

Bonds With France Put Perle in a Neo-Con Rage

by Rainer Apel

A heated verbal confrontation between U.S. defense advisor Richard Perle and former French Navy commander Adm. Jacques Lanxade was among the spectacular events at the annual *Welt am Sonntag* Security Policy Forum, held in Berlin during the first days of November. In his tour of Europe, the neo-conservative point-man Perle, known in Washington as the “Prince of Darkness,” was trying to isolate France and pull other Europeans, especially Germans, back to the side of the Washington war-party.

At the surface, the dispute was over anti-French remarks which Perle had made to that forum on Nov. 2. There, he said: “We should not fool ourselves: There are members in our alliance that really believe that Europe should be positioned as counterweight to the U.S.A. Chirac, for example, Dominique de Villepin, for example. And others in Europe think alike, too, it seems. That has to be clarified in Europe. Europe has to decide whether it wants to become a counterweight or remain an ally. These two exclude each other.”

Perle went further, dictating to Germany: “If Germany supports the French concept, it is the end of NATO. If, however, Germany realizes that Europe should not be a counterweight to the U.S.A.—that the community of interests and values is so important that a European counterweight were the last thing we would want—it would be the beginning of a new NATO. Too many in Europe, too many Germans, too many French and others believe that the Franco-German relationship is crucial for peace. And that the essence of that relationship is agreements between governments, in the last instance. I think that is a misinterpretation of history. Peace on this continent is not secured by talks between Chirac and Schröder—not by agreements between these two either—but by millions of Germans electing their government in a democratic way.” This was an unmistakable neo-con “suggestion” of a new, Christian Democratic government in Germany.

Perle’s attacks against the diplomacy of Chirac and Schröder and his reference to the presumably insurgent German electorate, indicate that a new round of destabilizations of France and Germany is up. This may come through sudden “scandals” and related incidents, hitting leading figures of their political establishments.

The Perle tirades against the Franco-German alliance, re-

peated in later events elsewhere in Europe, are, as Europeans point out, aimed less against what Chirac and Schröder are doing right now, than what they may do in the near and medium-term future. A front-page story in the leading French daily *Le Monde* of Nov. 12, on the potential of a Franco-German union, hinted at some aspects of what is being discussed between Paris and Berlin already. In particular, *Le Monde* reported a recent speech by French Foreign Minister De Villepin at the exclusive policy-debating club in Paris called In Real Time, in which he spoke of a “unique historical challenge that we have no right to miss,” in making “essential” steps toward a new level of Franco-German cooperation.

French Nuclear Umbrella Over Germany?

Two main motives were cited by *Le Monde* as being behind this intensification of talks between Paris and Berlin: “the Iraqi crisis, and the consciousness that the two countries have to face the same economic and social problems. The massive rallying of the Central European countries to the United States, against Paris and Berlin, confirmed that the [EU] enlargement [to 25 nations] would not be exactly a party.” The areas dominating the upgraded Franco-German agenda also prominently include defense, the newspaper reported. This seems to confirm what insiders have pointed to in recent weeks, namely that future defense cooperation between Paris and Berlin may include the revolutionary step of France extending its nuclear deterrence umbrella over Germany.

There have also been leaks about a recent memorandum jointly authored by young diplomats of France and Germany, said to outline the “synergetic effects” of a much-enhanced cooperation between Paris and Berlin in defense, foreign policy, economic, and research policies. Influential groups in both countries are working on the next steps, from the anti-Iraq War links towards a real, positively-defined alliance. That would have an impact on European affairs, as indicated by the decision of the EU defense ministers on Nov. 17, to establish a common agency for the coordination of military-industrial projects, including the supply of Europe’s armies with weapons and other equipment made in Europe.

Sources call attention to two strategic orientations that Paris and Berlin are pursuing. Avoiding an open conflict with the Bush Administration, contacts will be intensified to circles in the United States that maintain the claim for a sole super-power role globally, but oppose an imperialistic orientation based on pre-emptive wars. Second, a leading role for France and Germany in the ongoing European integration will be sought, centered on crucial policy areas such as economics, foreign affairs, and defense; while encouraging other European countries to contribute and join. This approach is described with the term, “Europe of the different speeds.”

This Franco-German strategy implies a reassertion of Europe against neo-con designs of the Bush Administration; exactly what keeps raising the temper of people like Perle.