

Democratic candidate in Berlin

Obama demands Europe send more troops to Afghanistan

Stefan Steinberg
26 July 2008

Barack Obama's speech before an audience of some 200,000 in Berlin was a reactionary affirmation of Cold War anti-communism and an attempt to promote the new framework for US imperialist militarism and aggression, the so-called "global war on terror."

Against the backdrop of a potted history of post-war US-European relations, the Democratic presidential candidate appealed for closer collaboration between the two continents in the struggle against the "new danger" of international terrorism and demanded that European governments increase their troop levels in Afghanistan.

In his call to arms in the "war on terror," Obama suggested that the populations of Europe, in particular Germany, had to overcome their aversion to war. The Democratic candidate, who is well aware of mass opposition among the German people to Germany's military presence in Afghanistan, declared: "No one welcomes war. I recognize the enormous difficulties in Afghanistan ... America cannot do this alone. The Afghan people need our troops and your troops, our support and your support to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda...."

Obama's first proposal was a call for concerted action by Europe and the US to send a "direct message to Iran that it must abandon its nuclear ambitions." Touching on the initial opposition of Germany and France to the invasion of Iraq, he said that "despite past differences" Europe should support the efforts of the US to stabilize the puppet regime in Baghdad and "finally bring this war to a close"—that is, accept an indefinite US military presence and American domination of the country.

In one revealing passage, Obama hinted that his election would not signify a lessening of US militarism

or the military burden on Germany and other European nations. He declared: "Yes, there have been differences between America and Europe. No doubt, there will be differences in the future. But the burdens of global citizenship continue to bind us together. A change of leadership in Washington will not lift this burden."

Obama thus took the occasion of his only public address during his overseas tour to reiterate a perspective of endless war and military violence.

The political substance of Obama's speech was aptly summed up by the right-wing Republican journal *National Review*, which published a sympathetic editorial Friday characterizing the speech as "fairly conservative and distinctly patriotic." The editorial stated:

"In the course of about 20 minutes the senator took the following positions:

- * A strong condemnation of Communist tyranny and a celebration of America's successful resistance to it during the Cold War;

- * A passionate plea for the continuation of the Atlantic Alliance and its evolution in a global partnership as the only basis for international security and safe commerce;

- * An endorsement of the war on terror that included President Bush's trademark argument that we must 'dry up the well of extremism that supports [terrorism]';

- * An unambiguous backing of NATO's mission in Afghanistan and a clear demand that Europeans should send more troops there;

- * A commitment to free trade, open borders, and globalization;

- * Support for the promotion of democracy in the

Middle East and elsewhere that included an acceptance that the Iraq war had been won by the US, its Coalition allies, and the current Iraqi government;

* A straightforward statement that Iran ‘must’ abandon its nuclear ambitions;

* And a patriotic evocation of America as the vehicle of the world’s hopes for freedom and justice.”

Obama’s appearance had been preceded by an unprecedented campaign in the German media, which gushed with enthusiasm for the presidential candidate. A number of newspapers had predicted a large turnout and drew parallels to the large gatherings in Berlin for John F. Kennedy in 1963, and Ronald Reagan in 1987.

Significantly, Obama chose to evoke the words of Reagan, whom official US opinion credits with winning the Cold War. Echoing Reagan’s “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall,” Obama declared, “When you, the German people, tore down that wall—a wall that divided East and West; freedom and tyranny; fear and hope—walls came tumbling down around the world.... and the doors of democracy were opened.”

Obama, who has never made a secret of his own enthusiasm for the “free market,” began his next sentence with “Markets opened too.” However, he remained silent on the socially devastating consequences of the introduction of capitalist relations into Eastern Europe, which led to the wholesale dismantling of industry in eastern Germany and mass unemployment, and in the former Soviet Union produced a fall in life expectancy seen previously only in countries ravaged by war. Obama’s speech was also notable for its neglect of the social crisis facing millions in the United States and Europe’s industrialized west, as well as the US financial breakdown that threatens to plunge the world into a new Depression.

The speech was crafted to simultaneously address several audiences. For the German and European public, he sprinkled his remarks with vague appeals for the unity of different cultures and efforts to fight Third World poverty and climate change. To the German and European bourgeoisie, he offered a more collaborative relationship and implied that, in return for their assistance in salvaging America’s neo-colonial ventures in Afghanistan and elsewhere, they could anticipate a larger share of the spoils.

To the American ruling elite, Obama offered assurances of his determination as president to prosecute US imperialism’s global hegemonic aims, while adopting a more multilateral posture and strengthening the transatlantic alliance.

There was high praise for Obama’s speech from across the German political spectrum, with leaders from the Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, Free Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party, Greens and the Left Party all expressing satisfaction.

The German and European bourgeoisie by and large welcome an end to the Bush era and see in an Obama presidency increased opportunities to pursue their own imperialist aims. The Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* wrote of Obama’s visit to Germany:

“In recent years America has had to face up to the limitations of its power in Afghanistan and Iraq, and also in other international issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian problem and the uranium dispute with Iran. Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy are assuming increasingly dominant roles in international diplomacy. What became clear after September 11, and is becoming ever clearer now, is that since the end of the Cold War our world knows no universal values of which the US is the main or sole representative.... America needs its old NATO allies once more.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact