

# Antiwar forum in Berlin: silence on role of US Democrats in Iraq war

**Our reporter**  
**7 March 2007**

On February 24 a number of German antiwar groups, including the German Peace Council and Attac, together with the Left Party-PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), held a meeting in Berlin on the situation in the Middle East. Approximately 120 persons attended the event, which brought together delegates from German organisations that had organised a number of protests against the Iraq war with representatives of Arab organisations active in Germany.

The meeting was held at the headquarters of the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, which was the daily newspaper of the Stalinist government in the former East Germany (GDR) and which continues to maintain close links to the PDS, the successor organisation to the party that ruled GDR.

Speakers addressed a number of issues relating to the Iraq war and its background. As it emerged in the course of the discussion, however, one of the aims of the meeting was to promote the supposed antiwar credentials of the US Democratic Party.

It also became clear that the organisers of the seminar were eager to pursue unprincipled relations with Arab nationalist organisations working in Germany. In the course of the meeting speakers pointed out the reactionary nature of anti-Islamist campaigns being waged in Germany and other European countries.

The main report at the morning session was given by Rainer Rupp, a leading editor of *Junge Welt*, formerly the most widely read youth paper in East Germany and now a political ally of the PDS. Under the aliases *Mosel* and *Topas*, Rupp infiltrated the NATO headquarters in Brussels in the 1970s and 1980s and proved to be the most successful spy operating for the Stalinist GDR regime. In the course of his report at the Berlin seminar, Rupp spoke at length about the background to the Iraq war and the strategy of neo-conservative forces in and around the Bush administration.

Rupp quoted from the testimony before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee given last month by Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser in the Carter administration. Brzezinski warned that the Bush administration might use a “provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the US blamed on Iran” to justify military action against Iran. Rupp said that the mainstream media had ignored this important

statement and that he had come upon it only “through the wonder of the Internet.”

Rupp went on to describe the current military build-up of US forces in the Persian Gulf and surrounding region, but ended his contribution by citing an Iranian source to the effect that American military preparations were primarily aimed at pressuring the Iranian government, suggesting that an actual military attack was unlikely.

A notable aspect of Rupp’s report was his failure to deal in any way with the politically complicit role in the war played by the Democratic Party.

In the ensuing discussion, WSWs reporter Stefan Steinberg commented on the report given by Rupp. After identifying the “wonder of the Internet” as the *World Socialist Web Site*, which reported both Brzezinski’s testimony and the silence of the US media, Steinberg criticised Rupp for playing down the danger of US military action against Iran.

He pointed out that the US Navy had assembled its forces in the Persian Gulf no less than five times over the past 15 years and launched military strikes on four of those occasions. Steinberg referred as well to the recent diplomatic missions of Vice President Dick Cheney: first to the Gulf states to obtain an agreement for the stabilisation of oil prices, and then to one of the US’s most loyal backers, the Australian government, where he made clear that the Bush administration considered a military attack on Iran to be one of its options.

These were clear indications that the US administration was preparing its allies for the possibility of a forthcoming military strike, he stressed.

Steinberg also noted that in addressing the issue of the Iraqi resistance, it was necessary to characterise the political aims and programs of those organisations active inside Iraq. There could be absolutely no doubt that the main responsibility for the current violence and bloodshed in Iraq rested with the US government and its occupation forces, and that the Iraqi people had every right to militarily resist the American occupation forces and their puppet government in Baghdad. But there was nothing progressive in the sectarian bombings carried out by various Shiite and Sunni militia groups, some of which were tied to the US-backed regime.

Finally, Steinberg insisted that no analysis of the Iraq war

could be made without addressing the reactionary role played by the Democratic Party, which had supported both the invasion of Iraq and the battery of antidemocratic measures introduced by the Bush government in the name of the so-called “war on terrorism,” including the Patriot Act. Having voted in the November midterm elections, motivated by opposition to the Iraq war, to return the Democrats to control of Congress, the US electorate was now being repudiated by the Democrats, who refused to take any action to stop the war—such as voting to end funding for US military operations in Iraq.

Rupp responded by declaring that it was not his intention to play down the danger of military action against Iran, but he completely ignored the other criticisms raised—in particular, the role of the Democratic Party.

The reason for Rupp’s reluctance to address the issue of the Democratic Party soon became apparent. Before breaking for lunch, the chair of the meeting invited a representative of the Democratic Party in Berlin to take a seat alongside Rupp.

Elsa Rassbach is a leading member of American Voices Abroad (AVA) and Democrats Abroad, two organizations that aim to mobilise maximum international support for the Democratic Party. Both organisations were active in ensuring that US voters in Germany gave their vote to the Democratic Party in last November’s congressional elections.

Rassbach apologised to the meeting, declaring she would have to shortly leave for an important meeting of the Democratic Party. She then made a brief appeal for support for an American soldier who has been imprisoned in Germany for refusing to serve in Iraq. She also failed to address any of the criticisms raised by Steinberg over the role of the Democrats.

All in all the Berlin meeting provided a revealing snapshot of the German antiwar movement. Firmly in the hands of such forces as the Left-Party-PDS and long-time Stalinist peace groups from West Germany, the antiwar movement acts as a sort of semi-official weather vane for German foreign policy.

In 2003 the same organisations represented at the meeting in Berlin participated in the organisation of major demonstrations to oppose the Iraq war—at a time when, for tactical reasons, Germany’s governing Social Democratic Party-Green coalition refused to openly support the US invasion and occupation. In fact, behind the scenes the German government was providing considerable logistical help in allowing US forces to operate from German soil and backing the activities of German secret service and special army units, which collaborated closely with the American military. At the time the government in Berlin was hopeful that the US Democratic Party could work as a moderating influence on the Bush administration.

Intent not to offend their transatlantic cousin, the SPD and the Green Party largely boycotted the mass antiwar demonstrations held in March 2003, while organisations such as the PDS, the German Peace Council and Attac worked to ensure that popular sentiment against the war did not spill over into open criticism of the German government and proffered support for the US

Democrats.

Four years later, despite the rapidly growing clouds of war, the German antiwar movement has remained largely silent on the threat of a new conflict with Iran. Its stance reflects the standpoint of the current grand coalition government (Christian Democratic Union—Social Democratic Party—Christian Social Union), which has refused to make any criticism of US plans to attack Iran while plaintively hoping for a diplomatic settlement of differences.

In fact, the preparedness of German Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) to support the activities of the Bush administration in Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with her failure to take any open position on the fate of Iran, has only served to encourage the most hawkish elements in the White House and Pentagon. The Merkel government is walking a tightrope. It welcomed the recent Baker plan and continues to hope that its own diplomatic manoeuvrings combined with vain hopes in the Democratic Party can still dissuade Washington from a violent confrontation with Iran. At the same time it is well aware that renewed imperialist aggression against Iran would have immense consequences—not least for Germany’s extensive interests in the region.

The German antiwar movement responds accordingly. It was prepared to oppose US war plans when the German government gave a lead. Under conditions where the German government closes ranks with America and remains silent on the threat to Iran these groups downplay the possibilities of a new war with Iran, seek to preserve their opportunist relations with Arab nationalist and Islamist groups, while at the same time intensifying their efforts to promote the US Democratic Party.

Nothing could more fully express the political bankruptcy of such organizations. The imminent danger of the expansion of the Iraq war through a confrontation with Iran into a conflagration, which would engulf the entire Middle East, underscores the urgency for the reorientation of the popular antiwar movement on the basis of an international socialist perspective.



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