

Summit Does No Harm And Very Little Business

By JAMES M. MARKHAM

PERHAPS it was the unlucky number, but the 13th meeting of leaders of the seven major industrial democracies last week will probably go down in history as one of the least consequential since Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt first came up with the idea of the annual get-togethers. The world economy is not quite in the parlous state it was in 1975, when the French President and West German Chancellor urged concerted action to deal with the dramatic rise in Middle East oil prices. But it is shaky enough, and the generalities and palliatives proffered in Venice, officials privately concurred, will probably change little.

For President Reagan, Venice was to have been a glittering, telegenic stage on which to demonstrate his leadership of the free world and check the erosion of his authority in Washington. But Mr. Reagan often came across as an amiable and important gentleman taking a protracted and somewhat lonely Italian holiday — his importance demonstrated by an imperial phalanx of security deployed on, over and around Venice's lagoons. While Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany and President François Mitterrand of France strolled through one of the world's most beautiful cities, Mr. Reagan, who had never been here before, did not set foot in the Piazza San Marco. The Europeans found him distracted and passive, reaching frequently for his little note cards for guidance. At a news conference, he suggested that the dollar might sink further, a gaffe that aides rushed to rectify.

On Friday at the wall in West Berlin, Mr. Reagan projected a more forceful image. "Mr. Gorbachev," he said in a rhetorical appeal to the Soviet leader, "open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" On three previous nights in East Berlin, rampaging East German youths, angry at being prevented from hearing British rock groups playing just across the ugly barrier, had shouted the same demand, "The Wall Must Go!" and had invoked the name of Mikhail S. Gorbachev while sparring with the police. But on Thursday night in West Berlin, ultra-leftists violently protested not the Communist-built wall, but the American President's presence.

In Venice, where the Americans had arrived making clear they were seeking allied support for a bellicose-sounding course in the Persian Gulf, they seemed in the end to be talking loudly and carrying a rather small stick. Senior White House officials warned Iran that American planes might take out its Chinese-made Silk-worm missiles if they were made operational in the Strait of Hormuz. The Administration also wanted the seven to endorse a ban by the United Nations Security Council on arms sales to Iran and Iraq, if the two combatants refused to negotiate a cease-fire. As Iraq has repeatedly ex-

pressed its willingness to stop conflict, the onus would fall on Iran.

But the Europeans, keen on keeping open lines of communication to Iran and fearful of East-West confrontation in the gulf, watered down the White House language. An "enforceable" Security Council resolution became "a just and effective one." At a news conference, Secretary of State George P. Shultz argued zestily that "effective" meant what he said it meant — "enforceable." The President called it "a case in semantics." Apparently seeking to cool anxieties, Mr. Reagan acknowledged that the Soviet Union had a stake in "peaceful shipping" in the gulf but he rejected the idea that the two superpowers should act as joint trustees there.

Embarrassing Reminder

On the economic front, in view of political uncertainties or weaknesses in all seven countries, no one really leaned on anyone else in Venice. Reacting to Japan's program to stimulate domestic consumption, the United States partially lifted economic sanctions imposed on Japan, which had been accused of dumping semiconductors at below-cost prices on the world market. But expectations that the Americans might pressure the West Germans to pump-prime their economy came to nothing. Mr. Kohl, seconded by Mr. Mitterrand, insisted that the vast American budget deficit is the world economy's core problem. The moral in Venice seemed to be that until Americans stop living beyond their means, their leaders will be hard put to give economics lessons to others.

The leaders also reaffirmed their intention to coordinate antiterrorist efforts but they delicately refrained from repeating their promise at Tokyo last year of a "refusal to export arms to states which sponsor or support terrorism." The Americans shied from what seemed an embarrassing reminder of the Reagan Administration's clandestine arms sales to Iran.

The seven also expressed their concern about the AIDS epidemic, solemnly placing the subject at the top

of the world's agenda. But they merely "welcomed" Mr. Mitterrand's proposal for an international committee on ethical issues raised by AIDS. He was known to be troubled by the growing tendency in the United States, Japan and West Germany toward mandatory testing for indications of the disease.

As for Mr. Reagan's arms-control strategy, White House officials had hoped for a thumping declaration of support but had to settle for more opaque, committee-drafted language. The topic was more seriously treated later by the NATO foreign ministers in Reykjavik. They endorsed a modified version of the Soviet proposal to abolish both medium- and shorter-range missiles. Also in the Icelandic capital, France and the United States seemed to bridge differences on how to deal with East-West negotiations on reducing conventional arms.

The Venice experience again raised the question of whether such meetings are worth the effort entailed in bringing the seven leaders together. Before departing, Mr. Mitterrand voiced his misgivings about these annual media spectacles. But others contended that it does no harm for the leaders to get a sense of what is on one another's minds, to take measure of respective strengths and, as seemed to be the case in Venice, weaknesses. Britain's Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, summed up this sentiment, asserting the meetings were, after all, a useful exercise in international group therapy."