

German chancellor lines up with US critics of Bush war plans vs. Iraq

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Since Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD-Social Democratic Party) spoke out earlier this month against participation in a possible US war against Iraq, the dispute has developed into an open conflict between the American and German governments.

On August 12 the American ambassador, Daniel R. Coats, appeared at the German chancellery to officially communicate to the German government the “disquiet” of the American administration. Neither Chancellor Schröder nor Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) took the time to listen to the American ambassador’s criticisms. Instead they sent the advisor to the chancellor on security matters, Dieter Kastrup, and Chancellery Minister Frank Steinmeier.

Afterwards, the German government declared in a press statement that Coats had merely requested to know the German position on the issue of a war against Iraq. Coats himself refuted this version of events the following day, “openly and vehemently,” according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Coats told the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* that his visit had the purpose of expressly presenting the American position. He had made clear that the “sentences and words” chosen by German Chancellor Schröder to criticise America’s Iraq policies were inappropriate. In addition, the US was annoyed that the chancellor accused the government in Washington of not taking into account the consequences of a war.

Chancellor Schröder quickly rejected the criticisms. At a national conference of SPD functionaries held August 18 in Berlin, he repeated his reservations regarding America’s Iraq policy and emphasised that friendship with the US did not mean “saying yes and amen to everything.” He could only warn against creating a “new trouble spot” through military intervention, under conditions where peace remained to be established in the Balkans, the Middle East conflict was out of control, and

there was still no final victory against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Schröder went on to say that Germany need not “worry that anyone accuse us of not measuring up to our international commitments.” He pointed out that currently, after the US, the German army had the second largest contingent of troops on duty internationally.

The vehemence with which Schröder has criticized American war plans is both remarkable and unprecedented. Up to now leading social democratic politicians have always defended the interests of the strongest and most influential of the imperialist powers. From the Korean War in the 1950s, to the Vietnam War, to the war in Afghanistan, the SPD has consistently supported US war policy.

Now the situation is changing. For the first time since the Second World War the divergent interests of the US and Germany are coming into open conflict. With his criticism of the US campaign for war against Iraq, Schröder is expressing both the growing concern of the European great powers over the destabilisation of the Middle East, with its incalculable consequences, as well as the prospect of American monopoly control over the most important sources of oil.

The transatlantic axis, nevertheless, continues to play an important role in German foreign policy. The German recovery after 1945 would have been impossible without billions in subsidies from the US, and close economic and political relations across the Atlantic constituted an important pillar of stability throughout the post-war period.

In this respect, it is convenient for Schröder to base his own criticisms of the war plans of the Bush administration on the growing conflict within American political circles. Behind Schröder’s blunt rejection of any participation by the German army in a “military adventure” lies the fact that he—at least for the moment—is speaking for an

influential section of the American political establishment that is articulating its own concerns over Bush's war plans. Discussions could well have taken place across the Atlantic, and even a certain division of labour worked out.

Barely had Schröder declared his opposition to a new round of military aggression against Iraq than a series of prominent politicians in Washington employed similar arguments, warning the Bush administration against a "military adventure."

On August 19 the online edition of the BBC reported on the growing scepticism in the US regarding an Iraq war. Critics warned that as of yet President Bush had failed to clearly explain why a military intervention against Baghdad was necessary.

Brent Scowcroft, security advisor to the senior Bush during the Gulf War of 1991, House Republican leader Dick Arme, from the right wing of the Republican party, as well as Democratic Senator Carl Levin all publicly expressed criticisms of US war plans.

Henry Kissinger, in an interview with NBC television, generally supported Bush's militaristic policy, but cautioned that the launching of a war to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein should be better prepared among the American people.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter, joined the debate, writing a column in the *Washington Post* in which he listed a series of conditions the US had to meet before attacking Iraq. These were designed to establish a broader international legitimacy for the military activities of the US. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* summed up Brzezinski's standpoint as follows: "If there has to be a war, then it has to be carried out in a way which legitimises the global hegemony of the US, and leads at the same time to a more reliable system of international security."

Schröder's alliance with sections of the US ruling elite makes clear that his criticisms of the Bush administration's war plans are not a question of "for or against war." It is much more a debate on how, when and under what conditions a war is to be carried out—as well as how the booty is divided at the end.

The criticisms of Kissinger, Scowcroft and Brzezinski are not directed in any principled way against a war with Iraq, but rather against starting such a war without making sufficient preparations. Because this war will have such profound political and military consequences, they are demanding better planning and the preparation of the American people for the likelihood of high casualty rates. They fear that American soldiers could be drawn into

street fighting involving heavy losses, and that the raging social, ethnic and religious conflicts in the region could lead to an escalation of the war with unforeseen consequences.

For their part, the German and European corporations and banks, for whom Schröder speaks, fear the loss of their lucrative export markets in the region and the consequences of a new oil crisis. They are not opposed to the imposition of a pliant government in Iraq, as long as such a regime is prepared to accommodate itself to their interests, and not exclusively those of the Americans.

Schröder's alliance with sections of the American elite can only prove to be temporary. The growing tensions between Germany and the US have profound objective causes. They are nourished by the profound contradictions of world economy and the growing polarisation of society on both sides of the Atlantic. Under the conditions of globalisation and a threatening recession, the struggle for the re-division of resources and markets necessarily takes irreconcilable and violent forms. At the same time, war is increasingly seen within ruling circles as a welcome diversion from domestic problems and tensions for which the ruling elites have no answer.

For the past decade the trend has grown for international conflicts to be resolved through military means—and this trend is not unique to the US. The SPD-Green Party coalition came to power four years ago with the election pledge that no German soldier would serve outside NATO territories. Now Schröder boasts that Germany has more soldiers deployed in international operations than any other country, apart from the US!

In opposing a new war against Iraq, German workers cannot place any reliance on Schröder and the SPD, who represent the interests of German imperialism. The most important ally of German workers is the American working class. The struggle against the growing danger of war calls for an international movement of the working class that brings together the fight against militarism with the fight against social inequality.



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