

Germany joins US, British, Israeli axis of aggression

By Ulrich Rippert
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Last Sunday, German government spokesman Ulrich William spoke on behalf of the chancellor, Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union—CDU), and expressed Merkel’s “great regret and deep sadness over the consequences of the Israeli air raid on Qana.”

Two days later, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party—SPD) began an interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with the words: “What took place on Sunday in Qana was appalling. The large number of civilian victims of the Israeli air raid is terrible and unacceptable.”

However, while the German population as a whole was genuinely appalled by clips of the charred and mutilated corpses of children in Qana, the German government, a grand coalition of the CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU) and SPD, has refused to recognise and condemn this act for what it is—a despicable war crime. Steinmeier’s warning to the Israeli government—that within the context of the “right to self-defence” any application of military force had to be appropriate and civilian victims avoided—was a cynical and cowardly evasion.

In Qana, it was not a case of inaccurate targeting or failure to take steps to avoid civilian casualties. Rather, innocent women and children were deliberately slaughtered so as to accelerate the flood of refugees from south Lebanon. This massacre was not an “unfortunate exception,” but rather an expression of the true character of Israel’s aggression, which up to now has cost the lives of more children than combatants.

At the meeting of European foreign ministers held in Brussels on Tuesday, Steinmeier, one day after his interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, not only blocked any condemnation of Israeli war crimes, but exerted pressure to strike the demand for an immediate ceasefire from the final joint statement issued by the ministers. The original draft, proposed by the Finnish presidency, called for an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon and included a sentence warning that “disregard for necessary precautions to avoid loss of civilian life constitutes a severe breach of international humanitarian

law.”

Under pressure from Britain and Germany, both formulations were dropped and an alternative resolution was agreed (with the support of the Czech Republic, Poland and Denmark) that called instead on all parties to “do everything possible to protect civilian populations and to refrain from actions in violation of international humanitarian law”—a formulation which dovetails with Israel’s own hypocritical justification for its war crimes. The resolution was further altered to place criticism of Hezbollah’s rocket attacks on Israel before a reference to Israel’s killing of Lebanese civilians in Qana.

These facts make it clear that, irrespective of Merkel’s declarations of “regret and deep sadness” for the victims in Qana, the German government bears a large degree of responsibility for the war crimes that are being committed in Lebanon. Nothing has served to strengthen and encourage the American-Israeli war policy more than the pro-American turn which has taken place in German foreign policy.

Before taking over as foreign minister in the current government, Steinmeier headed the chancellery in Germany’s former SPD-Green Party government, which was led by Gerhard Schröder. Steinmeier is well acquainted with the two-faced nature of Schröder’s opposition to the US-led war against Iraq. While publicly criticising the war, Germany worked behind the scenes to provide the American government and intelligence services with logistical support.

Nevertheless, Germany’s public pronouncements against the war did have some effect. Germany has no permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, but there can be no doubt that its reservations over the Iraq war served to bolster other nations with Security Council representation and helped prevent the passage of a UN resolution backing the war.

This, in turn, was a significant factor in the popular mobilization against the war. From the very beginning, the character of this illegal war of aggression was clearly established, and millions took to the streets across the globe to demonstrate against it.

In this respect, the efforts of the new government to unambiguously demonstrate a pro-American shift in German foreign policy is of major importance to the US and Israeli governments. Merkel, Steinmeier and company have played a major role in tilting the political balance of power in Europe clearly in favour of the US government and isolating critics of the US-Israeli war.

On Sunday evening, following the Qana massacre, Merkel made a point of telephoning the chief ally of George Bush in Europe, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, rather than French President Jacques Chirac. In so doing, she made clear that Germany's new pro-US orientation was not just a temporary matter, or merely the result of pressure from the US president. It was, in fact, a continuation and reaffirmation of the orientation Merkel indicated at the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg, when she appeared with Bush and joined him in justifying the Israeli onslaught against Lebanon as a legitimate act of "self-defence" following the July 12 border raid carried out by Hezbollah.

This change of orientation by the German government has served to change international relations and strengthen the most reactionary political forces. Germany's position has bolstered the Israeli regime and its sponsor in Washington in their conviction that their lawless aggression, including the bombing of a United Nations post, will go unpunished.

By giving the US and Israel its unqualified backing, the German government has encouraged the Bush administration and the Israeli government to intensify the slaughter in Lebanon. Thus the German government shares responsibility for the death and destruction being wreaked in Qana and throughout Lebanon, as well as in Gaza.

Three years ago, representatives of the German government were prepared to refer to the framework of international law in articulating their opposition to the US war against Iraq. For their part, the warmongers in Washington demonstrated their contempt for all such international rules and institutions. Now, the German government has made perfectly clear that it too no longer accepts international law as the framework for its policies.

This change in German foreign policy is particularly significant in regard to the SPD leadership. Not so long ago the SPD, well aware of the overwhelming opposition of German citizens to the Iraq war, exploited its anti-war stance to boost its electoral fortunes. But now that it has become clear that the post-World War II framework of international law has been irrevocably shattered, and imperialist militarism and brute force have once again become the rule, rather than the exception, the SPD has responded as it repeatedly did in the past: It has lined up with the strongest imperialist power.

There is another sense in which the German government

bears responsibility for the war crimes being committed in Lebanon. While the US is primarily responsible for equipping the Israeli military, Germany also supplies Israel with weapons—in particular, high-technology components.

In a July 27 broadcast, the television program "Monitor" reported on the delivery of German-made weapons to Israel. According to the report: "For days now, the Israeli air force has been carrying out raids in Lebanon. A part of the targeting mechanism, i.e., the sighting device of Israeli fighters, is based on German know-how and has been developed and delivered by, amongst others, a former subsidiary of the (German) company AEG."

The program then showed the targeting device built into the under-body of an Israeli F-16 bomber.

The report continued: "On the ground as well Israeli troops are fighting with German technology. The Israeli tank "Merkava" provides the main back-up for the current ground offensive in Lebanon, and the tank's barrel was developed by the German armaments company Rheinmetall. Moreover, without German technology the Israeli tank would be unable to shoot or drive, because the engine was developed by German engineers, with the gears coming from the German firm based in Augsburg, Renk-AG."

Although the German government claims it does not permit the shipment of weapons to "areas of tension," the next German-Israeli armaments deal is already in the pipeline. Israel is very interested in the German armoured troop carrier named "Dingo." The "Monitor" program reported: "According to our research, the German government recently agreed to the delivery of a test vehicle." When asked by "Monitor" whether the "Dingo" delivery would go ahead while Israel was waging war, government representatives refused to answer.

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