

Europe gripped by shock over ‘gathering of war clouds’

by Michael Liebig

Undoubtedly, Germany’s Green Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, has mastered with perfection the art of diplomatic parlaying—saying nothing with raised eyebrows and many words. However, when he was asked, on March 13, at the European Union foreign ministers meeting in Eltville, Germany, whether he could clarify the status of the debate around the new NATO strategy, Fischer remained speechless.

A foreign policy expert of another European Union country elaborated on the reason for this speechlessness in a background discussion. Behind the scenes, he said, “total consternation over the world situation” is spreading among the European governments. A military escalation is approaching ever closer in both the Kosova and the Middle East crises. Probably, attempts will be made to somehow buy time, but a military dynamic of its own has already gone too far. One senses ever more clearly, that supposedly “limited conflicts” in the Middle East, and also in the Balkans, carry within themselves the danger of escalating to a “big war.” It is inconceivable to him, this expert said, that the “Anglo-Americans” are expressly looking for military conflicts. How could they believe, through “limited wars,” that “quick military victories” could so easily be achieved, without calculating the devastating consequences of this policy for the totality of the world political situation? This borders on “insanity,” he said.

The foreign policy expert referred to a private discussion he had had with a high-ranking European government representative, who had told him: “We can’t tell the population what’s really going on, because if we did, panic would break out.”

A view from Moscow

Similar views were expressed by a high-level expert from a strategic studies institute in Moscow. What so deeply wor-

ries him, he said, is the “gathering of war clouds,” which are darkening ever larger portions the world political horizon. There are always more, and in fact more difficult conflicts, all over the world. Heads of state and government are becoming “unnerved,” he said, and thus he fears that they “will simply let things proceed.” And then, the catastrophe will suddenly be there.

In the next four weeks, three meetings will take place in Washington, where it will be essentially decided whether the “dark clouds of war” will converge to such an extent that they will release a deluge of “war storms”:

On March 22, Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov arrives in the United States. Primakov’s talks in Washington will be decisive for the question of whether or not the crisis in the Balkans will come to war. Certainly, the talks will also deal with the military escalation against Iraq, planned for April, by the Anglo-Americans, and will also involve the situations in Syria and North Korea.

These conflicts, and the visibly intensifying dynamic of a “New Cold War” in world politics, will also be on the list of themes for discussion of Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, who arrives in Washington on April 8.

Finally, the NATO 50th anniversary summit convenes on April 23, to discuss the “new strategic concept” of NATO. At this summit, the decision in essence will be reached, whether or not the train already building up steam—Cold War and “hot” regional wars—will irreversibly leave the station.

Whoever thinks here that we (and the strategic experts cited) are simply taking pleasure in painting apocalyptic horror scenarios, should listen exactly to what Willi Wimmer, a defense expert in Germany’s conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and former State Secretary in the Defense Ministry, has to say. He currently holds a leading post in the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Wimmer is definitely someone who does not belong to the category of peace movement softies.

Wimmer: 'The extinction of the world'

On March 13, in an interview with the German national radio Deutschlandfunk, Wimmer, in response to a question about his assessment of the discussion over a new orientation for NATO, said: The Americans are working on a new doctrine for NATO, where the Europeans are not really involved nor are they being listened to. NATO till now has been more than merely a defense alliance, it has been a community of values, where goals such as securing the peace and human rights have stood in the forefront. Now, a totally new orientation for NATO is being planned, where combat deployments anywhere in the world are uppermost. NATO is to become a global power instrument. Even a terrorist attack somewhere in the world, for example in Japan, could lead to a NATO intervention, said Wimmer.

In Europe, the attempted new orientation of NATO is being watched with great concern. He said that he believes that Germany will not go along with this transformation, with its foreseeable global military operations. Even more concerned, however, are "our friends in Asia," said Wimmer, who are always asking him about the already ongoing redefinition of NATO. NATO, Wimmer said, is being rebuilt into a global war instrument, and that could lead to "the extinction of the world."

Wimmer surely didn't say all this lightly; rather it requires courage to state so clearly where the transformation of NATO will lead to, under the designs of Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Henry H. Shelton and Defense Secretary William Cohen, or of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. A high-ranking military figure who previously had occupied a top position in NATO, confirmed Wimmer's assessment. Behind the scenes, there are deeply worried discussions occurring in the countries of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg, because the United States and Britain have demanded, as part of the new NATO doctrine, the "selective use of nuclear weapons" in case of terrorist attacks using biological and chemical weapons.

Sharping's 'stubborn resistance'

German Defense Minister Rudolf Sharping has been a lot more reserved and his remarks a lot murkier over the new NATO doctrine. At a Washington session of the Trilateral Commission on March 14, Sharping said that at the April 23 NATO summit, "we will also agree on a new strategic concept, outlining how to contend with new challenges and new opportunities. For the Alliance, which is capable of both meeting a wide range of threats to our common values and interests, and working in trusting partnership with other nations and organizations; for the only alliance capable of promoting security, prosperity, and democracy in and for the whole Euro-

Atlantic area, the new strategic concept must keep the right balance: affirming the fundamental capability for collective defense and at the same time providing for the full range of future conflict prevention and crisis management tasks."

All that is, of course, very abstractly formulated, but represents nonetheless a diplomatically worded attempt to save as much as possible from the "traditional" NATO.

Along these lines, Sharping told the German financial daily *Handelsblatt*, that he expects no "serious disputes" at the NATO summit, and that "work on the summit's texts" is far advanced. One can add that here it is not a question of "text formulation," but rather, the life-and-death-question of war or peace, which those responsible should address in clear language. Somehow, Sharping must have sensed that urgency, because he told *Handelsblatt* that NATO collective defense covers the "entire Euro-Atlantic area," but "the Gulf region certainly doesn't belong to that," even if there are other views from the Americans.

British: 'adapt or die'

Different views clearly exist from within the British government. Despite Sharping's diplomatic niceties, a deep rift is opening between the German and British positions concerning NATO, if we compare Sharping's statements with those of British Defense Secretary George Robertson. Robertson declared on March 8, at the Royal United Services Institute conference in London titled "NATO at 50": "The updated strategic concept will confirm . . . that NATO's fundamental tasks extend beyond simple collective defense. . . . The breadth of missions that NATO might undertake or support is staggering." The security of the NATO area now has to involve military capabilities for operations "outside NATO's borders. . . . [NATO] forces must be deployable to where they are needed, requiring strategic lift capability, and equipment that is readily transportable and instantly usable. Once there, they must be flexible enough to meet the diverse demands placed upon them, sustainable over long periods. . . . The troops have got to be trained and ready enough to survive when they arrive." And here there are "serious deficiencies," among the continental European NATO partners, who need armed forces that are "actually deployable" and "not only on paper." NATO, like all security organizations, has "two fundamental choices," namely, "they can adapt, or they can die."

The British Defense Minister, and General Shelton, are not exactly concealing their demands for a completely transformed, "new NATO." It's high time in continental Europe, not for diplomatic "stubborn resistance" to a NATO reorganization, but for clear words to be officially spoken by governments. This is all the more important, because, in the United States, there is no "monolithic" position regarding the new NATO doctrine. In the American government, in the U.S. military, and even in Congress, there are indeed forces who, in light of rapid slide into a new Cold War and "hot" regional wars, are saying: "Think of how it will end."