

# Schröder Drops 'A Munich Bombshell'

by Rainer Apel

A meeting of 400 top officials and defense experts of predominantly NATO countries on Feb. 11-13 in Germany revealed that the Bush Administration's new "charm offensive" has been a dud. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder made that clear, in his speech to the 41st Munich Conference on Security Policy (known as the "Wehrkunde Meeting"), in which he laid out a quite different perspective for transatlantic relations, than that upheld by the U.S. representatives there. The "new Rumsfeld," a role performed by an over-jovial U.S. Secretary of Defense in Munich, failed to smooth over the deep transatlantic differences, and neither did U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's blitz tour of Europe the week before.

The fact that the same old Bush Administration policy remains in place, behind this public relations maneuver of the second Bush Administration, was not missed by the European attendees at the Munich conference. The "in your face" formulation which Rumsfeld used repeatedly in Munich, that "the mission determines the coalition, and not the other way around" (meaning that the Bush Administration will cooperate with NATO only if it serves its own designs), revealed that nothing has changed with the re-elected Bush. The Munich debates on the Iran issue showed how deep the transatlantic frictions are: The Europeans want diplomacy, to end Iran's isolation, whereas the Bush team wants to increase the isolation—not only with diplomacy but also with military threats. The Bush Administration has not given any indication of active support for the Europe-Iran diplomacy; rather, the impression in Europe is that the American side prefers to wait for a deadlock or failure of the talks, in order to forge ahead with their own approach.

In his keynote address to the conference, Chancellor Schröder (whose speech was read by German Defense Minister Peter Struck, because Schröder was ill) uncharacteristically and bluntly addressed the Bush Administration's views on Iran in unmistakable language: "I want the U.S. Administration to actively support the Europeans' diplomatic efforts. We must overcome Iran's massive isolation. For Iran will only abandon its nuclear ambitions for good, if its economic as well as its legitimate security interests, are safeguarded." The Iran issue must be discussed also in "a dialogue with the region to develop sustainable security structures for the Gulf

region," Schröder urged.

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, in his speech Feb. 13, also frankly told the Bush Administration to "engage positively . . . to substantially strengthen the European drive." And he added, in apparent congruence with Iran's views on the matter, "if the whole process collapsed, then we would have to go to the [United Nations] Security Council." Sanctions against Iran would be counterproductive, Fischer warned, as they could "strengthen hardline elements in the Iranian government. . . . Iran is not Saddam Hussein. There, we have a contradictory mixture of very dark elements and democratic elements."

Fischer and Struck emphasized that a diplomatic deal with Tehran would only work if Iran's legitimate security concerns were properly taken into consideration. But U.S. Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) open endorsement of "Ukrainian-style regime change in Tehran," which did not draw any criticism from among the American delegation in Munich, showed that the aim of diplomacy (if there is any at all) on the U.S. side apparently is to interfere in Iran's sovereign affairs. Rumsfeld's references to Iraq and Afghanistan as being the alleged beacons of "new democracy," as opposed to Iran, underlined the prevailing U.S. approach, which the Europeans are concerned about.

For those who wanted to listen, the speech given in Munich by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Gholamali Khoshroo on Feb. 12, provided additional evidence that neither Iraq nor Afghanistan is in reality what McCain or Rumsfeld pretend they are: Khoshroo said that unlike the pre-war Iraq of Saddam Hussein, today's Iraq is a vast breeding ground for domestic and international terrorism, and Afghanistan, since the U.S. military attack, has turned into the world's largest farming area of opium-producing poppy.

## Schröder Demands a New Approach by NATO

But the Iran controversy was overshadowed by the big impact made by the remarks of Chancellor Schröder on the issue of "NATO reform." He began his speech with a reference to the unprecedented, worldwide solidarity for the victims of the tsunami catastrophe in the Indian Ocean region, saying that it implied a mandate for a new approach to the challenge of economic development. "Poverty and underdevelopment pose no less a threat" than the "proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and instability caused by failing states," Schröder said, urging that the "modernization crisis in many parts of the world" must be overcome, because this has direct implications also for the ongoing debate about a reform of the transatlantic alliance.

"The maxim continues to apply: Close transatlantic ties are in the interests of Germany, Europe, and America," the Chancellor said. "However, we cannot look to the past when it comes to translating this maxim into policies, as is so often the case when transatlantic loyalty oaths are made. Rather, we must adapt to the new circumstances. . . . In fact, the strategic



*German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder shocked the Munich Conference on Security Policy by stating that “poverty and underdevelopment pose no less a threat” than the “proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and instability caused by failing states.” Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, shown here addressing the conference, had no comment.*

challenges lie today beyond the North Atlantic Alliance’s former zone of mutual assistance, and they do not primarily require military responses. In Asia, China and India are emerging as new world powers whose weight will have an impact not just on the region but on global politics as well. And, the enemies we are facing today are no longer functioning states with a defined territory, but the new global risks.”

Bearing a greater role for international stability and order, Germany also sees that this brings with it the “right to be involved in decision-making,” Schröder said. “Our wish to see Germany become a permanent member of the UN Security Council derives from this need to base responsibility on legitimacy. I believe that the transatlantic partnership must take such changes into consideration, and to be honest, it does so insufficiently at present. This becomes clear when we look at the institutions which are supposed to serve this partnership. The admission of new members is proof that NATO continues to be attractive. And NATO’s presence in Afghanistan has highlighted how helpful its military organization can be even in distant crises. However, it is no longer the primary venue where transatlantic partners discuss and coordinate strategies.”

Questions related to this, Schröder added, would and should be on the agenda of talks with President Bush during the latter’s visit to Europe and Germany, Feb. 22-23. Schröder proposed that the reform of the Western alliance, as outlined by him, should also be discussed by a “high-ranking panel of independent figures from both sides of the Atlantic.”

These bold assertions are being described by conference participants as “Schröder’s Munich bombshell.” The “new” Rumsfeld was apparently taken by total surprise, indicated by his refusal, when asked during the discussion period, to comment on Schröder’s remarks; Rumsfeld said that he first had “to read the text.” The majority of even the German media ran alarmist reports indicating that Schröder intended to “undermine or abandon NATO.” Schröder, for his part, made it

clear after the Munich conference, that he would address the other leaders of NATO at their meeting in Brussels with President Bush on Feb. 22, on more details of his thoughts.

The German Chancellor, who began receiving more support from prominent figures on the European side of NATO and from the European Union after the first two or three days of initial shock after his Munich speech, reiterated his views in an interview Feb. 16, with the leading German business daily *Handelsblatt*. Schröder said that despite the heavy criticism which his proposal had drawn, which he thought was unfounded, he sticks to his idea; namely, to “first have strategic discussions, before political decisions in NATO are taken.” He welcomed the offer made by Secretary of State Rice during her recent visit to Germany, whereby a “new chapter of transatlantic relations” should be opened between Germany and the United States. But Schröder added that he saw the Bush visit to Mainz, on Feb. 23, as an opportunity to reaffirm that transatlantic commitment by entering a new dialogue—*on the level of true partnership*.

As far as Iran was concerned, Schröder reiterated that the policy of his government and of the EU was very clear: Iran must renounce possession of nuclear weapons, but negotiations can only be successful between the EU and Iran, if the “linkage is made with economic and security cooperation.” The ideal solution would be if both the United States and Europe would guarantee such an agreement, Schröder noted, adding that he opposed “automatically” implementing punitive measures against Iran. “I am against military intervention, but in any case, let’s not speculate,” he said, also refusing to answer a question about whether he thought the Iraq experiment would be repeated by the United States in Iran.

The upshot of the Munich conference: The transatlantic row since the Iraq War has grown deeper. The other message from Munich is that some Europeans are ready for a new kind of cooperation on economic development to eradicate poverty in the developing sector, a necessary precondition for peace.