

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### Trying to escape from the trap

*Germans are in a race against time to save the Balkans peace effort from collapse.*

**I**t was an impressive scene on May 12: At a press conference in Beijing, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder supported the Chinese government's call for a thorough investigation of the May 7 NATO bombing attack on China's Embassy in Belgrade.

Schröder thus became the second NATO head of government, with Italy's Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, to voice discontent with the flaky explanations that NATO military leaders and some alliance member governments, led by the British, have so far given for the incident.

Before Schröder left for Beijing on May 11, he spoke with D'Alema, and received NATO Secretary General Javier Solana in Bonn, to query him on the embassy bombing. Solana was unable to give a convincing explanation, to Schröder's total dissatisfaction. Schröder was angry, and he had a reason: Intensified diplomacy by the Germans, in cooperation with Italian, French, Swedish, and UN efforts, and with President Clinton and his special envoy, Strobe Talbott, had finally succeeded in "pulling the Russians back into the boat": Russia was a signatory of the Bonn resolution on Kosovo, which was presented by the Group of Eight foreign ministers on May 6. This resolution officially mandated that Schröder use his scheduled May 12-15 visit to inform the Chinese government of the G-8 consultations. This was an important signal, because China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, but not of the G-8.

Prospects for Schröder's talks in Beijing were good—on May 6. But the day after, NATO aircraft bombed the

Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the diplomatic mission of the one country that was just going to get integrated in the peacemaking diplomacy on Kosovo. For the Germans, this was a political catastrophe of the first dimension: Schröder's three-day trip to China was called off and replaced by a half-day visit for crisis talks on the embassy incident and Kosovo. Senior German government officials were angry. One of them exploded in front of journalists on May 8, saying, "We have just succeeded in pulling the Russians back into the boat, and now, we are throwing the Chinese into the water. . . . It's like starting all over again." By May 8, the G-8 resolution on peace in the Balkans, passed in Bonn on May 6, seemed to be merely a piece of paper.

On May 10, it became clear that the Chinese would at least meet Schröder on May 12, to discuss the matter. The Chancellor had sent a personal telegram of condolences for the embassy bombing incident to China on May 8, urging the Chinese to keep the door open to dialogue.

In his talks in Beijing with President Jiang Zemin, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, and Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, Schröder formally apologized for the embassy bombing, in the name of Germany "being a member of NATO and thereby, co-responsible for this tragedy." He told the Chinese that he shared their view that apologies would not suffice, that a thorough probe of the affair had to be conducted, and that consequences had to be drawn, as soon as the results of this probe had been publicized. The Chancellor's gesture was well received by the Chinese, but they also told him that

unless NATO halted its air war, peace talks would lead nowhere.

The message came across, it seems. There is also awareness on the Chinese side that in the NATO air war, there are pushers, such as the British government, and there are others, such as the Germans, that are being pushed. As a member of NATO, Germany is not being spared Chinese criticism over the air war, but it is acknowledged in Beijing that the Germans are not in the forefront of this war on Serbia. For example, former Chinese ambassador to Bonn Mei Zhaorong had harsh words against NATO policy, in a May 11 interview with the Berlin daily *Tageszeitung*. "But I cannot tell whether inside NATO, there is a radical and a peaceful group, which are fighting each other," he said.

Mei Zhaorong is said to be close to Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, in whose name he delivered a personal message to the international Wehrkunde security conference in Munich in February (see *EIR*, Feb. 26, p. 38). At that conference, Mei, along with the Russian and Indian speakers, warned against the global-strategic consequences of the new NATO doctrine of combat against so-called "rogue nations." The weeks since have shown some of those consequences, in the global frictions emerging over the Kosovo issue.

If the German government is taking steps to distance itself from NATO conduct in the Balkans, it will be welcomed not only in China, but also in Germany. The word was out in Bonn on May 12, that after his return from Beijing, Schröder intends to find out who in NATO controls the targetting in the air war, and who is to blame for the embassy catastrophe. German diplomats are also engaged in efforts to convince NATO to halt the air raids, at least for 24 hours, to see whether some concrete progress toward peace could be made.