

Neo-Con Conference Pushes for War on Iran

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On the first weekend of May 2008, Berlin was host to two extraordinary conferences. On the one hand, a crowd of altogether 1,600 predominantly young people from all over Europe met at the Humboldt University in order to discuss and reflect the turbulent, globally unfolding events of [1968](#). On the other, not far away, about 400 participants gathered at the classier, guarded »Auditorium Friedrichstrasse« under the theme of [“Business as usual? The Iranian regime, the holy war against Israel and the West and the German reaction,”](#) organized by the recently created [»Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin \(MFFB\)«](#). Astonishingly despite wide participation by journalist from major newspapers, there was no mention of the conference in the German media. The purpose of the following account is also to fill this crucial gap.

Also historically, not least due to the bitter experiences of the recent past and present, an examination of the *Weltanschauung* advanced at the conference bears importance: What has entered the political discourse in Washington in a dominant fashion since almost a decade now, namely the view of the so-called neo-conservatives, appears not only to sound the medial and political terrains in Germany, but be willing to offensively occupy them. As in the United States, Iran takes a prominent role here.

The very first event of this kind to take place in Germany, the MFFB’s “International Iran Conference” had set the target of intervening politically to bring about a radical re-orientation of Berlin’s Iran policy, one that is heading towards Iran’s complete isolation or “regime change.” At the same time, the addressees of such a posture were clearly named: Not only lies the “future of pro-Zionism” in the hands of the Right. But beyond the so-called Anti-Germans who are sympathizers anyway, the main task was to win over the whole left side of the political specter.

The introduction was delivered by the chairman of the German branch of the U.S.-based association [»Scholars for Peace in the Middle East \(SPME\)«](#), professor Diethard Pallaschke. SPME’s mission is to meet “anti-Semitism” and “anti-Israelism” as well as to support the security of Israel’s borders. In the United States, SPME is accused of acting, via so-called [»campus watch«](#) groups, against critical statements on university campuses about Israeli and also U.S. foreign policies in the Middle East. Amongst the most prominent victims of this [curtailing of academic freedom](#) are [Norman Finkelstein](#) (formerly at DePaul University and author of, most recently, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, 2008) und [Tony Judt](#) (director of New York University’s Remarque Institute), who both have Jewish background.

Pallaschke branded Iran the “biggest threat in the history of mankind” and as such “to all civilized states.” The next speaker was Charles A. Small, professor of history at Yale University, who argued that Nazism and “radical Islam” had a common ideology. Even

Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Israeli politician and longtime Brigadier-General, had alluded to the possibility of a “second Holocaust,” he stressed. There should be no support of Iran from students, scholars and European governments, especially as Iran’s President Mahmud Ahmadinejad “dehumanizes the other.” He hoped that all those groups would “begin to act and act quickly.”

Small further quoted the former chief of staff of the Israeli military, Shaul Mofaz, with his estimation that within a year an Iran armed with nuclear weapons was to be expected.¹ But according to the Iran report by 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, the [National Intelligence Estimate \(NIE\)](#), released in December 2007, Iran does not maintain a nuclear weapons program. This finding was recently [confirmed](#) by Mohammad El-Baradei, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), when addressing the Middle East World Economic Forum in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. Likewise [IAEA reports](#) state that there is no evidence for an Iranian weapons program. And if Iran ever decided to divert its civilian energy program to a military one, the NIE says that “[a]ll agencies recognize the possibility that this [nuclear weapon] capability may not be attained until *after* 2015” (p. 7).

A Preventive Nuclear Strike Against the “Satanic Ambitions” of the “Un-Civilization”?

Menashe Amir, former longtime director of the Persian program of radio [»Kol Israel« \(the Voice of Israel\)](#) and current head of the Persian website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [»Hamdami«](#), said the Iranian regime was intent on “destroying the world order.” The “dictatorial regime” ruling the country had “satanic ambitions,” he claimed. The Iranian people should be assisted in bringing about a “regime change” – for the sake of both Iranians and the rest of the world. Amir finished by telling an anecdote about a private audience he had with U.S. President George W. Bush, to whom he said: “Iranian citizens are waiting for you to rescue them.” Bush responded: “You know, we’ve the same problem in Iraq where we are stuck.”

Benny Morris, professor of history at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Israel), began his remarks about “A second Holocaust? The threat to Israel” with a quotation of the professing neo-conservative and *Washington Post* political commentator [Charles Krauthammer](#), foreseeing a nuclear power Iran already by 2009/2010. With a nuclear-armed Iran, Morris then argued, Israel would lose its significance. Apart from strategic losses, investment flows as well as the peace accords signed with Arab governments would be jeopardized. In order to forestall the strategic challenge of a ‘nuclear Iran,’ he suggested, Israel ought to intervene preventively and destroy the “Iranian nuclear project” by conventional but preferably nuclear weapons. This would certainly cause the death of many civilians, he admitted, but this prospect lies within the responsibilities of the Iranians themselves who after all have to account for such of regime – the “mad mullahs of Tehran.” All in all, a nuclear strike was preferable to a “second Holocaust” which was lurking from this “un-civilization,” Morris concluded.²

The „Third Option“: Positioning a Terror Organization Against the German “Steinmeier Policy”?

[Paulo Casaca](#), Portuguese Member of the European Parliament (MEP), dealt with the role of the European Union (EU) and the “effectiveness of sanctions” against Iran. The latter would have to go beyond the present United Nations sanctions framework, he said. “We really need economic sanctions from Germany and the European Union.” Casaca, member of the

socialist group of the European Parliament, then held up a picture he had obtained from “sources” of the “Iranian resistance.” It allegedly showed a tunnel built by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, a construction said to be in connection with a nuclear weapons program. The MEP did not hide that this “main Iranian opposition group” he was referring to was the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO, or MeK) – a militant group listed as terrorist by both the [European Union](#) and the [U.S. State Department](#). The “non-sense” of the MKO’s classification as terrorist organization ought to be removed, since, he claimed, it was all about supporting the “Iranian people.” In April 2004 Casaca had [spent](#) some days at »Camp Ashraf«, the shielded city and headquarters of the MKO, 60 kilometers north of Baghdad.

[Matthias Küntzel](#), member of SPME’s Board of Directors, warned to turn the conference into an academic meeting.³ Quite on the contrary, its aim should be to intervene politically, and above all to win the political Left over, he emphasized. Küntzel, who regularly writes for the *Wall Street Journal*, concentrated furthermore on German-Iranian trade relations. With Germany being Iran’s number one European trade partner, Berlin was assigned the vital task to realize the isolation of Iran, he argued. All in all, a discontinuation of the trade relations between Germany and Iran would only represent a small sacrifice for the former, but in turn would minimize danger posed by the latter, Küntzel claimed. But in providing biased figures, he supersized the German economy’s importance for Iran.⁴ His criticism of the German industry’s role and his suggestion to have a sit-in in front of the headquarters of the business giant Siemens were well received by the assembled left-wingers whose attitude towards big business is rather skeptical. Even more as Küntzel also demanded that the business interest was not allowed to stand above morality. Finally, he also called for the break-up of diplomatic relations with Iran. He further accused the German media – except for some comments in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the country’s largest conservative daily – of severe defaults as to the presentation of the “Iranian danger.”

According to Morris, Bush had assured the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that Washington was taking care of the Iranian nuclear program. But given the situation in Iraq there was only little probability of a U.S. military strike, he added. However, if Democratic Senator Barack Obama was elected president in November, he believed, then Bush would order an attack on Iran. Despite low ratings and little support for war on Iran, the outgoing U.S. president would have nothing to lose by such an attack. The rationale behind such anticipation, which Morris did not attempt to hide, is that the ‘Iran problem’ cannot be devolved unto Obama – who has even promised unconditional negotiations with Iran –, but could eventually handed over to a Republican President John McCain. The latter has already insinuated that he would continue the administration’s foreign policy and Iran strategy.

Contrary to the nuclear strike option preferred by Morris, Casaca referred to a “third option” – beyond “appeasement” and military confrontation. This variant consisted of supporting the political leadership of the “Iranian opposition” – a reference made to the MKO. Amir noted that it was sufficient to eliminate a single “chain” of the nuclear program in order to paralyze it. Thus it would suffice to “only” bomb the nuclear plants of Natanz and Isfahan, he claimed. But the best way to bring about a regime change in Iran was to follow his five-point plan: (1) Providing a serious military threat; (2) expanding the sanctions to paralyze the Iranian economy; (3) helping the Iranian population and ethnic minorities, so that they could demand their rights; (4) financially supporting the majority of the Iranians; (5) organizing the 3 million Iranians in exile, so that they can exercise pressure upon Western governments to convince them of the “danger” the Iranian regime posed. If all these measures were carried out, there would be no necessity for military action, Amir pointed

out.

To conclude the starting panel – whose title defined the “Iranian threat” in relation to Islamism, anti-Semitism, and the nuclear program – its moderator Alan Posener, chief commentator with the *Welt am Sonntag*, a German conservative Sunday paper, warned that one could not “fight dictatorships by over-cautiousness” but only by “strength.” But the latter would not be part of the “Steinmeier policy.” In fact, Posener’s call signals the dissatisfaction of those pushing for a tough stance vis-à-vis Iran, a military option included therein, with the Iran policy as pursued by the Foreign Ministry that is under the aegis of Frank-Walter Steinmeier and his Social-Democratic Party (SPD). Likewise, Volker Perthes and Christoph Bertram, respectively the present and former directors of the [»German Institute for International and Security Affairs \(SWP\)«](#) – a Berlin-based think-tank advising the German government on foreign policy matters – were criticized by the conference participants as Steinmeier’s Iran policy is believed to take into account SWP’s input. Both Perthes and Bertram plead for a Western [“strategic partnership”](#) with Iran, while Bertram – also a former director of the »International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)« in London – just recently called for a [détente policy](#) vis-à-vis Iran as the strategy so far had clearly failed. On the other hand, the Iran stance by Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Christian-Democratic Party (CDU) is considered to be in line with demands from Washington and Tel Aviv.

Anti-War Intellectuals as “Purchased Vassals” of the “Iranian Theocracy”?

The following morning was dedicated to the “character of the Iranian Regime.” The Iranian writer Javad Asadian deemed the return of the Twelfth Imam, the *Mahdi*, to form the religious and ideological core of the “Iranian theocracy.” The final aim was the appearance of this Shiite Messiah. He further claimed that Iran needed the atomic bomb in order to use it against Israel. Thereupon the publicist Nasrin Amirsedghi drew a dark picture of women’s rights in Iran, a country which was stricken with the “deadly pandemic” called “Islamic republic.” There was a “virus introduced” by Iran’s Revolutionary Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, she claimed, which was the Islamic law *Sharia*, characterized by “incalculable aggressiveness.”

In addition, Germany’s prominent Islam and Iran experts Katajun Amirpur, Navid Kermani and Bahman Nirumand acted as “purchased vassals” of the “Allah state,” Amirsedghi asserted, and Asadian added that they must be confronted followed by large applause. Revealingly, those three public figures are admittedly known for their statements critical to the Iranian government, but at the same time markedly [reject](#) any ‘military solution’ to the conflict.

Finally, Miro Aliyar from the Austrian Committee of the [»Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan«](#) explained that Iran was a multi-ethnic state, and therefore the ethnicities represented therein were entitled to autonomy. It is [reported](#) that the Bush Administration is supporting separatism in the Iranian provinces of Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Baluchestan in an effort to destabilize and disintegrate the country. Among the beneficiaries of U.S. and Israeli aid for that goal is the Iranian sister organization of the PKK, the [PJAK](#), that has conducted cross-border raids into Iran.

Israel To Carry Out a Preventive Strike Against Iran

Under the title “The Holy War against Israel and the West” *Ha’aretz* journalist Yossi Melman,

the U.S. neo-conservative figurehead Patrick Clawson and the German political scientist Alexander Ritzmann were due to speak. The latter underlined that the 'Islamic danger' was simmering inside Germany where the Lebanese Hezbollah maintained numerous offices. He also condemned the anti-Israel reporting of the Hezbollah broadcasting company [Al-Manar](#), which despite expulsion from different satellite networks could still be received in Europe still via one network. Ritzmann, who is a Senior Fellow with the neo-conservative Brussels think-tank [»European Foundation for Democracy«](#), opined that Iran could at any time activate these "Islamist" groups residing in Germany for political purposes, and will do so. Nearly all German politicians believe, Ritzmann claimed, that Iran represented a danger for Israel. However, the task was to make clear that Iran was also a danger for Europe and the whole world, he emphasized – indeed a challenge since based on the facts on the ground Germany's policy-makers are far from conceiving the "Iranian threat" in such dimensions.

Following the same dictum, intelligence expert Melman described the threat of an irrationally acting Iran that would acquire nuclear weapons capability between 2009 and 2011. If diplomacy failed, he predicted, Israel had to act militarily; an approach agreed upon by most Israeli politicians and parties, he added. Following the so-called Begin Doctrine – named after a former Israeli Prime Minister and used as basis for the 1981 bombardment of the Iraqi nuclear plant »Osiraq« – his country would act preventively within one or two years from now: "I believe Israel will have to do it," Melman concluded. Not sharing Morris' suggestion of a nuclear attack on Iran, he stressed that conventional tools might be sufficient. Melman covers intelligence and national security issues for the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* and is the co-author, with Meir Javedanfar, of *The Nuclear Sphinx of Tehran: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the State of Iran* (2007).

Clawson, [deputy research director](#) at the neo-conservative »Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP)« – a think-tank ascribed to the Israel Lobby – was certainly the most prominent international figure speaking at the conference. He argued that in addition to economic pressures, political and security measures must be taken, such as accelerating the "military security" of Iran's neighbors. Moreover, it must be openly voiced that "we will be prepared to deter Iran." However, if diplomacy failed, he said to me in an interview, he fears that the military option will be employed. Clawson, one of the [main players](#) in the preparation of the "regime change" enterprise in Iraq, has over the years demanded an equal lot for Iran.

"Language of Sticks" as the "Only Solution"?

On the panel "Iran and Europe: Dialogue or confrontation?" Saul Singer, *The Jerusalem Post's* editorial page editor, argued that Europe's "appeasement policy" regarding Iran would press Israel towards war.⁵ The author of *Confronting Jihad: Israel's Struggle and the World After 9/11* (2003) praised the event as ringing the "beginnings of a new anti-fascist Left." Singer, who earlier in the conference referred to the "Iranian nuclear war program," pointed to the Iranian President's disputed statements regarding Israel and called for Ahmadinejad to be legally pursued. This ought to be done according to the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#) whose Article 3(c) says that "[d]irect and public incitement to commit genocide" is punishable.⁶ However, one can doubt whether Ahmadinejad's falsified statement – which *verbatim reads* "The Imam [Khomeini] said that this regime occupying Jerusalem (*een rezhim-e eshghâlgar-e Qods*) must [vanish from] the page of time (*bâyad az safheh-ye ruzgâr mahv shavad*)" – can be interpreted as incitement to genocide, or is a call for a "regime change" in a country that in violation of the

most basic principles of international law continues a decades-long occupation.

Singer continued stressing that it was not the Iranian nuclear program that posed problem, but the very existence of the regime. The West could act, and had to do so, particularly so as it “holds international legitimacy in its hands” – in fact, a questionable judgment in the view of the reality of Western-led occupations in the last decade. Especially when it comes to the Iranian nuclear program, the majority of the international community has [consistently supported](#) Tehran’s position against Western accusations.

Finally, the well-known German journalist Bruno Schirra was convinced that the only solution regarding the “clerical fascist system” of Iran would be the use of the “language of sticks.” The author of *Iran – Sprengstoff für Europa* [Iran – Explosives for Europe] (2006) said that bombing Iran would only postpone the nuclear program to about five to ten years, so that in the end one would be forced to live with a nuclear-armed Iran.

There was no mention of the word “dialogue” included in the panel’s title, nor any suggestions in such a direction.

A “New Anti-Fascist Front” Against the “New Hitler”?

The final panel discussion was meant to promote “The need for a new antifascism.” Laying the foundational stone of the evening, Jeffrey Herf, professor of history at Maryland University, put Ahmadinejad on a level with Bin Laden and Hitler. It was a matter of defying “fanatic anti-Semitism,” he insisted, an ideological fanaticism that must not be underestimated.

The next speaker was Los Angeles-based Kayvan Kaboli, spokesperson of the [»Green Party of Iran«](#). He considered the “Tehran regime [to be] of fascist essence,” which not only in a few years, but right now represented an international threat – just like “global warming” as he went great length to explain. Iran, Kaboli asserted, pursued a “program of territorial expansion” and used Iraq as stepping stone to eradicate Israel. The “clero-fascist regime” in Tehran planned to “islamize the world,” he said. And the European “appeasement policy” toward Iran “for the sake of juicy contracts” was “shameful.” Kaboli finally called upon Iranian “opposition” groups to declare support for Israel. After all, the “two fascisms” – Nazi-Germany and Iran – were the same and also equally dangerous. It was the formation of a worldwide anti-fascist front, he suggest, which presented a way out.

The highlight of the congress was the contribution made by Thomas von der Osten-Sacken. The founder and director of the NGO [WADI](#), a German ‘relief and human rights’ organization mainly active in Northern Iraq, made it quite clear from the very beginning that what he called “Islam-Nazism” was very similar to Germany’s National-Socialism. Therefore anti-fascism was necessary, whose aim had to be to “bash these Islam-Nazis, put them in jail, and kill them” – a statement which was accompanied by large applause. As “anti-fascists” we had to “wage war,” not militarily however, but the war must be taken seriously, he insisted. Just like in the 1930s and 40s the universalistic vision must be to fight “despotism.”

Von der Osten-Sacken, who is considered a leading figure of the so-called “*Anti-Deutschen*” [Anti-Germans] – a well established ideological strand among the German Left which deems unconditional support for Israel’s policies as consequential lesson of Germany’s hegemonic strive in World War II and its Holocaust crimes – presented an agenda for the “democratization” of the Middle East. This included: secularization and “rule of law”; a

“restructuring of the economy”; a “federalization” instead of nationalization, in which Kurdish efforts for independence would be considered; against „gender apartheid“; and against both Iran and Syria. These programmatic points, which strongly reminded of the 2004 U.S. [initiative](#) for a “Greater Middle East,” were supplemented by his very curious interpretation of the ongoing Iraq War. The countries of the region, such as Iraq, are “rotten from the core” so that one only had to “screw the cork” and war would inevitably break out.

Altogether, he denied a nuclear weapons-free zone, which follows that Israel would remain the only country in the Middle East possessing such weapons of mass destruction. To conclude, Von der Osten-Sacken outlined his “vision” for the future of the region. He wished one day to be able to take the Intercity train from Tel Aviv via Amman and Baghdad to Tehran without any passport check, then go to a Tehrani disco, drink beer and later on have a sunbath at the Persian Gulf.[7](#)

Broder’s Slander Volley

The last speaker of the conference, Henryk M. Broder, was the most prominent figure among the German participants. An author for liberal-left outlets, above all Germany’s most influential political weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, is notorious for his defamatory polemics. In his 2006 best-seller *Hurra, wir kapitulieren!* [Hurray, we capitulate!], he accuses the West to “cave in” vis-à-vis Islamists and thus to promote Europe’s “Islamization.” Signaling his agreement with and referring to what his predecessor had outlined before, Broder quoted a Palestinian journalist friend whom he used to meet in Bethlehem with the sentence “It’s not about the occupation, it’s about the girls on the beach!” He stressed that the situation at hand was as “terrible and cruel” as in the 1930s. In an unmistakable reference to Nazi-Germany, Broder remarked that the topic Iran “looks somehow familiar to us.” But there was an important difference between 1939/40 and 2008, he added: nowadays, there was no Churchill who was able to act after negotiations failed. On his co-edited web-blog, [Die Achse des Guten](#) [The Axis of Good], which assembles a pool of writers and registers [nearly 400,000 unique visitors per month](#), Broder called Iran the “[Fourth Reich](#).” The “idea of war” was “horrifying” to him, but this option could not be omitted, he underscored.

Then, he contented himself with quoting passages from German daily papers of 2006 about the West-Iran standoff. The citations delivered the impression of European politicians constantly offering attractive incentive packages to the Iranians; but with resolute defiance, Tehran had been rejecting them. Furthermore, Iran had also repeatedly ignored ultimatums set by the West without shrugging its shoulders. This absurd lining up of newspaper excerpts caused a certain amusement within the audience. He did not need to read out the quotations from 2007, Broder added, because their content could easily be imagined. He finally quoted the Iranian president as saying “the Europeans are stupid,” and complacently added that Ahmadinejad might be right.

Then Broder turned to the [»Arbeiterfotografie«](#) ([Concerned Photography](#)). This group of politically committed photographers was the first in Germany to reveal the [mistranslations](#) of the Iranian President’s alleged “Israel must be wiped off the map” statements made during an anti-Zionism conference held in Tehran in October 2005. On its [initiative](#) the »Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (bpb)« [Federal Center for Political Education], a public think-tank, ordered the examination of Ahmadinejad’s remarks by the translation service of the German Parliament, the *Bundestag*. As a result, *Associated Press* (AP), *Tagesschau.de* (website of Germany’s most widely watched TV newscast) and *SpiegelOnline* (the online edition of *Der Spiegel*) conceded their unchecked adoption of translations

dispatched then by the major Western news agencies. However, they have not yet corrected their mistakes in previously published items.

The issue of Ahmadinejad's actual words gained prominence as late as this March with an article appearing in the country's largest daily, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, where the renowned Islam and Iran expert, Katajun Amirpur, pointed to the widespread mistranslation of this ["Iranian key sentence"](#) and the danger it harbors for serving as a pretext for waging war an Iran allegedly intent on "wiping Israel off the map."

Not amused by Amirpur's revelations then, at the conference Broder relinquished a rude tirade against "those who sparked the debate" with the bpb – a reference to the »Arbeiterfotografie«: Already calling the latter ["lumpenproletariat"](#) in a blog, Broder now added to this "troublemakers," "cranks," "bums," "anti-social elements," "subsidy receivers" and "madmen." However, he stressed, the bpb had "elegantly" solved the issue kicked off by those "fools." In fact, the [website](#) particularly provided by the public think-tank to open a discussion on Ahmadinejad's statements and "Iran's position" hardly presents a balanced, let alone educational account: From three contributions in total, one is by Matthias Küntzel and another – a polemic – by Broder himself.

The Auschwitz Lesson: Suspending Human Rights in Case of Emergency?

In the final discussion, the U.S. historian Herf called for a "new Atlanticism." Such an "Atlantic alliance" should wage the "long war against radical Islam" – a phrase at the core of [neo-conservative](#) thinking. At the same time he predicted that if the "U.S. withdraws from the world," especially from Iraq, then Europe will be exposed to greater danger.

Von der Osten-Sacken, on his part, claimed that a large majority of the Iranian population was in favor of "liberation." He underlined that we were in a "state of emergency." The lesson of Auschwitz meanwhile comprised the idea that "in some situations, human rights are to be suspended," he was convinced. Finally, Kaboli recommended including each willing group – regardless of its democratic posture – into an "anti-fascist front."

Fully in compliance with Küntzel's initial desire, the conference at no time ran the risk of being only approximately academic. Following his desire for political intervention, some of the prominent Berlin conference participants intend to talk to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In order to likewise refer to the alleged danger posed by Iran and to require concrete action, they moreover wished for a *Bundestag* hearing and also intend to talk to German companies.

All conference participants agreed upon the notion of a "worldwide threat" posed by the new quasi-"fascist" state of Iran. They also agreed upon an iron fist as best response to this. [8](#) Among this sea of consent, there was only a single moment in the conference where a dissenting view was voiced. A bearded, Jewish man from the audience said that the picture drawn between Good and Evil was not so clear for him as presented by the panelists. Immediately, he was interrupted by the moderator and asked not to issue a statement (whereas others who agreed with what had been said were extensively allowed to make their case) but to ask a question. However, he was not able to do so, as the microphone was promptly taken away from him by one of the organizers.

Against Iran and Islam: Unholy Alliances of the "Anti-Fascist Front"

With the participation of key Berlin panelists, an almost [identical conference](#), entitled “The Iranian Threat,” took place at the University of Vienna/Austria on the following day. The congress was organized by SPME Austria and [»Stop the Bomb – Coalition against the Iranian extermination program«](#), an initiative endorsed by over 4,000 petition signees, who demand a total isolation of Iran. Among them are Austrian Nobel Literature Prize laureate Elfriede Jelinek and prominent Dutch writer Leon de Winter.⁹ In an [interview](#) for *SpiegelOnline* – the very popular online edition of *Der Spiegel* –, conducted by Broder, in August 2005, De Winter states: “Sometimes there is only the choice between disaster and catastrophe, and then one must remember that the first and foremost task of the state is to guarantee the life and security of its citizens. [...] We deal with a new totalitarianism. No, this one is not new, but is only different. After the left fascism of the Soviets, after the right fascism of the Nazis, Islamism is the fascism of the 21st century.”¹⁰

»Stop the Bomb« emerged out of protest against ongoing trade relations between Austria and Iran. Especially the 2007 gas deal, worth of 22 billion euros, between the Austrian OMV (*Österreichische Mineralölverwaltung*), Central Europe’s leading oil and gas corporation, and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), is a thorn in the initiators’ flesh as it might undermine their much-desired, total isolation of Iran. In Berlin, the German journalist Schirra has uttered the wish to form a German variant of the »Stop the Bomb« initiative.

Unlike the German media, the Austrian daily *Der Standard* published a conference report headlined [“Threats of War from the Lecture Hall.”](#) The contents and threats that were uttered in Vienna led *Der Standard*’s Senior Editor Gudrun Harrer to assume that these both congresses must have been a concerted lobbying [“roadshow”](#) in an effort to push for war on Iran and to brand anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism.

The long-serving Mideast expert Udo Steinbach, director from 1976 to 2007 of Germany’s foremost Middle East research entity, the »German Orient Institute«, has called the Berlin conference’s goal to form an “AIPAC” in German-speaking countries. And indeed the resemblance to the [»American Israeli Public Affairs Committee \(AIPAC\) – America’s pro-Israel Lobby«](#) – deemed as of one of the most [influential American lobbies](#) – is hard to overlook. [Akin to AIPAC](#), WINEP and other parts of the Israel Lobby and the wider neo-conservative movement, the German-speaking variant is beating the drums for war on Iran.

Next on the agenda is a date 31 May–1 June at Cologne University, which the audience was given notice of by flyers in the entrance hall of the Berlin conference: The [“Kritische Islamkonferenz: Der Islam als politische Herausforderung”](#) [Critical Islam Conference: Islam as Political Challenge]. The event is linked on the website of the right-wing, Islamophobic [Politically Incorrect \(PI\)](#), which in turn also links to Broder’s *Achse des Guten* weblog. *PI* is also sympathizing with [Honestly Concerned](#), an initiative founded in May 2002 to counter anti-Israel stances in the media and also of the main supporters of the Berlin conference. By mid-May two major German organizations committed to fighting the “Islamization” of Germany and Europe merged into the [»Bürgerbewegung \(Citizens’ Movement\) Pax Europa«](#).

The bolstering anti-Islam movement in Germany appears to enjoy privileged ties with emerging neo-conservative ideologues. Allegedly in favor of Israel, the United States, and European values, those groups have designed a new globally omnipresent threat – this time, Iran in the company of Islam – which they cultivate both in domestic (immigrant integration) and foreign policy (Iran and its “evil” allies) stages. Startlingly, for building such an unholy alliance strugglers against anti-Semitism have unconsciously joined with rightist extremists.

These *agents provocateurs* have specialized in distorting the realities (forcing on the “clash of civilizations” concept upon social and political conflicts) and in perverting the lessons modern history provides. In their “West against the (Islamic) rest” paradigm, they ruthlessly camouflage the horrendous consequences of their recent drum beats, leaving the over one million Iraqi victims of the ongoing occupation a lone footnote in their bloody efforts to “promote democracy.” The blunt assumptions and statements uttered at the Berlin conference expose – without further need of comment – their homophobic attitudes. Even more gravely, they [invoke](#) the memory of millions of Holocaust victims to suit their one and only agenda: the “long war.” The self-proclaimed “anti-fascist” supporters of Bush’s neo-conservative project are in reality anti-democrats; and certainly they are not pro-Israeli or pro-American – nor are they pro-Iranian: they are pro-war.

And: It remains to be seen whether the conference organizers’ will to win over the Left will succeed. The German Left Party plays a decisive role here as it must decide whether it is willing to continue the path of anti-imperialism and anti-war, or is ready to bury them at the altar of a grotesquely defined *raison d’Etat* – as Gregor Gysi, head of *Die Linke*’s large *Bundestag* caucus, has recently [demanded](#). While Broder [applauded](#) him, he was boldly [criticized](#) by foreign and peace policy experts of the party-affiliated foundation who doubted if Gysi was really advocating a “leftist policy.” But despite the mobilization of “pro-Zionist” [factions](#) amidst leftist milieus, the huge crowd gathering at the Berlin 1968 Congress keep the hope astute that war-mongering will have a hard time selling its propaganda to sympathizers of the Left.

Version of 1 June 2008.

The author thanks Judith Schlenker (Germany) for translating an initial version of the report from German.

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NOTES

1 According to Small, this statement was made at the conference [“Understanding the Challenge of Iran,”](#) organized late April 2008 by the [»Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Anti-Semitism«](#) which is headed by Small himself.

2 In the aftermath of the conference, Morris voiced similar comments vis-à-vis the online editions of the German [Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung](#) (7 May) and the Austrian [Standard](#) (11 May) dailies.

3 For the views expressed in his talk, please refer to both his articles [“Ahmadinejads Mission”](#) [Ahmadinejad’s Mission], *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, 25 April 2008, and [“The Tehran-Berlin Axes”](#), *The Wall Street Journal* (Europe), 15 May 2008.

4 Küntzel’s presentation of figures in terms of German-Iran economic relations was biased. He estimated the German-Iranian trade volume to be at 5 billion euros, which is correct, but

he did not mention that as a result of the sanctions imposed upon Iran in recent years, a pressure mainly exerted by the U.S. Treasury, German exports had [halved](#) to [3 billion euros](#) for 2007. While trade with Iran equals less than 0.5 percent of Germany's total export volume, Iran covered 40 percent of her imports from Germany, Küntzel claimed. In reality, Iran covers roughly 10 percent of its total supplies worth of [over 60 billion U.S. dollars](#) from Germany. Furthermore Küntzel claimed that about three-quarters of the small and medium-sized enterprises in Iran were dependent on goods imported from Germany. This is also rapidly changing with Iranian firms turning to Asian countries and at the same time making efforts to increase domestic production capabilities.

In conclusion one must note that Küntzel supersized Germany's economic weight for Iran, thus serving the purpose of supporting his argument for a cancellation of German trade ties with Iran, which would then result in a quasi-total isolation of the Middle Eastern heavyweight. But the situation in a globalized world economy is more diverse than this simplistic assessment suggests. As a consequence of the U.S.-pushed sanctions regime imposed upon European economies, those have experienced significantly losses in trade shares with Iran. However, a complete breakup of the trade relations with Iran would have damaging long-term consequences for the world's number one export nation, as the chairman of the "North Africa-Middle East Initiative of the German Economy," Matthias Mitscherlich, emphasized in an [interview](#) on 29 November 2007. Meanwhile, European retreat from the lucrative Iranian market has made China, an EU rival, the most important trade partner of Tehran touching a bilateral trade volume of [25 billion dollars this year](#). The business volume with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has [hit 12 billion dollars](#), 10 billion of which are Iranian imports. The UAE is believed to serve as bridgehead to the Iranian market for U.S. firms.

5 In early 2008, the *Jerusalem Post* announced that it will begin a partnership with the *Wall Street Journal* including joint marketing and exclusive publication in Israel of *The Wall Street Journal Europe*. Its [current](#) head editor is David Horovitz who in 2004 replaced current *Wall Street Journal* editorial board member Bret Stephens. In addition, in 2007, Dow Jones & Company, the owner of the *Wall Street Journal* – whose editorial board is considered as supporting neo-conservative foreign policy stances – was bought by media mogul [Rupert Murdoch](#).

6 Former German State Secretary Klaus Faber, an attorney from Potsdam/Germany and acting chairman of the [»Wissenschaftsforum der Sozialdemokratie in Berlin, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.V.«](#) – a think-tank affiliated to the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) – pointed out that former Canadian Minister of Justice, [Irwin Cotler](#), had likewise called to ["try Ahmadinejad for genocide calls"](#). Later in the conference, it was agreed upon that further to the political agenda this legal path should be simultaneously followed.

7 Due to Von der Osten-Sacken's anti-Muslim agitation, the already independent WADI Austria recently dissolved from the main German organization to become what is now [LEEZA](#).

8 At the conference were also present: Wahied Wahdat Hagh, political scientist, former member of [MEMRI](#) Germany (»The Middle East Media Research Institute«), [online columnist](#) for *Welt Debatte* and [Senior Research Fellow](#) with the Brussels think-tank »European Foundation for Democracy«; Klaus Faber, German State Secretary ret., attorney from Potsdam and acting chairman of the »Wissenschaftsforum der Sozialdemokratie in Berlin,

Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern« and co-editor of *Neu-alter Judenhass: Antisemitismus, arabisch-israelischer Konflikt und europäische Politik* [New-Old Jew-Hatred: Anti-Semitism, Arab-Israeli Conflict and European Policies] (Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 2006).

9 Other important signees are the Berlin and Vienna conference speakers Küntzel, Casaca, Kaboli, Herf, and furthermore Hermann L. Gremliza (editor of the 'Anti-German' weekly magazine *konkret*), Kazem Moussavi (foreign policy spokesperson of the »Green Party of Iran« in Europe), Karl Pfeifer ([leading journalist](#) with the Austrian, pro-Israel online journal *Die Jüdische* [The Jewish]), Sacha Stawski (editor-in-chief of the online *Honestly Concerned*), Ruth Contreras (member of SPME's Board of Directors, coordinator for SMPE in Europe and chairwoman of SPME Austria), chief editors of »[German Media Watch](#)« (a pro-Israel media monitoring group established in 2001), [Andrei S. Markovits](#) (professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan and author of the German-language book *Amerika, Dich hasst sich's besser. Antiamerikanismus und Antisemitismus in Europa*, published by *konkret's* publishing house »Konkret-Literatur Verlag« in 2004), Micha Brumlik (who was present at the Berlin conference is professor for Educating Science at the University of Frankfurt/Main and co-editor of the political-scientific monthly magazine *Blätter für deutsche und international Politik*), Christopher Gillibrand (journalist with the [neo-conservative](#) *The Brussels Journal – The Voice of Conservatism in Europe*, which is published by the Zurich-based non-profit organization »Society for the Advancement of Freedom in Europe (SAFE)« and features articles from the American right-conservative daily *The Washington Times*), »[Scottish Friends of Israel](#)«, Raimund Fastenbauer (Secretary-General of the Austrian Federal Association of the Jewish Religious Community [»*Bundesverband der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinden*«]), and many others.

10 In own translation. The German original reads: " Manchmal hat man nur die Wahl zwischen einem Desaster und einer Katastrophe, und dann muss man sich daran erinnern, dass es die erste und wichtigste Aufgabe des Staates ist, das Leben und die Sicherheit seiner Bürger zu garantieren. [...] Wir haben es mit einem neuen Totalitarismus zu tun. Nein, er ist nicht neu, er ist nur anders. Nach dem linken Faschismus der Sowjets, nach dem rechten Faschismus der Nazis, ist der Islamismus der Faschismus des 21. Jahrhunderts." The interview can also be [retrieved](#) via WADI's website.

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