

Washington involved in drafting statements designed to split Europe prior to Iraq war

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The Bush administration was involved in the two separate European declarations issued prior to the attack on Iraq, designed to split the European Union and isolate Paris and Berlin for their antiwar stance the *Financial Times* has revealed.

In its 28 May article, “Moves to isolate Berlin and Paris approved by US”, the FT described the “discreet involvement of officials in the White House and a consultant working with the administration in Washington came at a critical moment in diplomacy in the weeks ahead of war. The statements were intended to show support for the Bush administration’s agenda and demonstrate that Paris and Berlin did not speak for Europe.”

At this time, things were getting tight for US plans to attack Iraq. Across Europe there was massive popular opposition to war. On 15 February, tens of millions across the continent and throughout the world took to the streets to denounce US sabre-rattling. Few believed the Bush administration’s claims that Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction” and constituted a major threat to world peace, which were widely regarded as cynical pretexts for the US to invade the oil rich country and seize control of the crucial resource.

Partly in recognition of the public mood, the governments of France and Germany had sought to curtail US war plans—insisting that all existing avenues through the United Nations, including extensive weapons inspections, must be exhausted first.

More fundamentally for the two European countries, the reckless behaviour of the Bush administration threatened to overturn all the institutions of international law and order, plunging the Middle East into chaos and undermining their own international standing against their more powerful rival. To allow the US to proceed in such a way, they reasoned, would be

to hand it a blank cheque that could eventually be cashed at their expense.

The so-called “letter of eight”, published in the *Wall Street Journal* on January 30, was clearly designed to blast any obstacles the European powers were seeking to employ out of the way. Apparently drafted by Spain’s Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, and signed by the leaders of eight European countries including the British and Italian premiers, the letter was drawn up behind the backs of France, Germany and the European Union.

Noting “American bravery, generosity and farsightedness” during World War II and the Cold War period, the letter pledged solidarity with the Bush administration’s efforts to “rid the world of the danger posed by Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction”.

Appearing just as US Secretary of State Colin Powell presented America’s flimsy case against Iraq at the United Nations Security Council, the letter was intended to silence Paris and Berlin, undermine efforts to forge a common European stance on the war and whip the UN into line.

Just one week later, 10 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, issued a joint statement similarly endorsing the US position on Iraq. Known as the Vilnius 10, this declaration served to underscore US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s contemptuous reference to Paris and Berlin as “old Europe” and signalled that America was determined to carve out its own sphere of influence in Europe’s backyard in direct opposition to France and Germany.

Although the Bush administration had made plain its delight at both statements, it strenuously denied any direct involvement. But the FT reveals that the Bush administration was “kept closely informed” of who the

signatories would be to the letter of eight, and had even been sent a draft.

Matters were even more straightforward with the Vilnius 10—with the administration actually drafting the Eastern European statement.

According to the FT, “the text was written by Bruce Jackson, a US citizen with close ties to the White House. US administration officials were closely consulted in the process.”

The paper adds, “a senior White House official insisted that the Letter of Eight was not ‘a product made in the USA’ but conceded that the V10 letter involved a greater level of Washington input.”



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