

Europe's inability to counter US-Israeli war policy

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When the Bush government unleashed its war against Iraq three years ago, a number of European governments warned of the danger that such an enterprise could lead to a military and political disaster. In particular, leading circles in Berlin and Paris warned publicly of an uncontrollable wildfire that would spread across the Middle East.

Today, after these fears have been confirmed in the most terrible form, the former critics of such a policy in Europe have now decided to line up behind the war offensive currently being waged by the US and Israel. This is the significance of the joint statement that was issued by the G8 summit in St. Petersburg. The German government, in particular, led by Angela Merkel, played an important role. While the French president raised the demand for a ceasefire and questioned the appropriateness of the Israeli bombing raids, the German chancellor lined up unconditionally behind the American proposal made at the summit for complete and uncritical support for Jerusalem.

Two days prior to the summit, as the Israeli army began its brutal military offensive against Lebanon and in front of the eyes of the world bombed the country's most important airport, Angela Merkel gushingly welcomed the American president when he touched down in Germany.

What lies behind this turnaround? It is insufficient to point out that it was clear three years ago that Merkel and other leading members of the union alliance of the Christian Democratic Union, (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) backed the Bush administration. Such momentous changes in political line are not decided upon by individuals, but have deep objective roots.

The fundamental problem confronting European political circles is that the Iraq war, involving terror for broad layers of the population on a daily basis—terror that is now being extended to the territory of Lebanon and Palestine, and that may soon extend to Syria and Iran—represents a historical turning point. Three years ago, the Bush administration brushed aside the United Nations and all existing international legal restraints and began its illegal war. In so doing, it made clear that it no longer felt restrained by contracts, agreements and international law, but with its highly developed military strength based itself instead on the principle of "might is right."

In other words, the political system established on the rubble

left by the Second World War, and which required that every country abide by international rules and laws, ceased to exist. The Iraq war and its extension to Lebanon and the Palestinian territories represents a return to imperialist politics in its most aggressive and brutal form.

This development posed European governments with a dilemma. They would much prefer a diplomatic solution to the war—or to be more precise: they would prefer to secure their own energy and geo-strategic interests through arbitration, but to do this they require the cooperation of the US government, which has absolutely no interest in following such a course.

This contradiction currently takes bizarre forms. European ruling circles and editorial boards are well aware of a number of facts: firstly, the Iraq war and the US occupation have had disastrous consequences for Iraq and the entire region; secondly, the Israeli government would never have contemplated the operation it is now carrying out in Lebanon without consultation and agreement with the Pentagon; and thirdly, the US government has been following a plan of action aimed at bringing Iran under its control—if necessary with force—to ensure access to the oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Basin. Nevertheless, the central demand to be heard at the moment in Europe is that the US government must intensify its engagement in the Middle East.

One of the first to emphasise this standpoint was the social democrat Karsten Voigt, who is the German's government coordinator for German-American relations. On the day the Israeli army destroyed the international airport in Beirut, with Washington's approval and with weapons "made in the US," Voigt told a German radio station: "First of all, one thing is correct, i.e., that the Middle East is an area where we would like more US, not less. And this is what normal critics of the US also say, because without the US it will not be possible to calm the situation there."

One would assume that the disastrous consequences of US policy in Iraq and throughout the Middle East—of which some European governments had warned—would have strengthened the role of the European bourgeoisies. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. Under conditions of an inflammatory situation and the danger of a military conflagration throughout the Middle East, the Europeans have now called for the

intervention of the world's principal arsonist.

In similar manner to Voigt, Germany's former foreign minister, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), argued in an interview with the *Die Zeit* paper: "Everything depends on the US, on its leadership, but on their own they would be overstretched." When *Die Zeit* raised the objection that Washington is "totally tied up at the moment in Iraq" and therefore already overstretched, Fischer responded: "There will be no solution without a determined America. Iraq and the vacuum of power there pose America and all of us with considerable problems. But the decisive question is not Iraq, it is Iran."

In a comment on Wednesday, the French daily *Le Monde* also wrote: "What is then to be done? Nearly everything has been tried—other than a massive engagement of the international community, in particular the United States, for the known compromise, including a military presence in the region."

The fact remains, however, that the military presence under the leadership of the US has led to a disaster in the region. Futile hopes on the part of the Europeans that one could damp the fire by tossing on more oil make clear that the power brokers in Berlin and Paris have absolutely no means of countering US war policy. At one and the same time, they are both impressed and intimidated by the way in which the Bush government follows its aims with such cold-blooded calculation and naked force.

The brutal bombing terror in Baghdad, Fallujah, Basra and now Beirut and Gaza—possibly tomorrow in Damascus and Teheran—have been instrumental in this respect. Also significant was the way in which the US government threw its weight around in Europe, with illegal renditions of alleged "terrorists," the maintenance of torture prisons and the contemptuous rejection of any sort of legal restraint, which left its mark and strengthened the most reactionary political elements.

It has not taken much to intimidate European governments. In addition, just a few months before ceremonies aimed at celebrating a half-century since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in the spring of 1957, which began the process of European unification, the European political elite is increasingly coming to the conclusion that, despite a common currency, European unification has not only come to a halt, it is threatening to go into reverse. Expansion of the European Union to the east has proved a failure, and national egoisms and contradictions are erupting throughout Europe.

European relations with Russia have also changed. For its part, the German government favours a balanced relationship that reaches out to both the west and the east. This is necessary in light of Germany's high level of energy dependence on Moscow. However, as tensions intensify between America and Russia, such a tightrope walk is no longer possible. At the same time, Russia under President Vladimir Putin is very different from the Russia of Boris Yeltsin. The decision by the Kremlin government to turn off gas supplies to Ukraine at the start of

this year sent shock waves through Berlin. Those voices warning of an over-dependence on Moscow grew louder, and contacts with Washington intensified correspondingly.

There is, however, an additional factor that has led European governments to line up behind the strongest imperialist power in Washington—the growing social crisis in Europe and a marked increase of social conflicts. This applies in particular to Germany.

From the very beginning, Germany's grand coalition was afflicted with a birth defect. It had emerged from an election in which the so-called "lefts," comprising the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party, received more votes than the "right wing" of the conservative union parties and the free market FDP. Merkel was only able to take over as chancellor because of the readiness of the SPD to form a grand coalition.

Shortly after the formation of the new German government, mass demonstrations developed in France opposing the attempts by the French government to do away with job-protection laws. Under pressure from the protests, which embraced millions, the Villepin government was forced to make a temporary retreat.

Under these conditions, the Merkel government proceeded more cautiously in terms of its domestic policies, which in turn earned it the wrath of influential business lobbies for whom the dismantling of the German welfare state was not proceeding quickly enough.

The decision to now back the side of the warmongers in the current war in the Middle East—although the regime is well aware that the vast majority of the population rejected the Iraq war and took to the streets in their millions to protest against it—represents a turning point. In the future, the German government will be ready to demonstrate the same degree of ruthlessness against its own population as it now does to the peoples of Lebanon, Palestine or Iraq.

In the final analysis, the new political orientation in Paris and Berlin arises out of the class character of these governments. Regardless of those critics who complain of "predatory US capitalism," the European elites pursue similar economic and political interests, and under conditions of growing tensions at home and abroad, have decided to align themselves with the strongest imperialist power.

This will in no way resolve the growing tensions between the Great Powers, and will do little to alleviate them. Instead it inaugurates a new stage of violent attacks on social and democratic rights.



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