

NATO elite is told: We must keep the economy strong

by George Gregory

“Our adversaries have learned that if our democracies become sufficiently aroused, we might mobilize our full economic strength to rebuild insuperably superior military forces. Our security therefore demands that we maintain overall economic superiority.”

Those were the words of U.S. Undersecretary of Defense Fred Iklé to the March 1-2 annual meeting of the NATO alliance's military elite, the International *Wehrkunde* (Defense Sciences) meeting in Munich, West Germany. Some 150 of the most prominent figures in the military establishment of the Western Alliance were in attendance.

Iklé, the featured American official, faced not a few among his European audience who relegated him to “that small bunch of ideologues around Weinberger—whose influence on [President] Reagan is steadily decreasing, however.”

This *Wehrkunde* meeting took place under conditions which demanded a strong American demonstration of commitment to U.S. defense and the integrity of Western political and strategic relationships worldwide. These conditions include the first phase of Gramm-Rudman budget butchery, which went into effect on March 3, one day after the beginning of the Munich assembly; second, by the fall of the Marcos government in the Philippines. The weight of U.S. policy is evaluated in Western Europe, by both friend and foe, according to criteria of credible U.S. power, and U.S. loyalty to established security commitments based upon that power. Gramm-Rudman and the Philippine destabilization call that credibility into question.

As perceived in West Germany, the U.S. State Department, the Trilateral Commission, the West German Foreign

Ministry, et al. have decided upon one of two possible policy responses to U.S. financial chaos and degraded credibility and power internationally: a re-run of the Kissinger-Nixon détente and arms-control program, with large-scale economic deals with the Soviet Union, including Soviet access to Western European technology, from an admittedly weaker position than last time around, but in the curious hope that the Russian leadership will not cheat this time.

But the *Wehrkunde* conference steered a course in the direction of the other possible policy response. There were no fixed moorings visibly guiding policy discussion, but there was also no mouthing about the “new phase of détente,” “new era of cooperation born in Geneva,” nor “back-channel crisis management of the superpower relationship.” Instead, there was a focus on fundamentals, and a number of sensitive subjects were discussed which are hardly ever mentioned in public.

West German Defense Minister Manfred Wörner, in his key-note address, “Strategy in Flux,” stated that, for Western European countries “to fully satisfy the Soviet need for security, they would have to surrender.” The 19th-century Prussian master of strategy, Clausewitz, gave a characterization which applies perfectly to the Soviet Union, when he noted that any “conqueror would prefer to invade a neighbor's country peacefully.” Contrary to notions of entering a “security partnership” with the Soviet Union, the new name for the rerun of Kissinger's détente program, Wörner noted that the West German government had received messages loud and clear from Moscow concerning policy expected of West Germany in this “security partnership”: “good behavior

in general, and prevention of SDI in particular. . . . The Soviet notion of security would in effect be our insecurity."

As for arms-control, the West German defense minister's evaluation was based upon the "Soviets'" thoroughly Russian drive to minimally "secure the empire acquired in the course of a history of several hundred years," rather than mere scepticism: "To them, arms control policy is primarily an instrument of diplomacy by which their own positions are consolidated, and Western freedom of action is curtailed."

Concluding the series of exploded myths and perceptions, Wörner stated: "It makes little sense to distinguish between 'a strategy of deterrence' and a 'war-fighting strategy.'" Western Europe confronts an overwhelming Soviet conventional superiority, which is becoming an even more enhanced threat for reasons Wörner outlined. Development of Soviet strategic missile defense is progressively degrading the deterrent value of U.S. strategic nuclear forces; likewise, upgraded Soviet air-defense systems, also in Eastern Europe, immediately degrade NATO's air forces, and will soon be able to defend against NATO's nuclear missiles in Europe; at the same time, improvements in the precision and armament of Soviet short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, which are armed with conventional and chemical warheads, and accelerated production of cruise missiles, means that "in the foreseeable future the Soviet Union will possess some kind of conventional first-strike capability in Europe."

While dealing with Soviet conventional supremacy itself "can not be accomplished without the participation of the United States," "the need for a European defense system is as logical as it is imperative." The evaluation in the relevant West German military staffs is, in fact, that the time latitude on developing and installing an enhanced European air-defense capability against short- and medium-range missiles, whether nuclear or conventionally armed, cruise missiles, and the 4.5:1 superiority of Soviet air forces, is probably even less than for SDI itself.

The only debate over the issue of whether SDI should be "restrained" or bargained away in exchange for Soviet missile reductions occurred between American senators, not with the Europeans, who have made up their minds, that they do not want it bargained away.

Wörner's argument is, that the need for a European defense system "could be met by an extension of the American defense system" (and West Germany does intend to participate), but other Western European countries, which are less obviously enthusiastic about SDI, have to contribute to an enhanced air defense for Europe, or recommend surrender. "Even if it did not come to war, Western Europe would, under the influence of numerically superior Soviet military power, be susceptible to political blackmail, and in the longer run submissive to the Soviet Union."

Undersecretary for Defense Iklé was also aiming to shake up his listeners. His jokes about the "dozens of papers by NATO experts" who can employ only "euphemisms" to describe a possible attack on NATO by "an aggressor, alluding

perhaps to some fairy tale creature like Rumpelstiltskin," came right after he derided any quest for "arms stability," pursued in the West with such complacency that the Soviets were virtually invited to seize superiority, while nothing at all became stable in the developing countries.

One day after the conference, liberal West German Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher flooded the media with protests that "those who seek superiority" are "undermining East-West stability," arms control negotiations, and prospects for cooperation. A foreign policy spokesman for Genscher's Free Democrats named Iklé as the culprit who had committed this heinous crime, and demanded that President Reagan "shut Iklé up, or risk losing credibility himself."

Fred Iklé had, in fact, quoted a widely circulated policy statement of Genscher's from December 1985. "I disagree," Iklé said, "with a view sometimes expressed by European officials that we should help the East to modernize its economy, and that our help toward improving the economic development of the Soviet bloc contributes to European stability." Iklé charged that this would merely "make it easier for the Soviet leadership to accelerate its military buildup."

Doctrinal debate

There is a raging debate in the ranks of West German commanders on NATO operational doctrine, for which West German officers have no responsibility, according to NATO rules. Officially, there is no West German staff for operational planning; the operational levels of maneuvers are planned at NATO. The issue is the insanity of expecting to defend by waiting for the enemy to storm across the East-West divide, with no depth of territory to fall back into, but with a NATO prohibition against crossing the border to the East at the very moment of attack to carry out flanking and envelopment counter-attacks within the enemy's own territory.

It was a mistake for Iklé not to demand a corrective NATO command guideline to incorporate West German officers in responsibilities for operations planning. But he did denounce the insanity of "the dogma of immaculate aggression . . . which holds that our enemy, after launching a full-scale attack onto our territory, would remain immaculate of any sin," so that it would be a sin, in turn, to hit him on his own territory. With the exception of those West German flag officers who earned most of their stars under Helmut Schmidt, who went so far as to eliminate courses in tactics at West German military academies, it is rather obvious—hot potato or not—where the majority of army commanders stand on this issue.

American participants at the Wehrkunde conference, particularly congressmen and senators, repeatedly dodged questions about the U.S. budget, and merely responded with "it [Gramm-Rudmann] hasn't gone into effect yet, don't worry." These are the kinds of Americans, said the Europeans, who would pull U.S. troops out of Europe on "cost effectiveness" grounds. Then, they would try to convince Europe it was all done because they thought Europe wanted a troop-reduction deal with the Russians at any price.