

Chancellor Schröder moves toward a German military mission in Iraq

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Four months after the Iraq war, the Schröder government is no longer excluding in principle the participation of German troops in the occupation of the conquered land.

Just before his departure to Afghanistan on August 11, Defence Minister Peter Struck told the *Frankfurter Rundschau* he not only endorsed a stronger role for NATO in Afghanistan, but also supported the deployment of the military alliance in Iraq. The precondition would be an appropriate United Nations mandate, and then the participation of German troops would be quite possible.

Green Party chairperson Angelika Beer repeated this view on *Deutschlandfunk* radio. “If the Americans carry this process through and agree to give the United Nations a mandate,” Beer said, the Bundestag (parliament) would decide to what extent German participation made sense—“whether that means a civilian, police or military” deployment.

On August 13, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder distanced himself from the defence minister and told the press he did not think much of “wild speculation about things that were not yet ripe for a decision.” At the same time, however, Schröder stressed that the government had “an elementary interest in the success of the reconstruction of Iraq.”

Schröder’s further comments indicated that German participation was not a matter of principle, but a question of the price that the United States was ready to pay. Press reports quoted him as saying, “Giving the United Nations somewhat greater responsibilities in Iraq has nothing to do with a mandate allowing participation by NATO and its member states.”

Schröder was referring to the Iraq resolution adopted the following day by the Security Council. Resolution 1500 grants the UN an “important role” in Iraq, but this remains limited to purely humanitarian, organisational and technical tasks. Washington did not want to grant the UN political powers because it wants to maintain its monopoly over the levers of power in the occupied country, so that it can continue to oversee unilaterally the privatisation of the Iraqi oil industry and the assignment of lucrative “reconstruction” contracts.

Under such conditions, Berlin—as well as France, Russia and India—are not ready to contribute their own troops to the occupation. Under pressure from Russia and France, the Security Council reacted to Washington’s unyielding attitude by refusing to formally recognise the Governing Council set up by the US as an interim Iraqi government.

However, horse-trading in the Security Council continues. Paris,

Moscow and Berlin do not exclude that Washington, under the pressure of increasing military problems, could be forced to make greater concessions. If the US gave over part of its power to the UN, the question of sending troops would be posed anew. The divergent statements of Struck and Schröder are thus less an expression of political differences within the German government than of the ongoing haggling over the price of German participation.

Paramilitary GSG 9 units, the Special Forces of Germany’s Federal Border Police, have been stationed in Iraq for several weeks. Their official task is to ensure the security of German businessmen, journalists and installations. The task of the GSG 9 units sent to Afghanistan 15 months ago, to prepare the German military mission in Kabul, was described in identical terms.

The British security company Centurion reported seeing convoys of armoured vehicles conveying German diplomats to Baghdad from Jordan “accompanied by heavily armed officials of the elite GSG 9.” The convoy engaged in a heavy exchange of gunfire with unknown assailants.

The big German industrial and trade associations are exerting strong pressure on the government, demanding that it utilise the obvious difficulties of the American occupiers in Iraq to promote their own interests. The expressions of praise for the “great work done by German soldiers in Afghanistan,” with which US president Bush surprised official Berlin at the beginning of the month, were regarded in company boardrooms as a signal that German military participation in Iraq could be useful in pressing their economic interests.

At present, high-ranking economic delegations are making the rounds in Baghdad. Under no circumstances do the representatives of German big business want to be swept aside by the American occupying authority—the Coalition Provisional Authority—when it comes to the granting of contracts.

The newsweekly *Der Spiegel* recently complained that the American administration had completed three international tender offers thus far without any German companies getting a share of the action. Instead, in May, the California-based Bechtel Corporation secured a large-scale contract worth \$680 billion overall to restore the Iraqi infrastructure, and at a conference for subcontractors nearly 90 percent of the value of business transacted went to American companies.

As far as the German corporate elite is concerned, this must change in the future. To this end, the Federal Association of

German Industry (BDI) has set up the Iraq Discussion Forum. In addition, the German Business Forum, which brings together managers from high-tech industries as well as sales and research personnel, scientists and politicians, has organised a Taskforce for the Reconstruction of Iraq to promote the interests of small and medium-sized German firms.

The BDI is seeking the greatest possible participation of German enterprises in the annual Baghdad trade fair, and is soliciting support for a “fact-finding mission” in Iraq, according to the on-line magazine *german-foreign-policy.com*.

The Iraq offensive being undertaken by German business is aimed above all at securing control over profitable parts of the 40 largest Iraqi enterprises, which the US administration wants to denationalise.

Politicians and business representatives point out that many of the power stations, roads, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure facilities had been built by German companies 20 years earlier. Before a total commercial embargo was imposed on the country in 1990, Germany had risen to become Iraq’s most important trading partner. In 1982, German exports to the country reached a high point. After the embargo, this almost totally collapsed.

It was only last year that German business succeeded in once again increasing its commerce with Iraq, while France in recent years has remained slightly ahead of Germany in the level of trade with Iraq. At the Baghdad trade fair last September, both countries were able to conduct a robust level of business. But the war in the spring destroyed all such advances.

The German government’s original refusal to support the war was directly connected with these economic interests. In letters and discussions with Schröder last autumn and winter, several German trade associations demanded that he use all means possible to influence the American administration in averting a war. Today, the same trade associations are urging military participation in order to end, or at least limit, the US monopoly of power in Iraq.

While some conservative politicians and uniformed brass still warn against reckless military intervention in Iraq and call for restraint, the German government has begun to change its point of view. Just as in matters of social and taxation policy, the interests of the large concerns and trade associations drive the government’s foreign policy. Despite all the denials, a German military mission in Iraq could come about sooner than most observers might expect. If the Schröder government initially wanted to hinder America’s recourse to arms because it threatened German business interests, it now fears being left to stand on the sidelines as the war booty is being shared out.

This attitude has nothing to do with a fundamental rejection of so-called “preventive wars,” the defence of international law, the establishment of democratic structures or other such principles that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens like to proclaim at election time. It is the strengthening of German and European great power interests that underlies preparations for a German military mission in Iraq.

At the end of June, at a summit in Thessaloniki, European foreign ministers agreed on an outline for a new European Union

(EU) security strategy that adopted major elements of the American doctrine. The text referred expressly to the possibility of conducting preventive wars. The EU, the summit declared, should be ready to “act before a crisis arises... We must develop a strategic culture, which calls for early, rapid and, if necessary, long-lasting interventions.”

The doctrine stresses the need for a European military power as a counterweight to the US and emphasises European economic interests. The summit resolution stated: “As a union of 25 states with more than 450 million inhabitants, producing 25 percent of the world’s GDP,” the European Union had to be “an important global actor.”

The growing readiness of the German government to participate in the military occupation of Iraq has another, no less reactionary, aspect. It means lending support to the Bush administration, which is coming increasingly under domestic pressure.

Even as opposition to the Bush administration within the US grows, and the course advocated by Rumsfeld, Cheney and Bush meets increased resistance; while the administration’s stated war aims are exposed as lies, and criticism of Bush from angry soldiers and their families increases in tandem with the rising death toll of American youth in uniform—the German government rushes to assist the regime in Washington.

In this way, the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition in Berlin supports the most right-wing political forces in the US, who act with brutality and ruthlessness against the American people, trample international law underfoot, and intimidate political opponents. Bush intervened repeatedly in German politics to strengthen the conservative opposition. He endeavoured to isolate Germany and France in Europe. But despite all that, Schröder now hopes, since Bush is in a tight spot, that a personal discussion with the president and a friendly handshake will “normalise the strained relationship.”

This course must be rejected unreservedly, just like the welfare cuts being implemented by the Social Democratic-Green Party coalition. The only principled attitude towards the sending of troops is: Not a man and not a cent for the military occupation of Iraq!

The European working class must fight for the immediate withdrawal of the occupation forces in Iraq and unite with the American people in a common fight against the Bush administration.



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