

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Bush league pushes Germans east

Facing cuts in U.S. troop levels in the post-INF period, politicians here have quickly lost their nerve.

The political outcome of the trip by Christian Social Union leader Franz Josef Strauss to Moscow Dec. 28-30 is a momentary demoralization among German conservatives, and a panicked trend toward "political arrangements" with the Soviets. Strauss, the longtime "Mr. America" and key defense lobbyist in postwar West German politics, has joined the appeasers; his positive report on Mikhail Gorbachov earned him applause from even the left-wing Social Democrats, whose chairman, Hans-Jochen Vogel, hailed the event: "The Moscow trip of Strauss was the long-overdue capitulation of a former cold warrior."

The idea for the Moscow visit did not exclusively originate in Germany, nor in Strauss's mind. There is ample evidence that friends in the U.S. Eastern Establishment encouraged Strauss to go to Gorbachov.

There are telling hints that Henry Kissinger and other ranking figures of the "Bush league," out of concern that continued resistance against the INF agreement in Germany might ruin George Bush's plan for early INF ratification and, thus, also his presidential bid, told Strauss to support the vice president of the United States.

The token offered to Strauss was an arrangement to have him meet with Gorbachov personally, while his old rival in Bonn, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, is still waiting for his own chance to meet the Soviet leader. The other token, it is said, was the promise by Bush that in case of a U.S. troop pull-out from Germany, Strauss, "as an old friend of the Americans," would be consulted.

It seems that the chief arbiter between Bush and Strauss is Kissinger, who was already doing this kind of thing back in 1969, at the time of the first round of "détente." Then the newly appointed National Security Adviser to the President, Kissinger met Strauss in Munich, to seek his approval for a five-year plan for U.S. troop withdrawal from Germany after a strategic agreement with the Soviets on arms control in Europe.

As a former defense minister in Bonn (1956-62) and longtime leading representative of Germany's "military-industrial complex," Strauss was important for the U.S. Establishment. It is said that, even back then, Strauss did not give a clear "no" to Kissinger's offers.

Concerned circles around the U.S. publication *Strategic Review* found out about this 1969 affair and intended to publicize it. It was considered sensitive enough to have the NSC (Kissinger and Helmut Sonnenfeldt) and the State Department declare the matter "classified," banning its publication.

Kissinger went to Munich to see Strauss on Jan. 7. As in 1969, publicity on this encounter has been avoided. Collaborators of Strauss's in the German military have reported, however, that privately, he has been talking about the "coming withdrawal of U.S. troops," about "the unreliability of the Americans." He is also said to have criticized the United States for "not being born to a world leadership role," for having "missed their historic chance," and the like.

These statements put Strauss in the camp of German conservatives who

have been on the side of the Eastern Establishment as long as it appeared strong. Now that the Western giant is beginning to crumble under the progressive decadence of that Eastern Establishment, German conservatives are looking eastward, to options of accommodation with Moscow.

There are many longtime Strauss supporters among the German right-wing, who believe that "time is running out for deals with Moscow, and we should use our chance as long as the U.S. troops are still here." As a matter of fact, U.S. diplomats like Ambassador Richard Burt have encouraged German conservatives to "see opportunity in the disengagement of the Americans." The seeming opportunity, Germans are told, is that Germany could "rise from the longtime status of a client to one of a partner now."

Moscow is putting the same kind of propaganda into the ears of German conservatives. "For a long time, you in Bonn have been under the rule of the Americans and could not speak freely," the Kremlin keeps telling the conservatives, "but the INF Treaty offers chances for a new partnership between Germans and Soviets." This is what Gorbachov told Strauss in Moscow in their 160-minute meeting Dec. 29. Strauss, as he reported later, found Gorbachov "very convincing."

Well, Strauss has always had one weakness, namely, deep-rooted political pragmatism. He always checks which way the wind is blowing. With George Bush hinting at U.S. troop withdrawal, and Mikhail Gorbachov having the Red Army fully available, it does not take much to "convince" a staunch pragmatist like Strauss.

It may also work the other way around, of course: At the moment that the U.S. Senate were to reject the INF agreement, Strauss would be right back on the side of the rejectionists.