

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

New wars, but where?

At the 30th Munich Conference on Security Policy, European analysts took stock of the new U.S. administration.

The 30th Munich Conference on Security Policy Feb. 5-7 was the first major international gathering of 200 senior NATO defense experts and politicians since the inauguration of the new U.S. President. Naturally, everybody wanted to find out what course the new Clinton team would take in defense policy in global terms, and on the Balkans conflict specifically.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, a regular guest at these annual conferences, also attended this one, but was reluctant to tip his hand, since the new administration had not yet released its official policy on the Balkans (see article, p. 35). He only spoke at a closed event at the Munich Residence on Feb. 6, and on that occasion limited himself to generalities.

"NATO has its role to play in the former Yugoslavia and as a peacekeeper elsewhere," he said, urging alliance member governments to "summon the imagination and courage to redirect our alliance in this direction." This left ample room for speculation.

More forthcoming was Norman Sicisky of the Washington, D.C. Croton Institute, who addressed the conference on Feb. 7, introducing himself as a longtime close collaborator of Les Aspin on strategic and defense matters, who knew what the new boss of the Pentagon was thinking.

"The new world order is full of disorder and conflict," he said. "People and nations discuss peace dividends, but there is little peace."

Sicisky's presentation put the em-

phasis not on the question of whether to intervene in the Balkans and how, but on something else, which has to be seen in a broader context of ongoing U.S. and NATO strategic reviews.

Forecasting that the total number of U.S. military personnel would drop "from the 1.6 million projected under the Bush administration plan to about 1.4 million," he said that, concerning overseas deployments, "President Clinton's campaign proposal called for maintaining a forward presence in the Pacific and stationing from 75,000 to 100,000 troops in Europe."

Concerning Europe, he was "confident that we can maintain a credible, effective fighting force composed of a small army corps with the necessary level of air and naval support," a force designed in Clinton's preliminary five-year defense plan for missions quite different from the past mission of U.S. forces in Europe, that of deterring any Warsaw Pact attack on Europe.

"NATO's forward defense lines are no longer drawn along the Fulda Gap," Sicisky said. "They have been redrawn for now in the former Yugoslavia and are appearing in conflicts farther east. They have already been defended in the Kuwaiti desert and are being tested in Somalia. They are now and, I believe, for the foreseeable future, intertwined with the lines of global security and stability. We have to expand our concept of NATO's roles and missions and prepare together for operations in areas other than

those of the classic NATO-Warsaw Pact scenarios.

"We have to be ready for large-scale conflicts like Desert Storm, as well as smaller peacemaking and peacekeeping roles. I know our units have begun training together in NATO's southern region for such contingencies, and that some of our members are discussing joint exercises in Mediterranean countries outside Europe. These seem to me to be steps in the right direction."

The main concern of the NATO elites, as indicated in the speech of the alliance's Secretary General Manfred Woerner at the conference on Feb. 7, seems not to be with the fate of the Bosnian victims of the Serbian attacks. Rather, they evidently fear that inaction on the Serbian issue would result in the loss of the U.S. aura of "will and leadership," and with diminution of its role as the one superpower in the world after the end of the Cold War.

NATO, Woerner said, still served as a crucial reference point in "the projection of military power" for everybody around the globe these days.

The prime concern of the United States is, however, whether that "projection of military power" is also seen where it really counts: by the states of the Community of Independent States (CIS), the former "second superpower," which still commands a vast arsenal of nuclear arms and other systems of mass destruction.

For lack of a real design for peacekeeping, which would have to be premised upon economic and political cooperation with the CIS, the wisdom of the United States and the rest of the NATO member countries is reduced to confrontation scenarios and military warnings against Moscow. The Balkans war is therefore subsumed under that bigger geopolitical consideration.