

German foreign minister in Washington— cowardice personified

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For millions of people in the Middle East, Europe and the US the torture photos from Abu Ghraib have delivered the final proof and confirmed something they knew, or at least suspected, for a long time—the war against Iraq is nothing other than a brutal imperialist war of conquest.

Following the exposure as outright lies of the initial reasons given to justify the war—Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and connections to Al Qaeda—the disclosure of widespread torture practices has torn to shreds the last excuse given by the Bush administration to justify its occupation of the country, i.e., the overcoming of a brutal torture regime and its replacement with a democratic alternative.

There is barely anyone who believes that the torture incidents are just the work of a few disorientated soldiers. Such a thesis is refuted by the enormous amount of photographic material, the carefree manner in which the photos were taken, the early warnings from the Red Cross and other human rights organisations, as well as the known details of interrogation methods used by the American secret services, etc.

In the final analysis, the torture in Iraq arises from the character of the war itself. Colonial suppression inevitably gives rise to widespread resistance, which can be held in check only by further repression, intimidation and terror. This was the case in the Nazi invasions of Poland, the Soviet Union and the Balkans, and, in similar fashion, in the French occupations of Algeria and Vietnam. As a military disaster becomes more and more likely, the brutal methods of intimidation and suppression on the part of the occupying power are inevitably stepped up.

The fact that this is now taking place before the eyes of a broad public has a great deal to do with the political crisis of the American government and its allies.

The Spanish government led by Jose Maria Aznar was voted out of office because of its support for the war. Following the change of government, the new Socialist

Party prime minister, Rodriguez Zapatero, has moved to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq sooner than at first expected. In so doing, he anticipated plans of the US military to use Spanish troops as cannon fodder by sending them to a particularly dangerous front line in the remaining weeks of their posting.

Since then, Polish support has also wavered. Last week, the Warsaw daily *Rzeczpospolita* wrote: “The government in Washington has not only led Western states into a war which cannot be won, but has also distorted the concept of democracy so profoundly that many people can no longer recognise it. It is not sufficient in this situation merely to call for the resignation of Rumsfeld. Responsibility for his incompetence and arrogance lies with the entire government of the United States.”

In Italy, the pressure on the already shaky government of Silvio Berlusconi has increased since it became known that the government was already aware of the abuse of prisoners last year. This was reported on television by the wife of an Italian soldier who died in the course of the war. There were indications that abuses were taking place, but the superiors of the soldier refused to do anything about it.

In Great Britain, criticism of Prime Minister Tony Blair’s unwavering loyalty to George Bush also continues to grow.

If the German government had been serious about its opposition to the war, it would now be demanding an end to the occupation and the immediate withdrawal of all American and British troops. This, however, has not been its reaction.

Last week German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer travelled to Washington, to assist in the damage-control exercise being carried out by his colleague and “friend” Colin Powell, and offer the shaken US government help in the form of a reworked UN resolution. In his talks with Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice,

Fischer refused to call a spade a spade by directly raising the criminal nature of America's undertakings in Iraq. Instead, he echoed the euphemistic and deceitful choice of words worked out by the Pentagon.

His appearance before the American press was a thoroughly embarrassing spectacle. With an emphatically worried expression, he blustered about the common tasks involved in "defending Western values" faced with the growing threat of terrorism. He had been shocked by the pictures showing torture, he declared, but merely said, "Those who bear responsibility for this humiliation, abuse and even worse crimes must be investigated and brought to book."

Those really responsible, however, do not need to be investigated. Their identities have been known for some time. They sit in the Oval Office and in leadership positions in the Pentagon.

Fischer parroted American propaganda, which has continuously repeated that the abuses in the prison of Abu Ghraib were "un-American": "American democracy is based on values which define the Western world up to today," he intoned. Fischer said nothing about the fact that the current US government was trampling democratic rights under foot and that a defence of the genuine democratic traditions of the United States was inseparable from an unrelenting struggle against the Bush government and the American ruling elite which it serves.

Fischer's stance had little to do with diplomatic niceties, as some commentators have suggested. What happened to such "niceties" when US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld reacted to German and French reservations about the war by undertaking a deliberate campaign to divide Europe? In what sense were the niceties of protocol observed when Bush intervened in German domestic affairs and called for the sacking of the government justice minister who had likened his foreign policies to that of Hitler? Bush went so far as to refuse to congratulate Chancellor Schröder following the latter's reelection. "Diplomatic niceties" is a euphemism for the cowardice of German politicians in the face of American militarism.

In an interview with the Berlin daily newspaper *Tagesspiegel* Fischer made clear the real interests motivating his response. After referring to the "moral high ground" and describing the moral ties binding the US as of fundamental importance to the entire Western world, he said, "America has to react in a vigorous manner on behalf of the entire West. All political forces in Germany share an interest in ensuring that America re-

establishes its essential moral leadership as the normative dominant feature of the West. That is absolutely necessary, otherwise the result will be greater and more enduring damage."

Fischer here is not just speaking from the heart for his own Green Party, but equally for the German SPD (Social Democratic Party), the coalition partner of the Greens. The SPD was thoroughly discredited following its support for the First World War and its leading role in propping up the Weimar Republic, and was only able to re-establish its influence with the support of the United States. The Marshall Plan and the stabilising role of the US in Europe established conditions for relative compromise between working people and bourgeois rule.

The Greens, which emerged from the student protest movement, quickly made their peace with the existing order and today represent the interests of a relatively small, privileged layer of the middle class which sees any popular movement—whether in the Middle East or in Germany itself—as a threat to its social status.

The unilateral actions of the US against Iraq deeply shocked the SPD and Greens. However, they are even more fearful that the loss of credibility on the part of the US in the Middle East and Europe could lead to the emergence of a broadly based movement of social opposition that they would be unable to control. This is what underlies Fischer's appeal to "American values"—an appeal made to a government that has repeatedly shown its contempt for democratic values.

In the same interview, Fischer pleaded with the US government: "The bond established between power and legality is one of the great civilising accomplishments of the Enlightenment and the Western world. America also fundamentally defines on the basis of such legality."

When asked by *Tagesspiegel*: "What are the political consequences arising from the scandal with the torture pictures? Should the Americans leave Iraq more quickly?" Fischer expressly spoke out against a withdrawal of American troops: "I do not know what the Europeans could do militarily that the Americans are not able to do. That would be of little help."



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