

The German chancellor and the Baker-Hamilton report

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On December 7, the official German government web site posted the following comment: “The chancellor [Angela Merkel] welcomed the Baker Report on the situation in the Iraq. The commission of experts has supplied a very realistic presentation of the situation.”

This estimate was then repeated by the *Financial Times Germany* a few days later: “The Baker report is characterised in particular by a realistic description of the situation in Iraq, Merkel said. To that extent, it is a ‘reasonable’ starting point for considerations regard the pacification of the country.”

What is the “realistic description of the situation in Iraq,” outlined in the report of the commission presided over by former US Secretary of State James Baker and former Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton?

Following three and a half years of US occupation and an unceasing propaganda campaign about the introduction of “democratic conditions,” the report draws a devastating balance sheet of the situation in Iraq. It begins with the following words: “The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating.” According to Baker and Hamilton, the Iraqi government, which was imposed by the US, is in the process of disintegrating. Conflicts between Sunnis and Shiites are intensifying and “could trigger the collapse of Iraq’s government and a humanitarian disaster,” the report declares.

The Iraqi population suffers from terrible living conditions, and the study declares that the Iraqi government is “not adequately advancing national reconciliation, providing basic security, or delivering essential services.” According to the report, this situation has been brought about by violence, corruption and religiously motivated conflicts, together with the collapse of the judiciary, the financial system and other civilian institutions.

Under such conditions, as many as 1.8 million Iraqis

have fled Iraq to neighbouring countries, while another 1.6 million have been dispersed within the country itself—according to the Baker-Hamilton report. Notably, the report does not mention the Johns Hopkins University study that estimates some 655,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the war and occupation. The Baker-Hamilton report also says nothing about the nearly 3,000 American soldiers who have been killed in Iraq, or the additional 20,000 wounded—many of whom are severely disabled or suffering from psychological traumas. The report also prefers to ignore the estimated costs of the illegal American invasion and occupation—i.e., approximately US\$400 billion so far.

Nevertheless, despite these omissions, the Baker-Hamilton report, which was praised by the German chancellor, makes clear that the military and political disaster in Iraq has produced an unprecedented political crisis in the United States.

Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) is the sort of politician who regards convictions and principles as an obstacle to her political work. Her pronouncements are chosen to suit the most immediate political requirements and whatever is called for to advance her own personal career. Since taking over leadership of Germany’s so-called grand coalition (CDU, Christian Social Union [CSU] and Social Democratic Party [SPD]), she has possessed an overwhelming majority in the Bundestag, the German parliament, and evidently assumes she will never be called to account for her words and deeds.

She is mistaken, however. Crimes of such magnitude as those being committed in Iraq, will not remain unpunished. It is above all necessary to recall that Angela Merkel bears a large measure of responsibility for the disaster in Iraq. She was the leading German politician who gave her full support to the Bush

government's war of aggression, which violated all known international law.

In early 2003, shortly before the invasion of Iraq, she visited Washington in her function as CDU chairman to offer Bush, Rumsfeld and Cheney the cooperation of the conservative union parties (CDU-CSU), which were in opposition at the time. In a February 20, 2003, *Washington Post* op-ed piece entitled "[SPD chancellor Gerhard] Schroeder Doesn't Speak for All Germans," Merkel attacked the stance of the SPD-Green government, which was refusing to send German troops to take part in the Iraq war.

She accused Schröder, the chancellor at that time, of sweeping aside the "most important lesson of German politics—never again should Germany go it alone...for the sake of electoral tactics [in other words, Schröder had opposed the war to win votes in the previous national election]."

Two weeks earlier, at the Munich Security Conference, Merkel delivered a speech expressing her support for America's belligerent policy. In Munich, she declared that only the concrete threat of force and the massive intervention by US troops into the region had forced Saddam Hussein to comply with UN weapon supervisors. On the other hand, she said, Schröder's politics contradicted "German state interests." According to press reports at that time, Merkel gave assurances in discussions with representatives of the American delegation that a German government under her leadership would be prepared to sign the statement of eight European states declaring their full support for the US invasion of Iraq.

Since taking office a year ago, Chancellor Merkel has pursued a similar political course and sought to back the Bush government at every available opportunity. It is only necessary to recall the two leaders' warm embraces during Bush's visit to Germany, at last summer's G8 summit in St. Petersburg and then again just a few hours before the beginning of the barbarous Israeli bombardment of Lebanon.

The Baker-Hamilton report, unwittingly, confirms that the US military deployment in Iraq amounted to a war crime. The logical conclusion is that those responsible must be held to account and prosecuted for their offences.

In this respect, it is significant that charges have been brought against the former US Secretary of Defence

Donald Rumsfeld, together with other civilian and military personnel for war crimes and other crimes against humanity. The charges have been made by a coalition of lawyers' and human rights organisations, including the Republican Attorneys' Association in Berlin, the New York-based Centre for Constitutional Rights, and the International Federation for Human Rights in Paris, as well as other international legal and human right organisations.

The lead attorney, German lawyer Wolfgang Kaleck, represents 11 Iraqi victims of sadistic torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib and one Saudi citizen detained at Guantánamo Bay. The legal action has been made possible by Germany's 2002 universal jurisdiction statute.

Two years ago, the German Prosecutor's Office refused to begin a preliminary investigation, arguing that there existed "no indications that the authorities and courts of the United States had or would be prepared to implement criminal charges on the basis of the violations of criminal law described in the charge sheet."

Kaleck and his associates have now produced a comprehensive charge sheet approximately 300 pages long, backed up by the appraisals of six prominent attorneys, which demonstrates that a prosecution in the US was deliberately suppressed and that, in line with the German penal code, authorities in Germany are now obliged to take action.



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