have guaranteed access to the uranium essential to their nuclear industries.

Discussion on the other topics on the agenda — “the economic problems common to all the industrialized countries,” disarmament, the Middle East crisis,

southern Africa, etc. — did not produce any concrete known proposals.

On the economic-financial questions, Mr. Barre explained what France means by “organized free trade” — not a return to protectionism but only a defense reaction against the more brutal imbalances in trade patterns.

As far as the Middle East conflict is concerned, Barre expressed France’s preoccupation that any prolongation of the current deadlock in the Mideast peace talks beyond the end of the year will seriously jeopardize world peace.

On disarmament, Prime Minister Barre expatiated on the declarations made a few days before by Foreign Minister Louis de Guiringaud. The French government, Guiringaud declared to the French daily *Le Monde*, Sept. 15, “means to put up (fresh) proposals on disarmament,... favors an independent, hence international to some extent, control of arms reduction.” Barre further declared that France will present its views on the question after consultations with “our American allies and our Soviet Friends” at the special United Nations session on disarmament in spring 1978.

Last, Barre wished full success to the Carter Administration’s energy policy, on the grounds that the continued increase in U.S. oil imports contributes heavily to unbalance the world oil market, and, by aggravating U.S. trade deficit, further endangers the world financial situation.

In view of the meager known “results” achieved during those three days of talks, it is not surprising that most of the U.S. press viewed Barre’s trip as a “public image-building” venture. Indeed electioneering concerns loomed large in Barre’s (and French President Giscard’s) mind. Barre is the first French Prime Minister to officially visit the U.S. since the foundation of the Fifth Republic. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that Giscard — apparently in the interests of bolstering his “strong-man” image in the face of RPR party leader Jacques Chirac’s continued bid to replace him as the nation’s president — has entrusted Barre with a new series of diplomatic-trade missions in Moscow, Bonn, Hungary, and Syria in the coming weeks and months.