

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Clash with London over the Balkans

British perfidy in the face of Serbia's war crimes has broken Bonn's usual façade of appeasement of London.

I have the greatest difficulty in understanding why the same powers that were ready to intervene against Iraq in order to defend Kuwait, are not doing anything to defend Bosnia," declared Johannes Gerster, member of the German parliament and of Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic party, after a two-day fact-finding mission to the Balkans July 22.

Gerster was highly critical of the fact that Great Britain is not only refusing to take any refugees from Bosnia, but is also rejecting any significant financial aid. The Germans have so far committed 190 million Deutschmarks (\$126 million) for the refugee relief fund, the British only about \$6.3 million.

Gerster's statement is one of many recent attacks on British policy from Bonn politicians.

A news program on national German television on July 22 portrayed the European Community (EC) negotiator in the Balkans conflict, Britain's Lord Carrington, as "distracted and badly informed" and, therefore, ripe for replacement.

On July 21, at the EC headquarters in Brussels, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel interrupted a presentation by British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, calling his remarks on the Bosnian issue "a lot of hot air."

A ranking diplomat on the German Foreign Ministry staff was even more direct: "British diplomats are the main obstacle to progress on the Yugoslav situation."

These statements mark a shift of

views in German politics, away from the line that tensions between Bonn and London should be minimized in view of the "greater goal" of European integration.

News coming in from Bosnia, including from refugees arriving in Germany, is undermining Bonn's usual appeasement of London. German television gave prominent coverage, for example, to Bosnian refugees proposing that "several thousand Bosnians should be brought to London" for a protest rally against the policy of the British government.

British diplomacy's support for the Bush administration's approach on the Balkans problem has been noticed with increasing outrage, including by some longtime Anglophiles.

The prime aim of Anglo-American policy in the Balkans has so far been to prevent any other power from gaining influence there, one such analyst explained in a discussion with this author. The abrupt shift by U.S. Secretary of State James Baker at the end of May, toward military threats against Belgrade, did not signal a real change of policy, but rather has to be in close relation with traditional U.S. interests to maintain political control of the Balkans and "keep the Germans out." The U.S. considers the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean an American sphere of influence. The same geopolitical view exists in London, which considers the Balkans a prime object of historic British "littoral interests" in the Adriatic Sea.

This means that whenever Germany makes a move toward strengthen-

ing western sanctions against Serbia and supporting the victims of the Serbian war, that move is instantly blocked by the British diplomats in the European Community bureaucracy.

When Foreign Minister Kinkel presented an initiative on July 21 for additional EC economic and financial aid to Croatia and Bosnia, which would have helped both republics to provide the 2 million refugees from the war zones in Bosnia with food and other relief, Britain's Foreign Secretary Hurd said the issue was "too complicated" to be dealt with at the moment, and should be put on the agenda sometime in the autumn.

The same duplicitous tactic was employed in early July, when Kinkel was campaigning for a limited western air strike against Serbia to put a halt to the new Belgrade offensive into Bosnia that was beginning then. The British government objected, on grounds that Kinkel's initiative interfered with the ongoing Carrington mission for a new cease-fire in Bosnia. London argued that a cease-fire was the necessary precondition for any U.N. or western intervention.

When the cease-fire talks collapsed instantly, because Serbia expanded its offensive, Lord Carrington declared that the talks were "fairly hopeless" for the time being, and that the world should rather wait for the "warring parties to exhaust themselves." He then proposed a London peace conference that should meet in late August. Kinkel said that was too late; something had to be done now.

On July 27, Kinkel reacted to Carrington's tactic, with the unprecedented step of publicly encouraging the opposition in Serbia to launch mass protests against the Belgrade regime. He said he didn't intend to overthrow the Serbian regime, but it was certainly about time that it felt the heat also from within.