

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Can Germany help stop war?

Last-minute peace feelers from the federal parliament necessarily have centered on economic development.

On the eve of the Jan. 9 meeting in Geneva between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, there was already hectic activity by European diplomatic circles, mainly in Paris and Bonn, to try to control the damage and launch an emergency Euro-Arab effort to prevent the outbreak of war at the last minute. As we go to press just after that failed meeting, diplomatic efforts are continuing.

The Germans were concerned that a failure of diplomatic talks not only meant war in the Gulf, but would be exploited by those in Moscow who wanted to return the Soviet Union to Stalinist-authoritarian rule.

The German and French initiatives called for Western concessions which could be met by concessions from Iraq and start to defuse the immediate war danger. More than even France, Germany—having no past as a colonial power in the Mideast—can contribute to peace in that region.

On Jan. 8, Hans Stercken, chairman of the foreign affairs commission of the German parliament and a senior member of the German-Arab Society, proposed a verifiable timetable for an Iraqi troop withdrawal from Kuwait in stages. Once the withdrawal process was begun, one could then talk, he said, about an agreement on objectives of Baghdad policy, such as a “division of the [Rumaila] oil field that is disputed between Iraq and Kuwait . . . but can definitely not be maintained in its present condition” or “the two disputed islands [Bubiyan and Warbah] that Iraq claims, not without

justification.”

The Stercken proposal, resembling the one made before by Michel Vauzelle, the chairman of the foreign affairs commission of the French Parliament, had the merit of addressing the need for economic assistance to the Mideast: “We should examine whether the European Community couldn’t give structural aid to the entire Gulf region,” Stercken recommended.

“The war may be prevented now, but this alone won’t bring peace, neither in the Gulf, nor anywhere else in the Mideast,” said an Arabist who is on the board of advisers to the German government, in a discussion with *EIR* before Baker and Aziz met.

“War,” he warned, “could break out over at least a hundred other reasons in the course of the next years. The entire region is still very far from being stable.” Without Europe offering something else than military threats, the Arabs, even the most moderate, would not feel attracted by a European peace initiative, the Arabist said.

Peace and stability basically mean development of industry and agriculture in tandem with social stability—the perspective of mutual progress on the Arab and the Israeli side in a reliable framework of economic cooperation.

It is in this domain, economic development, that the Europeans should play a role. Especially Germany with its industrial weight can do a lot. Any attempt to act like the French, who deployed troops next to the Americans, though separate from them, in

the Gulf, was doomed to failure from the outset of troop deployments in August.

Without a single shot being fired in the Gulf, the international embargo had hurt badly not only Iraq, but also the other Arab countries that joined the embargo. The stream of several million refugees—mostly guest workers employed on jobs in the Kuwaiti economy—calls for an input of several billion dollars to stabilize that aspect of the Gulf crisis.

The lack of Western aid for the refugees, except certain German-funded relief programs, brought the Egyptian and Jordanian economies close to collapse. In Turkey, the absence of foreign aid added to the economic recession and provoked a wave of protest among workers in the streets, against the austerity and pro-Bush policy of the government.

Germany, France, and other European nations must place something attractive on the negotiation tables to convince the hostile powers in that region that a perspective of peace and mutual progress is feasible—in the domain of water management, for example. The shortage of clean water will pose a big problem for Israel in the near future. Without water, the Mideastern deserts will produce neither food nor comfort for human beings—no matter whether they are Arabs or Israelis.

With 1 million immigrants to Israel from the Soviet Union expected in the next two years, the problem will get much worse. There may be “water wars” in the region then over the control of the Jordan River or the Euphrates.

The Third World ministries of Germany and Italy have small water development projects already in the planning stages or under construction in Jordan and Egypt. More of that can, and should be done.