

New US Iraq resolution

German chancellor Schröder declares his support for Bush

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At the beginning of this week, the tug of war over the formulation of a United Nations resolution designed to give the Bush government international backing for further US action in Iraq entered a new round.

Government sources in Germany report that Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD - Social Democratic Party) offered the American president his support in the course of a 15-minute telephone call on May 30. According to press reports, “The chancellor and Bush agreed that they would speak with a common voice on this issue.”

A speaker for the Federal Press office in Berlin said, “It was a substantial and constructive discussion,” but then refused to give any details. Already a week earlier, the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), had declared the US-proposed UN resolution to be a “good basis” for further discussions and spoke on a number of occasions about the details with his transatlantic colleague, Colin Powell.

Though the German government is not a standing member of the UN Security Council and possesses no right of veto, it nevertheless plays an important role in UN deliberations. Fifteen months ago, it was a major partner of the group of countries, including Russia and France, that refused to support the previous US Iraq resolution.

The new tone struck in the German chancellery, and its repeated assertion that prior transatlantic tensions had been overcome, serves to clarify two points: firstly, it is once again clear that prior differences over the Iraq war were of a purely tactical nature. From the standpoint of its own economic and political interests, the German government was not prepared to let Washington establish unlimited control over the

oilfields of Iraq and thereby emerge as the predominant power in a region so critical for energy resources and world politics.

Secondly, the discussions over the new UN resolution show that the German—and to an equal extent, the French—governments support the occupation of Iraq and the establishment of a puppet government in the country. Berlin and Paris are merely seeking to use current military setbacks and the growing political crisis of the American government to expand their own influence in Iraq.

In doing so, both countries have taken up the mendacious language of the UN resolution itself, in which the Security Council refers to a “new phase in the transition of Iraq to a democratically elected government.” The precise nature of this “democratic transition” was clearly shown by the events of June 1.

Inside the space of a few hours, the US occupying powers made their own proposal for president of Iraq and, following their inability to impose him, rapidly came up with another candidate. After the resignation of the former US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, a new transitional government was appointed from candidates handpicked by the US and then sworn into office. There was only one thing missing in this exercise in democracy—nobody consulted with the Iraqi people or even suggested that they play a role in the decision-making.

There is a further reason for the profound disquiet of the German government over developments in Iraq, and which accounts for its readiness to support George Bush. It fears that a military defeat for the US and its withdrawal from Iraq would deal a devastating blow to imperialism and bourgeois rule, not just in the Middle

East, but throughout the world. Fully aware that they themselves had warned of such a danger at the start of the war, they have now made it clear that there is be “no gloating” over US reverses.

Representatives of every German political party have expressed their concern about the growing loss of influence by the American government. Otto Graf Lambsdorf, the finance and foreign policy speaker of the liberal Free Democrats (FDP)—the party that almost exclusively occupied the post of German Foreign Minister after the war—stated in the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt*, “A friend in need has to be helped.”

The clearest expression of this political sentiment came last week from the weekly *Die Zeit*. Under the headline “Call for help by the Superpower,” Matthias Nass wrote: “George W. Bush is trying to retrieve anything in Iraq that can be rescued. That does not amount to much. The bankruptcy of his strategy is complete: politically, militarily and morally. Not since Vietnam has America swayed so off course in its foreign policy. Never since then has the superpower appeared so lacking in direction and leadership, utterly shocked at the consequences of its own actions.”

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The paper, which includes amongst its publishers former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD), then goes on to describe how much the US government is “disintegrating” as a result of internal divisions. It then evaluates Bush’s recent speech at the Army War College as a call for help hidden “behind rhetorical bombast,” because, on its own, the US is unable to establish stable relations inside Iraq.

Nass goes on to write that this appeal for help from Washington should not be misinterpreted as a return to multilateralism, and he emphasises: “Nevertheless it is important to assist America at the moment it calls out for help.” Nass continues by noting that UN secretary Kofi Annan had already visited Paris and speculates that “perhaps, who knows, the French will send troops.” Germany does not have to send troops, it can fulfill its role by training Iraqi police and border guards while assisting in financial help for reconstruction.

Die Zeit goes on: “There is one thing above all that is not in the interests of Schröder and Chirac...a humiliated superpower. How does it help to accuse the

Americans of beginning the war on an unfounded basis: that their incompetent occupation policy has driven Iraq to the edge of a popular uprising. They know this themselves. Things would be even worse for the Iraqis if America were to withdraw in panic.”

There are historical roots to Germany’s fears of a growing loss of authority by the American government. In the 1920s, it was American intervention that helped bail out German capitalism in a period when hyperinflation had unleashed revolutionary struggles. With the help of billions of dollars in the form of US loans, gold parity for the German mark was established and economic relations temporarily stabilised.

Even more significant was the support of American imperialism at the end of the Second World War, when the German economy lay in ruins. At that time, the US’s Marshall Plan formed the basis for a subsequent German “economic miracle.” Under these conditions, it was in particular German social democracy that was able to re-establish its influence through policies based on social reformism.

The dilemma today, however, is that, 60 years after the Second World War, the same ally is confronted with a profound economic, social and political crisis. By rushing to the assistance of the Bush administration, the German government is strengthening precisely those forces that, with their aggressive militarism, have played the main role in plunging the world into instability.



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