Danish government challenged over missing Iraqi WMDs

Niall Green
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Denmark's Liberal Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen recently paid a five-day visit to Washington where President George W. Bush thanked him for Danish support during the attack and occupation of Iraq. Denmark sent a small naval detachment to the Persian Gulf during the conflict and is preparing to send 380 soldiers to aid the occupying forces.

The trip comes amidst accusations that the Liberal-Conservative Danish coalition used fabricated claims of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to generate support for the war. Rasmussen has insisted that the war was justified—with or without the discovery of prohibited weapons. "There were several other good reasons to launch the military action," he claimed.

"Collaboration with terrorists was another reason. At any rate, the world becomes a better place to live whenever a dictatorial regime is removed. That's justification in itself."

By contrast, Rasmussen's Conservative Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller maintains that the participation of Denmark in the war was due to allegations by Britain and America that Saddam Hussein had stockpiles of illegal weaponry.

Caught out by the mounting evidence that no such weapons exist, the two leading Danish proponents of war seemingly find themselves at odds with each other. But Møller criticism's are simply aimed at covering over, post facto, the Danish government's abject capitulation before the US.

A member of the European Union and NATO with strong economic ties to Germany, Britain and the US, tiny Denmark's traditional policy has been to balance between its more powerful allies. In its strengthened orientation towards US imperialism during the Iraq conflict, the Danish government abandoned this role. Fearing that a confrontation with America would be disastrous for Danish interests, while conflict with the Franco-German core of the EU would be merely bruising, the government chose to side with Washington.

In the run-up to the United Nations Security Council vote on the war, Thomas Donnelly, a senior Bush foreign policy advisor, warned Denmark that it faced a "diabolical" choice. Suggesting that the survival of NATO was at risk, Donnelly made clear that it was the issue of Iraq that would dictate who were the United States' allies.

The US-dependent interests that the Rasmussen government sought to protect included those of Danish-based multinational AP Møller Group, the parent company of shipping giant Maersk. Registered as a US company, Maersk signed a five-year $400 million deal with the US Department of Defense earlier in the year to maintain and operate eight Bob Hope-class military supply ships in the Indian Ocean. A further 19 Maersk vessels are subsidised by the US Maritime Security Program to the tune of $2.1 million per ship annually to make them available for military supply tasks.

In addition to its direct dealings with the US military, AP Møller Group has an oil and gas arm with interests in the Persian Gulf region.

As a reward for Denmark's support, the American Embassy in Copenhagen has indicated that Danish business will be given a favourable position when bidding for Iraqi contracts. An Embassy official said, "Denmark took the lead in participating in the coalition. Therefore, we'd like to ensure that Danish companies and other coalition partners have the opportunity to participate in the rebuilding of Iraq."

Having attempted to secure the favour of Washington, Danish efforts, led by the foreign minister, are now largely focused on repairing the damage done

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to European relations. As part of the reconciliation process Per Stig Møller has attempted to give an impression of distance from the Bush administration. He has disassociated the government from US sabre-rattling over Syria, and has rebuffed US demands that Denmark agree to protect Americans from prosecution under the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

Møller will visit Berlin in July to hold talks with his German counterpart Joschka Fischer. It is likely, however, that the Danish government feels somewhat emboldened by the about-face performed by Germany and France following their post facto acceptance of the invasion and occupation at the UN. Denmark now seems to be attempting to lecture its larger European neighbours on the best way to accommodate to the reality of US aggression. A Danish foreign office statement issued 6 June, calls for the EU to strengthen its capacity to participate in international conflicts using its own military means, with the European Security and Defence Policy and the 60,000-man European rapid reaction force to be the basis for a new era of European "peacekeeping" independent of NATO and the US. But in this attempt to encourage a more robust EU foreign policy, the Danish position remains that Europe must avoid direct conflict with the US at all costs.

Speaking to a conference on the future of European integration in May, Møller called for the EU to play the junior partner to American imperialism. He urged the EU to develop "not as a counterweight to the United States of America ... but as an independent and attractive player and partner for the US."

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