

German Green leader Joschka Fischer bangs the drum for Afghanistan war

Peter Schwarz
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The escalation of the Afghanistan war has created severe difficulties for the German government. Contradictory statements on Germany's course in the war have emerged from the chancellery, the foreign ministry and the Bavarian state chancellery.

While CDU (Christian Democratic Union) Chairperson and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Defense Secretary Karl Theodor von Guttenberg (Christian Social Union—CSU) are preparing to announce an increased German deployment by the end of January, the CSU chairman and Bavarian prime minister, Horst Seehofer, has publicly argued against such a move. The FDP (Free Democratic Party) chairman and German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, has kept silent on the issue.

Behind these divergences is increasing public opposition to the war. According to a recent poll, 69 percent of those questioned favored the fastest possible withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan—an increase of 12 percent since September. According to the poll, 77 percent are of the opinion that they have not been honestly informed about the Afghanistan deployment by the government.

Der Spiegel commented on the results of the poll: “The government cannot react as quickly as opposition to the Afghanistan deployment grows.”

The increasing brutality of the war, the fraudulent Afghan presidential election and rampant corruption of the regime of Hamid Karzai, as well as the recent massacre at Kunduz and its cover-up by the German government, have undermined the official rationale given for the war. Barely anyone in Germany believes today that the role of the German Army in Afghanistan is to dig wells, emancipate Afghan women, protect the civilian population and promote democracy. For very good reasons, however, the government is reluctant to reveal the real aims of the war.

It is against this background that Joschka Fischer has

gone public to defend the Afghanistan deployment and provide new justifications for it. As the first and only Green Party foreign minister (1998-2005), Fischer played a key role in breaking the post-war taboo against international deployments by the German Army. It was Fischer who justified the participation of the German Army in the Kosovo war with the cynical argument that the legacy of the Holocaust obliged Germany to prevent alleged genocide in the Balkans. The dispatch of German troops to Afghanistan also occurred during his term in office.

What stands out in Fischer's latest commentary is that he no longer seeks to justify the Afghanistan deployment on the basis of humanitarian arguments. Instead, he cites exclusively geo-political aims.

“The source or meaning of the conflict in Afghanistan is impossible to find in the country itself,” Fischer writes in a contribution to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. “Afghanistan is the battlefield, but the causes of the wars that have devastated it since the mid-1970s were and are still to be found beyond its borders. So an exclusively ‘Afghan solution’ is not possible.”

According to Fischer, what began in 1989, after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Afghanistan, was “a proxy war between regional neighbors over power in the Hindu Kush.” Pakistan, supported by Saudi Arabia, “sought strategic depth against its arch enemy India,” and for this purpose equipped the Taliban. Iran defended its interests with the assistance of the Shiite minority, and the northern neighbors (including Russia) looked for support to the Tajik Northern alliance and the Uzbek militias.

The invasion of Iraq in March 2003, which Fischer terms a “folly,” meant that US President George W. Bush was “not only squandering America's military strength,” but also that “Iran became the central geo-political player in the entire region.”

Fischer continues: “So, those who are grappling with

the Afghan riddle today should consider, first and foremost, the regional realities: Can the West afford to withdraw?"

Fischer answers this question with a clear "no" and demands the continuation of the war on the basis of a clearly defined goal—"a stable status quo in Afghanistan that will prevent the country from again becoming a battlefield of regional interests and an organizational base for Al Qaeda." He continues, "Without a sufficient military presence, as well as improved and reinforced reconstruction efforts, this goal is not attainable."

This is a revealing confession. In order not to leave "power in the Hindu Kush" to regional neighbors, the leading figure of the Greens endorses an expansion of a war which has already costs the lives of thousands of civilians and will undoubtedly cause the deaths of tens of thousands more. Fischer has the backing of his party, even though its current spokesmen are somewhat more circumspect in their comments.

Fischer does not answer the obvious question as to why the US and its European allies have more right to exercise "power in the Hindu Kush" than the country's regional neighbors. This is where his candor ends. He presents the war as a selfless intervention by the US and its allies, aimed exclusively at preventing terrorism, Islamic radicalism, nuclear threats, regional conflicts and looming disintegration.

Fischer knows better. As a paid lobbyist of the Nabucco pipeline project, which will allow leading European energy companies to exploit the natural gas reserves of Central Asia, Fischer is in the front line in the struggle for oil and gas—the resources which have fueled the war in Afghanistan.

As a former foreign minister, Fischer is intimately acquainted with the strategic conceptions of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who, as national security adviser to US President Jimmy Carter, initiated the US program of support for the Afghan Mujahedeen. In his 1998 book *The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski developed the thesis that the key to the defense of US global supremacy in the 21st century was control of Central Asia. He attached particular significance to Afghanistan.

For Fischer, it is imperative that all means are employed to defend access to the mineral resources of Central Asia and the supremacy of the "West" in the region. While German and American interests are not identical, any defeat for America in Afghanistan would not only irrevocably damage the authority of US imperialism, it would also have profound implications for the European

powers. On both sides of the Atlantic, Afghanistan serves as the "chessboard" where the ascending nations of China, India and Russia can and must be held in check.

"The big question" for Fischer is "whether the US and its European allies still have the strength, perseverance and far-sightedness for such an undertaking." He notes: "There are good reasons to doubt this. The alternative would be a chaotic and dangerous future in this large hot spot."

A glimpse at historical developments reveals that the strength and perseverance of a belligerent power depends on the extent to which it can restrain and suppress internal opposition. A vital condition for the "perseverance" of the German Army in the First World War was the betrayal of the working class carried out by the German Social Democratic Party; in the Second World War, it was the smashing of the workers' movement by the Nazis. More recently, the US lost the Vietnam War largely because of increasing domestic resistance to the war.

In this respect, more can be expected from Fischer and the Greens. They have transformed themselves from pacifists into enthusiastic proponents of war. A hundred years ago, the German middle class swooned at the naval program of the emperor. Today, the Greens express their enthusiasm for the deployment of the German Army in Afghanistan.

The form has changed, but the content remains the same. This stance has its own inevitable logic. As public opposition to the war grows, so too will the readiness of Fischer and the Greens to support repressive state measures to combat popular resistance.

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