

# Communiqués show waning Washington influence

BY STEWART FLEMING, US EDITOR

WHEN President Ronald Reagan arrived in Venice a week ago he disappeared to a country hotel for the first few days to recuperate from the journey, spending much of his time taking walks and watching films with his wife Nancy.

The contrast with his first summit in Ottawa in 1981, which produced the vivid picture of Mr Reagan vigorously taking charge—chauffeur-ing an anxious-looking West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in a golf cart—is striking. It symbolises the diminished influence not only of Mr Reagan, but also of the US in summit decision-making.

In almost every area that the summit leaders have addressed, US positions have been watered down in the drafting process or dropped before the meetings opened.

Instead, it has been the Europeans who have had the biggest influence on the way the various summit communiqués have evolved. The Japanese have been largely on the defensive because of the weakness of Mr Yasuhiro Nakasone, their Prime Minister, dissatisfaction with their economic and trade policies and the fact that their strongest ally at such international meetings has traditionally been the US.

The summit statements on East-West relations, and especially on the Gulf war, provided the most graphic evidence of the shift in the balance of power away from a Reagan Administration which has lost international credibility and clout.

The Iran arms sales scandal, for example, led directly to a statement in the political communiqué confirming the principle of "no concessions" to

terrorists or significantly their sponsors."

Disenchantment with the US conduct of foreign policy, which deepened with the near-disaster at the Reykjavik summit, was evident in the refusal of summiters to go along with the tough statement on policy in the Gulf which US officials initially sought.

Mr George Shultz's efforts to interpret the summit statement on the Gulf as an endorsement of the US call for a ceasefire, a retreat to international boundaries and mandatory sanctions against whoever failed to heed the call—almost certainly Iran—was greeted with profound scepticism even by a sympathetic US press. It, too, found it hard to understand how words like "ceasefire" did not appear and how the call for "effective measures" by the United Nations could be interpreted by the US as a call for mandatory sanctions, especially when Mr Schultz conceded he did not know whether China

and the Soviet Union would support such a call in the Security Council.

In fact, of course, the other summit nations had succeeded in their goal of enjoining broad principles such as free navigation in the Gulf, but not what they saw as the dangerous tilt towards Iran implied by Mr Shultz.

Most striking and significant, especially when it is contrasted with the "evil empire" rhetoric of Mr Reagan's early days as President, was the cautious but clear endorsement the summit leaders gave to the internal and external policies of the Soviet Union.

As US officials presented their interpretation of the communiqué, they were again at pains to emphasise that US priorities which the other summit leaders can broadly accept were mentioned. Those include the resolution of regional disputes, withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, an improvement in Moscow's human rights

record and progress across the board on East-West relations.

A new and remarkable element in the communiqué was the guarded but nevertheless optimistic assessment of the significance of the reforms which Mr Gorbachev is setting in train. It was hard not to detect the hint of detente in the communiqué's wording that "it is our hope that they will prove to be of great significance for the improvement of political, economic and security relations."

Mr Reagan's difficulty, of course, is that having embarked on a firm course towards an arms control agreement on intermediate and shorter-range missiles in Europe, partly to reinforce his weakening domestic political position, he is hard pressed to stick with his earlier hard line towards Moscow. This is especially so when scepticism about US policies and leadership is being fostered by Mr Gorbachev's success in presenting a favourable image to the West.

## US stand on AIDS rejected

BY STEWART FLEMING

The BROAD outline of the Reagan Administration's recent stand on AIDS was rejected implicitly yesterday at the Venice summit.

Saying that efforts to combat AIDS needed to be intensified and made more effective through international co-operation, a chairman's statement on AIDS was issued in Venice saying that the attack on the disease had to be based on the principles of human rights.

The statement went on to say that in the absence of a

vaccine or cure "a strategy based on educating the public about the seriousness of the AIDS epidemic, the way the AIDS virus is transmitted and the practical steps each person can take to avoid acquiring it or spreading it" is needed.

After a fierce debate within the Reagan Administration, the President last month announced that the federal government would require testing of people for AIDS where it had authority such as in prisons or dealing with

immigrants.

Where it lacked such authority, the Administration said it would encourage AIDS testing, for example in the case of couples seeking a marriage licence.

The Administration has also avoided placing emphasis on practical education to combat AIDS by instructing children about the use of condoms. Conservatives in the White House have maintained that this would encourage immorality and could tend to weaken family ties.

US economic problems, and the nation's weakened capacity to lead, also left a mark on the communiqué. When it comes to spending money, on helping Third World debtors, or boosting the capital of the World Bank, it is Washington—with its budget problems and the pressure the Democratic Congress is exerting on the foreign aid budget—which is having to drag its feet.

The other summit leaders have had to accept therefore that such issues as the world bank capital increase or the strengthening of the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment facility, cannot be done as quickly as some would want. But the reference to the possibility that the World Bank's "financial stability" might require a capital increase and the deadline for approving the structural adjustment facility expansion show that these are issues which the other summit leaders believe need to be addressed urgently.

The statements out of the summit thus provide little for Mr Reagan in his efforts to rally his conservative supporters—supporters who will be needed to push an arms control accord through the Senate. They will do little either to damp down right-wing criticism of European failure to support the US enthusiastically.

But European governments know that conservative strength is on the wane that Mr Reagan's effectiveness as President is fast declining, and that now might be an opportune moment to encourage those in the US who have been more sympathetic to European concerns.

DATE

June 11

SUBJECT/SUJET

Financial Times of London

PUBLICATION

