

Europe, Asia Talk Back To Rumsfeld and McCain

by Rainer Apel

This year's 39th Munich Conference on Security Policy—the annual former “Wehrkunde” meeting—gathered several hundred defense politicians and experts, notably from NATO member countries, on Feb. 7-9, and documented what one may appropriately term “the clash of two civilizations”—an almost unbridgeable gulf between the pro-war party and those that want to avoid a military operation against Iraq. Resistance against the war push led by the American and British conference attendees, was especially strong from government officials of France and Germany who spoke at the Munich event.

The conference began as all had expected it would: U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld praised the “new friends,” like those eight European leaders who signed the Jan. 29 letter of support for the U.S. cause against Saddam Hussein, taking that as indicative “that momentum is building throughout the world” for an imperial policy. On the other side, Rumsfeld saw those “old allies” like France and Germany that were, in his view, “undermining NATO” and America. Rumsfeld then also lashed out against the United Nations, portraying it as an institution of untrustworthy people who had allowed “terrorist states,” Iraq and Libya, to chair its disarmament and human rights commissions, respectively.

After his speech, Rumsfeld took his seat among the audience, so confident that he *removed his earphones* so as not to hear the translation of the next speaker, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer. But the German official, who speaks excellent English, responded to that provocation by pushing his prepared manuscript aside and confronting Rumsfeld directly, “Excuse me, I am not convinced by what you’ve just said!” Fischer said that real evidence for the war against Iraq was not there, telling Rumsfeld, “You still have to make your case!” Fischer said that it was unacceptable to start a new war in Iraq, with all the implied dangerous repercussions for the entire region, while the war in Afghanistan still has not come to an end and reconstruction of that war-torn nation has only just begun.

The Foreign Minister continued mostly in German, but frequently switching to English to address Rumsfeld personally. The scene was tense as it has never been before at Wehrkunde conferences.

Similarly tense was the aftermath of the next American speaker, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). He also praised the



While Donald Rumsfeld lectured Europe and the UN at Munich, opposition to his war plan hardened. Russian President Putin (left, with France's Chirac) on Feb. 10 backed the French-German initiative against an imminent Iraq invasion; China publicly supported it on Feb. 11.

“letter of the eight,” attacked the UN inspection regime in Iraq as useless and a waste of time, and called for regime change in Baghdad as the kickoff for regime changes throughout the entire Mideast and Gulf region. McCain then attacked the Franco-German cooperation in resisting the war drive as unacceptable, and warned that the Iraq issue might tear NATO and the United Nations apart, as the 1920s League of Nations was torn apart by the Abyssinian War issue. McCain also got counterattacked, by French Defense Minister Michelle Alliot-Marie, who spoke after him. She endorsed the German Foreign Minister's call for an enhanced inspection regime as a viable alternative to war, which “must always be the last resort.” She said that before any military action were launched, its risks for the civilian population, for the fighting troops, for the states neighboring Iraq, and especially the risk of a global conflict between the West and Islam, must be weighed. Alliot-Marie then vehemently defended the Jan. 22 Franco-German “Elysée Treaty” Declaration as absolutely crucial for the future integration and development of Europe, and rebuked its U.S. adversaries like Rumsfeld and McCain.

To the embarrassment of the war faction, earlier hints in the morning news of Feb. 8 that France and Germany were working on a joint UN initiative for enhanced inspections in Iraq, were not only confirmed by German Defense Minister Peter Struck at the Munich event later in the afternoon, but received public support also from Russian President Vladimir Putin, during talks with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in Berlin on Feb. 9. And the evening after the close of the Munich conference, Feb. 10, the governments of France, Germany, and Russia issued a joint declaration—endorsed by China on Feb. 11—in favor of inspections and increased efforts to avoid a war.

Thus, whereas Rumsfeld had tried to portray a world that was on the side of the Bush Administration, there was ample evidence only three days later, that the world was rather on the side of the French and the Germans. This was also the pattern visible in other presentations at Munich, when the

Russian, Indian, and Iranian speakers voiced support for the more differentiated Franco-German position than for the simplistic Anglo-American position.

The position of President George Bush was, in any case, further eroded by the boasting of Sen. Joseph Lieberman's (D-Conn.), who remarked at Munich that the present American policy on Iraq was actually based on a joint initiative by McCain and himself—the Iraq Liberation Act: “You might therefore say that when it comes to Iraq, President Bush is just enforcing the McCain-Lieberman policy.”

Iranians Urge Dialogue of Civilizations

Iran's first-ever invited speaker at Munich, Deputy Foreign Minister Gholamali Khoshroo, said on Feb. 9 that the West has been wrong to see the events of Sept. 11 as an attack by Islam on America as the leading power of the West. There still is an inaccurate Western concept of Islam, of what it means in culture, civilization, society, Koshroo said. Iran, for its part, is deeply concerned about the militarization of international security policies since Sept. 11, as it is about the increased presence of foreign troops in the Persian Gulf region and Afghanistan. And although it seems that an Iraq war is likely, Iran still holds that war must be prevented.

As victims of Iraqi chemical weapons during the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran War, the Iranians might generally be believed to have a just motive for a war of revenge against Baghdad; but Khoshroo stressed that Iran is against such a war. It also opposes a forced regime change in Baghdad, because of the impact it would have on the humanitarian situation of the civilian population inside Iraq, on the neighboring countries, and on global crude oil prices. It has gone largely unnoticed, Koshroo said, that not only Iran, but the other states in the Persian Gulf, in January officially voiced their opposition to a war. When discussing the situation of Iraq, its immediate neighbors must be consulted, Khoshroo urged.

Before the Iranian diplomat, Brajeesh Mishra, India's national security advisor, had criticized the present, Western obsession with al-Qaeda, which he said was preventing a broader discussion about other, perhaps more dangerous aspects of global terrorism. The “coalition against terrorism” which the United States rallied after Sept. 11, 2001, is not qualified to deal with the problem in a competent way, as it “includes states that are part of the problem,” Mishra said. He reiterated India's proposal for an international United Nations charter against terrorism—which has, as Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov confirmed at the Munich conference, the official support of the Russian government.

And the representative of China, Gen. Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of the Chinese general staff, urged the West to overcome double standards and cooperate in the formulation of a more precise definition of, and more efficient fight against, the plague of terrorism in all its variants.

Eurasia, apparently, does not share the Rumsfeld approach to military affairs and security.