

Die Zeit pleads for German interests in Iraq

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Following the Second World War, there was widespread public agreement in Germany that the country should never again pursue an aggressive foreign policy involving the use of military means. This position changed after the reunification of Germany in 1990. In 1992, the official guidelines drawn up for the German army stipulated “the sponsoring and securing of worldwide political, economic, military and ecological stability,” as well as the “maintenance of free world trade and access to strategic raw materials.” Nevertheless, military interventions on the basis of mere power and interest politics would not have been publicly accepted.

On the political scene, it was above all the Green Party that exerted itself to overcome this threshold. In countless, passionate and highly moralistic debates, it argued over whether German participation in crises should be armed or unarmed, for the purposes of peace-keeping or enforcing peace, with blue helmets or green helmets. The predictable result was to drop the barrier to military interventions after every dispute.

On the media scene, those press organs regarded as liberal-leaning performed the same role. They did their best to provide a humanitarian aura for all of the foreign interventions conducted by the German army—including its participation in the war against Yugoslavia. They regularly claimed it was not an issue of German interests but rather the prevention of genocide and the securing of freedom and democracy.

Now that appears to be finished. The lead article in the July 17 edition of the newspaper *Die Zeit* pleads in blunt fashion for the pursuit of German interests in Iraq. According to the deputy editor of the paper, Bernd Ulrich: “It is an issue there of economic interests, also oil, and perspectives for development policies. Germany should not miss this—provided there is a UN mandate—unless we do not have enough soldiers to send there.”

The article deals with whether the German government should react to the growing problems confronting occupation troops in Iraq and to the domestic difficulties of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair—who justified the war with falsified documents—by sending in German troops. It carries the revealing heading: “Berlin should use its opportunity in Iraq.”

Die Zeit claims that any gloating (*Schadenfreude*) would be inappropriate. While it would be legitimate to turn down any request by the Americans for German participation in Iraq—“After all, the Americans undertook this campaign against the will of the Germans”—such a response would achieve nothing. It was necessary therefore “to decide on the basis of other criteria whether German troops should risk their lives in Iraq.” The first question had to be “whether such an intervention serves German interests.” There then follows the sentence already cited above referring to economic interests and oil.

Blood for oil! It is not possible to put it more directly than *Die Zeit* does.

In common with many other German newspapers, the weekly journal originally had criticised and rejected the American war plans. But hardly had the first shots been fired when the paper changed its position in order to eventually line up with the American victors at the time of the fall of Baghdad.

Up until now, the paper justified its turnabout by arguing that there should be no further damage to German-US relations. This argument also crops up in its latest lead article: “Naturally an engagement in Iraq will improve German-US relations.” But this consideration is secondary. Priority must be given to German interests in Iraq. In the final passage, under the heading “Return to *realpolitik*,” the article argues: “With regard to the US” the German government “must neither prove its gratefulness nor demonstrate

German emancipation. Realism, astuteness and the safeguarding of our own interests are sufficient.”

The reference to “*realpolitik*” is significant. The concept emerged in Germany in the middle of the 19th century and stands for a foreign policy free from any sort of ideological scruples and directed in the naked pursuit of national interests. German chancellor Bismarck was the living symbol of this policy, which—under his successors—finally led to the catastrophe of the First World War.

The editorial line of *Die Zeit*, which is co-edited by former Social Democratic chancellor Helmut Schmidt, is close to the government. Its lead article throws an illuminating light on the German government’s original rejection of American war plans. Many opponents of the war thoroughly misunderstood the “No to war” loudly proclaimed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder during his election campaign last November. They thought that the German government was opposed in principle to the colonial suppression of a defenceless country. In fact, as the WSWS continuously emphasised, the issue for the German government was how to preserve its own interests in the region, which it saw threatened by the American aggression.

Since the fall of Baghdad, the government has step by step moved closer to the US administration—not least during the recent visit to Washington by German foreign minister Joschka Fischer. Although he would have been entirely justified in criticising his hosts, Fischer said absolutely nothing. As a correspondent for the Berlin-based *Tagesspiegel* put it: “Not a word about the current debacle for the US government regarding the reasons for the war. Nothing regarding the suspicion that the war had been achieved through manipulation, deceit and lies. Not a word about the mystery of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction which refuse to be found. Not a word about the incompetent plans of the occupying powers for the postwar period.”

Instead, Fischer indicated the basic readiness of the German government to collaborate with the US in Iraq, declaring in a host of television interviews: “It is in the joint interests of Europe and the United States to concentrate our forces in order to win the peace.”

Fischer did not go so far as to promise to send German troops. He did not, however, exclude the possibility. The prerequisite was a clear United Nations resolution and the existence of a legitimate Iraqi

government. Bearing in mind that he recently praised in the highest terms the puppet government enforced by US civil administrator Paul Bremer, the obstacles he has raised should not be too difficult to overcome.

Fischer obviously shares the standpoint of *Die Zeit*, that now is not the time “to teach the Americans manners,” but rather—in the tradition of *realpolitik*—to safeguard German economic interests. For this the warmongers in Washington can be thankful. Over the long term, however, this will do little to resolve transatlantic tensions. After all, those in power on the American side of the Atlantic are also practitioners of *realpolitik*.



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