

German government blocking inquiry into secret aid provided for Iraq invasion

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The German government is strenuously seeking to prevent a parliamentary committee of inquiry aimed at clarifying the role played by Germany's former Social Democratic (SPD)-Green Party coalition in supporting the Iraq war and other illegal practices carried out by the US government. All of the parties in Germany's current grand coalition elected last autumn—the SPD, the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU)—are working in unison to prevent any parliamentary investigation.

The SPD is afraid that further exposures of the activities of the German Intelligence Service (BND) will finally bury the myth that the SPD-Green government, led by Gerhard Schröder, opposed the US war. In addition, any investigation may jeopardise Germany's current foreign minister, Frank Walter Steinmeier (SPD), who as a head of the chancellery in the Schröder government was responsible for coordination with the secret services. Steinmeier has expressed his own opposition to a committee of inquiry, which, he argued, would simply be used to encourage “anti-Americanism.”

The CDU is also opposed to shedding light on the secret cooperation between the Schröder government and the Bush administration. Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) would like even closer cooperation with the US. Further exposures of German support for the criminal activities of American secret services would be detrimental to such a move. “A committee of inquiry would make the work of the services more difficult,” warned the chairman of the Union faction in the German parliament (Bundestag), Volker Kauder.

Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) even claimed that an investigation into the activities of the secret services would represent a threat to domestic security. The former head of the BND, August Hanning, has functioned as undersecretary of state under Schäuble since last December.

Making public their work contradicts the sense and purpose of secret services, Schäuble told the *Bild am Sonntag*. As he has already done in his argument for the deployment of the army inside Germany itself, Schäuble once again cited as his reason the soccer world championship taking place this summer. A committee of inquiry would not “concern itself with security, but with the security authorities and thereby tie up important forces,” he stated.

This is a remarkable stance for an interior minister who, according to his post, also has the responsibility to protect the German constitution. Schäuble is obviously of the opinion that a major event such as the World Cup championship can only be held if national executive bodies are freed from any public scrutiny and have the sort of authority that is usually associated with dictatorships.

Schäuble had formerly expressed his view that the government should use confessions obtained through torture carried out in foreign

countries. Cases such as those of the kidnapped German citizens Khaled El-Masri, Mohammed Haidar Zammar and Ramez Sultan, as well as the Turkish citizen Murat Kurnaz, who grew up in Germany, would have inevitably been raised in a committee of inquiry. Zammar was interrogated in a Syrian prison and Sultan in a Lebanese torture prison by BND agents, while Kurnaz was interrogated in Guantánamo by BND and other German intelligence officials. El-Masri is also convinced that a German was present at his interrogation in Afghanistan.

Such a committee of inquiry requires that the overwhelming majority of Germany's three opposition parliamentary groups—the Greens, the free market Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Left Party—agree to an appropriate request. All three parliamentary groups initially agreed last week to an inquiry following internal meetings, but now the Greens are desperately trying to backpedal.

The party is in a dilemma. On the one hand, they want to brush up their thoroughly discredited reputation by posing as defenders of basic rights ready to expose abuses by the secret services. This makes it difficult for them to oppose the demand for an investigation into illegal secret service practices. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly evident the former Green foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, is deeply involved in the murky practices of the German Intelligence Service.

According to a report in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, Fischer, together with Steinmeier and the interior minister at the time, Otto Schily (SPD), personally promised to provide extensive co-operation to the US government prior to the war itself. Fischer was not only informed of the presence of two German agents in Baghdad who passed on information to the US secret services, according to *Der Spiegel*, but he personally met and congratulated the two agents for their work in the summer of 2003.

When the Bundestag faction of the Greens initially decided in favor of a committee of inquiry, Fischer was the only one to oppose it. He obviously has something to hide. In the meantime, other Green Party leaders have also dissociated themselves from their own decision. The two chairmen of the party, Renate Künast and Fritz Kuhn, have said that an enquiry would not be necessary if the government clarifies some unresolved issues.

The speaker for the Greens on legal affairs, Jerzy Monday, justified this retreat with remarkable openness and stated his party would not agree to an investigation “which contained accusations in relation to SPD-Green policy.” In other words, the Greens will only support an investigation when it uncovers nothing.

The deputy leader of the Left Party parliamentary fraction, Petra

Pau, expressed her sympathy with the Greens, saying, “We do not want confirmation of any prefabricated judgments; it is a matter of clearing up the facts.”

There is also some reservation in the FDP regarding such a committee of inquiry. While party chief Guido Westerwelle is in favor of it for short-term political considerations, the party’s foreign expert and deputy head of the parliamentary group, Werner Hoyer, has been critical. Up until 1998, Hoyer was minister of state in the Foreign Office. According to newspaper reports, FDP party head Wolfgang Gerhardt is also opposed to an inquiry.

In a parliamentary debate on the topic last Friday, Foreign Minister Steinmeier warned, “You can set [the committee of inquiry] on the tracks, but the station it arrives at might be a different one than you think.”

It is already foreseeable that either the committee of inquiry will not happen or, as is often the case with such official investigations, important issues will be buried and the whole affair hushed up. Nevertheless, the numerous details that have come to light during the past few weeks are sufficient to completely undermine the myth that the SPD-Green government effectively opposed the Iraq war.

Schröder and Fischer regarded the US war plans as a danger to German interests in the Middle East and feared a destabilisation of the entire region. But after they failed to dissuade the US from going to war, they provided substantial logistical support in order to strengthen the US militarily.

This began with granting US forces unlimited access to German airspace and unrestricted rights to use American military bases situated in Germany. In so doing, as the German Administrative Court later determined, the German government was supporting an illegal war and violating international law.

The German government also relieved a hard-pressed US military by strengthening the presence of the German Army in occupied Afghanistan. In addition, the government tolerated the transport of prisoners illegally held by the CIA over German territory, and cooperated in the kidnapping and torture of German citizens. And finally, it supplied the US secret service with information that was important for the pursuit of the Iraq war.

It is clear that the BND maintained at least two agents in Iraq after the outbreak of the war, and that these agents collected information, at least some of which was then passed onto US forces. The exact nature of this information remains to be established.

There has as yet been no confirmation of the claim that BND agents provided the US with the coordinates of a restaurant where Saddam Hussein was allegedly located. The restaurant and surrounding area was destroyed by American jets and at least 12 civilians were killed. Saddam Hussein was not present in the building.

The Bundestag parliamentary control committee (PKG), which meets in secret, held a six-hour meeting last Wednesday to quiz the two agents and prominent BND officials. Details of the contents of the hearings are unknown, and members of the PKG are not even allowed to reveal details of such meetings to their parliament colleagues. All that was said is that there was agreement over the credibility of the statements made by the secret service agents who said they did not provide target information for the US in the above-mentioned case.

In the meantime, however, new evidence has arisen about logistical support provided by the German secret service to US forces occupying Iraq. Since the claims first arose, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and his former secret service co-coordinator (who currently heads the BND), Ernst Uhrlau, have maintained that the Intelligence Service rendered

“no active support for war activities.”

In fact, the intelligence agency provided logistical support and proposals for how the US should conduct the war before, during and after the invasion. Such collaboration with the US is confirmed in a detailed report in *Der Spiegel* (March 2006), which bases its information on anonymous “high-ranking Intelligence Service co-workers” and “former members of the US military.”

In October 2002—i.e., directly after Schröder had been voted into office on the basis of his public pronouncement against the Iraq war—the BND worked out a concept, according to which militarily trained agents should go to Baghdad and obtain information for the German government on the progress of the war.

According to a recent report in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, Joschka Fischer, the foreign minister at the time, insisted on such a mission. Together with Interior Minister Schily and the head of chancellery, Steinmeier, Fischer then promised the US cooperation before the impending invasion, promoting the value of “special German connections” in Iraq, and “existing contacts to the regime of Saddam Hussein.”

According to *Der Spiegel*, after Fischer and Steinmeier agreed to the plan, German agents went to Iraq in the middle of February 2003, just a month before the invasion, and were given accommodation at the French Embassy. They then used coded satellite telephones to send a broad range of information to the BND center in Pullach, including sentiments among the Iraqi population, the location of defenses, whether bridges were passable and the state of the Hussein regime. The US was informed about the presence of the German agents, if only to prevent any inadvertent bombing of their location.

Shortly afterwards, the American military secret service, the Defense Intelligence Agency, asked Germany intelligence about the condition of trenches around Baghdad that were allegedly filled with gasoline and about Iraqi troop movements in the capital. These questions were subsequently answered by the Pullach center. Officially, Steinmeier and the Intelligence Service insisted that the only information provided was related to so-called “non-targets”—i.e., schools, hospitals or embassies.

In addition, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported on January 19 that, according to a US source, just prior to the beginning of the war, the DIA requested that the German Intelligence Service provide assistance in detecting a building allegedly belonging to the Iraqi secret service. The report claims that the BND agents stationed in Baghdad located the building and passed its coordinates on to the BND center in Pullach, which in turn informed the DIA. It is not known if this building was then destroyed by US forces. A BND speaker declined to comment on the report.

If Steinmeier, Fischer and Co. now claim they gave “no active support for war activities,” they are merely adopting the attitude of a small-time crook who proclaims his innocence after helping in a big bank robbery. He was merely keeping lookout and would have urged his accomplices not to shoot innocents—only security guards. And, after all, he argues, he was against the bank robbery from the start.



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