

ernment of Japan, is the worst of them all: the members of the government have put their hands to the sword of political suicide, by adopting a policy worse than the hyperinflationary policy of 1921-1923 Weimar Germany, a policy which could virtually destroy Japan as a functioning nation, and that in short order. These reforms are disasters, deserving of no kinder term than "lunacy."

What will happen, as each of these recent "reforms" blows up: in Indonesia, in South Korea, in Japan, and elsewhere? What will the idiots of the IMF and kindred institutions propose, then, when the next explosion occurs, and the lunacy of their previous, recent policies becomes undeniable, perhaps during the second half of March?

The issue of analysis, is: When will these idiots make way for sanity, at last? What kind of revolutions shall we experience—very soon—unless the presently prevailing delusions, in Washington and elsewhere, are abandoned for the kinds of alternatives identified as just, here?

Do not be so occupied with attempting to interpret, perhaps to seem to explain away, what happened at convocations such as Davos or Munich, that you miss the essential common feature of these events. The world, as most of you took it for granted, until a very recent time, no longer exists. There is a new world out there, and you must quickly come to terms with the reality that represents.

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## The Wehrkunde Meeting

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# Opposition arises to a strike against Iraq

by Rainer Apel

The 34th International Munich Conference on Security Policy, also known by its traditional name, the "Wehrkunde Meeting," was held on Feb. 7-8 in a somewhat ceremonious context, because it was the official farewell for Baron Ewald von Kleist (75), its founder and chairman since its first conference in 1962. The American delegation was the biggest ever, with 120 members out of 207 conference attendees in total, and among them were many close friends of von Kleist, including U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen. The second-largest national contingent were German foreign and defense experts, and the third-largest were the British. Defense and foreign policy experts from the other 13 NATO member nations, as well as from Russia, Hungary, Poland, France, and Japan, also attended. In the future, the event will be hosted by Horst Teltschik, a former national security adviser to Germa-

ny's Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who now is a member of the board of BMW.

The ceremonious aspect of this meeting, however, was overshadowed by the escalating conflict over Iraq, and by the differences across the Atlantic, in assessing the exact nature of the threat that Iraq's Saddam Hussein poses to the Mideast and the rest of the world, and the necessity of a military strike against Baghdad. From a German point of view, there is a big risk involved in pursuing a military build-up in the Persian Gulf as a means of increasing the diplomatic pressure on Iraq. The German government and opposition alike, believe that President Bill Clinton would prefer a diplomatic solution to this conflict, but fear that the way this military force is being built up in the Persian Gulf by the Americans and the British is creating a dynamic, similar to the situation in 1990, that will lead to war. It is feared here in Germany in particular, that Clinton will suffer political damage from a military action that will do little harm to Saddam Hussein, cause human casualties among the civilian population of Iraq, and alienate America's friends throughout the entire Arab and Muslim world. It is feared that such military action will achieve nothing but to create pretexts for a clash of civilizations between Western, Christian nations and those of the Arab and Muslim world.

This is a kind of consensus across political party boundaries which existed before the Wehrkunde meeting, reflecting the bad experience with George Bush's and Margaret Thatcher's Gulf War of 1990-91, and with what came after. The Germans know that there are many leftovers from the Bush era in the bureaucracy of the Clinton administration, and especially in Congress and the U.S. media. Not only do they cause big problems for President Clinton, but they also tend to foam at the Germans, whenever Germany wants to pursue a policy that is not in line with scenarios for strategic confrontation which these "Bush Babies" spin out.

### **Bush-ites push the British line**

The keynote address to the conference which Chancellor Kohl delivered on Feb. 7, avoided any mention of the Iraq issue. But the "Bush-ites," who comprised a section of the U.S. delegation, pushed the British line for war on Iraq. Beginning with Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), other members of the Senate such as John Warner (R-Va.), Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), and Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Tex.), former security advisers Brent Scowcroft, Fred Ikle, and Helmut Sonnenfeldt, and former top administration officials including Richard Perle and Richard Burt, this faction launched a barrage of complaints that the Germans are not giving full support for a military strike against Saddam Hussein. Lieberman and Warner threatened a U.S. pullout from NATO, should the Germans fail to rally behind the three U.S. aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf. Perle went so far as to say that Germany's chemical industry had armed Saddam Hussein with biochemical weapons of mass extinction.

Chancellor Kohl took extensive notes on all these charges, which came, to be precise, from only a small group among the 120 American attendees, and he chose to respond only in his concluding words to the Saturday morning session. Next to him sat U.S. Secretary of Defense Cohen, who did not say anything while the controversy with the Bush-ites played out. Cohen did not bring up the Iraq issue until Sunday morning, and most of what he said, came during the discussion period, and not in his address. For the Germans, Cohen's conduct signalled that Clinton, and a good part of his administration, are neither in favor of a war on Iraq, nor of Bush-ite propaganda wars on Germany.

Responding to McCain and company, Kohl chose to drop all diplomatic courtesy. He declared that he profoundly disapproved of this German-bashing, just as he had disapproved of Western policies during the Iran-Iraq War in the early 1980s, to build up Saddam Hussein as a "useful pawn" against the Khomeini regime in Iran. Kohl said that, in his view, many, if not most, of the problems that the world is faced with in the Persian Gulf today, can be traced back to this flawed assessment of Saddam Hussein as "useful." Kohl emphasized that there is no lack of German solidarity with the Americans; that if need be, the Americans can use their air bases in Germany for military strikes against Iraq. But, he added, "contrary to others, I have not even been asked yet for such support."

### **Kohl attacks the 'special relationship'**

During his response, which was spiced with ironic remarks on other NATO allies and their flaws and neuroses, Kohl addressed the British feeling of being "something very special," which, he said, may have to do with their sharing the same language with the Americans, or with "being the oldest member in the club." This public attack on the "special relationship" ideology which is cultivated in London and among Bush-era relics in U.S. politics, is something that has been very rare in Kohl's political career. The Chancellor clearly differentiated between the Clinton administration and "certain groups in Congress" and the media. He said that most problems between the United States and Germany usually emerge outside the governmental relations between Washington and Bonn. Kohl added that Germans are asking themselves how it is possible that the public in the "most important nation of this world" has nothing else to do than debate Clinton's alleged affairs with women, as if there were lack of big problems to solve. Kohl said that what is still lacking, is a serious debate about and answer to the question, "What comes after a strike?"

Paradoxically, during this turbulent morning session, in this entire controversy between Americans and Germans, not one of the 30-member British delegation opened his mouth. It was an appropriate illustration of how the British, playing out "balance of power" scenarios, watch other powers fight among themselves.

Now, there should be no illusion that once Clinton were to give the green light for a military strike on Baghdad, Kohl would make sure that American aircraft can use their bases in Germany. Formally speaking, the Americans have to ask the Germans for permission to use the bases for missions outside the NATO area, but it is almost certain that Kohl will give this permission, even if he disagrees with the military strike. Faced with a campaign for reelection this September, Kohl would run a considerable risk by giving such permission, because the majority of German voters oppose a new war in the Gulf, even though they also dislike Saddam Hussein.

### **Can a Gulf war be avoided?**

Is there a way out? Many German foreign policy experts believe there is, as they told this author in discussions during and after the conference. They believe that a war in the Persian Gulf can be avoided, although they concede that the present constellation of forces rather points to a military option. Two of the Germans who attended the meeting, both members of the governing coalition in Bonn, stated, first of all, that they see a clear distinction between Clinton and the McCain types, and that they are confident that Cohen is in Clinton's camp. One of the Germans told me the night before Kohl's keynote address, that the confrontationists within the U.S. delegation were spotted sitting together, spinning something out. The McCain types are known for such confrontations, from many previous Wehrkunde meetings. Their caucusing was an unmistakable signal that something was up for next morning, that the Germans had better be alert. And maybe, Kohl was tipped off on that, so that the attacks by McCain and others did not catch him off-guard.

Both German politicians whom I talked to said that, from a German point of view, which they wished were also the American one, a military conflict with Iraq makes no sense. It would neither succeed in eliminating all Saddam Hussein's dangerous weapons arsenals, nor remove him from power, nor launch a successful revolt of whatever "opposition" force there might be (which they doubt exists) inside Iraq and its Armed Forces. The civilian population of Iraq would be the ones to suffer, and the Americans would be deeply discredited among the Arabs, all of whom oppose a military move against Iraq, including Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the entire peace process involving Palestine, Jordan, Israel, and Syria would be torpedoed.

### **British duplicity**

I received the same assessment from a senior member of the German Institute of Oriental Studies, based in Hamburg. He said that what is startling, is what close contacts in several Arab countries told him: that British diplomats are going around there, giving their Arab discussion partners a different line than that which is being put out in London. The British diplomats are telling the Arabs that the proposed military

strike against Saddam Hussein is no good, that it will neither overthrow him nor remove all dangerous military arsenals, but only provoke a civil war which the anti-Saddam forces would lose. Furthermore, the British are saying that a diplomatic solution which accepted the structures of the Saddam regime should rather be sought, working through them for a post-Saddam era.

The Oriental Studies source conceded that there is a strange pattern of former Iraqi military leaders or politicians always ending up in exile in London, which indicates that the British still have secret connections into the Iraqi elite. This doesn't mean anything for the Iraqi opposition as such, because these ties are just strings which the British use for their own geopolitical purposes. The source added that, just as the Clinton administration is already being humiliated in the eyes of the world, because it cannot get any further with the peace process in Palestine, so it will lose whatever remaining respect it still has in the Arab world if it walks into the Baghdad trap.

A much-neglected aspect here, the source said, is that the "dual containment" policy of the United States against Iran and Iraq has deprived the Americans of billions of dollars of economic contracts. There are surveys in the United States that document this, but influential circles in the State Department and the Pentagon have a policy of working through Israel, for contacts into the entire Mideast region. Clinton does not like that, the source said, but he thinks he has to make concessions to the Zionist lobby and to the Christian fundamentalists at home.

The source said that it is astonishing that American industry is not putting on more pressure for a change, to improve relations with Iraq, a former leading market in the region for U.S. products. The United States has no policy for the region, and the military muscle-flexing can only work to their disadvantage.

Some Americans may view such military action as a welcome compensation for all the failures in the Mideast peace process, showing that the Americans are still capable of acting, but they will be proven wrong, the source said. If one American missile hits an Iraqi bunker with women and children, killing many of them, instead of eliminating Saddam's arsenals, the world public—including the American public—will be against the United States.

Also interesting was a discussion with a senior expert at the German Foreign Policy Association in Bonn, the German equivalent—though not always by policies—of the New York Council on Foreign Relations. This source began the discussion with an ironic answer to the question why British diplomats in Arab capitals are saying things different than their own government propaganda in London on Iraq: There is that tradition of British diplomacy being "quite pluralistic," he said. In his view, Clinton is seeking a diplomatic solution to this conflict with Iraq, but there is the problem that American

policies in the region are caught in the trap of power politics, or, to be more precise, "dual containment geopolitics." For lack of other options, there is only one option left, namely, to increase the diplomatic heat on Baghdad by waving the military stick. As long as that serves to enhance the diplomatic level, and remains subordinate to it, it is basically okay, he said. But as long the United States does not have a policy for the region, there is no political alternative to the military dynamic.

This was already the case during the Iran-Iraq War, when the Americans thought Khomeini had to be contained, so they built up Saddam Hussein, he said. But it is much more difficult now, than in 1990, to build up such an alliance. Talking about a non-Saddam Iraq, as the Americans and British do—how would it look after all, he asked, if there is no viable option for a change at the top in Baghdad that would be more acceptable to the West than Saddam himself? All the talk about inner-Iraqi "opposition" to Saddam is rubbish. Iraq after Saddam will look very much the same, for the time being, and to think of installing a pro-American regime, coming into Baghdad on U.S. tanks, after the history of 1990-91 and the sanctions policy, is nonsense. Thus, the United States runs a high risk now that Saddam will not respond the way it would like him to, and then, military strikes become the only option. This is what Clinton wants to avoid, the source said, because it would provoke a big backlash throughout the Arab world.

In any case, there is no quick fix for the Persian Gulf region, the source said. Liberating the region from the current situation requires a lot of time and patience. One should take the case of Iran, which is slowly transforming itself from Khomeini-ism to a more moderate, more modern state and society. And, what is very important, the transformation of Iran has nothing to do with sanctions from outside; it is a genuine, inner-Iranian development. The United States has been very late in finally recognizing that, he said.

Iraq also will need time to develop leaders other than Saddam Hussein, he said. At the moment, any hopes for a post-Saddam era, something like the post-Khomeini era in Iran, are premature, and nothing of that sort can be achieved through outside pressure or military action.

Clinton and his closest advisers may have some ideas on how to get out of this Persian Gulf dynamic, the source said. But Clinton is under heavy attack from Congress, where the "Jewish lobby" is active, along with anti-Islamic women's leagues, Christian warrior types, the media, and so on, and Clinton has tended to back down. On Palestine, Clinton has already made one concession after another to try to calm down the right-wing radicals in Congress. That problem of U.S. politics would remain after a military strike on Baghdad. Apart from the population of Iraq, the region around the Persian Gulf and the Mideast as a whole, which would deserve a more rational policy, will suffer from these power plays, he said.