

## Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

### New German initiatives in Mideast

*The Germans want the end of sanctions against Iraq and an economic role in Palestine.*

Germany is not a big player in Mideast policy, but it can give vital economic and industrial support for the two rebuilding jobs on the Mideast agenda: building the economy of the formerly occupied Palestine (plus the reconstruction of Jordan and Lebanon); and reconstructing Iraqi industrial potential, once sanctions against Baghdad are lifted.

A hint of the potential was provided during the spectacular May 2 visit of Palestinian Liberation Organization chairman Yasser Arafat to Stuttgart, the seat of the Daimler Benz Corp., Germany's largest industrial firm. The visit, a "private" project of the company's chief executive Edzard Reuter, put together with the explicit blessing of Chancellor Helmut Kohl, was, as Reuter said, to "demonstrate the support of a big industrial enterprise for the treaty between Israel and the PLO."

The company's Dornier Management Consulting will conduct a survey of options to set up transportation and other vital infrastructure links, fresh water supplies in the new Palestine, as well as professional training of the Palestinian work force. This undertaking is not just altruistic; the Daimler Benz group is forced to shift its heavy dependency on car production to other products in the infrastructure sector.

A politician said to have been active behind the scenes of Arafat's visit is Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski—called "Ben Wisch" because of his excellent contacts to the Arab world. The senior Social Democrat speaks fluent Arabic and has been a troubleshooter in Mid-

east and North African missions for all German governments for the past 30 years. "Ben Wisch" has also been involved in German efforts to get U.N. sanctions against Iraq eased.

A delegation of German politicians and economic experts will tour Iraq in June, to probe chances of easing or lifting the sanctions. Such a move would also help Jordan, whose economy has been hit hard by more than three years of anti-Saddam policy on the part of the western powers, and help the Jordanians to restore the role of their Red Sea port of Aqaba as a vital transshipment point for goods into and out of the Mideast.

The delegation will be promoted by Hans Stercken, the chairman of the foreign relations committee of the German parliament, and president of the German Atlantic Association. Stercken and Wischniewski criticized George Bush's drive, in 1990, to launch a war on Iraq. Their role in lifting sanctions would not have been possible if Bush were still President, because he invested enormous energies into forcing Chancellor Kohl, in late 1990, to gag critics and help fund the Gulf war.

Another sign that the climate between Bonn and Washington has improved since President Clinton moved into the White House, is a review of Bush's Gulf war in the *European Security* monthly of the Society for European Security—the former Wehrkunde society, which has sponsored 31 annual February gatherings, in Munich, of the top brass of NATO military and political bodies.

The April issue of the journal ran

an unprecedentedly sober analysis of the 1991 anti-Iraq war, written by Jürgen Hübschen, a former military attaché at the West German embassy in Baghdad from 1986 to 1989. The hard-hitting attack on the Bush strategy wouldn't have run in the past three years.

"Iraq, a secular state with an education system that was a model for the region, with a good infrastructure, a status for women that is amazing for the Arab world, a country without hunger and unemployment, was bombed back into the pre-industrial age," Hübschen wrote. The whole Iraqi population has been victimized because Saddam Hussein stayed out of Bush's reach. "Revenge, punishment, reparations, and isolation can't be a basis for lasting peace," Hübschen wrote, warning that whoever may replace Saddam one day, will not accept a continued political and economic degradation of Iraq as a nation, nor its being shut out from the Persian Gulf region.

Geopolitically, the 1991 war on Iraq destroyed "a factor of counterbalance against the rising regional power Iran," contributing to the artificial creation of an "Islamic bastion" with Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan at its core, enlarged by the ex-Soviet republics Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—and potentially, Turkey.

Bush used black propaganda to justify the war, while the main motive has always been to gain control of the region's oil wells and states. The entire war against Iraq was therefore never a "just war" nor even a "justified war."

Another such war would not have Germany's backing, German Defense Minister Volker Rühe told his U.S. colleague William Perry in Washington, D.C., on May 2, making it official that Bonn has begun a review of its Middle East interests.