

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Arms scandal clouds over Bonn

The government seems certain to face a political tempest over German involvement in arms sales to Iran.

On Oct. 28, Heinrich Boge, the head of the federal anti-crime bureau (BKA) here, gave a very unusual press conference. Reporting on the BKA's successful operations against several networks of illegal arms dealers in the previous several weeks, Boge indicated that "just the tip of the iceberg" has been touched. German arms dealers are "big bosses in this international network," the German sub-branch of which he described as a "multibillion business."

Without giving details, Boge hinted at international connections between the weapons salesmen and the Middle Eastern drug trade.

Though cautious, Boge's remarks touched on a very explosive matter. An important part of illegal Western weapons deliveries to Iran runs through West Germany, the more so since late 1986, when U.S. investigators first began looking into the Irangate affair.

Having run into high-level trouble with illegal arms purchases in Britain, France, Sweden, Austria, and the United States, Iranian envoys preferred to diversify their purchases by contracting trade partners in Germany. An important section of the arms underground was thus shifted into Germany, and the time-pressure under which the arms dealers operated in restructuring their "business networks" exposed more and more to the eyes of the police. The political apparatus of this illegal arms business in Germany is also being more and more exposed.

For example, on Oct. 24, it was made public that the office of U.S. special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh is

looking into secret talks between U.S. and Iranian envoys that took place at the Hilton Hotel in Mainz, West Germany (Oct. 28-30, 1986). The American team consisted of Lt. Col. Oliver North, Gen. Richard Secord, and Robert McFarlane; the Iranians were represented by Albert Hakim and Manucher Ghorbanifar.

Of this group, Hakim, at least, was no stranger to Mainz, nor to the Mainz Hilton. He had had meetings there many times before, negotiating illegal arms deals on behalf of the Shah, and then Khomeini. Hakim is an arms dealer operating at the level of governments.

Therefore, the question now is, how much of his talks at the Mainz Hilton went on with the knowledge of the West German government, and specifically, the foreign ministry of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, which has been involved in secret and not-so-secret dealings with Iran since 1979-80.

The revelations about the Hakim-North talks in Mainz are not likely to be welcome at the office of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, whose government is being hit by many scandals amid the bad news from the stock markets. Another affair related to his own political home-base, Mainz, is the last thing the Chancellor needs at this moment.

Kohl's government has also come under attack in connection with the death of Schleswig-Holstein Gov. Uwe Barschel, which has brought to light various scandalous matters involving Kohl's Christian Democrats in Barschel's home state. Kohl's minister of finance, Gerhard Stoltenberg,

has come under special attack, not only because of his austerity policy, but because of the role he played in arms deals with Khomeini's Iran between 1979 and 1982, when he was Schleswig-Holstein governor.

Thus, any close look into German-Iranian affairs involving the shipyards in that northern German state, at the very least exposes cabinet member Stoltenberg in a very obvious way.

The left-wing parliamentary opposition here, the Social Democrats (SPD), have found in these weapons deals a welcome lever against the government. Their vehicle is the parliamentary subcommittee on illegal arms deals, which reconvened after a pause of six months on Oct. 15. The subcommittee, which started looking into illegal submarine deals with the Republic of South Africa more than one year ago, now has access to shipyard documents that will shed some light on details of these and other weapons deals.

On Oct. 23, the first set of documents was delivered to the committee. The committee found that the companies, names, and institutions involved in the South African deals are the same as those mentioned on the German side of Irangate.

During the month of November, the SPD is planning to make contact with the relevant committees of the U.S. Congress, to gain access to additional documents on illegal weapons affairs involving German dealers. The Social Democrats plan to have members of the Schleswig-Holstein state government testify before the subcommittee, as well as Chancellor Kohl and Finance Minister Stoltenberg.

The SPD is considering various other parliamentary and legal steps to keep the issue "hot," so there is little doubt that the government will soon face a big tempest.