

Quayle menaces Europe with a trade war

by Rainer Apel

The annual international Wehrkunde defense conference convened again in Munich, at the Hilton Hotel, on Feb. 9-10 for its 29th meeting, after a one-year hiatus due to the 1991 Gulf war. As in the past, the select 180 participants included former and currently serving defense ministers, parliamentarians and congressmen, and spokesmen for military industries and research outfits from the NATO member countries, who gathered to deliberate on the topic "New Dimensions in Security Policy."

The main theme of the conference was supposed to be how NATO defines its tasks after the fall of the Warsaw Pact and U.S.S.R., and how to stop the (rightly or wrongly) feared "global proliferation of atomic, chemical, and biological weapons," for example from former Soviet republics to so-called "dangerous Third World states" like Iraq or Libya. There was indeed discussion of these issues, as this writer saw, but the arrival of U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle brought a whole new element into the conference.

He threatened a U.S. trade war and the end of the alliance with Europe, should the Europeans refuse to make further concessions to U.S. demands in the GATT trade talks.

Trade war threat

Quayle said that the growing trade conflict between the United States and the European Community is a much more important problem for the continued existence of the alliance than other aspects of policy. "Trade is a security issue," said Quayle, and stressed that success in the GATT "Uruguay Round" is "absolutely critical"; it is in Europe's own interest to recognize this promptly. "It is critical for the security of Europe, the security of the United States, the security of Asia. We have to conclude the Uruguay Round," he said.

Other American conference participants, such as Republican Senators Richard Lugar (Ind.), William Cohen (Me.),

and John McCain (Ariz.), were even cruder. "I don't think the Europeans understand how far they have to move on trade. If they don't back down, it could undermine NATO and American participation in the alliance. We are heading for a precipice that Europeans really don't understand," said Lugar. Cohen topped him; he said that a miscarriage in the GATT negotiations would drastically reduce the Americans' willingness to keep troops in Europe: "If I had to project, I would say the number will come closer to 100,000 and perhaps 75,000." And McCain told the Europeans: "It's true that they've heard threats of American withdrawal for 40 years. But this time it's different. Times have changed."

Here it was interesting to observe that the German participants, especially the usually refractory Social Democratic Party (SPD) opposition, conspicuously refrained from protesting. SPD member of Parliament Norbert Gansel distanced himself in tone from Quayle, but said he saw his GATT performance as "right on the mark." As for the liberal Free Democratic Party partners of the ruling German coalition, party chairman Count Otto von Lambsdorff picked up the ball from Quayle and demanded that the Bonn government finally put pressure on Paris, since France (whose farmers have been vocal in resisting U.S.-exacted "free trade" concessions that will ruin them) is the main obstacle to concluding the GATT accord.

There was not much doubt that the Bush administration was staging this confrontation as a rehearsal for heightened pressures on Bonn as the U.S. presidential race heats up. With the severe economic depression paramount in American voters' minds, Bush and his Democratic rivals—but for Lyndon LaRouche—have been practically knocking each other over in the race to prove who can be more rabid in blaming the allies in Europe and Japan for U.S. failures, and exacting tribute, in the form of poisoning these allies' economies by "free trade."

Keeping Europe under NATO control

The second area of tension Quayle addressed, was the strict rejection of the Anglo-Americans (England works in tandem with the United States) of anything that smacks of the quest for an independent European defense. He could not see, said Quayle, "what substitute there could be for the alliance as the guarantee for our defense and the security of Europe. . . . We're not viewing the WEU [West European Union] as a European alternative to the alliance." Of course it is not a question of the WEU as such, because the British are members of it too, but it has everything to do with the preliminary efforts in Bonn and Paris to build up a stronger cooperation in the military domain as the core of a future, independent European defense policy.

That was seen in the fact that the protestations in the speech given on the morning of Quayle's arrival by German Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg, to the effect that ongoing German-French planning is taking place in full harmony with NATO, had practically no effect. For the Anglo-Americans any Franco-German joint defense effort is unacceptable, basically because in their view, continental European politics must never, ever, slip out of the control of London and Washington.

Shared SDI: Is there a catch?

Earlier, U.S. Ambassador Henry Cooper had revealed, in a summary of discussion of the American SDI experts, that present advances in research and development allow the realistic hope that a ground-based missile defense system (GPALS—Global Protection Against Limited Strikes) will be ready to deploy by the mid-1990s. Around 2000, the deployment of a space-based SDI system could be expected. Since Bush and Yeltsin recently put out a mutual statement of intent about American-Russian cooperation in this area, the United States is also extending an offer to Europe to jointly develop and station such missile defense systems, said Cooper.

This offer was reiterated by Quayle on the second day of the conference, with reference to the special threat to Europe (and hence to Germany). Just on geographical grounds alone, asserted Quayle, a "threat to Europe through missile attack from countries such as Iraq is much more likely than a threat to America." From its ongoing program of development of GPALS and SDI, the United States would make available the protection systems relevant to defending against such missile attacks.

Given the general anti-European thrust of Bush's policy, Quayle's offer certainly should be viewed with caution. Although Germany should avail itself of this unprecedented chance, it is unfortunately to be surmised that there is a "catch" in this change of mind. The price could be, besides concessions on GATT and the prohibition of the European joint defense project, also that Germany should make itself available for future Anglo-American-led punitive missions

against "dangerous countries like Iraq." This would be completely in line with Bush's policy, but Germany would cut its own throat.

Unfortunately, very little was actually said about the "SDI" aspect itself, not least because discussion among the American, British, and Dutch, but also German participants in the conference, focused on the "nonproliferation of dangerous weapons systems and technologies." Much was discussed about the rationale (or lack thereof) of controls over technology transfers into the Third World, as well as sanctions and eventual punitive actions against insubordinate countries. None other than Hans-Jochen Vogel, leader of the Social Democrats, pushed a "world government," whose task would be the centralized, international control of technology experts. Vogel's speech was explicitly and repeatedly saluted by other participants.

This brought out into the limelight, the push toward what has been called technological apartheid—the actions of the industrialized countries to keep developing lands in enforced backwardness. While the renowned nuclear scientist Edward Teller attempted to lift the discussion to a higher standpoint (see page 63), showing that security policy is a far deeper issue than the mere sum of military options and terrifying annihilation potentials, the Munich conference-goers failed to respond.

Is there another agenda?

One reason could be that the drumbeat for a new military spree against some "dangerous" country had gotten very loud. In an emergency statement released on Feb. 11, U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche warned, "Moves are afoot in Europe and elsewhere which indicate that the Bush administration, perhaps in concert with the British government and with the consent of some other forces around the U.N. Security Council, are moving toward a very early military or related adventure." He identified the prime target as Libya, with Iraq as the second most likely, and Yemen as another candidate. He added that a U.S. military action in Haiti, already threatened some weeks ago, had become more likely.

LaRouche explained that after the officers' revolt in Venezuela in early February—a reaction to the devastating effects of International Monetary Fund conditionalities on Central and South American nations—"Bush might be very likely tempted to make an operation against Haiti to demonstrate U.S. willingness to take military action against people it does not like in the Western Hemisphere." Among the public events which led him to his evaluation, LaRouche cited the "strange behavior" of Quayle in Munich and Geneva, and also, the remarks of Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.) at the Wehrkunde meeting. The Democratic congressman, who chairs the House Armed Services Committee, pointed to Desert Storm and stated that the U.S. is "now the biggest killer on the block" in conventional as well as nonconventional weaponry, after the demise of the Soviet Union.