

Germany's Merkel sides with Bush against Iran

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8 May 2006

Last Wednesday, German Chancellor Angela Merkel offered US President George W. Bush her unqualified support in his operations against Iran. After White House talks with Bush, Merkel told the press there had been “complete agreement” that under no circumstances was Iran to be permitted to manufacture nuclear weapons.

On the same day, Britain and France circulated a draft resolution for the United Nations (UN) Security Council, delivering an ultimatum to Teheran to put a stop to its controversial nuclear programme. The resolution invoked Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. This means that, if the Security Council were to support the resolution and Iran failed to comply, compulsory sanctions or military action would follow.

The resolution is sponsored by both the US and Germany. Its purpose is to provide a basis for nudging Russia and China—both of whom have veto power on the Security Council—towards a harder line against Iran.

Washington is following a double strategy. On the one hand, representatives of the Bush regime are once again threatening US unilateral action in the event the UN fails to join in its drive against Iran. This would not exclude a military operation, extending to the use of tactical nuclear weapons. Only recently, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice again stressed that the US could take action against Iran with a “coalition of the willing” if the Security Council refused to come on board. This is the expression previously used in the illegal war against Iraq.

On the other hand, Washington is endeavouring to build up as wide a front as possible to isolate Teheran. This is why it is supporting European efforts to put pressure on the Iranian government through negotiations. Thus, Bush emphasised the importance of a multilateral procedure after his meeting with Merkel. “The Iranians have got to understand that we won't be backing down and we have a strong partnership,” he said.

Neither of these strategies cancels out the other. They complement each other. Prior to the Iraq war, Washington had used the UN to put pressure on Baghdad. UN sanctions

weakened the country, crippling it until the US felt strong enough to annex it militarily without the UN's backing.

Bush has admitted that the intended Security Council resolution against Iran was framed for tactical reasons. He has said that there is talk of tactics at this stage, and moves involving the Security Council are “one of these tactics.”

John Bolton, the US ambassador at the United Nations, expressed himself even more clearly. He said that consideration had to be given to various ways of preventing Iran from developing the technology and facilities required for mastery of the nuclear fuel cycle. “Certainly we'd like to do that within the Security Council, but it would not be prudent to ignore other options,” he claimed.

Germany is playing a major role in these manoeuvres. Washington's European allies in the Iraq war are now either political lame ducks, like Britain's Tony Blair, or no longer in office. Spain's José Maria Aznar lost his post two years ago, and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi was voted out of office last month. France's President Jacques Chirac is virtually incapacitated because of his domestic crisis.

Under these conditions, Germany has become Washington's most important European ally. Furthermore, the German government enjoys good relations with Moscow and Beijing and is best positioned to gain their support for a more robust Security Council resolution. Merkel has recently come to be on a first name basis with Russian President Vladimir Putin and intends to visit China in the near future.

Consequently, the German chancellor was well received in Washington. Bush called her a “partner in peace”—a reference to his father, who had once named Merkel's political foster father, Helmut Kohl, his “partner in leadership.” For her part, Merkel has responded positively to Bush's flattery. On her first visit to the US in January, she expressed mild criticism about the detention camp in Guantanamo. This time, however, her comments lacked any trace of a critical attitude.

The chancellor's second visit to the US since taking office proceeded in a harmonious atmosphere that elicited an

outpouring of superlatives from the German media. Commentators spoke of “an escalation of friendliness” and “warm rays of spring heralding a new sincerity and closeness.”

Bush and Merkel showered each other with compliments. The president praised the chancellor for her “strength and resolve” on the issue of Iran. He described Merkel as a “clear thinker” and a “fascinating person” with a “unique approach to problems,” owing to her experience with the “iron hand” of communism.

No one—least of all Bush himself—seems to have noticed the irony of this statement. Merkel, who grew up in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) of eastern Germany during the Stalinist era, was not among the critics of the Stalinist regime. She had her experience with the “iron fist” not as a regime opponent, but as a functionary who clenched her raised fist in loyalty to the party line of the Stalinist youth organisation. It was only when the GDR regime was on its last legs that she joined an right-wing opposition group and then scrambled to make herself a career in Helmut Kohl’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU).

In Washington, Merkel continually emphasised her concurrence with Bush. Bush even accepted an invitation from her to Stralsund, where he will visit Merkel’s eastern German constituency in July. The chancellor will show him there “what has been achieved in the new German states” and bring him into contact with people “who have lived on the other side of the Wall.”

However, Bush will hardly be allowed to set eyes on normal people. When he met Gerhard Schröder in Mainz during his last visit to Germany, the whole region was blocked off. The same will happen in Stralsund, where the unemployment rate is 22 percent and demonstrations against Bush have already been planned. As once was the custom for state guests in the GDR, Bush will get to see Potemkin villages: freshly painted facades with new windows and curtains, designed to hide the drabness of everyday life.

In lending support to Bush’s drive against Iran, Merkel is sharing responsibility for a policy even more criminal than that of the Iraq war, which has cost more than 100,000 lives and brought the country to civil war and chaos. A military attack on Iran or the use of nuclear weapons would plunge the whole region into chaos and bring in its wake acts of reprisal throughout the world. It could also lead to a third world war.

The alleged disapproval of the Iraq war on the part of the previous Social Democratic-Green government was a fraud. The Schröder/Fischer government may not have sent soldiers into Iraq, but it supported the war in every other way. It helped implement sanctions against Iraq, provided the US forces with military bases and airspace in Germany

and relieved US combat troops by increasing Germany’s military presence in Afghanistan. Now, the grand coalition of the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) and SPD (Social Democratic Party) is going a step further and backing Bush’s buildup against Iran without any reservations whatsoever.

Like Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, the Iranian nuclear programme is only a pretext, designed to cloak Washington’s pursuit of quite different aims. Even if the Iranian regime attempted to manufacture nuclear weapons, this would not involve any serious threat to the US. Other powers in the region—Pakistan, India and Israel—have long been in possession of nuclear weapons and nevertheless continue to enjoy the support of the US government.

The real aim of the US is to replace the current regime in Teheran with a US-controlled regime or to directly occupy the country, which has enormous oil and gas reserves, as well as great strategic significance on account of its geographical position between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, Europe and India. Since a revolt in 1979 overthrew the US puppet regime of Shah Reza Pahlevi, which was infamous for its oppression and torture, the US has been unable to wield any political influence upon Iran. It does not even maintain diplomatic relations with the country.

US Middle Eastern policy is also aimed against the interests of the European powers, which have close economic ties with Iran and are dependent on Iran as source of oil and gas energy. However, confronted with sharpening social crises in their own countries, the European governments prefer to cooperate closely with the US. They try to make the public believe that a war can be avoided by stopping the US from going it alone. This is a dangerous piece of self-deception, as has already been proven by the war against Iraq.



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