

# German chancellor assures Bush of “broad support”

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On Sunday, January 21, the news magazine *Der Spiegel* published an interview with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Following visits to a number of Middle East countries, Rice made Berlin her first European port of call and held talks with both the German foreign minister and the chancellor, Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU).

When asked if she had met skepticism or criticism in the course of her discussions in Berlin, Rice answered, “I found the German government quite understanding regarding what we are trying to do.” Rice went to say that she was “impressed and pleased” that Berlin also welcomes “a renewed commitment by the Americans in Iraq.” She continued, “I found broad support for what the president is ready to do.”

The German government has refrained from issuing any official statement following the announcement by the American president two weeks ago of plans to increase the number of US troops in Iraq and expand the war. The interview with Condoleezza Rice now makes clear that the German government supports the aggressive military actions of the Bush administration.

In so doing it strengthens the hand of George W. Bush at a time when he faces increasing isolation internationally and also in his own country. In the mid-term elections held last November, Bush’s Republican Party lost both houses of Congress to the Democrats and since then every opinion poll has confirmed that a large majority of the American population reject the war in Iraq.

The Democrats are certainly not prepared to spike Bush’s gun and end a war that they supported from the start. But they have taken a more critical stance towards Rice than she encountered in Berlin. When she recently appeared before a US congressional committee the secretary of state was subjected to a “grilling” over the Iraq war.

Chancellor Merkel also had the opportunity to criticize Bush’s decision to escalate the war in Iraq. On the day before Merkel’s meeting with Rice, the former US ambassador in Germany, Richard Holbrooke, had called upon the chancellor in the *Berliner Zeitung* to confront the secretary of state with European criticism of American policy in Iraq. Instead the chancellor did the opposite and gave Bush her backing.

The German government has thus made itself an accomplice

of a war that from the outset violated international law and in the meantime has developed into one of the greatest war crimes in history.

In the course of antagonizing ethnic and religious conflicts, the American-led occupation has transformed Iraq into an inferno. More than a hundred lives are lost every day. According to a study by the renowned Johns Hopkins University, 655,000 Iraqis have died since the start of the war. To this figure must be added the sum of more than 3,000 dead American soldiers and tens of thousands of wounded and war damaged. The fact that the Merkel government is now prepared to line up with the warmongers in Washington, although the military disaster and almost inconceivable suffering of the Iraqi population is plain to see, speaks volumes about the character of her government.

Merkel’s support for Bush is not new. At the beginning of the war—as millions took to the streets in protest and the German chancellor at the time, Gerhard Schröder (Social Democratic Party—SPD), voiced verbal opposition—Merkel expressed her support for the war. In an article in the *Washington Post* headlined, “Schröder Does Not Speak for all Germans,” she attacked the SPD-Green government for refusing to send German troops to take part in the Iraq war.

Why, however, does she continue to support this war, although its disastrous military and political consequences are so now obvious, and with many former supporters now criticizing the war? There are several reasons for this and some are bound up with Merkel’s own political biography.

Bush’s has talked about “democracy and freedom” in Iraq, while at the same time establishing a puppet regime that has terrorized the population and ruthlessly imposes the interests of the occupying power on behalf of a privileged minority. This is a form of politics with which Merkel is quite familiar.

She became politically active at a time when there was much talk of “democracy and freedom” in the former East Germany (GDR). However, events surrounding the reunification of Germany in 1989-90 proved that such talk had little to do with the reality. Instead of any genuine democracy and freedom a social order was introduced in the former GDR that imposed the profit interests of a small minority with brutal force. The extent of the social devastation created in the following one-and-

a-half decades is unparalleled in peacetime.

Merkel was never interested in democracy in the sense of a political system that responded to the wishes and desires of the majority of the population. As long as the Stalinist dictatorship in the GDR remained largely intact she was prepared to adapt and she remained politically inactive. Only at the time of reunification, in a period of the smashing up of social and cultural gains in favor of the unrestrained enrichment of a small minority, did her political interest awaken and she began her rapid ascent in the CDU.

This explains why she is now prepared to greet with great respect and acknowledgment a politician like Bush, who has ruthlessly insisted on pushing ahead with his policies in the face of opposition from a large majority of the electorate. Someone ready to demonstrate his determination and unyieldingness to his own population impresses Merkel. Behind Merkel's masquerade of a friendly, open and even occasionally naive manner lurks a power politician who knows no scruples.

Her support for Bush should be seen as a warning: the ice-cold way with which the Bush administration ignores and bypasses the will of the American electorate and terrorizes Iraq is to be a role model for the future behavior of the government in Berlin.

The German adaptation to American war policy is also bound up with the German ruling elite's fears that a military defeat for the US in Iraq would have disastrous consequences for the whole region. If the strongest imperialist power confronts serious difficulties, then the other great powers also feel threatened. In this respect Merkel speaks on behalf of the majority of European Union states and is attempting as EU council president and head of the upcoming G8 summit to strengthen the hand of the US government.

Merkel is not, however, just a willing handmaiden of American interests. She is not "Uncle Sam's poodle"—taking the place of the British prime minister whose own political career is floundering. Merkel speaks for her own, i.e., German, imperialist interests, and her support for the US is contingent on definite conditions.

First of all, she demands that German companies have access to markets in Iraq, or to put it more precisely, that German business has its share in the plundering of Iraq. And, secondly, she is attempting to dissuade the US government from undertaking a military strike against Iran—fearful of the repercussions for German energy supplies and the considerable economic interests Germany shares with Teheran.

The German Economics Ministry has prepared a "German-Iraq Business Conference" for this June, and one of the main points under discussion will be the Iraqi oil industry. Under the headline "Iraq Needs us Now," the CDU deputy and foreign policy speaker Eckhart von Klaeden wrote recently in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), "Iraq possesses the third biggest oil reserves in the world and thereby has central

significance for global energy security, in particular for Germany and Europe."

Von Klaeden also calls for the rapid expansion of trade links with Iraq in other areas: "We should quickly develop a German-Iraq Chamber of Commerce.... It could initially have a provisional seat in Amman until a transfer to Baghdad is possible. From the start this German-Iraq Chamber of Commerce should have a branch office in Arbil in the economically flourishing region of Iraqi Kurdistan" (FAZ, 12 January 2007).

With regards to US plans for Iran, Condoleezza Rice told *Der Spiegel*, "We do not want an escalation. Our plan is to react to Iranian activities which harm us."

In fact, such "Iranian activities" are being systematically provoked to be able more easily to develop a pretext for waging war. On no less than three occasions during the past four weeks, US soldiers have arrested Iranians and those associated with Iran in Iraq, including diplomats and influential religious leaders such as the Shiite clergyman Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

Military preparations for a strike against Iran are already well advanced. Following a pause of several months, since December a fleet of US vessels, led by the aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower, has been patrolling the Persian Gulf. At the end of January the aircraft carrier John C. Stennis will reinforce the fleet. Under the headline "Storm Warning in the Gulf," *Der Spiegel* reports that the US ships and planes carried out a maneuver in November, which simulated "support given to a newly elected government against an ongoing rebellion."

Irrespective of the details of diplomatic horse-trading, the support proffered by Chancellor Merkel to US war policy has one inevitable consequence: it strengthens and encourages the Bush administration to undertake even more criminal military adventures with entirely unpredictable consequences.



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