

2011/1/1 Abstract: The strategic situation at the turn of the year

Lothar Rühl

2010 was the year of Afghanistan and the American Southwest-Asia policy with the retreat perspective opened by President Barack Obama after the beginning of the withdrawal of US combat troops from Iraq in 2009. This retreat ended in August 2010, and only about 50.000 US soldiers are to stay until the end of 2011-2014 as instructors and advisors for the Iraqi armed forces, and also for special missions against terrorists. The political result of the seven years' war, occupation and assistance mission for the new Iraqi state has remained uncertain because of the varying political conditions and circumstances in the country. At the end of the combat mission in the middle of the year 2010 the security situation was considerably better than in the years 2006 and 2007, the critical stage of the uprising of the Islamicist „Al Qaida in Mesopotamia“ with its Sunnite „caliphate“ goal and the Baathist resistance fighters of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, which had declined in the war of 2003. The Western policy of pressure and offers against Iran concerning the termination of Iranian uranium enrichment as a prerequisite for the production of nuclear weapons, the resumption of negotiations, which had been mediated by USA for one year, between Israel and the Palestinian autonomy authority on the „status“ of Palestine, the signing of the „new START“ agreement between the USA and Russia aiming at a further reduction of strategic nuclear weapons arsenals, and the drawing up of a new „strategic conception“ for the North Atlantic Alliance between defence of alliances and military missions for international security outside the alliance area, are additional strategic developments. The ending of the final games in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose order of events and duration were not foreseeable in 2010, as well as the political conflict with the Shiite Iran are still up in the air, and the development of the situation in Pakistan has remained unpredictable and precarious. The strategic implications of the nationwide destructions in Western Pakistan, caused by the enormous flood disaster along the river Indus, and the resulting misery of the population in this region, together with the Islamicist militancy and the vicinity to the theatre of war Afghanistan as well as to Central Asia and China, are obvious. The extensive fires in Russia in the heat of the summer of 2010 sent out the same alarm signal to Europe as had done those on Europe's Mediterranean coasts or in California years ago. After the fire disaster in Russia and the grain export embargo until the end of 2010 imposed by Moscow, the UN world food authority FAO warned about famines and disturbances caused by hunger in poor countries due to the shortage and rise in prices of food. As far as the global picture is concerned, the importance of China as an upcoming superpower grows especially in Central Asia and towards South Asia. For the USA as the protecting power of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the South-East Asian states and Australia and as a new partner of India, such a Chinese naval power policy represents a concrete strategic challenge in the perspective of the next century. Especially the Islamic Middle East remains as the great political strategic challenge for international security. Its abundance of primary energy gives the global risk in it the world economical dimension, and with the economic interests of the industrial countries of the West puts a heavy strain on their policies and strategies for crisis control.