

Bush, Schröder, Keep Disagreements Quiet

by Rainer Apel

Despite German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's open criticism of Bush Administration policies at the Feb. 11-13 "Wehrkunde" conference on Security Policy in Munich (see *EIR*, Feb. 25), the Feb. 23 Bush-Schröder meeting in Mainz seemed to be a mutual public relations affair, aimed at creating the impression that in spite of the differences, there are also some points the two leaders and their administrations have in common. As the German Chancellor revealed at the concluding 20-minute press conference, he and Bush had agreed to no longer mention their differences in public, but

rather talk about subjects on which their views converged.

But these "common" points have very little substance, if their press conference is any indication. Schröder began with remarks on the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change, rather than with strategic matters like Iraq and Iran. And even here, Schröder said that the fundamental differences on the Kyoto issue remain, but that the United States and Germany will try to cooperate on a "pragmatic," or a "technical" level that would not touch any of the basic disagreements.

No Progress on Substantive Issues

On the Israel-Palestine problem, Schröder said the "Quartet," the joint diplomatic effort of the United States, the UN, Europe, and Russia to achieve a peace agreement between Palestine and Israel, was important, but that the U.S. role was decisive. On Iraq, Schröder said the differences over the war were a thing of the past, and that now the two leaders would look forward to securing a stable and democratic future for the Iraqi nation (which everyone knows is still far away).

And on Iran, the most recent bone of transatlantic content-

ion, Schröder said that there was agreement between the European Union (EU) and the United States that a diplomatic solution should be found, but he could not refer to any concrete sign that the Bush Administration would join the European diplomatic effort with Tehran. It was rather revealing when Bush, in his remarks at the press conference, called the EU talks with Iran a "viable effort," but described that diplomacy as "only just beginning," as if none of the talks between the EU and Iran during the past 12 months had ever taken place.

Although Bush and Schröder conferred for 90 minutes, 15 minutes longer than originally planned, it was obvious that there were not many common points of importance that either of the two leaders could reference at the press conference. It is doubtful that this summit was worth all the public relations efforts invested by both sides, to create the impression that "a new chapter has been opened in U.S.-German relations."



American military personnel pose with President Bush at the Wiesbaden, Germany, Army Airfield. Bush was in the area for a 90-minute meeting with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. No substantive results were announced.

Huge Security Measures

The disruptions caused by the one-day summit undermined any public-relations benefits: Security protection measures were unprecedented. The downtown area of Mainz around the Catholic Cathedral, usually a very crowded place, looked as empty as on a gray Sunday morning—even outside the inner summit protection zone, which was guarded by several hundred police and anti-riot units, not including the several hundred members of the Presidential security team that were on site.

The summit protection zone also covered a large part of the region, with highways blocked for most of the day, which forced numerous shops not only in Mainz as such, but also industrial firms in the wider region, like GM'S Opel car-making plant in Rüsselsheim, or the Dyckerhoff cement-producing plant in Wiesbaden, to shut down production the night before.

And about 15,000 residents, on both banks of the Rhine, were affected by special protection measures: No parking of cars or bicycles in the streets of the protection zone was allowed, no garbage containers could be out, people could not walk outside their homes without security checks; it was almost like security at an airport. As was evident in many media interviews, the population of the region—usually rather pro-American in its views because the two German states of Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate have been centers of U.S. military presence for 50 post-war years—was not amused at the Presidential visit.

Bush Screened from the Press

In an effort apparently to avoid any critical questions that might disrupt Bush's carefully scripted performance, only two questions each from German and American media were allowed at the press conference. A roundtable meeting that Bush had originally planned with Mainz citizens was called off the day before, because (according to leaks to the media) the German side could not ensure that no nasty questions would be posed to President Bush.

All in all, what can the German Chancellor claim as his summit achievements? The U.S. President and his team may be a bit more jovial in tone than in 2003 or 2004, but in terms of political substance, they have given no indication that the "meaningful transatlantic dialogue" which Bush paid lip service to at the press conference, would also occur in reality. There is no reliable sign that the future will hold fewer surprise proclamations by Bush, and real consultations instead, before the next U.S. decision to act. And the Germans cannot be certain they will be listened to at the Bush-run White House during the next major international crisis, in spite of Bush's saying in Mainz that "good relations with Europe mean good relations with Germany." Nice words, but meaningless ones, unless the Bush Administration really changes policy, from confrontation to cooperation.