

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Signs of sanity in foreign policy

Analyst Michael Stürmer calls attention to the potential for a Eurasian land-bridge, and the dangerous erosion of NATO.

A rethinking is going on among the German elites, about the kind of institutions required for the coming century. Michael Stürmer, the director of the Institute of the Foundation for Policy and Security Studies in Ebenhausen, the quasi-official foreign policy think-tank of the German government, recently published two essays in the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which is widely read among German policymakers.

In the first essay, which appeared on Aug. 9, Stürmer warned the West against neglecting the strategic importance of developments in the Central Asian region, which could play a positive role as a bridge between Europe and Asia in the coming century. Especially as far as Iran is concerned, its catalytic role in the entire region—for better or worse—is not properly acknowledged in the West, Stürmer wrote. The fact is that the opening in May of the rail line between Mashhad and Tedzhen, has closed the gap in direct rail connection between Europe and China, bypassing Russia, and gives Iran, which is still isolated by the West, a “pivotal function” for Asia.

The geopolitical implications of this new rail line are immense, Stürmer wrote: “Through the link to the Iranian rail grid, the connection to the big port of Bandar Abbas on the Strait of Hormuz is established. Central Asia and South Asia are provided with a rail connection.” The West should put an end to the “carrot and stick” approach it has practiced toward Iran, and cultivate positive contacts to those Iranian elites that want to cooperate with the

West, in the project of the new Silk Road, Stürmer recommended. The alternative would be chaos and fanaticism throughout the region.

In the second essay, published on Sept. 6, Stürmer warned against not taking the crisis and erosion of NATO seriously, and called for a new concerted effort, especially between the United States and Germany, to define a Western strategy for the next century that would be oriented toward cooperation with other regions of the world.

Stürmer wrote this essay on the 50th anniversary of a speech given by then-U.S. Secretary of State James Byrnes, in Stuttgart, the “Speech of Hope” which opened the door to postwar friendship and close cooperation between Americans and Germans. Stürmer emphasized that Byrnes’s speech put an end to the “one-worldism” of the Allied elites, which had a rigid containment approach to the postwar Germans, and even strove, under the so-called “Morgenthau Plan,” to turn Germany into a deindustrialized, agrarian state.

The Byrnes speech set the tone for a conceptual shift among the Americans toward a new policy of re-industrializing Germany, and making it a reliable ally of the United States in Europe, Stürmer recalled. This new U.S. policy broke with the rigid military occupation habits of the other three wartime Allies—the British, the French, and the Soviets—and their emphasis on war reparations and dismantling of industry. This, Stürmer hinted, should serve as a model for

U.S.-German cooperation in the 21st century.

Stürmer’s remarks reportedly reflect discussions inside the German government, behind closed doors. Evidence of that was the way in which the Byrnes Memorial event was organized, the official, Sept. 6, U.S.-German commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the “Speech of Hope.” The commemoration event featured speeches by German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who revealed a bit of the ongoing discussion process about the envisioned “next 50 years” of U.S.-German cooperation.

Kinkel emphasized that after the first 50 years of postwar U.S.-German cooperation, the next 50 years must see a broadening of relations, between the now-reunited Germany and the United States. He said that the unification of Europe includes the United States as “an integral part of Europe.” He said that the role of NATO would have to be modified, in order to take into account the changing world of the next century: “In the year 2020, seven out of the 15 leading industrial nations of the world will be Asian ones, and of these, number one will be China.”

Western policy in the next century must be based on a cooperative spirit toward these new centers of world policy, Kinkel said. He also referred twice to President Clinton’s visit to Germany in July 1994, when the U.S. President called for a strong U.S.-German role in the economic reconstruction of eastern Europe.

Warren Christopher compared the situation in Bosnia to the war-devastated postwar Germany of 1945. He called for the same intensity of reconstruction effort that was launched in Germany in the late 1940s, to be carried out in Bosnia today, in a joint U.S.-German project.