

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

German despair: a lesson from history

Disappointment with the Americans runs deep, and may result in a swing over to the Soviets.

Since the late 1960s, we have seen the Social Democrats and the Free Democrats here swing over to openly pro-Soviet views. The Greens, an appendix of the Soviet-run anti-defense movement that entered the system of political parties in the late 1970s, have formed the third parliamentary group to side with Moscow.

At the parliamentary level, the only line of defense was formed by the Christian Democrats, who held on to pro-American views. This is rapidly changing now, and it has to do with deep disappointment at the conduct of successive U.S. administrations in military affairs.

It has been pointed out by numerous conservative politicians, among them Lothar Ruehl, the former assistant defense minister, that a dangerous trend is at work behind the transatlantic controversy over "missile modernization." In reality, these voices warn, NATO is being transformed into an Anglo-American bloc that is considered "vital" by the U.S. and Britain, and a continental European bloc that is viewed as "less important."

Ruehl has warned against a certain complacency on the part of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who thinks that "whatever happens, the U.S. will always stick to the Germans as their most important allies." Kohl is convinced that for the U.S., maintaining troops and equipment in continental Europe, and West Germany most of all, is an unchangeable fact of American defense doctrine.

This, Ruehl has rightly warned, is changing right now, and if the trend is not recognized clearly, Bonn may find out one day, and not long from now,

that the U.S. considers its strategic interests "better preserved in another European country, and no longer in Germany." This is a clear reference to the Anglo-American bloc.

Not seeing this danger, and not looking for countermeasures (military and political), will lead to catastrophe. Disappointment with the United States is already deep among conservatives, because of Reagan's betrayal at the 1986 Reykjavik summit and because of the American part (assisted by interests in Britain) in a boycott of a viable German share in the Strategic Defense Initiative.

The U.S. media and the Bush administration have charged the West Germans with being unreliable allies, with thinking of a "new Rapallo" pact with Moscow (a replay of the 1922 economic-military agreements), and with generally being troublemakers throughout the 20th century.

It may be appropriate to remind Americans that their withdrawal from European affairs in the 1920s was one of the biggest mistakes of U.S. policy after the end of World War I. Numerous German conservatives, like the late Franz Josef Strauss, have even declared that they think the early pull-out of U.S. troops from the essential occupation zones in Germany started the whole trouble that led to World War II.

"U.S. troops pulled out from Germany in the early 1920s?" Few people know that U.S. troops occupied a large section of the Rhineland. In West German museums, for example, the one at Hambach Castle, one can see photographs of a U.S. army machinegun company guarding the Rhine River

near Koblenz in 1920.

The withdrawal of the Americans not only cleared the way for the French and British to occupy and loot the Rhineland (under the guise of war reparations), but also discredited the pro-American faction among the German conservatives, including Konrad Adenauer, then mayor of Cologne. The withdrawal of the Americans from their "German entanglements" paved the way for the Anglo-American-Soviet Trust and its pro-Soviet (but anti-American) assets among German conservatives. This was a major contribution to what became known as the "spirit of Rapallo."

The rise of the Nazi movement from the late 1920s on was as much an anti-American, anti-Western phenomenon as a pro-Soviet one, culminating in the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact.

Had there not been demoralization of certain pro-American factions among the conservative elites in German politics, maybe things would have developed in a different way in the late 1920s and 1930s. Even if there had been a war (because of Soviet plans for invasion of Germany and Western Europe, for example), the postwar period would have looked different. There wouldn't have been an Anglo-American-Soviet Yalta Treaty, no doubt.

While the parallels between today and the 1920s cannot be drawn too far, it is justified to imagine which way post-1945 European affairs would have developed, had there not been strong contingents of U.S. troops stationed in continental Western Europe to this date.

Should the Bush-Baker team really think of pulling back into a "Fortress Anglo-America," in the course of the 1990s, they will lose the Germans to the Russians. What is worse: The Germans may not like it, but will accommodate.