

# Clinton, Kohl firm up special relationship

by Edward Spannaus

During their Feb. 9 meetings in Washington, U.S. President Bill Clinton and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl consolidated the new partnership between their two countries which has superseded the old postwar "special relationship" between Britain and the United States.

Last July, Clinton shocked and outraged America's former colonial masters by announcing the new German-American partnership during his visit to Bonn, and how the United States and Germany planned to work together with the newly independent nations of eastern Europe.

The President said in Bonn last July that the common partnership with Germany is "unique . . . because so many of our challenges are to Germany's east." Clinton declared at that time that the United States and Germany "have a more immediate and tangible concern with these issues even than our other friends in Europe."

In case anybody had missed the significance of what had happened, the British press proclaimed it. "U.S. Cuts British 'Special Link,'" shouted the London *Guardian*, bemoaning the fact that Clinton had "effectively ended" the special relationship with Britain, and reduced it to "a mere sentimental tie with the Mother County."

## Clinton welcomes Kohl

"America has no better friend than Chancellor Kohl," declared Clinton as he opened the news conference following his meeting with Kohl at the White House on Feb. 9—a statement which must have sent chills through the Foreign Office in London, the same Foreign Office which Henry Kissinger said he kept better informed than his own President when he was secretary of state 20 years ago.

Earlier in the day, in welcoming ceremonies, Clinton recalled how he and Kohl had walked together through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin last summer, and then stated: "Now our two nations must continue our journey together with the same resolve we have shown in the past. Today we renew and reaffirm our vital partnership."

Following their meeting—which lasted longer than scheduled—the two world leaders indicated that their major topic of discussion concerned Russia, eastern Europe, and NATO's expansion there. Chancellor Kohl expressed special concern that Russia not be pushed into a corner and isolated.

"This will immediately bring us back to the old, bad structures of the past, and I don't want, in a few years ahead, to be facing the accusation that had we acted in time and reasonably, we could have prevented this," the chancellor said.

Clinton reported that they had discussed the enlargement of NATO, which he said would be "gradual and open." "We also agreed that in parallel with expansion, NATO must develop close and strong ties with Russia," Clinton said. "Chancellor Kohl and I will consult closely on the form this new partnership will take. We share a vision of European security that embraces a democratic Russia, and we will continue to reassure President [Boris] Yeltsin that an expanded NATO will pose no threat to a democratic Russia."

Chancellor Kohl, in his remarks to the press conference, underscored the need for patience in the expansion of NATO, and the need for the process to be gradual, and step by step.

"As a German, I am more aware than others how difficult it is to take a country where people speak the same language and bring two parts of it together after 40 years of complete isolation. . . . And if I try to imagine back, and I do, what it means [is] that since 1917 Russians lived under the communists (being aware that the Romanovs weren't exactly a picnic either) . . . you can appreciate how difficult the process that is going on in Russia is at this time."

## Kohl visits Capitol Hill

The German Chancellor went from the White House up to Capitol Hill for meetings with the congressional leadership, including Republican leaders Sen. Robert Dole (Kan.) and House Speaker Newt Gingrich (Ga.). The principal topics of discussion were Russia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, although informed sources indicate that Kohl was also concerned about the effect of Republican-sponsored cuts in the defense budget, particularly expenditures involving Europe and those which would provide a housing subsidy for Russian soldiers withdrawn from Germany.

The Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* commented: "On the ruins of the Anglo-American special relationship, so vital at the time of Reagan and Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher, yesterday a new one was born, between Germany and the United States." *Corriere's* U.S. correspondent Ennio Caretto wrote: "It is the beginning of a historical shift between the postwar, post-Cold-War period (the 50 years of yesterday), ruled by the synchronization between London and Washington."

The London *Independent* began its coverage of the Clinton-Kohl summit with the comment: "While Britain yesterday squabbled about what sort of coinage it is to have in the future, the real fate of Europe was being decided elsewhere." A companion piece, entitled "The Great Atlantic Drift Away," noted that the British government "is interested in any attempt to repair the transatlantic breach which might partly restore Britain's previously pivotal role."