

## Wehrkunde marks deep split between U.S. and British

by Rainer Apel

The 32nd Munich Conference on Security, the annual gathering of senior western defense experts and politicians popularly known as the "Wehrkunde Conference," on Feb. 3-5, featured the most direct clashes ever between Americans and British. Taking differences over Bosnia as the bone of contention, the clashes illustrated in a drastic way, on the one hand, how deep the split between the Clinton administration and Britain's ruling elites has grown since the President proclaimed the end of the special Anglo-American relationship, during his European tour in July 1994. On the other hand, the new type of close bilateral cooperation between Americans and Germans that has been established between President Clinton and Chancellor Helmut Kohl and which is forming the core of the envisioned restructured transatlantic alliance, became visible in the way the agenda of the event was arranged.

Following the keynote address by German Defense Minister Volker Rühle, the first day of the conference featured a report by Jürgen Schrempf, chairman of the German aerospace industrial group DASA, about the role of the western industries in future efforts to build peace—between East and West, as well as North and South. The third main speaker was French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé; this signaled that through its alliance with Germany in European affairs, France is being coopted into the U.S.-German design. The fourth main speaker was Sergei Yushenkov, chairman of the Russian State Duma defense policy commission and an outspoken critic of Yeltsin's Chechnyan intervention—which indicates that the more reasonable currents in Russian politics are oriented toward this new framework of international security policy. The concluding second day of the conference was shaped by an address by U.S. Defense Secretary William J. Perry. Among the main speakers, none was from the United Kingdom.

At Wehrkunde conferences of the past, most Americans sided with British-led attacks on the Germans as an allegedly "unreliable" NATO alliance partner. This time, however, nearly all Americans who had come to Munich used discussion periods between the main speeches to take the British to task for their disastrous role in the Balkans. The performance of the British in Bosnia was taken as a point of reference, but it was evident that a much deeper conflict over a number of strategic interests between the United States and Britain was being addressed—illustrated by the fact that Democrats and Republicans alike joined the attacks on London's policies.

### Serbia should become a target

U.S. Sen. William Cohen (R-Me.) began the attacks, calling for an abrupt change of the western alliance's approach toward Bosnia, and for an end to the "dual key" situation which (upon an Anglo-French initiative at the U.N. Security Council mainly) kept NATO blue helmets hostage to the indifference or even pro-Serbian views of the United Nations. Cohen explicitly welcomed the replacement of British Gen. Sir Michael Rose as commander of the Unprofor blue helmet force in Bosnia as something that has been long overdue and which should be followed by the "immediate resignation" of U.N. special Balkans envoy Yakushi Akashi. Cohen said that in order to enforce the NATO-led Unprofor mandate in the Balkans, retaliation against future Serbian violations of cease-fire agreements and continued aggressions against the Bosnian enclaves as well as against the blue helmet forces, should be carried out also against select military-relevant targets in Serbia itself, if it seemed appropriate.

This met angry protest from the British military and diplomats present. Defense Secretary Malcolm Rifkind shot

back by telling the United States that their criticism would be more acceptable to London had the Americans stationed ground forces in Bosnia, as did Britain. U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry insisted in his speech, however, that the paralysis of NATO by Anglo-French Unprofor tactics at Bihac had taught "negative lessons from Bosnia." Countering the British propaganda about the "positive" results of their blue helmet mission in Bosnia, Perry said that "here, Bihac stands as a powerful cautionary tale. The U.N. was unable to stop the fighting in Bihac—indeed, for many weeks it was unable even to resupply the beleaguered Bangladeshi Unprofor battalion in the region. And NATO was not asked to act because the U.N. feared that air strikes would invite retaliation against its soldiers on the ground."

"While the dual key arrangement with the U.N. was created for understandable political reasons," Perry said, "a heavy price in NATO's credibility has been paid for violating the basic military tenet of unified command and control."

The American charges culminated in a statement by former Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, who said that the Americans were fed up with being lectured by the British and French about what they should think about the Balkans. He said that, with an intensity not seen since the big transatlantic controversies over the "Euro-missiles" in the early 1980s, the British and French kept knocking on doors in Washington in an effort to tell the Americans about "principles" that they themselves were not upholding in the Balkans. This had to stop, Perle said, because the United States was committed to lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnians, to striking against the Serbs, and to protecting the planned pullout of the European blue helmets from Bosnia and Croatia. Urging a drastic shift of NATO's policy toward Bosnia, Perle called on alliance members to follow the example of Turkey, which had already committed itself to training Bosnian soldiers to use western military technologies which would be given to them after the arms embargo is lifted.

### **British outside the mainstream**

This chilly wind, shocking as it certainly was for the British, didn't come as a total surprise. Indeed, Rifkind's speech pledged Britain's commitment to cooperate with the Americans and Germans in their joint initiative for transforming NATO, after the end of the Cold War and German reunification, into a new, broader "transatlantic partnership" that included economic aspects as well. In sum, London wants to jump on the bandwagon that is presently driven by the Clinton-Kohl alliance.

This does not signal the end of British sabotage, nor of recent efforts by London to flirt the French into a kind of new "Entente Cordiale" outside of NATO. The very warm reception that France's Foreign Minister Alain Juppé got from the Germans at the Wehrkunde event—this at a crucial moment when he became very angry at mocking British remarks about European policies and the format of present-day politicians of France—demonstrated, however, a German

awareness of London's games with Paris. The "entente" is not an accomplished fact, but it is being undermined by continuing British-French frictions.

With Clinton's backing, the German government of Kohl is assigned the role of a mediator among Americans, British, and French, for the new type of transatlantic partnership being formed. A government leak to the press after the Wehrkunde meeting—the day before Chancellor Kohl's departure for Washington on Feb. 8 for talks with Clinton—revealed that on Bosnia, the Germans are aware of the "nuances" between their own and the British views, but are firmly on the American side.

Germany is also becoming a mediator concerning Russia. Instead of the discredited Russian Federation Defense Minister Pavel Grachov, who was disinvited from Wehrkunde by German Defense Minister Volker Rühle, one of Grachov's most outspoken critics on the Chechnya war, Sergei Yushenkov, the chairman of the State Duma committee commission on defense policy, was invited to address the Munich gathering. This invitation, Yushenkov said in his Feb. 4 speech, was a crucial sign of western support to Russia's opposition. On Feb. 8, Sergei Kovalyov, another leading Russian opposition figure, was received in Bonn by Kohl's Minister of the Chancellery, Friedrich Bohl, and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel.

The German government has informed President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian government that, unlike the British and other western governments, the Germans will not support economic sanctions against Moscow, but that it insists, along with the Clinton administration, that economic cooperation as well as the development of western relations with Russia proceed in a general environment of respect for human rights. Yushenkov in his speech at the Wehrkunde conference said the same, and he explicitly thanked the Germans for their support to the democratic forces of his country. He also listed the United States and Germany as the states in the West with which Russia has developed the closest relations and confidence.

In his Wehrkunde speech Feb. 4, Jürgen Schrempp, chairman of the German Aerospace Group, called for a joint "Conflict Prevention Initiative" (CPI) of leading industrial firms of the West to build relations with the East through joint great projects of infrastructure development. He said high-speed train lines and energy cooperation projects are crucial for modernizing the eastern economies because only in this way could one defuse social-political conflicts, which, he said, have proven to be the prime source of most military conflicts. British participants at the Wehrkunde event contested this notion, pointing to the Balkans as allegedly proving that ethnic tensions were behind this "civil war." Since Clinton signaled to Kohl in Berlin last July that he has designed a special, leading role and responsibility of the Germans for the economic development in the former East bloc, including Russia, the British view is, once again, outside the mainstream of the new transatlantic relations.