

Germany: Praising Obama, Joschka Fischer calls for increased militarism

By Ulrich Rippert
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In his regular Monday column for the weekly *Die Zeit* newspaper, the former German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer (Green Party), summed up “Barack Obama’s recent speech in Berlin” as follows: “Put an end to European free-riding when the military situation is serious!”

The fight against terrorism is “by no means over,” according to Fischer. The war in Iraq was wrong, he writes, quickly adding that the war against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan is “inevitable, however.” In Afghanistan, Europe must be prepared to accept the “same risks as the US.”

The division of labour, which results in “the US fighting and the Europeans rebuilding,” will no longer be accepted by a president Obama. In the future, Europe and Germany will have to engage “more intensively and on the basis of increased risk.... Africa will assume greater importance under a president Obama, and that is also a good message,” Fischer writes. Obama’s repeated reference to the tragedy in Darfur in his Berlin speech means that in this region, Germany must also assume a “greater share of the risks.”

Fischer welcomes Obama’s call to “act and negotiate together” in the case of international crises.” If these diplomatic efforts fail, however, Obama will not hesitate “to pledge his allies to carry out tough alternatives,” Fischer stresses, and concludes: “Iran could become the first such example.”

Much more blatantly than other commentators, the former foreign minister and leader of the Greens is seeking to transform the hopes of broad layers of the population for an end to the Bush government and their associated illusions in Barack Obama into support for a right-wing policy. A new turn towards increased militarism is being pursued in Germany in the wake of “Obamania,” which has been so fervently encouraged by broad sections of the German media.

It is therefore necessary to keep a cool head and not be swept along by the widespread campaign to celebrate Obama.

An essential element of the jubilation for Obama is a very superficial understanding of politics. The media’s fixation on political figures such as Obama can lead to the conclusion that political decisions are the product first and foremost of the individuals who make them. However, this personalisation of politics completely ignores the fact that major political issues are decided in a complex procedure by leading layers of the ruling elite on the basis of defending and advancing their class interests.

Fischer presents a particularly vulgar form of the personification of politics. He writes: “First and foremost, Obama embodies the exact opposite of George W. Bush and his Neocons, and for very many Europeans, this fact makes him a redeemer.” Secondly, Obama embodies a “new generation,” and thirdly, he has “a great deal of charisma,” which enhances his credibility.

However, the reality is that Bush is not Satan and Obama is not the Messiah. There is barely any other country where money plays such a prominent role in selecting a president as in America. In 2000, George W. Bush was able to steal the presidency on the basis of support from an influential rich elite, despite the fact that he lacked an electoral majority.

The war plans developed in the White House that culminated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq in defiance of international law and without the backing of a UN resolution were not the product of the personal ambitions of the president or his advisors. It was much more a reaction by influential layers of the American elite to counter the accelerating economic decline of the US. The military occupation of Iraq and the establishment of control over some of the world’s most important oil fields were aimed at bolstering US power in this strategic region.

Since then, the US economic crisis has continued to intensify, and along with it, US military aspirations. A possible attack on Iran and an expansion of the war in Afghanistan, which has already been announced, are bound up with the attempt to establish stronger control of the major oil fields in the region of the Caspian Sea. This is why an end to the era of Bush will not mean an end to US militarism.

In view of substantial military setbacks in Iraq and increasing resistance in Afghanistan, sections of the US elite are now proposing an alteration in transatlantic relations. The aim is to boost US aggression through a stronger military commitment by European governments. That is one of the reasons why Obama's presidential campaign is able to rely on assistance from influential Wall Street layers and other finance magnates. His call "For Change!" is not a call for an end to military adventurism, but rather, preparation for a change in US foreign policy aimed at demanding more financial and military support from Europe—including the readiness to sacrifice soldiers on the battlefield.

While Joschka Fischer fulsomely praises the American senator, the number of critical voices is already increasing. Under the headline "America's exchange policy," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote on Monday that Obama's demand for more German troops in Afghanistan will "not have pleased" his many German supporters.

The article continues: "Even less to the taste of the Obama fans is what the Democratic politician promises from a stronger commitment on the part of the allies: if NATO sends more soldiers to the Hindukusch, the US could save on military expenditures. With these billions, Obama revealed at the weekend, he intends to lower taxes and compensate his compatriots for the steep rise in gas prices."

Obama's statement makes clear that he regards foreign policy and alliances mainly from the standpoint of domestic politics and pursuing his own agenda.

The same criterion, however, also applies to the German government. The US demand for more combat troops is being used to justify a rapid buildup of military forces. Irrespective of the diplomatic formulations employed by government representatives, the intensification of the intervention by the German army in Afghanistan is aimed at furthering German interests in the region. On a number of occasions, the government has made clear that, although the country lacks its own energy reserves, Afghanistan is an important bridgehead to the huge resources of the Caspian region. As such,

Afghanistan continues to remain crucial to German interests. In fact, the first-ever drilling rigs in Baku on the Caspian Sea more than a century ago were installed by German companies.

Calls for closer transatlantic co-operation cannot hide the fact that beneath the surface the struggle for power and influence between the great powers is growing.

The audience of 200,000—including many students and young people—who turned out last Thursday to hear and applaud Obama in Berlin will rapidly be shorn of their hopes and dreams. The Democratic candidate for the presidency does not represent an alternative for the masses—either on this side or the other of the Atlantic. His open appeal for more German troops in Afghanistan has already led to a great deal of political disillusionment on the part of his supporters.

Workers and young people should recall what took place with the change of government 10 years ago. At the time, there was also a considerable thirst for change. After 16 years of conservative CDU in power, many were convinced that any alternative would be better. However, the successor government—a coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Greens led by Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Joschka Fischer (the Greens)—proved exactly the opposite.

Schröder and Fischer were responsible for the first major international military operation by the German army since the Second World War and introduced the broadest package of welfare cuts in postwar German history. The cuts and savings implemented by Schröder and Fischer far exceeded any of the measures introduced by the CDU.

Joschka Fischer has plenty of experience in transforming illusory hopes for change into right-wing policies.

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