



Giscard d'Estaing

France

Giscard faces blackmail and domestic pressures

by Garance Phau

The French and Soviet foreign ministers, Jean Francois-Poncet and Andre Gromyko, held "frank and serious discussions" on the world situation in Paris April 23, according to the French national radio. French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, who recently declined to meet with U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, will hold talks with Gromyko April 24 in view of the "gravity of the world situation."

Just prior to Gromyko's arrival, François-Poncet told a national television audience that "we have a few questions to ask of Mr. Gromyko." He delivered a sharp warning to the Soviet Union, saying that they are endangering detente by their continuing "massive military presence" in Afghanistan. He thus reiterated his lengthy remarks before the French National Assembly the week before.

Like their allies the Germans, the French have been under enormous pressure to "choose sides" given the imminent danger of world war due to the U.S. Carter administration's posture around the crisis in the Persian Gulf. The French are well aware that if they do not follow U.S. leadership in the Atlantic alliance, the Carter administration could undertake a maverick unilateral deployment into the Middle East that would make nuclear war with the Soviet Union a certainty. Therefore, although the French adhere to their own independent policy, their very desire for peace seems to force them to follow the U.S. in preparations for war. They are being blackmailed, to put it simply.

An article in the April 24 *Washington Post* delivered a snide comment on the "uncomfortable" position America has imposed on the French, who would like to "wiggle" out from in between the superpowers.

The French daily *Le Figaro* notes that although the Franco-Soviet talks now underway are characterized as "frank" on the French side, Soviet commentaries point to a positive outcome. The Soviet news agency *Novosti* calls the talks "very important and far reaching. The Brezhnev faction, says *Le Figaro*, seems open to a symbolic gesture around Afghanistan to ease tensions, but the Red Army has blocked any such move.

The French are proposing that Gromyko mediate in the freeing of U.S. hostages in Teheran, according to the newspaper of the Italian Communist Party, *Unita*, noting that although disagreements over Afghanistan characterize the Franco-Soviet discussion, agreement could be reached on a European-wide disarmament conference.

The Carter administration pressures on Giscard are compounded by growing internal pressures, featuring France's Zionist lobby. Day after day, editorials in the French press demand that France either cooperate with Washington, or take strong Cold War initiatives "independently." Typical is a *Le Figaro* editorial by Jacques Jacquet-Francillon: "In the face of the double challenge (Iran and Afghanistan)...the Free World appears disunited because unity would demand...at least a common virtue: courage." He said that Atlanticist François Mitterrand, Socialist leader, was right to attack Giscard's "do nothing" attitude toward the Iranian hostage crisis.

At this point, not only the Socialist Party, but the Gaullist RPR party—Giscard's coalition partner—and sections of his own UDF party are demanding docility in the face of Carter's behavior and demands.

In addition, a wave of terrorism has begun in France, much of it attributed to Israeli intelligence.

The most immediate threat to Giscard's government, however, is represented in an effort to "watergate" Prince Michel Poniatowski, a former Interior Minister who has functioned as an ambassador-at-large for the French president. Poniatowski, who is proven at least to have perjured himself in this affair, is accused of covering up the 1976 assassination of Assembly Deputy Jean de Broglie, a prominent politician and businessman. The French National Assembly, voted to reopen the case after hearing evidence that despite field reports that an assassination attempt would be made against de Broglie, the Interior Ministry under Poniatowski took no action.

There is, in fact, significant evidence that Poniatowski is far from innocent in the case. The entire affair, however, is reminiscent of the famous "Springer Affair" in West Germany in the early 1960s, when a scandal against the far-from-innocent defense minister Franz Joseph Strauss was used to topple Konrad Adenauer, whose government, like Giscard today, was seeking both detente with the Soviet Union and a Franco-German alliance independent of the British-U.S. axis.