

Report From Germany by Rainer Apel

Walking a Tightrope

Germany wants to keep its principled opposition to the Iraq War, but also avoid open clashes with the United States.

The talks that U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell had in Berlin on May 16 yielded some “conciliatory” though austere gestures: Both Powell and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder conceded at a press conference that differences over the Iraq War remain, but hoped an agreement could be found in the formulation of an updated U.S. draft resolution for the United Nations Security Council that would regulate the post-war process in Iraq. The fact that no questions were taken at this press conference, indicated that neither leader wanted to risk the thin aura of “progress” being torn apart by some insistent journalists.

German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who also remained rather tight-lipped at his own press conference after his meeting with Powell, was more to the point in an interview given to the weekly *Der Spiegel*—after Powell had left Berlin. In the interview, published on May 19, Fischer urged international diplomacy to proceed in close cooperation with the United Nations, urging that “everything that we do, be done with recourse to all peaceful means available. . . . We did have differences over the question of war. These still remain. But this is the past, and we are looking forward, and we have to take notice of the new realities.” Fischer said that the latest U.S. draft resolution was “not sufficient, otherwise we would not have to discuss about it.” The points addressed by French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin have to be clarified: “The role of the United Nations in relation to the victorious powers; the question how to transform the oil-for-food program; how to guarantee transpar-

ency for the future, until a fully sovereign, legitimized Iraqi government exists; and lastly, the problem of the weapons of mass extinction.”

Granting Anglo-American current control of Iraq, Fischer said the UN should give final certification of the status of the country.

By aligning himself so closely with the view of France’s Foreign Minister, Fischer sent an indirect message of dissent to the Bush Administration. Germany has adopted a “pragmatic” approach which tries to keep the anti-war opposition role in close coordination with the French and the Russians, while at the same time trying to avoid new open clashes with the U.S. war party. But the war party keeps launching new provocations against France, Germany, and Russia, speculating that they will drop their reserve and expose themselves as “anti-American.”

So far, the Schröder government has avoided being drawn into a new confrontation, but a number of nasty provocations have already occurred. The day before Schröder received Powell, President George W. Bush “spontaneously” dropped into a meeting that Vice President Richard Cheney had with Roland Koch, the Governor of the German State of Hesse and a member of Schröder’s chief opposition party, the Christian Democratic Union. The President talked with Koch for about 15 minutes, mainly about Bush’s deep concern about the close cooperation between Germany and France undermining the relationship between the United States and Germany. But the affair was rather nasty, as Bush allegedly has such a

busy schedule these days that he could not find time for even a short meeting with Schröder, neither during the St. Petersburg 300th anniversary celebrations on May 30-31, nor the G-8 Summit in Evian, France, on June 1-3. Christian Democrat Koch is considered a “coming leader of Germany,” by U.S. neo-conservatives. Schröder did not respond openly to the slap.

The other provocation was a propaganda article written by Ralph Peters, a leading mouthpiece of the neo-conservatives. In the May 15 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, under the provocative headline, “Hitler Was Honest, At Least,” Peters’ piece employed insulting language to make his case that by aligning with the French, the Germans had ruined their relationship with the Americans beyond any chance of repair. The Americans would pull out all their troops from Germany, Peters threatened, calling Chancellor Schröder a “charlatan” whom no American would trust, and compared to whom, Hitler was “honest, at least.”

“You had your moment in the anti-American sun,” Peters warned Schröder, “but at high noon, you proved powerless and incapable.” No matter what the Germans may think about it, Peters wrote, the Americans will “not wait” for another 9-11, but “pre-emptively strike wherever we think it is necessary, and we will do so without asking Europe for permission, ever again.”

This overdrawn propaganda piece reminded the Germans that problems will remain as long as the “chickenhawk” warriors around Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz stay in office. France has taken a more realistic approach: Through its ambassador in Washington, the French government confronted the Pentagon with a long list of complaints about “propaganda lies against France.”