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## NATO Alliance

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# Apel: 'Don't play into Moscow's hands'

by George Gregory, Bonn Bureau Chief

"This Wehrkunde meeting is taking place amid increasing tensions in the Western alliance," said West German Defense Minister Hans Apel in his opening address to the annual meeting of the private military association Wehrkunde in Munich the weekend of Feb. 13. "Are we really agreed on future orientations of our policy toward Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union?"

Do we have common, shared answers on how to meet the tremendous economic and social challenges of our own nations, as well as worldwide?"

Apel's pointed remarks undoubtedly surprised a number of persons in the American delegation. His evaluation of strategic realities is clearly even harsher than that of U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, who arrived in a "Bonn-bashing" mood. Senator Tower's parrot-like claim that the West German government is suffering from "nostalgia for détente," and Senator Glenn's glowering that the U.S. Senate might well vote to withdraw American forces from Europe if "Europe," which always means West Germany, doesn't do "more" for its own defense, was far from the mark if they expected to impress Apel.

The West German Defense Minister was perfectly willing to engage in a little quid pro quo. Europe do "more"? Fine, said Apel. But then why don't the Americans realize that their high interest rates have seriously depleted Europe's economic resources? You would like us to reallocate resources to "conventional armament" buildup? You would like us to do so, as Mr. Weinberger stipulated and NATO General Rogers has stipulated, at a 4 percent annual rate of defense increase, instead of the current guideline of 3 percent? Very well, said Apel. "Then, let us also discuss the issue of U.S. universal military training" [the draft].

Apel might also have mentioned the 22,000-man reduction in British NATO forces slated for 1982, as well as broad cuts in British bomber and naval fleets. But then, no one really expects the British, whose industry has hit a 15-year low and is still sinking, to field a serious military force.

Apel laid out a number of basic principles of the power equation. "Policy toward Eastern Europe can neither be aimed at supporting the power bloc of the

Soviet Union, settling for the status quo, nor can it be aimed at overthrowing that power bloc, because the result would be war. . . . We want to carry out a policy which gets us further in Europe, which overcomes the status quo, which does not play into the hands of the hawks in Moscow."

The pointed finger could hardly be missed. The question asked of those who aimed to "overthrow the Soviet power bloc," those who want a showdown, was just whom the showdown is supposed to be directed at: the Soviets or Bonn? The effect of confronting Bonn is that the Soviets are going to get the idea that the alliance is willing "to allow Western Europe to become a power vacuum," said Apel. It was odd that Senator Tower, who was wise enough last year to acknowledge the damage done to Western military capabilities by America's high interest rates, this year closed his eyes tight on that issue.

### 'If you make yourself a sheep'

Hans Apel made the reply that unilateral disarmament is obviously ridiculous. But just as obvious is that economic debilitation resulting from Paul Volcker's interest rates is just as much unilateral disarmament as retiring all armed forces and junking strategic capabilities. Quoting a Russian proverb, Apel said: "If you make yourself into a sheep, you will always find a wolf in your neighborhood."

Word is out that the Weinberger crowd thinks the United States ought to steer toward autarchy—"Fortress America." Given the state of the U.S. economy, and the world economy thanks to U.S. credit policy, as well as U.S. military capabilities, that is more than ridiculous in the eyes of the tougher Europeans. "Those who put the ties between North America and Western Europe into question not only endanger the Western Alliance," said Bonn's defense minister. "They thereby increase the danger of war. . . . National egotism by no means determines our policy. . . . Détente is part of a comprehensive Western strategy, not merely derived from German interests. Without the European pillar of detente policy, things would look much worse in other parts of the world than they already do."

As for those "other parts of the world," the Third World, stability and Western interests there are "primarily a political issue in any case, not solely a military issue." For Bonn, said Apel, "an extension of NATO territory is not up for discussion." Yet he went further: for the West as a whole, "the Third World is not a theater of our foreign policy."

"There is no doubt that the Soviet threat has increased more rapidly than the military answer to it from the Western side," but this is not something Bonn has not realized. "We are not wanderers between the worlds—our policies remain constant, reliable and calculable," he concluded.