

# German Greens back airspace for US warplanes

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Coinciding with the beginning of the Iraq war, the German Green Party has officially spoken out in favour of allowing American and British troops to use German air space and bases to launch military operations.

A March 20 statement by the parliamentary faction of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens), records with approval that the federal government, “despite their and our rejection of this war, will not place in question overflight and usage rights in accordance with the NATO treaty for American and British bases in Germany and their security. As far as these are directly or indirectly involved in the war against Iraq, it (the government) will tolerate this.”

The Greens’ agreement to the use of German facilities for war purposes is noteworthy in two regards.

Firstly, it makes clear that their formal rejection of the war is not serious. The enormous US bases in Germany, with runways suitable for takeoff and landing by large airplanes, play an important role in the logistics of the war. A large quantity of the military supplies from the US to the Middle East is routed via these bases. Their closure for war purposes would seriously impair American military plans.

Even small countries like Switzerland and Austria have closed their airspace to American and British military aircraft. In Italy, where the government supports the war, the dispatch of US paratroopers into northern Iraq has unleashed a political scandal. Opposition speakers said that the use of the northern Italian Aviano airbase, from where US soldiers departed, meant Italy had entered the war and represented a breach of the constitution. Former president Francesco Cossiga, a Christian Democrat, even called for the unilateral cancellation of the NATO treaty. In contrast, the German Greens “tolerate” the direct or indirect involvement of German bases in the war against Iraq.

Secondly, the attitude of the Greens shows their readiness to drop those constitutional principles they normally avow when they do not fit in with their political conceptions. The German constitution strictly forbids any active or passive support for a war of aggression and the government would be obligated to close German airspace and bases if it

accepted that the war against Iraq was contrary to international law. Many well-known experts in international law have advanced this view. The distinguished International Commission of Jurists in Geneva has called the invasion of Iraq “completely illegal” and a “flagrant infringement of the UN Charter’s prohibition of the use of force”.

The Greens are fond of quoting such views in their own propaganda against the war. But when it comes to drawing the practical conclusions, they immediately pull back. In this regard, the resolution of the parliamentary faction treads a veritable tightrope. Accordingly, the war is “disputed in international law”, is “in no way warranted” and “cannot be justified”, the US administration has acted “over the heads of the majority of the Security Council, the international community and the world population” and their behaviour does not accord with the UN Charter. However nowhere does it say that the war is illegal or contrary to international law.

The arguments with which the parliamentary faction justifies its attitude are a typical example of Green Party “realpolitik”. Their central assertion is that although the war should be rejected, consistent opposition to it would harm Germany’s foreign policy interests. The relevant passage reads:

“Germany will uphold its rejection of the attack and its decision not to participate, with neither soldiers, weapons nor money. At the same time, independently of the evaluation of US and British conduct in international law, the federal government must reach a political decision about the significance of transatlantic relations and NATO. These belong to the indispensable foundations of German foreign and security policy and to the core elements of their stability and continuity.... A responsible policy may not endanger or destroy these basic elements. This applies irrespective of the present situation and independently of actual governments—in the USA as in Germany.”

How transatlantic relations, i.e., the relationship with the American administration, can be assessed independently of

the fact that Washington is attacking another country and in so doing bursting apart the entire postwar political order remains a secret of the Greens. In reality, they simply assert that upholding the NATO military alliance with the US is more important to them than the fate of the people in Iraq.

The statement goes even further: “The refusal to grant overflight rights and the use of military facilities could lead to a break with Germany’s most important ally. This would weaken the federal government, a government that plays a leading role worldwide in the opposition to the Iraq war and the associated strategy. Such a refusal would neither hinder nor shorten the war.”

This argument is absurd. If the German government seriously opposed the warmongers in Washington, the Greens argue, this would weaken its ability to play a leading role in the opposition to the war!

There could not be a clearer expression of the profound gulf between the former pacifist party and the millions of people who have taken to the streets against the war. For those demonstrating, it is a matter of stopping a war they regard as barbaric, unjust and criminal. For the Greens it is a matter of German foreign policy interests. They place more store in preserving a military alliance, NATO, which enables the German government to play in the league of the great powers, than in the fate of the victims of war.

This has been the attitude of the Social Democratic Party-Green Party government in Germany from the outset of the Iraq conflict. Their differences with the Bush administration are of a tactical rather than a principled character. They supported UN sanctions against Iraq, which have already cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of children, as well as the draconian inspection regime, which trampled over Iraq’s national sovereignty. Neither does the SPD-Green coalition in Berlin reject military interventions in principle, as their participation in wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan demonstrated.

The German government opposes the US over Iraq above all because it fears that otherwise the entire region will fall under American control, endangering Germany’s own economic and political interests. Berlin regards as unacceptable the increasingly unilateral actions of the Bush administration to establish America as the only hegemonic power, without regard to her allies. This view is also supported by a large section of the opposition Christian Democrats in Germany.

Rejection of the Iraq war and at the same time the clinging to NATO are two sides of the same aim—to preserve and develop Germany’s own international weight. This stance cannot be reconciled with a consistent opposition to the war. This is the root cause of the diverse, vacillating, inconsistent and opportunist positions taken by the Greens.

There is also a third aspect that arises just as logically from the defence of German interests—German military rearmament. The cry that Europe must become a great power, that it must not only catch up economically but also militarily with the US, has resounded ever louder in the German media since the beginning of the Iraq war. It is time America “was shown European muscles” (*Frankfurter Rundschau*); “the religious-ideologically embellished imperial hegemony of America desired by President Bush” virtually forces the formation of a “counterweight” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*); and similar statements could be read last week in German newspapers.

The Greens support this development. The former pacifists have become champions for the restructuring of the largely conscript *Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces) into a highly professional, mobile, international army of intervention. They are the only party in parliament to call for the *Bundeswehr* to be transformed into a completely professional army.

The price for this course of action has, naturally, to be borne by the mass of the population—in the form of further welfare cuts to free up the necessary funds for rearmament; as cannon fodder for future wars and as potential victims in a conflict between the great powers.

The statement by the Green’s parliamentary faction makes clear why the movement against the war can only win influence and be effective when it develops independently of the Greens, the Social Democrats and the government. Its starting point must not be the interests of “German foreign policy”, but the common, worldwide interests of the working class and young people, who are taking to the streets everywhere—including in the US.



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