

of staff of the IDF, a position which is a stepping stone to that of chief of staff. As commander of the Air Force, Halutz, the architect of Israel's infamous targeted assassinations policy, has been drafting operational plans and conducting training for long-range strikes against targets in Iran. If he becomes chief of staff in 2005, his appointment will mark clearly that Sharon's military and security faction is preparing for a future expansion of the conflict well beyond the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Uncertainty of Cheney's Future

In creating a sense of uncertainty, Sharon is also reacting to the uncertain future of his main allies in Washington: Vice President Dick Cheney and the neo-cons, according to the Israeli intelligence source cited above. Without continued support from factions in Washington, Sharon's circle will not be able to sustain their current policy. They are likely seeking to reposition themselves now.

The reality of the situation within Israel is unsustainable. Israeli political commentator Akiva Eldar wrote in *Ha'aretz* on Feb. 9 that Sharon's Gaza announcement "stems from the collapse of the defense establishment. Over the last few months, IDF, Shin Bet and Border Police field commanders have been reporting that their forces are stretched to the limit. They say that officers and soldiers, policemen and Shin Bet agents have all reached the point of exhaustion. The high command is complaining that training days have been reduced to a minimum, and officers are warning that friction with Palestinian civilians at roadblocks and settlement outposts is eroding motivation and destroying the soldiers' morale."

The Israeli economy also continues to collapse. The same week Sharon announced his evacuation plan, garbage was piling up and schools were closed throughout Israel as municipal workers, along with the municipal authorities for which they worked, staged a nationwide strike because the government refuses to finance their deficits. These municipalities are so bankrupt that workers have not been paid for up to five months. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being transferred to building Sharon's Berlin Wall of the Middle East, the cost of which will reach \$4 billion. In fact, the wall is being built with American taxpayers' money. The Israeli economy would have collapsed long ago, were it not for the \$9 billion in loan guarantees given to it by the Bush Administration. Already, \$3 billion of these guarantees have been used to plug the huge hole in the Israeli budget, mostly created by military expenses and the construction of Sharon's wall.

The Israeli intelligence source warned that while there are other factions within the military and security establishment who understand that the current policy is unsustainable, Sharon's faction will remain undeterred by these realities as long as they are in power. The departure of Cheney and the neo-cons will deter, but will not stop them, until they are removed from power within Israel.

The Wehrkunde Conference

Only 'Outsiders' Introduce Reality

by Rainer Apel

This year's Feb. 7-8 international Munich Conference on Security Policy (the Wehrkunde Conference), the 40th annual event of its kind and the first since the Iraq War, was not dominated by the spectacular, noisy clashes that occurred last year, such as that between U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer ("you've not convinced me at all") over the motives for the Iraq War. The sessions had obviously been prearranged in a way that tried to ban highly controversial items from the agenda. For example, the fact that the alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, the official pretext for the war, have not been found, was not a subject for debate; nor was the profound political trouble that has resulted for U.S. President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, from their lies on the WMD issue.

Hot issues like these, especially Cheney's role, were instead addressed outside the event, at a rally of the LaRouche Youth Movement on Feb. 7, about 200 meters away from the Bayerischer Hof conference site, which was sealed off by police. The LYM also did at this rally, what conference participants omitted entirely from their two days of discussion—namely, addressing the reality of the global economic-financial collapse and of the untenability of the dollar-centered speculative bubble.

Near the end of the conference, the Indian representative also delivered a pungent warning to the assembled, mainly trans-Atlantic, representatives (see below).

Rumsfeld Loses Control

Rumsfeld affirmed in his speech that "the world is a safer place today because the [war] coalition liberated 50 million people: 25 million in Afghanistan, and 25 million in Iraq." But that did not convince the European skeptics; nor did his statement that the symbol of post-Korean War "safety," the South Korean capital Seoul, showed what "real democracy is: light, cars, energy." Rumsfeld otherwise left no doubt that "rogue states" such as North Korea had the choice, either to act like Saddam Hussein's defiant Iraq, or like "cooperative" Libya—a formulation that conveyed the threat of military action.

Although the 300 conference participants generally

stayed away from passionate disputes in response to such provocations, some did try to spark a debate during the questions and answers after Rumsfeld's speech. Markus Meckel, a member of the foreign affairs committee of the German Parliament, said that the United States seemed to work with NATO only when it saw it fit, at other times preferred unilateral acts, which he said posed the question how serious and long-term the U.S. commitment to the alliance was. Rumsfeld literally shrieked: "It's long-term! Any monkey looking down from Mars on Earth knows, that the countries in NATO and North America are the bulk of countries on the face of the Earth that have the same values, the same lack of a desire to impose their will on somebody else, and take their real estate and seize it. We don't do that! We're the bulk of the democracies in the world, we have common interests, and that is what the interest of the United States has been and is today."

Rumsfeld repeatedly defended the preventive first-strike doctrine, "in an age when terrorists are threatening to acquire and use biological, chemical and nuclear weapons as something that has to be weighed and considered by all of us," given "the possible catastrophic consequences."

Joseph Joeffe of the weekly *Die Zeit* was quoted by U.S. National Public Radio saying that no one trusts these charges any more. "I've got to make sure before I train my M-16 on the other guy, that what he has in his pocket is actually a gun, and not his pipe. What are we going to do about intelligence in a situation where first-rate intelligence is absolutely vital, so we don't shoot the wrong guy?"

Christophe Bertram, director of the German Institute for International Politics and Security in Berlin, asked Rumsfeld about the U.S. go-it-alone policy; and Wolfgang Ischinger, German ambassador to the United States, asked what Washington intended to do to improve its reputation internationally. But they did not get a direct response from Rumsfeld. Bertram told television journalists after the session, "It was a performance of, 'We know better.' "

These were the few "incidents" that occurred during an otherwise rather uncontroversial debate. But basic differences in assessments between the United States and Britain, and the Franco-German alliance—on the war, on postwar conduct in Iraq and on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—had clearly not disappeared, despite efforts to paper them over. This became evident when German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and the Defense Ministers of France and Germany, Michele Alliot-Marie and Peter Struck, spoke. Fischer said he was skeptical of a NATO mission in Iraq (as proposed in Munich, again, by Rumsfeld), because of the "high risk of failure," and he added that Germany would anyway not send troops for such a mission. The combined instabilities of the situation in Iraq and of the unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict posed unabated dangers and risks for the entire region, Fischer warned. Lasting solutions were possible only "in a new cooperation with the states of the

Middle East," Fischer said, warning, "If we fail to do so, or if we are too short-sighted, too narrow-minded or too hesitant, we will have to pay a high price." Alliot-Marie made clear that France insisted that two main conditions be met for a NATO deployment—earliest-possible re-transfer of sovereignty to an elected government in Iraq, and a United Nations mandate—but that even then, French troops would not be deployed in any occupation role.

But what was said by the Europeans, including Fischer's proposal for an all-Mediterranean "free-trade zone" including the Mideast, was much too vague to pose a real alternative to present U.S. geopolitics.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov went a small step farther than the European critics of the Bush Administration, by exposing the fact that after the U.S. intervention of 2001 in Afghanistan, the production of opium there is "now nine times that under the previous Taliban regime." Ivanov said it was "understandable that by allowing drug peddling in Afghanistan, the NATO alliance ensures loyalty of warlords on the ground. . . . Nevertheless, the drug flow from Afghanistan is posing serious threats to the national security of all of the Central Asian CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] and Russia. It results from the absence of a truly international approach toward stabilization in Afghanistan."

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), much wilder than Rumsfeld on this occasion, lashed out at the Russians, demanding that Moscow stop working with the Belarus regime and deploying "agents of destabilization" in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and in Latvia. "The dramatic deterioration of democracy in Russia calls into question the fundamental premises of our Russia policy since 1991," he charged. He also portrayed new targets of neo-con confrontationism, when stating that the "success [of Halliburton-style democratization] in Iraq would embolden Iranian reformers and help push Syria" into the U.S. camp.

In stark contrast with all that, were remarks made on the second day of the conference—after most of the press had left—by the Indian chief national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra. He warned against the international spread of instability, should the "endless cycle of violence in the Mideast" continue, and the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people be further delayed. Mishra contrasted the dangerous political vacuum there, with the constructive efforts made in 2003 by the Asians; in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; in talks between India and Russia; with the "groundbreaking visit of Indian Prime Minister [Atal Bihari] Vajpayee to China"; the SAARC economic cooperation summit of South Asian states; as well as the recent steps toward conciliation between India and Pakistan. "History can either guide us, or haunt us," Mishra said, adding that the establishment of "new routes of transportation" was crucial for international cooperation, and that there were "areas of progress yet untapped."