

## Europeans slow pace to war, but not enough

by Carol White and Rainer Apel

The heads of government gathering on the occasion of the CSCE summit Nov. 19-20 in Paris witnessed an important defeat for the Anglo-Americans. The 34-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe rebuffed the Thatcher-Bush demand for approval of U.S. aggressive military moves against Iraq. In the view of some, before the summit, there was a real danger that the United States was planning to use the military exercise Imminent Thunder, involving 10,000 troops, as the pretext to launch a military strike.

The highlight of the summit was, of course, the defeat suffered by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her party caucus, forcing her resignation on Nov. 22. Whoever the next British prime minister may be, the momentum of her thrust toward war in the Gulf has been slowed. Shock waves are only just beginning to hit in the Bush camp, where it was the Iron Lady who was calling the shots. The liberal London *Guardian* hints that Bush himself may suffer a big political backlash in the U.S., because he has allied with Thatcher on the Persian Gulf, while having "failed to comprehend the depth of European and Soviet doubts" about a war there. Judging from his diplomatic efforts during his current European tour, the *Guardian* says, he has "clearly misread the emerging international scene. . . . This has serious implications for Mr. Bush, whose hitherto golden touch in foreign affairs has compensated for domestic embarrassments."

Bush and Thatcher are not the only political leaders facing political crises at home, of course. While the situation in the Soviet Union is most dramatic, French Premier Michel Rocard barely survived a vote of confidence in the French Parliament on Nov. 20. About half of the delegates simply did not vote.

Despite President François Mitterrand's call for a security conference to negotiate all elements of a Mideast settlement

and similar positive initiatives, the French have not removed their troops from the Gulf deployment. In general, Mitterrand's policy has been two-sided throughout the crisis, opposing the Anglo-American policy verbally, but not in deeds. Gulf policy surely is at issue for those French political forces smarting at the defeat in the Lebanon for Gen. Michel Aoun's resistance, and this must also be taken into account in looking at the opposition to the Rocard government. Rocard is known as an Anglo-American sympathizer.

Perhaps the greatest shock to the United States was the unwillingness of Mikhail Gorbachov to commit Moscow to supporting a U.N. Security Council resolution endorsing the use of force against Iraq. Since Yemen (an ally of Iraq) will take over the presidency of the Security Council from the United States in December, this could remove the United Nations as a backstop for Bush's military adventure. Further, the Soviet stalling occurs just at the time when Bush has been trying to use U.N. resolutions as a legal mechanism to dodge the U.S. Constitution's clear mandate that only Congress can declare war.

### A negotiated settlement

In opposition to the Anglo-American war faction led by Mrs. Thatcher with her epigone George Bush, there is a growing faction among Europeans which is demanding that there be a negotiated settlement in the Gulf—one which does not depend upon Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait as a precondition. Indeed, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, on the occasion of his Nov. 18 meeting with Bush, said that release of all hostages by Iraq would be a sufficient condition for such negotiations to start. He underscored this toughening of German opposition to the Bush war drive, with the pointed remark that for negotiations to work, both sides must be willing to negotiate.

Despite lip service to a fundamental accord between Germany and the United States on Gulf policy, the reality is an increasingly sharp division. Just as Bush's plane was landing at Ramstein Air Force Base, the national DLF radio station ran an interview with the German chancellor, in which he strongly opposed a military scenario for the Gulf conflict. Kohl hinted that many steps in the direction of a diplomatic solution have been launched that are "not fit for the public at this moment." He also warned, "military strategists" always think about military objectives, but "never spend thoughts on the immense civilian casualties and devastation a war would cause."

Visiting Speyer Cathedral shortly before his consultations with Kohl, George Bush received another unequivocal message. The Catholic Bishop of Speyer, Anton Schlembach, a close friend of Kohl's, addressed the U. S. President personally in his prayer, urging him to "restore law and sovereignty" in the Gulf "by deterrence and economic pressure, rather than war and bloodshed."

What exactly Kohl and Bush discussed at their private encounter at the chancellor's home in Oggersheim that Sunday afternoon, remained secret. Certain conclusions can be drawn, however, from angry comments delivered to the U. S. media by senior members of the executive staff traveling with the President. Kohl told Bush, they leaked, that the NATO treaties bound him to lend logistical support to the U. S., but the German government would not deploy troops, nor back any offensive military action against Iraq as long as there were still options for progress on the diplomatic level.

### **The Brandt mission**

Kohl's increasingly open opposition to any military adventure in the Gulf should be read in conjunction with the extremely strong statements by former Chancellor Willy Brandt. These must be seen as reflecting the official position of the German government, just as his trip to the Gulf was an official trip rather than a private venture in diplomacy.

Brandt pointed out that Germany is well placed to play an independent role in a negotiated settlement, because she does not have troops in the area. Equally important, he placed the onus for the lack of a resolution so far on the shoulders of Margaret Thatcher, "The Lady," in an interview published in the German weekly *Der Spiegel* on Nov. 19. The quote is: "Europe mustn't act unconcerned, naturally. But as long as the European Community cannot yet act jointly for many reasons—The Lady being one of them—it is up to the individual governments. And each government is faced with the question whether it plans to slide into something which would be difficult to convey to the public.

"The reference often made about the weight the enlarged Germany has gained," Brandt concluded his remarks, "must not lead, in the wake of an acute crisis, into the provincialism that one has grown familiar with. The weight of Germany must be cast on the scales in favor of peace and those human

beings who are exposed to danger. It can even be an advantage for discussions and/or negotiations that no German troops are stationed in the Gulf."

During a peace-seeking mission in Baghdad Nov. 6-9, which included two encounters with Saddam Hussein and one with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, Brandt had found that a more prominent intervention of the united Germany would be appreciated. The Germans, Brandt was told, could play a key role in avoiding a major war, because they had had no past as a colonial power in the Mideast region and sent no troops to the Gulf.

On Nov. 20, Iraq announced it would release all Germans still kept hostage, paying tribute to the "positive role of Germany in this crisis" and its efforts in the broader context of German-Arab relations. There is more than a coincidence between the Brandt assay and the Iraqi announcement, of course.

The peace plan proposed by Brandt included the following elements: withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, and their replacement by contingents from Arab League member states; a plebiscite of the Kuwaiti people; settling a secure Iraqi access to the Gulf waters; settling claims for compensation demanded from each other by Iraq and Kuwait; and establishment of a consortium of whatever shape that will include compensation funds through which both states can attune their oil policy.

### **Germany's 'Arab card'**

It is the view of the Germans (government and opposition thinking alike) that the key to progress on the Gulf issue lies in the capitals of the Arab world, and German diplomacy is to assist this process. One may call that "Germany's Arab card."

Indeed, Germany maintains an intense secret diplomacy with the Maghreb states, centering around the Moroccan King Hassan, as well as with Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan—with whom Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher has been on the phone repeatedly on the Gulf issue over the past weeks.

The three leaders of Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan are in the forefront of intra-Arab efforts to solve the Gulf conflict by peaceful means, and are also spearheading initiatives for the institution of a constant Euro-Arab dialogue. Ongoing German steps in this direction are overlapping closely with comparable efforts by France. A discussion *EIR* had with a senior member of German-Arab Society the day after the Moroccan initiative to convene an emergency Arab League summit had failed, showed the unbroken commitment for a diplomatic solution. He said there is an intra-Arab consensus that the Iraqi request for compensation from Kuwait was justified.

In short, the week of Nov. 19 definitely slowed the pace toward war, but there is still a long way to go before we can say that we are on the way toward peace in the Gulf.