

# The plutonium scandals: A 'third force' is creating German-Russian tension

by Rainer Apel

Remarks in Moscow on Aug. 23 by Vladimir Klimenko, a senior national security adviser to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, are certain to be a bombshell against London-centered networks of geopolitical propagandists and their fellow-travellers in the United States and western Europe. A "third force," Klimenko charged in an interview with Interfax news agency, is at work to create an artificial nuclear safety alert targeting Russia and Germany. Their intent, he said, is to "re-build the Berlin Wall between both states. . . . Not all states—and consequently, their secret intelligence agencies—want a strengthening of friendly relations between Russia and Germany."

Klimenko also charged that foreign interests were attempting to use the recent, staged plutonium-smuggling incidents to propagate international controls over Russia's nuclear technology complex, especially the military part of it.

Klimenko did not name a particular western country as being behind that "third force," but informed sources in Moscow have told *EIR* that there is awareness in Russia about the role British politics and operations play to undermine the sovereignty of Russia, and against Germany's cooperation with the Russians.

Klimenko's remarks came at the conclusion of three days of high-level talks in Moscow between Russian and German intelligence officials, and a few days before another visit to Germany by Yeltsin. Now, one has to recall the vitriolic reactions in certain media to the proposal Yeltsin made during his mid-June trip to Germany about Russo-German cooperation in joint railroad and other infrastructure projects linking the capitals of both countries. In what must have worked upon British geopoliticians' minds like the proverbial red flag to the bull, Yeltsin called for a project for a high-speed rail line between Moscow and Berlin. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's positive and immediate response to that proposal, as well as his frequent references in the weeks following that meeting with Yeltsin to the importance of deepening Russo-German relations, signalled that the Aug. 31 meeting between the German chancellor and the Russian President in Weimar, at the official farewell ceremony for the last Russian troops leaving the eastern part of Germany after 49 years of occupation, was certain to become a highly symbolic event in that strategic perspective.

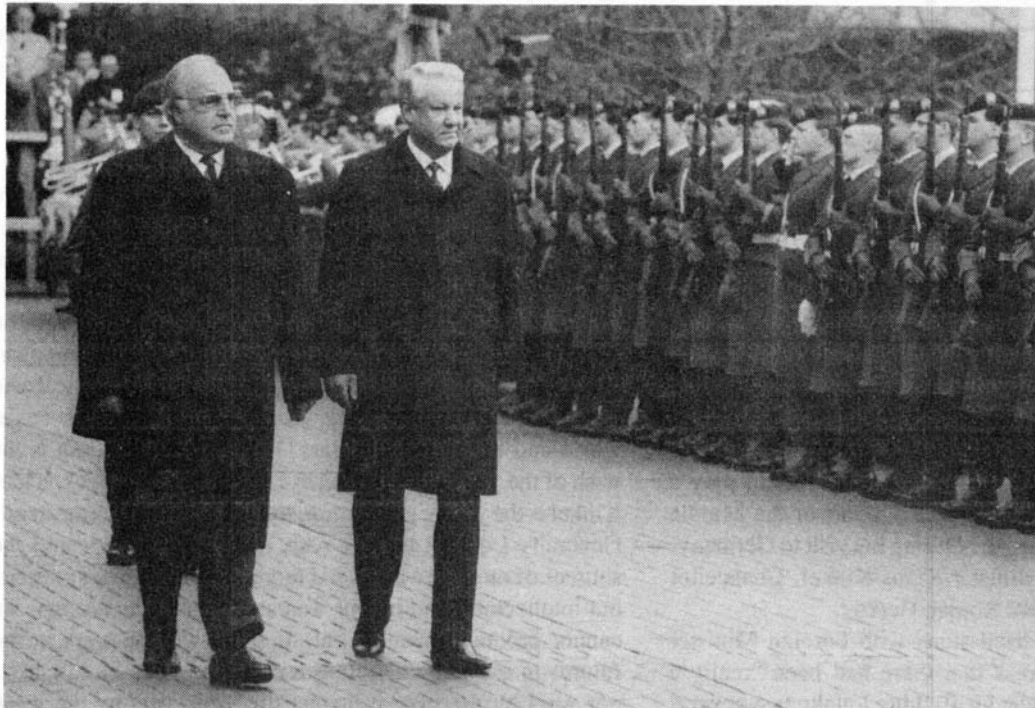
The date is very symbolic because, even more than the

fall of the Berlin Wall, it signifies that the wartime and post-war era is over and that, as diplomats used to put it, "a new chapter in the book of mutual relations can be opened." Seen against the background of almost 100 years of British-manipulated enmity between Russians and Germans, the strategic constellation of the summer of 1994 is definitely the best thing that has occurred in Russo-German relations since the 1890s. Indeed, as President Bill Clinton put it in his historic July 12 address at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, "everything is possible" now between Berlin and Moscow, where little has been possible during the preceding century. Furthermore, this perspective has the explicit backing of the U.S. administration and, to a large extent, also of the French government. This is the very constellation that British geopoliticians have traditionally tried to sabotage. It is only consequential, therefore, that Britain's response is "not friendly," to put it mildly.

## Where's the evidence?

It is a strange coincidence that the most recent series of plutonium-smuggling incidents occurred on German soil exclusively; that in all cases, speculation about the "Russian origin" of the plutonium or other radiating substances have been circulated by the media; that massive efforts have been launched by the media in Germany, Russia, and internationally to provoke politicians and experts of all sides into evaluations and commentaries on those reports—without any concrete evidence for the charges ever presented by anybody. It is worth noting that Russian spokesmen have been relatively cautious in this situation, refraining from exchanging charges or counter-charges with the Germans, in spite of the fact that the spectacular Aug. 10 plutonium seizure at the Munich international airport had been staged by German investigators who arranged a "sting" operation between Moscow and Munich behind the back of Russian authorities.

The incident, which involved the police search of a civilian airliner at the Munich airport which had Valentin Sidorenko, the deputy Russian cabinet minister for atomic energy, on board, had the potential for a major diplomatic crisis between Bonn and Moscow. This explains why Chancellor Kohl got on the phone with President Yeltsin right away to tone the affair down and arrange a special meeting of German and Russian security and intelligence experts in the Russian



*Chancellor Helmut Kohl (left) and President Boris Yeltsin review Bundeswehr troops in Bonn, November 1991. When a scandal erupted over the discovery in Germany of smuggled plutonium that was supposedly of Russian origin, Kohl hastened to contact Yeltsin to arrange for a meeting of experts, to clarify the matter and prevent it from leading to a political explosion.*

capital for Aug. 20-22. The German delegation was led by Bernd Schmidbauer, Chancellor Kohl's chief coordinator of secret intelligence affairs, and included the heads of the German counterespionage unit as well as of the foreign intelligence agency, among other senior experts.

### **Protecting good relations**

Sergei Stepashin, the president of the Russian intelligence agency FSK, in an aside during remarks to press on Aug. 21 after the first round of talks with the German delegation, sent an important signal in respect to Russia's relations to Germany. The purpose of these talks, Stepashin said, is to "underline the common interest in not having any irritations overshadow the upcoming visit of President Yeltsin to Germany."

An eight-point catalogue of priority measures concerning steps to improve nuclear safety in Russia, as well as making cooperation against organized crime, espionage, and sabotage in the sphere of nuclear technology more efficient on both sides, was agreed upon at the Russo-German meeting of experts. Both sides agreed that the full text of that paper was to be personally reviewed by Kohl and Yeltsin before being published. Moreover, the Germans and Russians resolved that consultations on related matters would be established, with meetings of officials and experts on a high level to be on a regular basis.

German delegation leader Schmidbauer called the Moscow talks a "very positive and fruitful event," and signalled that he was satisfied with the results. The German delegation emphasized that the alleged "Russian origin" of the various plutonium seizures of the past weeks was not sufficiently

traceable at this point, and that more data would still have to be collected before any conclusions could be drawn. Both sides would also investigate, it was hinted, why all of the spectacular plutonium-related incidents of the past week occurred on German soil, what the background to that striking pattern was, and in whose interest it was to have these things going on in Germany.

Klimenko's remarks may be a hint as to the direction in which these investigations will go. Furthermore, of particular interest in respect to Russo-German cooperation is the fact that at the conclusion of his Moscow talks, Schmidbauer met with Yevgeni Primakov, his Russian counterpart and President Yeltsin's chief coordinator of foreign intelligence affairs. It has not been made known what exactly the two discussed, but Primakov's spokesman leaked to the press—a week before the important Aug. 31 Weimar summit between Kohl and Yeltsin—that the two had discussed a broad range of international issues, which made clear that they had more than just the plutonium issue on their agenda.

London-centered geopoliticians may draw their own conclusions from that, one being that this round of staged scandals discrediting Germany and Russia did not work as originally intended.

The fact that deputy cabinet minister Sidorenko, who was on that so-called "plutonium plane" that was searched at the Munich airport, signed two agreements on Russo-German cooperation in the civilian nuclear technology sector in spite of the trouble he met on his arrival there, may indicate that, at the moment, relations between Russia and Germany are stable enough to shake off provocations attempted by "third forces."