

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

German diplomacy pays off

Germany's cease-fire diplomacy has been facing off against British war-mongering.

With the resolution passed by the Group of Eight (G-7 plus Russia) foreign ministers in Cologne on June 8, the diplomatic framework has been established for an end to Balkan hostilities, a withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo, and the stationing of an international peacekeeping force—mandated by the United Nations—in Kosovo, which would allow the safe return of almost 1 million refugees. All of this was within reach as of this writing.

Much of the diplomacy that contributed to the opportunities for peace after more than 10 weeks of NATO's air war on the Serbs, centered around the role of the German government. In retrospect, the destruction of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by NATO bombs on May 7, was a watershed: The Germans then decided to intensify their efforts to end the war as soon as possible, and to ensure that it would not escalate even further.

While not officially breaking with NATO over the attack on China's Embassy, or over the air war, the Germans intensified diplomatic contacts with Russia and China to achieve a cease-fire. During his May 12, one-day visit to China, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder publicly apologized for the embassy bombing, and called for a thorough investigation of the incident and for a review of NATO decision-making structures. Schröder also emphasized in Beijing, that he hoped that U.S.-Chinese relations would not suffer from the embassy bombing. Numerous articles have since appeared in the Chinese press, addressing the fact that NATO is split over the Kosovo

issue, that there are hawks and non-hawks.

On the eve of the G-8 foreign ministers resolution, the director of political affairs at the German Foreign Ministry, Gunter Pleuger, stayed in Beijing for two days of talks. His discussion partners had pointed out to him that Germany's active role in getting China involved in the cease-fire process, was praised highly by the Chinese. There are also reports by diplomatic sources that among the 19 NATO member-nations, Germany receives the best rating among the Chinese, while Britain and its war-mongering government receives the worst. If China, one of the UN Security Council's five permanent members, supports the G-8 formula, it is also due to the intense diplomatic communication between Germany and China over the last few weeks.

There is also a Western component in this cease-fire diplomacy: The White House has chosen to work through Bonn, and its good relations with Moscow and Beijing, to restore a strategic dialogue among the United States, Russia, and China. This has proceeded, to the embarrassment of the war-mongers in Britain. The British daily the *Guardian* on June 5 revealed that in a direct way. It reported that Clinton, from the outset of the air war, had never been in favor of a ground invasion of Kosovo, and that most recently, he had even become "more, and not less, hostile to a land operation in Kosovo."

"For the first half of the Kosovo conflict, Mr. Clinton's primary European ally and confidant was [Prime Minister] Tony Blair," the *Guardian*

wrote. "But after the NATO summit in late April, the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, became increasingly influential. In the final weeks of the conflict, U.S. policy has been more closely calibrated toward German caution than British belligerence. German diplomatic sources in the U.S. have sometimes had a more realistic take on U.S. intentions than their British counterparts."

White House support enabled the German government to split from the pro-war course of Blair, and to openly promote diplomatic efforts for a cease-fire in the Balkans, while the British kept calling for a ground war. Without that crucial backing from the White House, Schröder certainly would not have said what he said in an exclusive interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel* on June 7. As if he had anticipated that Britain's Gen. Sir Michael Jackson would break off the military talks between NATO and the Serbs on a foul pretext, on June 7, which delayed the moves toward a cease-fire by several days, Schröder stressed that the peace talks had to be conducted with maximum speed, so that no time gaps emerged: "In such gaps, things may always happen that endanger the entire process," he warned.

Schröder urged a review of NATO decision-making structures after the end of the air war. "It cannot be contested, that there have been incidents that are reason enough for a review—just take the destruction of the Chinese Embassy," he said.

Such steps would inevitably put the Germans into a fierce fight with the British and their officers in the NATO command structure, who have played a determining role in NATO disasters over recent weeks. Some people in London will not like that review. But others, in Beijing and at the White House, certainly will.