

# Iraq war splits NATO

**Peter Schwarz**  
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The Atlantic alliance is facing the deepest divide in its 50-year history. In the course of the past few days the positions of the opposing parties have become more and more entrenched. While the US and Britain are pressing for a military strike against Iraq as soon as possible, France and Germany are setting all wheels in motion to diplomatically outmanoeuvre the US.

The accusations hurled by both camps at one another are becoming more acrimonious with each passing day. On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, testifying before the Senate Budget Committee, warned that NATO might break apart if Germany, France and Belgium did not drop their resistance to military support for Turkey.

The *Wall Street Journal*, mouthpiece of the most aggressive and reactionary factions within the US establishment, posed the question on a fundamental level and asked whether NATO “continued to serve the interests of the United States.” The newspaper accused Germany of following “an agenda aimed less at defusing war than at actively promoting American defeat.” If NATO does not change course, the editorial said, “it has outlived its usefulness.” It concluded by declaring: “What President Bush calls ‘a coalition of the willing’ will become America’s new security alliance.”

France and Germany, whose criticisms of US war plans until now were generally passive and muted, have taken several diplomatic initiatives in recent days in a last minute attempt to avert a military strike against Iraq.

On Monday, French President Jacques Chirac and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, who had just visited Berlin, presented a joint declaration by Russia, Germany and France in Paris. The statement called for extended weapons inspections in Iraq. “There still is an alternative to war. The use of violence can only be the last resort,” the statement declared, in clear opposition to the remarks of US President Bush, who earlier this week said, “The game is over.”

On the basis of this joint declaration, the three powers may seek to block a British draft resolution to be presented to the UN Security Council on February 14. The US-backed resolution would effectively give Washington a green light for a military strike.

Chirac and Putin said they were confident that the majority of Security Council members agreed with them. Since Secretary of State Colin Powell’s speech to the Security Council on February 5, Chirac has intensified his efforts to find support in the council, speaking to the heads of state of China, Mexico, Chile, Syria, Cameroon and other countries.

On Monday, NATO representatives from Belgium, France and Germany vetoed military preparations for the protection of Turkey

in case of an Iraq war. Such preventive military planning, they argued, could “send a wrong signal” and subvert any peaceful solution of the Iraq conflict. “If we bowed to this request, we would embark on the logic towards war,” Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel commented.

This veto prompted indignant rebukes from US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who described it as a “shame” and a “terrible mistake.” He declared: “Whoever prevents the Alliance from taking even the most minimal provisions for the defence of Turkey threatens to undermine its credibility.” President Bush publicly accused Berlin, Paris and Brussels of damaging NATO.

The efforts by Germany and France to impede US war plans are motivated by their belated recognition that international institutions and agreements will not prevent the Bush administration from pursuing its interests in a unilateral and aggressive manner.

Washington decided on the military occupation of Iraq a long time ago. The debates in the Security Council, the weapons inspections and the fake proofs of weapons of mass destruction merely serve the purpose of deceiving the public.

Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger recently admitted in an interview with the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* that the US government has always regarded the UN resolution that forced Iraq to accept renewed weapons inspections as a mere pretext for war. “No government that talked to President Bush or his advisers since Resolution 1441 was passed in November 2002 could have any doubt that within a few months the Americans would announce a material breach of this resolution as well as retaliatory measures.”

Given the fact that more than 100,000 American soldiers had already been deployed in the region, Kissinger said, any retreat without a regime change in Iraq would be tantamount to catastrophe.

Retired US General Wesley Clark, NATO’s chief of staff during the war in Yugoslavia, said in an interview with the same newspaper that the decision “to direct the Iraq issue towards war” had already been taken in late 2001. Following the defeat of Saddam Hussein, there would be a “massive American presence in the region” and “a military administration in Iraq.” Clark proceeded to name the next military targets of the US: Syria—“within 12 months”—and then Iran.

With regard to their long-term interests, Germany and France cannot possibly accept such a hegemonic position for the US in the Middle East. It would bring Europe’s energy supplies and large export markets under the total control of its biggest economic rival. In addition, they fear that a war against Iraq will destabilize

the entire region and radicalize Muslim immigrants who live in Europe in large numbers. The Afghanistan conflict, they further fear, could be rekindled by a war on Iraq—a situation for which German soldiers in Kabul are utterly unprepared.

For many months the German and French governments expected that they would be able to come to an agreement with the US on a joint policy. They placed their hopes on more moderate sections of the political elite in America. However, after leading Democrats expressed their unreserved support for Bush's war plans and the so-called doves led by Secretary of State Powell turned out to be hawks, these hopes were dashed.

Powell's speech to the UN on February 5, in which he raked up long-refuted propaganda lies instead of presenting serious evidence as promised, shattered the remaining illusions about a more moderate wing within the US administration.

The political establishment in Germany has grown embittered over the efforts of the American government to split Europe on the issue of Iraq. The statement of solidarity with the US, drafted and signed by eight European states at the suggestion of the *Wall Street Journal*, was an open attack on European endeavours to arrive at a joint foreign policy. Since then, the tone has turned notably harsher on both sides of the Atlantic.

At a meeting of the Social Democratic members of parliament on Monday, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, to loud cheers from his audience, spoke of an "historical decision for Germany." The near future would show, he said, whether a multi-polar world would prevail or whether all important decisions would be taken unilaterally—in Washington.

French President Chirac expressed his opposition to a world order in which the Americans would assume the role of prosecutor, judge and executioner.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to confuse the stance taken by Berlin and Paris with a principled opposition to war in Iraq. Both governments accept the myth of Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction, thus conforming to the declared aim of US policy: the "disarmament" of Iraq—a euphemism for the country's colonial subjugation. What they don't accept is that this should take place under the exclusive control of the US.

As the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* correctly noted, the initiative of France and Germany for intensified weapons inspections amounts to the establishment of a UN protectorate. This plan, which is being distributed by the French UN delegation in the form of a so-called "non-paper," envisages doubling or tripling the number of UN inspectors. They are to be accompanied by armed units of a UN security corps, while American U2 and French Mirage planes conduct constant air surveillance. This would effectively extend the "no-fly" zones to the entire territory of the country.

Should this project be put into practice despite American reservations, it would be very easy to create some provocation as a pretext for war—which would then be supported by Germany and France. "Any obstruction or violent sabotage of this disarmament mission would be met with an immediate military counter-strike," *Der Spiegel* writes. "And this strike would not be based merely on the power politics of a single super power, but on the world

organization's right to use force as laid down in Article VII."

The attempt by Germany and France to stifle the war plans of the Bush administration by diplomatic manoeuvres is bound to fail, because it does not take into account the roots of these war policies. The aggressive foreign policy of the US government is a reaction to the deep inner crisis of American society for which the ruling elite has no solution.

The deep divide within NATO is neither a mere episode nor the result of political misunderstandings. It is an inevitable consequence of the internal contradictions of world capitalism, which find their most developed expression within the US. The era in which relations between the great powers could be regulated peacefully is now past. As in the first half of the last century, every serious economic and social crisis raises the danger of a world war.

The only viable answer to the danger of war is the international mobilization of the working population on the basis of a socialist program. The policy of diplomatic manoeuvres, on the other hand, serves to exclude the mass of the people from political life.

In this respect, it is instructive to study the arguments brought forward against Chancellor Schröder in Germany. On several occasions, Schröder made rather undiplomatic statements on US policy. He did so for purely domestic reasons, in an attempt to raise his poor standing in the opinion polls by demagogic appeals to the anti-war sentiment that is very broad and deep within the German population. However, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party) and even those sections of the media critical of the US cautioned that he was going too far. They accused the chancellor of isolating Germany internationally and eroding the country's diplomatic room for manoeuvre.

An editorial in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* summed up these criticisms. Public opinion, it said, was the greatest threat to diplomacy: "Diplomacy breaks down if its delicate mechanisms are exposed to high voltage—the heavy currents of public emotions." Since the collapse of Metternich's Europe in 1848, this danger had become inevitable, the author wrote with regret. "From then on," he declared, "foreign affairs were no longer pure cabinet policy, but began to intertwine with the sentiments of entire nations expressed in public opinion."



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