

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Strauss: Gorbachov's envoy in Africa

The Kremlin and the Bush league have recruited the Christian Social Union leader for their African crisis management.

Having met Mikhail Gorbachov in Moscow Dec. 29, Germany's conservative Christian Democrat, Franz Josef Strauss, surprised many with the revelation that he found Gorbachov's "new thought" very convincing. Apparently, this included "new thoughts" on Africa, a subject they discussed in Moscow Dec. 29.

The last week of January, Strauss toured the Republic of South Africa, Mozambique, and Angola. He met Premier Pietr Botha, President Chissano, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi, and KwaZulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, to discuss political and economic perspectives for a de-escalation of the crisis in the region. Strauss offered economic and financial assistance from Germany for the reconstruction of railways, ports, and roads. He advertised aid in the restoration of the Cabora Bassa dam in Mozambique and the construction of a railway connection from Maputo to Johannesburg.

But, South African media reported that he delivered a personal message from Gorbachov to Botha. He let it be known that he had noticed "significant changes in the Soviet approach on African issues," and that he was convinced that "Moscow wants to pull out from Africa, though not completely." Gorbachov, Strauss said, was interested in a peaceful settlement, rather than continued confrontation.

According to German sources, Strauss discussed with UNITA rebel leader Savimbi an Angolan "national unity government." The MPLA of Acting Premier Dos Santos would keep its pro-Soviet views and occupy a ma-

majority position in this government, but the arrangement would allow the military disengagement of the United States and the Soviets from Angola. The withdrawal of Cuban troops could be facilitated, removing the main reason for military raids by South Africa into Angola.

This kind of shuttle diplomacy places Strauss square in the middle of American-Soviet "regional matters" negotiations. Hardly had the German politician left Africa, than the U.S. State Department's special envoy on African affairs, Chester Crocker, arrived in Luanda, to discuss options for a Cuban troop withdrawal, and Western economic assistance in the reconstruction of Angola's economy.

It sounds too good to be true, especially if one keeps in mind that the new East-West diplomatic offensive on southern Africa is linked to the INF summit consultations on "regional matters." Given the fact that none of Moscow's political pawns in this region would be sacrificed, while the West would drop its main ally, Savimbi, in Angola and force general restraint upon the South African republic's military, the strategic advantages of this policy arrangement would mainly be for Moscow.

Some intelligence sources say that the Soviet Union may temporarily mimic military disengagement from Angola, thereby seducing the Western powers to pull out from the region as well. Meanwhile, the Soviets and their proxies would use the time to prepare a broader offensive in the future, at a time that would catch the West off guard and without any means to inter-

vene directly.

Why should the West, why should its diplomats, fall for this trap? And what, after all, can be the interest of Franz Josef Strauss in this South African shuttle diplomacy? Hasn't he warned until very recently that any disengagement of the West would help Moscow's strategic aims and inevitably mean "Iranization" of the Republic of South Africa?

Seeking for explanations as to why Franz Josef Strauss changed his mind so quickly, the following hints are given by intelligence sources in Germany: First, the perspective of certain U.S. withdrawal from South African affairs, as well as the expected military disengagement from Europe, makes conservative German politicians like Strauss nervous and susceptible to wishful thinking about arrangements with Moscow.

Second, the German economy is highly dependent on strategic metals from southern Africa—at between 80% and 90% of its total requirements. Germans seek Soviet assurances regarding these supplies, after the Americans failed to guarantee stability in Pretoria.

Third, the German elite has no policy design for European, let alone African affairs, but subscribes to pragmatism.

Fourth, most have so far refused to take Lyndon LaRouche's proposals on strategic policy seriously; instead, especially German conservatives prefer listening to the Bush league, which offers them the status of junior partners in "regional conflict" diplomacy.

Moscow and the Bush league think that the positive reputation Strauss has so far had in Pretoria may help to get the South Africans "in line." What should make Botha highly suspicious, however, is that the Strauss he knew was not the one who visited him most recently.