

European Union summit: France, Germany seek rapprochement with US

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19 April 2003

Europe's heads of state are continuing their policy of conciliation with the Bush administration in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq. A statement by the European Union (EU) issued at its Athens summit on April 17 in effect legitimizes Washington's war.

The EU resolution says nothing about the war having been conducted without the authorisation of the United Nations and therefore in violation of international law. Nor does it mention the deaths of thousands of civilians and the injuries inflicted by the use of illegal weapons such as cluster bombs. There is, moreover, no reference to the failure of the American occupation force, following the collapse of the Baathist regime, to defend the population from looters and criminal elements, or halt the destruction of Iraqi cultural treasures of immense world importance, such as the national museums and library.

Indeed, the resolution contains not a single word of criticism of US actions in the war's aftermath, despite incidents of US troops firing into crowds of unarmed civilians and the process under way of establishing a colonial-style regime under US General Tommy Franks and ex-general Jay Garner.

Instead, the EU accepts that in the immediate period Iraq must be governed by "coalition forces", i.e., the US, with the assistance of Britain. They are to take responsibility for ensuring "a secure environment", presumably by shooting anyone who opposes the occupation of Iraq. The EU makes the absurd claim that this is compatible with providing the "people of Iraq" with the "chance to shape a new future for their country".

The central concern of the European powers is that the United Nations get a foot in the door as a stalking horse for advancing their own economic and geopolitical interests in the Middle East. Much of the discussion on the resolution took the form of haggling between Britain, on one side, and France, on the other, over whether the UN's role would be described as "central" or "important". Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair favoured "important," whilst France's President Jacques Chirac insisted on "central". Chirac got

this way, though even then British spokesmen noted that the resolution proposed the UN be given *a* central role, not *the* central role.

The EU accepted that initially the UN's "central" role would merely be to help provide humanitarian assistance. Only with the say-so of the Bush administration would its role be expanded to reflect its "unique capacity and experience in post-conflict nation building."

The resolution was passed with the collaboration of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Chirac's terminological victory is entirely pyrrhic. None of Europe's leaders are in any doubt that the Bush administration intends to transform Iraq into a US protectorate and will block any attempt to place the country under the authority of the UN.

Britain, Italy and Spain have up to now supported Washington's war drive and its colonialist aims in Iraq, hoping thereby to get a share of the war spoils. Now France and Germany are abandoning their previous tactical opposition to the war. By doing so they hope to mend fences with the US, placate the more bellicose anti-European voices within the Bush administration and protect their own economic interests in oil-rich Iraq.

Even before the EU summit, Paris, Berlin and Moscow had been scrambling to effect a rapprochement with Washington. As soon as military victory seemed assured, frantic efforts began to rebuild bridges to the US. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder met with Blair en route to the summit as a means of opening dialogue with Bush, whilst Chirac phoned the US president for the first time in six weeks, pledging to "act pragmatically and case by case" on matters relating to Iraq.

The prostration of the European powers before the war cabal in Washington will only encourage the global hegemonic ambitions of US imperialism. Already the Bush administration is making threats against Syria that raise the possibility of a military attack.

France, Germany and Russia are likely to get short shrift for their efforts to ingratiate themselves. Leading hawks

within the Bush administration are gloating over their humbling of Europe and are opposed to any concessions to America's rivals. In recent days US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and US Treasury Secretary John Snow have said that the main role which France, Germany and Russia can play in securing Iraq's future is to forgive billions of dollars in loans that they are owed. Given that Iraq's oil revenues are to be used to pay for the cost of the war, this would represent an indirect payment by Europe to America.

The contempt in which Europe is held is epitomized by an April 14 *Washington Post* article that declares the UN could "be invited to help with certain brief relief and civil administration chores" and goes on to say that France was made a permanent member of the Security Council in 1945 "as psychotherapy for a crisis of self-esteem brought on by bad behavior."

The article continues: "There is no entitlement for France, Germany, Russia and the United Nations. They did all in their power to keep Saddam Hussein in power, which makes them accessories to tyranny and war crimes."

By legitimizing, after the fact, the illegal and predatory war waged by the US, the bourgeois governments of Europe are rendering a critical service to the Bush administration, which is much in need of international credibility. These governments are well aware of the massive antiwar sentiment within their own countries and around the world, including within the US. By now suggesting that the conquest of Iraq was justified by the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein, and that democracy and progress can be established through aggressive war and military occupation under the aegis of American imperialism, they are sowing political confusion and helping Washington condition public opinion, especially within the US itself, to future and even more brutal military adventures.

The Bush presidency faces a mounting domestic crisis, which has led to press speculation over whether Bush will follow in his father's footsteps by winning the war but losing the election. The White House is seeking to impose unpopular cuts in vital services at a time when the economy is in severe difficulties and many US states are effectively bankrupt. At the same time it is carrying out a war policy that does not have the support of the majority of the population.

The EU summit in Athens underscores the political dangers inherent in the position of those tendencies within the antiwar movement that look to Germany, France or Russia to act as a counterweight to US militarism. Chirac, Schröder and Russian President Vladimir Putin are the political representatives of their own bourgeoisies and are incapable of seriously opposing the drive to war. Their

governments refused to endorse America's war plans essentially because their own interests in the region were threatened, and because US militarism and unilateralism cut across the global interests of the European powers.

They were prepared to make limited use of popular antiwar sentiment in an attempt to gain leverage with Washington, but they were always hostile to what was an initial expression of an anti-imperialist movement of global proportions, out of fear that this would get out of control and threaten their own vital interests.

This popular antiwar sentiment remains. The Athens summit was besieged by thousands of protesters who launched attacks on the British Embassy and British Airways.

The drive towards war is not merely the product of the subjective intentions of the right-wing cabal that holds power in the United States. It is rooted in the crisis of world capitalism, which finds its most explosive and malignant expression in the social and political crisis of American capitalism.

Presently the US enjoys a massive military advantage over its European rivals, which accounts in part for the current emphasis on appeasing Washington. However, this will only spur ongoing efforts to transform Europe into a military power able to successfully challenge the US—a policy that can only be carried through on the basis of attacking the living standards and democratic rights of the European working class.

Prior to the Athens summit, France, Germany and Russia met in St. Petersburg to discuss a common strategy, and the European parliament voted to set up a common defence procurement policy for Europe's armed forces. Belgium has called a summit on European defence for April 29, with the support of France and Germany.

Thus, to the extent that they seek to develop an independent position from Washington, Europe's ruling classes offer only an alternative form of militarism, bringing with it the spectre of a new arms race and a descent towards World War Three.



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