

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

The decline of geopolitics

Closer U.S.-German ties signal that the "special relationship" between Britain and the U.S. is unraveling.

The atmosphere of the U.S.-German consultations during early February showed a cordiality between a U.S. President and a German chancellor that is unprecedented in recent history.

German news correspondents accompanying Chancellor Helmut Kohl to the U.S. reported that while Clinton is getting along well with the German, he is having enormous problems in even establishing minimal good relations with the two other important European leaders, British Prime Minister John Major and French President François Mitterrand.

"In Washington D.C., Clinton said once again that Germany is the most important American partner in Europe," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* daily wrote on Feb. 2. "Personal aspects are involved as well: Clinton has more difficulties dealing with France's President Mitterrand, and he apparently has mixed feelings when thinking about British Prime Minister Major."

In view of the historical enmity that still has a negative impact on relations among the big European states (as shown by massive British obstruction of the German unification process in 1989-90), the existence of good relations with the United States is a lifeline for the present German state, which is faced with potential new threats from the big power in the East, Russia, and therefore urgently needs the support of America.

The remoralizing effect the talks with Clinton had upon Chancellor Kohl, became evident on the occasion of the Feb. 4-6, Conference on Securi-

ty in Munich, sponsored by the military journal *Wehrkunde*. This traditional event, which gathers the top echelon of western defense and foreign policymakers, showed a combative Kohl, who at long last called into question some shibboleths of current western policy.

Kohl attacked the school of predominantly British-spawned geopolitics, which says one should not invest a single dollar into the Russian reforms because, allegedly, Russia is doomed to end up in chaos. Kohl called this kind of Russia "expertise" irresponsible, and even a "criminal view in light of all the terrible things that have happened in this troublesome century."

Kohl said the argument that Russians, because of their anarchic national character, could never be democratic or "western," reminded him of those who argued after the last world war that U.S. investment then into the new, postwar German democracy would fail because the national character of the Germans was allegedly "authoritarian" and therefore, undemocratic.

What makes things even worse today, Kohl said, is that in the event that the Russian reforms fail, those very same experts who now argue against western support for Russia, will then "be the first to declare: 'See, we told you so; it simply had to fail.'"

Kohl also attacked the role of "those experts from Harvard" who are trying to dictate terms to the Russians. He warned of a backlash: "The Russians have a fine memory. They still recall the pilgrimage of western ex-

perts to Moscow, of experts who showed the most servile behavior toward the regime then, who came in crowds for the funeral of Andropov. And now the same experts are coming back to Moscow, telling the Russians what to do and what not to do. Acting like those experts from Heidelberg and Harvard violates the dignity and feelings of the Russians, and it will have the most severe political consequences one day."

As far as the role of Vladimir Zhirinovsky and his backers in the Russian military was concerned, Kohl said "such views shouldn't be discarded as views of a clown," since they pose a threat to peace of the kind that Hitler already posed in the early 1920s when nobody wanted to take him seriously. "The question whether there'll be war or peace in the 21st century has not been answered yet," Kohl said, warning that the complacency dominating in the West now, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and with all those agreements signed with Yeltsin, could soon turn into a psychological trap. He recalled the situation in 1925, when the German and French foreign ministers, Stresemann and Briand, signed the Locarno Treaty. Nobody thought then that there would ever be war again between France and Germany, and nobody was aware how fragile peace was. But eight years later, Hitler took power in Germany; another six years after that, war raged between France and Germany again.

Another *Wehrkunde* speaker, William Perry, the new U.S. secretary of defense, broached the same issue, arguing that the end of the Cold War must not lead into complacency: "In light of all the turbulences in Russia," Perry said, "we have reason to fear a new nightmare of the dark in Europe if reforms fail and reaction sets in. And reason to take the kind of active measures the nations of the '30s failed to take."