

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Worries about stability in the East

*Defense and military officials are losing confidence in the ability of politicians to handle new crises.*

A presentation given at a defense policy event in Wiesbaden on Jan. 11 highlighted the erosion of confidence in the politicians among military officials in Germany. Gen. Dieter Clauss, formerly at the staff of NATO's Strategic Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), said that the time when the "experts," based on the seeming "stability" and calculability of the Cold War period with its clearly defined differences between East and West, were able to produce reliable analyses on the strategic situation, is definitely over.

The deterioration of "expert" analyses has left the politicians, who make decisions on defense issues, unprepared to deal with the new situation, and a dangerous vacuum has been created, Clauss warned.

At the moment, one might argue that the Russian Armed Forces might be too absorbed in the crisis in Russia to pose a threat to NATO, but nobody could tell now what Russia's military power will look like in five years, Clauss said. In 1917, when the czarist armies dissolved, nobody imagined that only a few years later, the Red Army would knock on the city gates of Warsaw, threatening to storm the Polish capital.

And with Yeltsin reportedly seriously ill, that was one more big question mark over Russia and the future of its Armed Forces and foreign policy. One could not even make forecasts about the near future in the West, Clauss said. It is as uncertain whether the current government in Bonn will be reelected in October as it is proba-

ble that Britain's Prime Minister John Major will not survive the ongoing scandals. Nor could one predict what France would look like at the end of this year, because President François Mitterrand is in such bad health.

The alarming thing is that the political elites do not seem to take these assessments seriously, nor will they even think a few years ahead. For the armed forces, especially those in a country so exposed to the highly unstable East as Germany, this is an unprecedented situation. The German Army does not yet know what its budget will be for this year; commanders don't know yet whether the money will be there to pay the new recruits, Clauss stated.

The German military has signalled its deep discontent before, but the results of the Russian elections on Dec. 12, and the increasing aggressiveness of leading representatives of Russian politics in recent weeks, has led the discontent among the military to boil over. Before, it had been considered inopportune and a violation of "rules of conduct" to make one's discontent public. Concern had been voiced behind closed doors and before select defense policy audiences, but the military's protest against Bonn's inaction has now become open.

The first senior military spokesman to break the institutional silence on defense matters after the shock of the Russian elections, was Defense Minister Volker Rühle. In an internal government document dating from before Christmas but leaked to the media at year's end, he warned against a

further weakening of national defense at a time when "uncertainties and the crisis potential in our close and broader neighborhood" provided "reason for grave concern and unrest."

"Nobody would cancel his fire insurance when there hasn't been a fire for a long time," Rühle wrote, pointing out that without a "substantial German contribution," it would be impossible to think of a "Europe that is capable of action in military terms if need be."

The attack on Bonn became even more direct in a statement Dec. 28 by Peter Würzbach, the former assistant defense minister, who charged Chancellor Helmut Kohl with "irresponsible conduct" for allowing the Finance Ministry to plan new defense budget cuts in an increasingly tense strategic situation. This, he indicated, would send the message that Germany is not willing to defend itself.

Kohl's spokesman, Dieter Vogel, felt compelled to denounce Würzbach as a man "who tends to make headlines by eccentric statements."

The next blow against Kohl's inaction came Dec. 30, when the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a summary of critical remarks made by Willy Wimmer, the assistant defense minister. Wimmer said he felt highly alarmed at the neglect for security questions shown by the cabinet. There has yet to be a cabinet mandate for an in-depth assessment to determine whether Russia is on its way to becoming a "partner" of the West, or whether a new Cold War-style confrontation is on the agenda, he warned.

So far, politicians have responded with the discredited line: "We trust Yeltsin; don't dramatize the situation." So far, the political establishment in Bonn has shown itself unprepared to deal with the crisis. For the turbulent year which 1994 will become, this is a bad omen.