

European press reacts negatively to Bush proposals on Iraq

Peter Schwarz
12 January 2007

The first reactions by the European press to George W. Bush's proposal to send an additional 20,000 soldiers to Iraq range from scepticism to outright rejection.

The left-liberal Paris newspaper *Libération* compares Bush with a poker player who finds himself on a losing streak but nonetheless ups his ante, risking everything. The US president finds himself in a situation "in which he can neither win the war nor admit that he has already lost it." The increase in troop levels will do nothing to help, the paper writes. Bush's statement that a retreat would be catastrophic for Iraq is correct, according to *Libération*, but "nevertheless this also applies when there are 20,000 US soldiers more. That will be the case in a few months. Then Bush will again confront a dilemma: pay up or go."

The Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* declares that "despite his defeat in the November elections and the change in public opinion," Bush is continuing "the path of unilateralism." He has chosen to ignore the advice of both his most loyal generals and the Iraq Study Group. Thus, "The 'new course' of the White House resembles the old mess in Iraq, which has transformed the country into a hellhole—despite 3,000 dead Americans in four years and \$357 billion spent."

With the title "Liberated to death," the German weekly *Die Zeit* accuses Bush of scorning the Iraqi people. "After all, the Iraqis are not themselves responsible for the difficulties they face. They were forced upon them. Even their own product, the despot Saddam Hussein, could not have held on for so long without help from abroad. The Iraqis are also not responsible for bringing Al Qaeda into the country; they are not responsible for the incompetence, corruption and irresponsibility which characterises the US deployment in Iraq. But nevertheless they are to be

punished for the sins of their self-appointed masters."

Die Zeit openly calls for the withdrawal of US troops. "The suffering of the Iraqis will only decrease when they are able to stand together as a self-confident state against intriguing neighbours and intervening great powers." To this end they need assistance, "but not occupation soldiers, American or anyone else."

Spiegel Online ran its article on the new Bush proposals under the headline "More Blood, More Money, more Doubts." Just a day before, the magazine featured a short comment by the former US security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in which Brzezinski described the invasion of Iraq as "probably the biggest foreign policy disaster in US history." In the same comment, Brzezinski also warned the Washington administration of the dangers of a military adventure in Iran.

The British *Guardian* calls Bush's decision for a troop increase the "last throw of the dice in a misconceived enterprise that has dragged his country, this country and the Middle East into a nightmare. In opting for a troop surge, Mr. Bush has ignored the message of the mid-term elections, the Iraq Study Group, Congress, his own top generals and most world opinion."

Only Republican Senator John McCain and right-wing Democrat Joe Lieberman supported his plan, the paper notes.

The *Guardian* continues, "The claim peace is returning to Basra is as unreal as Mr. Bush's hope that order can be brought to Baghdad." Referring also to Prime Minister Tony Blair, the paper writes, "Surrounded by the wreckage of the disaster they created, both men still hope, against all reality, that somehow the pieces can be put together again. But their project is dead. A few more troops, or a few more

months, will not restore it.”

Even conservative newspapers that are politically close to Bush doubt the feasibility of his plans. The London based *Daily Telegraph*, writes, “There are grave doubts as to whether the relatively small number of extra troops and the fragile authority of Nouri al-Maliki’s government will allow this to happen,” although the *Telegraph* then goes on to praise the American president’s “political courage.”

For its part the Austrian *Salzburger Nachrichten* sees only the courage of someone gripped by despair, writing, “It requires courage to so roundly ignore the recommendations of recognised experts and many voices of reason within his own party, and among the generals. Against all the opposing opinions and rhetoric President Bush is consciously risking the effectiveness of US armed forces, which are already very overstretched. No wonder that many in his own camp are seeking with horror to distance themselves from Bush’s policy.”

From Paris the conservative daily *Figaro* comments, “George W. Bush has not had a strategy for Iraq for the past six months. In view of the doubts of the US public and Congress he is going into battle. It is the last chance to save his presidency.”

If one takes these commentaries as a whole, a picture is sketched of a rapidly approaching catastrophe. Bush has chosen to ignore any rational considerations, political advice and even his own generals and in so doing is preparing to plunge Iraq, the Middle East, the US and a large part of the globe into disaster.

There can be no doubt that many of the doubts and fears articulated in the European press are shared by officials and ministers in European governments and foreign ministries. After all, there are traditionally close links between such institutions and the editorial boards of Europe’s main newspapers. Nevertheless there has not been a word of protest, not to speak of diplomatic or political reactions, from European political circles.

Last week German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Bush at the White House and spoke with him at length over the situation in Iraq and the Middle East. At the end of their deliberations she had only words of praise for the US president.

Prior to the Iraq war European governments that refused to take part in the war were continually accused of appeasement. The accusation is linked to the Munich

Treaty of 1938 and the refusal in particular of the British government to do anything to oppose Hitler’s aggressive annexation of Czechoslovakia.

Now the accusation of appeasement levelled against European governments is entirely appropriate. The silence on the part of European governments, and in particular the German government, to the criminal forms of militarism which are currently being pursued by the Bush government—and the way in which they seek to ingratiate themselves with Washington while closing their eyes to the catastrophic consequences of Bush’s policies—can, with all justification, be compared to the stance adopted by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain in Munich.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact