Behind all this is the slow, unsteady progress toward political unity which Europe has been making following the entry of Britain in the Common Market last year. The French have been using the process to build a Gaullist Europe—divorced from the United States. They have insisted on policy stands hostile to American interests in the Near East, and on a procedure which forbids consultation with Washington until decisions are taken.

Most of the other European countries, and especially West Germany, want to stick close to the United States. So while going along with France on procedural questions, they have tried to cooperate with the United States on practical matters. In fact, during the past year there has been a rare degree of harmony between Wash-

The consultation issue erupted again as a result of Dr. Kissinger's efforts to organize co-operation with the allies on the energy question. At the Washington energy conference last month, he did prevail on eight of the European countries to agree to work jointly with the United States in dealing with problems growing out of the energy crisis. France, which opposed any co-operation, was left isolated.

But the French made a slight comeback by prevailing upon the other European countries, March 4, to agree to a forthcoming meeting with Arab leaders from which the United States would be excluded. Once again, Dr. Kissinger felt that he was presented with a decision by the Europeans without serious advance consultation.

The President then piled it on in Chicago by indicating this country would withdraw troops from Europe if the allies did not co-operate more in political and economic issues.

Both men have a point. The habit of non-consultation is bad. Unless checked soon, it could harden over the years so that eventually the United States and Europe would drift apart on all major issues.

Moreover, the occasion is not necessarily bad for a showdown. The French are uncomfortable in their isolation—hence the relatively conciliatory speech over the weekend by Foreign Minister Michel Jobert. The socialist governments in West Germany and Britain are defensive about relations with the United States and the Soviet Union.

The negotiations Dr. Kissinger now has under way in the Near East and with the Soviet Union.

At bottom, however, I think the President and Dr. Kissinger are playing with fire. Advance consultation is not all that important—and they know it better than anybody. No present government, not excluding the Nixon government, is strong enough to make binding commitments about the future of Atlantic partnership.

By forcing a conflict now, practical co-operation on specific issues is made more difficult. Worst of all, by raising the troop question, Mr. Nixon is only playing into the hands of those in this country who want to withdraw troops as a first step in an overall thinning of relations with Europe.

Washington.

As a nation hopefully growing out of adolescence, one of our more painful lessons is that we will have to relinquish more of our disposable income for food in the foreseeable future. We have been spoiled by the food prices went up 21 per cent last year, a far greater increase than for other consumer items. What we are not always mindful of is that, in terms of disposable income, food expenditures (17 per cent) in the United States in 1974 were higher twice as much for a pound of bacon, 50 cents a pound more for a broiler chicken and 60 cents for a small loaf of bread selling in Washington for 28 cents.

That same 28-cent loaf of bread, in January, 1974, cost the German housewife 43

literally laughs when it reads doomsday complaints from the U.S. about high food prices.

We are a notoriously short-memoryed people. Food prices, in terms of disposable income, actually dropped for much-desired beef and other meats, grains and fruits. The U.S. has been a hog about beef. Only three years ago our per capita beef consumption was 117 pounds, compared to 55 pounds in Europe and 7 in greater threat from obesity than starvation. We are bad eaters.

Moreover, in today's world, American agriculture is our strongest economic weapon. All this prattling talk in the Sixties about ur-