German foreign policy targets Africa

Andreas Reiss
7 February 2004

The list of those accompanying German chancellor Gerhard Schröder on his recent visit to Africa reads like a Who's Who of German big business: Jürgen Schrempp from DaimlerChrysler, Wolfgang Mayrhuber from Lufthansa, Rolf Kunisch from Beiersdorf and Commerzbank chief executive Martin Kohlhaussen. A total of 23 business chiefs travelled with Schröder on his trip through Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana and South Africa.

The composition of the delegation made it clear that the trip was bound up with tangible economic interests. In the past few years, the African continent has received increased attention from the Great Powers, and Germany does not want to be left out. The discrete planning of military interventions accompanies these economic initiatives. Germany, France and Great Britain are working uncharacteristically towards the same end. After the US established itself in Iraq, in the face of European objections, Africa has now become the favoured location for interventions by the military strike forces that the European Union (EU) is currently building up. Amongst its other objectives, Schröder's visit was also aimed at assessing the continent's political terrain.

Schröder first travelled to Ethiopia to meet Prime Minister Zenawi and representatives of the African Union, which has its headquarters in the Ethiopian capital. In a speech to the African Union, Schröder promised an "honest partnership." "This is certainly a moral question," he said, "but it is also a question of economic and political common sense." Europe cannot live in freedom as long as there is disunity and conflict in its neighbourhood, the German chancellor insisted.

Similar statements emanated from German government circles before the trip. The claim that instability and violence, in the form of terrorism, could spread from Africa to Europe is then used to justify an aggressive political and military intervention in African affairs.

After Ethiopia, the chancellor travelled to Kenya. Since the beginning of the year, the country has been governed by a "rainbow coalition" under the leadership of Mwai Kibaki. Under the slogan of "fighting corruption," it has closely cooperated with the western Great Powers. Schröder made a point of praising Kibaki's government for its struggle against corruption and for establishing stability, including in the surrounding region.

He promised to double German development aid to a total of 50 million euros—a drop in the ocean, amounting to less than 2 euros per head for the country's population. The money is planned for expanding the infrastructure in the areas of water and energy supply, encouraging private agriculture, and training the police. In this respect, collaboration with German experts is anticipated—and increased collaboration is also planned between the intelligence services of the two countries.

In addition, Schröder promised to intervene to reduce EU trade barriers. For some time, developing countries have demanded the dismantling of the system of high subsidies with which the EU supports its own agricultural interests—subsidies that then make it impossible for African countries to export their wares to the West.

Schröder's intervention on behalf of Africa, for the dismantling of such obstacles, is not motivated by mere humanitarianism. In the first place, the issue is being used as a means of reducing subsidies to European farmers. Secondly, such measures are aimed at facilitating the shift of industrial production abroad. European trade restrictions also hit Western companies based in Africa, which produce goods for re-importation to Europe.

In South Africa, Schröder met up with head of state Thabo Mbeki. After their talks, Schröder stressed the broad agreement between the two governments: "We considered where differences existed and established that there were none."

In fact, there are differences in their respective attitudes to Zimbabwe. For a long time, the EU has been insisting that President Robert Mugabe be replaced by a government that is prepared to cooperate with the West. At the beginning of 2002, the EU imposed diplomatic sanctions on Zimbabwe and froze its financial aid. For its part, South Africa continues to support Mugabe.

On the day before the talks between Schröder and Mbeki, the South African newspaper *This Day* commented: "In talks, President Thabo Mbeki will condemn Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe is an easy target to condemn for the violation of human rights, bearing in mind that Germany has no business interests there. On his recent visit to China, Schröder made no mention of human rights' violations by a government that he has made a partner to German business interests."

Schröder's last stopover trip was Ghana, where he visited the "Kofi-Annan Training Centre" for African "peacekeeping" soldiers. After training, these forces will be used to intervene across the continent to quell conflicts. The German government and German armed forces have offered considerable support, so far providing 2.15 million euros to finance the camp.

The training camp has enabled Ghana to increase its significance as a force for order in Africa. The country has contributed soldiers to virtually every UN intervention since 1960. Ghana is therefore an important partner for all those seeking to increase their influence across Africa.

German foreign policy has demonstrated considerable interest in Africa for some time. According to news magazine *Der Spiegel*, it is the continent that is "most on the mind" of Foreign Minster Joschka Fischer. "We should not let Africa escape our attention," stated the leader of the Greens in the course of a visit to the German army command centre for international interventions.

An African visit by the German chancellor was originally planned for November 2001, but was then cancelled following the intervention by the German army in the Afghanistan war. Last summer, Germany contributed 20 soldiers to the French-led intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This was the first-ever joint military action on the part of the EU. Then, in October of last year, Fischer undertook visits to South Africa and Namibia.

But Germany is not the only interested partner—other Great Powers have recently increased their diplomatic and military activity in Africa. In addition to its activities in the Congo, France sent troops to its former colony, the Ivory Coast.

The European powers' engagement in Africa is in competition with that of the US. In 1997, the US had already played an important role in the overthrow of the French-backed Mobutu government in Zaire (now the DRC). The militias of rebel leader Laurent Kabila were trained and provided with weapons by CIA agents. In 2003, Washington sent troops to Liberia, wracked for years by a bloody civil war. Last year's Africa tour

© World Socialist Web Site

by President George W. Bush was aimed at developing US interests on the continent.

The motives for the Great Powers' increased interest in Africa—for a long time the "forgotten continent"—are plain to see. The continent possesses huge reserves of raw materials, internal markets with great potential for growth, and cheap production costs. Following the war against Iraq, African countries with large oil reserves such as Nigeria and the Congo have won new significance in European eyes.

Over the past year, German trade with Africa grew to a total of 23 billion euros, continuing a long-standing trend. In South Africa alone, 450 German companies employ over 70,000—particularly in the chemical, auto, electrical and engineering industries, where 2.6 billion euros have been invested. Kenya is also regarded as a potential market for German goods and as a base for German industry.

Schröder spoke of developing a type of "privileged partnership" with Kenya. The country is regarded as a model of stability in the region, but its image has suffered following recent terrorist attacks—the bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and the bombing of various holiday hotels in 2002. Cooperation with the Kenyan police and intelligences services will be expanded in order to stabilise the country.

After Britain, Germany is the biggest investor in this country, which lies on the Indian Ocean. Some 150 million euros of German direct investment flowed into Kenya in 2001. For years, Kenya has attempted to establish itself as a profitable production base. Together with state-run advisory organisations for foreign investors, the country has set up 22 so-called Export Processing Zones, offering significant business incentives: exemption from consumer goods tax (VAT) and taxes on preliminary products, as well as fewer management restraints.

As Africa's biggest economic power, South Africa is even more important for German companies. For more than 50 years, DaimlerChrysler has been active in the country, where it produces for export to Asia and Australia. However, the end of apartheid has expanded the potential for economic growth.

Claus E. Daun, a member of Schröder's delegation, controls a group of 16 companies in South Africa with a total of 14,000 employees. In the run-up to the latest trip, Daun gave an interview to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. His comments were revealing. When asked why he was producing in Africa and not China, he replied, "When one wants to produce something for re-import to Germany, then perhaps one should go to China. At their current level of wage costs, the South Africans cannot compete. But when you want to produce something for the local market, then here is the right place. Forty-five million people live in South Africa and 80 percent represent potential future consumers. When they have money, they are prepared to buy. In December, there were growth rates here of 15 to 20 percent."

Daun then went on to praise the ANC—which once declared itself in favour of socialism—for its economic policies. "It was fascinating to see how rapidly the ANC threw the old ideas in the waste bin and grasped globalisation. In particular, Nelson Mandela. He immediately understood that socialist ideas were now just history. This is an amazing paradox: In South Africa, economic policy is faring better under the communists than [under] the previous apartheid government. And in Germany, the SPD must dismantle the so-called welfare state." Daun then spoke of a "dynamic and get-up-and-go mood," and explained the reason: "The great majority of the people here have no other option but to get on the move."

When asked about the role of the trade unions, he answered, "Yes, they often say they do not want Chinese type conditions.... In response, I say, is it not better to produce with half the pay instead of having to import one hundred percent from China? Half pay still puts something into the pockets of employees and they can then acquire skills."

The German company Siemens is also actively intervening to expand its interests in South Africa. It is involved in constructing a dam in the Democratic Republic of Congo together with a South African company, which then plans to export the electricity gained to South Africa.

Hand-in-hand with economic and diplomatic engagement, the European powers are developing an increased military presence on the African continent.

According to a report in *Der Spiegel*, French president Chirac and British prime minister Blair have been agitating for months "that the EU must engage more strongly in the crisis regions of the divided continent—when necessary with European troops." In Africa, "the performance of a joint security and defence policy should be put to the test. In particular, the French link this with the bold demand that Europe emerge alongside the US as a global player. To this end, Africa is the ideal world region, because unlike the Middle East, most conflicts can be checked with limited forces."

According to the magazine, the former rivals have already drawn up a plan in Brussels for a future intervention in Africa by EU forces. Possible targets for intervention include Burundi, the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Germany intends playing an intensive role and will contribute 18,000 troops to the planned 60,000-strong EU intervention force.

Apparently, there is agreement in the German chancellery and foreign ministry on this point. In light of the anticipated domestic opposition, the military engagement, however, is to take place one step at a time—as in the case of the Balkans. In the first place, "humanitarian assistance" is to be sent in the form of a medical corps; then the dispatch of "observers," staff officers and specialists; and later, for their protection, small contingents of troops, which will then eventually be reinforced by larger fighting units.

As usual, it is Green Party leader Joschka Fischer who has been given the job of finding an historical justification for the newly awakened military ambitions. Whereas the legacy of the Holocaust supposedly obliged Germany to prevent the alleged genocide of the Kosovans and bomb Belgrade, now the 1884-85 Berlin Conference is cited as a precedent. In Berlin at that time, under the mediation of German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, France and England divided a large portion of the African continent between them. Now when it comes down to the issue of the bloody heritage of colonialism, it is necessary that the Europeans stick together. "This cannot be left to the two colonial powers," Fischer blustered in the German cabinet.

One could put it in a more straightforward manner: after the re-division of Africa in the nineteenth century, when Germany came away virtually empty-handed (with just Cameroon and the territory today known as Namibia), this time, in the twenty-first century, it wants a share of the booty.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site