

German chancellor threatens Iran and demands seat on UN Security Council

Peter Schwarz
1 October 2007

Is the German government ready to support US aggression against Iran in exchange for a seat on the United Nations Security Council? The first appearance by German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the United Nations General Assembly points in this direction.

In her speech in New York on September 25 Merkel supported the demand for increased sanctions against the Islamic republic—a longstanding demand of the Bush administration, which also has the support of France following the election earlier this year of a new president and government.

Merkel called upon Tehran to prove that it is not working to develop nuclear weapons. Should Tehran fail to do this, she would push for harsher sanctions. “Let us not fool ourselves,” she said, “if Iran came into the possession of nuclear weapons, it would have devastating consequences.”

Merkel reversed the burden of proof, declaring: “The world does not have to prove to Iran that Iran is building a nuclear bomb. Iran must convince the world that it does not want the bomb.”

Under conditions where Washington categorically refuses to recognize any evidence that does not support its charges against Iran, even when it is provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Merkel’s statement amounts to a blank cheque for the Bush administration.

Merkel went to call for a permanent seat for Germany on the Security Council. “Germany is ready to take more responsibility with the assumption of a permanent seat on the Security Council” she declared, and went on to stress the urgency of such a move: “Time is short, there are various crises to be dealt with.”

Merkel emphasised that the current composition of the Security Council no longer reflected today’s world. “There is no other alternative than to adapt it to political reality,” she said.

Merkel’s stance was supported by the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. He told journalists that he was intent on raising German ambitions “in the corridors” of the UN with as many member countries as possible.

In an interview in the *Bayerischen Rundfunk*, former German UN Ambassador Gunter Plüger also called for a German seat

on the Security Council. He justified this with the increasing number of international military operations being conducted by German forces. The best decision remains useless if it is not implemented, he said. “That means that the Security Council should include those few states which have the resources necessary to implement a Security Council decision. And this surely includes Japan and Germany.”

Since the reunification of Germany in 1990, the federal government has repeatedly raised the demand for a permanent seat on the exclusive circle of five veto-wielding powers on the Security Council—the US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China. The campaign won momentum two years ago when Merkel’s predecessor, Gerhard Schröder, coordinated with the governments of Japan, Brazil and India and agitated worldwide to expand the number of permanent members to include the four nations plus two African countries.

The plan failed following the failure of African countries to agree candidates. Japan hesitated and the US and China threatened to impose a veto. In the absence of any final vote by the Security Council, the US was not required to make any final commitment. Until now the German government has refrained from raising the demand again.

Now Merkel obviously sees a chance of achieving the desired goal. In his own speech to the General Assembly, President Bush indicated he was open to plans for reform, but mentioned only Japan in this connection, advocating the addition of “Japan and others” as permanent members of the Security Council.

According to a report in the *Bild* newspaper, Merkel will travel to Bush’s Texas ranch in November for a two-day private meeting where she will seek the support of the president for a German seat. It is unlikely that Bush would agree to this without demanding something in return. The price for a deal could well be German agreement to intensified sanctions and an eventual war against Iran.

Merkel’s threats against Iran express a change of course in German foreign policy. Up to now Berlin has urged a united approach against Iran by the Security Council, and sought to prevent a break with the US on the one side and Russia and China on the other, thus allowing Germany to balance between the two camps. The German government also sought to avoid

any escalation of the conflict because of its close business relations with Iran. Germany is Tehran's most important trading partner.

Merkel did not go so far in New York as French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who called for sanctions to be imposed on Iran by the European Union without a Security Council resolution. But her aggressive threats point in the same direction.

Some weeks ago Sarkozy referred to the alternative between "an Iranian bomb or the bombardment of Iran." He repeated his threats in his speech to the UN assembly.

Sarkozy maintained that there would be "no peace in the world if the international community proved too weak to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons." Iran has the right to civil use of nuclear power, he said, but added, "[I]f we permit Iran to arm itself with nuclear weapons, we are taking an unacceptable risk to the stability of the region and the world." In his next sentence he claimed: "All experts all over the world agree that Iran is working on a military nuclear weapon."

Merkel's change of course in foreign policy is in part related to Sarkozy's initiative. Until a few years ago, Paris and Berlin aspired to stand up to the US as equals on the basis of a unified European foreign policy. However, this project has largely failed. Instead of drawing Berlin and Paris together, increasing tensions with the US have served to intensify the historical conflicts between the two countries.

Tensions over economic and foreign policy issues have been mounting since the assumption of power by Sarkozy's government. The German press has been full of trenchant and sarcastic reports on the "restless Frenchman."

Berlin has responded with indignation to Sarkozy's efforts to establish French supremacy in the EADS (Airbus) company, his campaign for a state-dominated monopoly in the sphere of energy and nuclear power, his attacks on the independence of the European central bank, as well as his unilateral foreign policy initiatives in Darfur, Libya, Lebanon and Iraq.

In view of the tensions in Europe, Sarkozy has undertaken to break with France's previous Gaullist foreign policy tradition in favour of closer links to US foreign policy.

The German weekly paper *Die Zeit* concluded that in recent weeks Sarkozy has "very clearly laid his claim to be a main player in world affairs," and sought to explain his aggressive course against Iran as follows: "Sarkozy realises it is no longer possible to prevent an escalation of the conflict and prefers to surf along with the wave."

Now the German government is taking the same course. In light of increasing tensions with Russia, which is asserting its own interests with growing self-confidence, and China—only last week Merkel's meeting with the Dalai Lama led to denunciations by the Chinese side—Berlin has also decided to further close ranks with America and "surf along with the wave."

Already in 2003 Angela Merkel had taken a different line

from that of then-Chancellor Schröder, whose public criticism of the Iraq war led to a cooling of relations with the US. After taking office in 2005 Merkel, sought to recover ground and seek closer links to the Bush administration.

Now she has gone a step further. Her aggressive threats against Iran serve to strengthen Washington's plan for a military assault on Tehran. A number of newspaper articles have already drawn attention to the advanced stage of preparations for a substantial military strike, before the expiration of Bush's second term of office, aimed at destroying Iran's nuclear plants, military installations, and civilian infrastructure.

The claim—spread above all by Sarkozy—that increased sanctions would prevent a war by forcing concessions from Tehran is hardly credible, as is amply demonstrated by the Iraq war. In the case of Iraq, UN-imposed sanctions were used to provide propaganda for the war and weaken Iraq prior to the attack launched by the US. In any event, current American preparations for war against Iran have little to do with its nuclear program, but are driven by the country's large oil reserves and its strategic situation in a region containing the world's largest energy reserves.

It is significant that Merkel has linked her policy swing toward Bush's course against Iran with the demand for a German seat in the UN Security Council. Behind the endlessly intoned formula that Germany is ready to assume "more responsibility" lies the drive by the country's ruling elite to once again operate as a major imperialist power and to support this by military means.

Following its defeat in two world wars, for which it bore the main responsibility, the German ruling class was forced to assume a more modest role in world politics for many decades. Now it hopes that a Security Council seat will expedite its admission into the circle of the imperialist great powers. That in furtherance of this aim the German government is prepared to support or tolerate a war which could threaten the lives of millions of Iranians demonstrates the criminal character of German imperialism's ambitions.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact