

German TV interview: US president repeats “Third World War” warning

German Chancellor Merkel sides with Bush

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Shortly before the arrival on Saturday of German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the president’s ranch in Crawford, Texas, George W. Bush declared, “We definitely need Germany’s help on issues like Iran.”

He thus made it clear that the visit of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chancellor, which came immediately after the Washington talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, should be seen in direct connection with US threats of war against Iran.

In an interview with the German news channel n-tv, Bush reaffirmed that Iran must put an immediate halt to its uranium enrichment program and repeated his warning of a Third World War. “You know,” he said, “if you want to have a Third World War, you need only drop a nuclear bomb on Israel.” He added that this was “neither a prediction nor a wish.”

Prior to her departure from Berlin, the German chancellor said she would deliver “a clear message” in Texas. She would make “every effort to convince the American president of the need for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear dispute with Iran.” The *Financial Times Germany* quoted Merkel saying that a military strike “simply cannot be allowed to take place.”

These words were addressed less to Washington than to the German population. The chancellor’s advisers had already stressed to Merkel the need to maintain a certain outward distance from the American president and not make too obvious an adaptation during her visit to the Bush ranch. Her trip should be perceived “as a counterweight” to the visit of Sarkozy, who had just completed “an emotionally-charged ‘reconciliation and hug’ tour through the US capital,” wrote *Spiegel Online*.

Should she act otherwise, Merkel could expect an adverse reaction from the German public. Her predecessor as chancellor, Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Gerhard Schröder, had assured his re-election in 2002 with rhetoric directed against the Bush administration and the Iraq war, against a background of strong anti-war sentiment among the German people.

But the real attitude of the head of the German government was made clear in her support for tougher sanctions against Teheran. Commenting to the *Berliner Zeitung*, Merkel said she was banking on “the determination of the international community, including Russia and China.” She added, “If the current talks are not successful, then Germany will also be willing to implement further, tougher sanctions.”

In her remarks to the newspaper, Merkel once again sought to portray sanctions as instruments of a negotiated solution. But this is pure eyewash.

In the Berlin chancellery, everyone is well aware that the strengthening of economic and political pressure against the Iranian government is part of an escalation strategy for a military attack against Iran that has been set in motion by the most aggressive sections of the US administration. Five years ago this was precisely the strategy advanced against Iraq.

In fact, the die in the chancellery had been cast long before. The Berlin government would like to avoid a further military escalation in the Middle East and fears an uncontrollable conflagration with unforeseeable consequences. But if the American war preparations against Tehran are put into effect, the chancellor and her Social Democratic foreign minister will line up with Washington. This is the real message Merkel took to Crawford.

Behind the warm images of friendly hugs and congenial walks in the woods by Merkel and Bush lies the complicity of imperialist regimes on the eve of a new military adventure which will have devastating consequences.

There are several reasons for the shift in foreign policy in Paris and Berlin. It is not predominantly a result of a change of government in both countries. Rather, the Iraq war and the military and economic disaster it has produced have permanently changed relations between the major powers.

For months, Berlin government circles have been discussing how best, in the words of former foreign minister and Green Party leader Joschka Fischer, to respond “to the self-imposed decline of the United States.” Bush’s repeated declaration, “We need the Germans,” was registered with satisfaction in Berlin. The German government is once again ambitiously seeking to increase its sphere of influence as a world power and believes that, at least at this stage, it is preferable to pursue its own imperialist interests as a junior partner of Washington.

The chancellor’s own position with regard to relations with Washington is in line with her past policy. She uncritically endorsed Bush’s war policy from the very outset.

Like many leading figures in Eastern European politics, Merkel was politicized during the collapse of the Stalinist regime. Her anti-communism and her enthusiasm for capitalism are closely linked to a fascination with the unrestrained enrichment of the corporate elite that has taken place in the United States, as well as its claim to global political supremacy.

By giving support to Bush, the German as well as the French governments are complicit in the preparation of a wider war in the Middle East, which, given the growing tensions with Russia and China, will have far graver consequences than the Iraq war and could easily escalate into a global confrontation. In this context, Bush’s warnings of a Third World War must be taken very seriously.

The friendly hugs and mutual praise between Bush and Merkel should not be mistaken for a resolution of growing transatlantic tensions. The United States on its side had been closely observing the growing aggressiveness of German foreign policy.

According to the latest edition of the monthly *Iran Report*, published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, fierce confrontations have taken place between government representatives from the United States, France and Germany over their respective economic activities in

Iran.

According to the report, German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier (SPD) accused the American government of being hypocritical. He charged the US government with imposing sanctions to curb the expansion of the German economy in its major market of Iran while facilitating the operations of American firms through front companies operating from Dubai.

Under the headline "Germany No Longer Iran's Leading Trading Partner," the report declares that "after nearly three decades" the German economy will have to cede to China its role as leading trade partner with Iran.

Working people must be on guard and draw their own conclusions. Support for Washington's war policy means a return to imperialist politics in its most aggressive and brutal form.

This trend is not limited just to German foreign policy. In the past, "stability" in terms of foreign and domestic policy was closely bound up with so-called "social partnership" and the maintenance of a degree of social harmony in Germany and other European countries. A return to imperialist militarism means a new stage in the assault on social and democratic rights.

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