Germany: Former Green Party leader advocates European military role in the Middle East

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Following the change of government in Berlin little was heard from the former Green Party foreign minister Joschka Fischer. He resigned from all leading party positions and only occasionally attends the Bundestag (parliament) as a backbencher. However, he has now resurfaced in the midst of the controversy about the anti-Muslim cartoons and the escalating dispute with Iran. In a long contribution that appeared February 11 in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Fischer advocates the stepping up of Europe's military role in the Middle East.

"The Middle East will go through a deep crisis of transformation lasting perhaps two to three decades, which bring great risks and dangers," writes Fischer. Europe will not be able to "stand aloof from the dislocation, crises and conflicts of this region, which is so central to its own security." The crisis will force "Europe to grow up very fast in security policy terms ." It must begin to "think about a second line, beside the elements of partnership, dialogue, cooperation and the aid given to transform [the region], to include security guarantees and elements of an effective and simultaneously convincing defence [policy]."

In plain language, this means that in future Europe should increasingly pursue its interests in the Middle East using military means. Apart from diplomatic and economic activities ("partnership, dialogue, cooperation"), military activities ("security guarantees and defence"), will increasingly come to the fore.

Fischer is advancing these arguments at a time when political debate in Germany and Europe includes discussion of a possible military strike against Iran.

One week earlier, at the Munich Security Conference, Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) had drawn a parallel between the Iranian government and the Nazi regime, warning against adopting a policy of "appeasement," as the Western powers had done with Hitler in the 1930s. At the same time, she had declared that Germany was ready to accept greater military responsibility alongside the US.

When the Social Democratic Party (SPD) chairman Matthias Platzeck responded by saying that military options against Iran should be excluded, he came under fierce attack from the CDU and from his own party. The SPD's defence policy spokesman Rainer Arnold and deputy chairman of the parliamentary foreign affairs committee Hans Ulrich Klose (SPD) insisted in *Bild* newspaper that the use of military threats was vital; comments echoed by several CDU politicians. Meanwhile, Platzeck's position as a leading member of the SPD is being questioned.

At the weekend, the British *Sunday Telegraph* reported about Pentagon plans for a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. The article said that details of targets, bomb payloads and logistics had already been calculated. The attack would probably be made by B2 stealth bombers, which can fly from the US carrying up to 18 tonnes of precision weapons, as well as by submarine-launched rockets. According to the *Telegraph*, present planning in the Pentagon goes far beyond the usual routine operations. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is being kept continually up to date.

Fischer's contribution in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is expressly on the side of Merkel and the US. Although he regards an air strike against Iranian nuclear facilities as risky, and the invasion and occupation of the country as "irresponsible," he does support stepping up the threat of force.

Precisely for Europe, "the present crisis concerns its own security," writes Fischer. "Looking away or putting a better face on things is no use." In contrast to the run-up to the Iraq war, Iran's nuclear programme "poses a genuine security threat." Talking to Tehran "only continues to make sense, while they remain in serious negotiations. If discussions only serve to cover up and play for time, they are the wrong way [to proceed]."

Fischer's first proposal is a "strategy of economic and political isolation," which should be accompanied by a comprehensive offer for the full normalization of relations if Teheran accedes. "Only in the context of [Tehran] either facing isolation or accepting what is on offer can the consensus of the international community be maintained," he writes.

The Iraq war was also prepared in a similar manner. UN

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sanctions, at that time supported by the SPD-Green government of Schröder and Fischer, merely established the preconditions for the war.

Fischer's latest outburst has once again shattered the myth that the Greens are in any way opposed to war and imperialism. The opposite is the case. The real "service" provided by the Greens consists in the fact that they opened the door for German military missions abroad, after a period of decades following the Second World War during which the German armed forces were pledged to a purely domestic defensive role. This is why the autodidact and former street fighter Joschka Fischer was tolerated as foreign minister for seven years, an office that is normally reserved for the most trusted representatives of the political establishment.

Fischer answered initial fears that German foreign policy might change direction under him with the words: "There is no Green foreign policy, but only a German foreign policy." During his term of office, he did not take a single important decision that could not also have been made by a liberal, conservative or social democratic foreign minister.

The rejection of the Iraq war—which was more of an initiative by SPD chancellor Gerhard Schröder than Fischer—was not motivated by fundamental considerations, but by power politics. American advances against Iraq cut across substantial German interests. Once the war had begun, however, the German government rendered every conceivable logistical help to the US—from the unrestricted use of bases in Germany, relieving US troops in Afghanistan, to the collaboration of the German Secret Service. Only recently, Fischer personally blocked a parliamentary committee of inquiry into this collaboration.

What differentiated Fischer from other foreign ministers was his ability to win fresh social support for a policy of military intervention. In the midst of the Yugoslavia crisis, for which German foreign policy was substantially to blame, he stood the argument that had traditionally been used against such interventions on its head. Whereas there had previously been a consensus that German troops should not be despatched to the Balkans because of the crimes committed there by Hitler's armies in the Second World War, Fischer now declared that the memory of Auschwitz obliges Germany to act militarily against "ethnic cleansing." On the basis of this same reasoning, the Greens supported the NATO bombing of Belgrade and sided with the Albanian nationalists in Kosovo.

A section of the Green rank-and-file followed Fischer down this road. Since then, the Greens, whose roots go back to the protest movement against the Vietnam War and which still advocated a pacifist course in their 1998 election programme, have become the most vociferous proponents of German military intervention—from Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa.

Fischer's latest utterances go a step further. When he talks about Europe needing to "grow up in security policy terms," he means deploying the military in situations which exceed current parameters.

It was "correct," he writes, that after the September 11, 2001 attacks "the status quo was no longer acceptable in the Middle East, not only for the US government but also for Europe." From the outset, the Iraq war was "in its strategic core, a war of regional re-organization." However, Washington's strategy for the Iraq war "massively underestimated the scope, the harshness, the duration and the costs of this challenge." Now one confronts "grim alternatives"—as the article he has written is titled.

According to Fischer, the election victory of Hamas meant losing a partner for the international peace plan, the so-called Road Map. On the other hand, the danger exists that Iran or Saudi Arabia could finance the Palestinians if the West does not cooperate with Hamas. In Iraq, the US is stuck in a quandary. Both options, staying or withdrawing, have more negative than positive consequences. Only by "increasing engagement" is it possible to break out of this "lose-lose situation," but the majority of Americans are not ready for this. And as we have already seen, Fischer regards developments in Iran as a "genuine security threat" for Europe.

From all this, the long-standing spokesperson of the Greens concludes that Europe must intensify its militarily engagement in the Middle East. Naturally, he justifies this by reference to security and stability concerns. Radical Islam is an "expression of a profound crisis of modernization of the Arab world," writes Fischer, in the jargon of postmodern sociology. "Freedom of opinion and criticism and a secular society stand against orthodoxy and God-given laws."

The illustrious ex-minister fails to mention that the Arab masses are experiencing the so-called "modernization" in the form of American precision bombing, Israeli border fences and a rebirth of hated colonialism. The words 'oil' and 'gas,' i.e., the questions at the heart of developments in the Middle East, only appear once in his article: when he deplores the hunger for oil and gas on the part of China and India!

Despite the verbose phrasemongering, which Fischer knows only too well, his proposals amount to nothing more than German and European support for the extortionary and predatory goals pursued by the US in the Iraq war.

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