Federal Foreign Office (Germany) — auswaertiges-amt.de

Foreign Minister Westerwelle in a Deutschlandfunk interview on Obama’s latest Middle East speech

2011-05-20

The questions were put by Christoph Heinemann

[...]

US troops preparing to leave Afghanistan; several Arab countries in turmoil; Bin Laden dead; US Special Envoy for the Middle East has thrown in the towel; Benjamin Netanyahu due in Washington – where the Israeli Prime Minister also plans to make a major speech on the Middle East; and Fatah and Hamas have just made up.

That was the backdrop to the speech Barack Obama gave yesterday at the US State Department. Federal Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (FDP) is now on the phone.

Good morning.

Good morning, Mr Heinemann.

Mr Westerwelle, what do you think was the US President’s core message?

The core message is that the US Administration quite clearly wants once again to move boldly ahead also on the Middle East peace process. The changes sweeping the Arab world are also an opportunity to make headway here. And the Middle East peace process can contribute, too, in a major way to ensuring the success of these changes we’re now seeing, the democratic revolutions across the Arab world.

Boldly, you said. Wasn’t it perhaps rather over-bold to cite the year 1967?

Everyone knows the Israelis don’t find that at all amusing.

The American President spoke of the 1967 borders, including mutually agreed and negotiated modifications of those lines. That must never be forgotten. That’s the view of the international community and it’s the right view.

All the same, Benjamin Netanyahu was disappointed – he’s on his way to Washington right now.

I believe the talks between the two men, Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Obama, can bring progress here, too. The crucial point, in our view, is that there's now a historic window of opportunity in the Middle East, in North Africa, in the Arab world. What we're seeing there is the onward march of freedom and democracy. This means we now need to also help shape developments. In the Middle East peace process that means returning at long last to the negotiating table. In the talks I've had this week and throughout recent weeks I've repeatedly encouraged all parties to get back to direct peace negotiations. At the moment this is still difficult. Beyond that, we can make our influence felt also via the so-called Middle East Quartet. But a settlement is needed anyhow, time is not on any country's side. Nor is it on the side of people generally, for that matter. Unless the Middle East peace process makes headway, we're going to have a festering conflict for years to come. That can't be healthy for anyone and certainly not for the democratic changes taking place in the Arab world.

Mr Westerwelle, are you expecting Netanyahu to offer concessions in his speech on Tuesday or is he going to fit milk glass into that historic window you mentioned?

We'll certainly support everything that signifies progress. It's our firm belief that there has to be a negotiated two-state solution. That's clearly in Israel's interest, what's more. Israel's long-term security will crucially depend on whether it has stable and democratic neighbours – and stability is something autocratic regimes can't provide. No regime in Israel's neighbourhood is stable if it represses its citizens. Stability exists only where there are stable societies. And without a negotiated two-state solution to the Middle East conflict, these stable societies will not exist. Democracy and thriving economies that offer people in the region the prospect of a better life – that's the key to stability. So it's vital to seize this window of opportunity that's now opened up.

So at this moment in time, when the world – the Arab world at least – is in turmoil, European unity of purpose and, as far as German-American relations are concerned, also trust are more important than ever. In a recent article in a German newspaper on Germany's policy on Libya, James D. Bindenagel, a former US ambassador here, wrote that German policy in the past had always been consistent, but this was no longer the case.

Germany's foreign policy is not only consistent, it also stands for international solidarity. We're of course very strongly engaged internationally. I'm thinking here of operations such as in Afghanistan, for example. Or the part we're playing with German forces patrolling directly off the coast of Lebanon. We decided against German troops participating in the combat operation in Libya, it was a decision we considered very carefully and we're in extremely good company with many others on this. The majority of

member countries is not participating either in this military operation in Libya. That this means we're neutral is not correct. Obviously we stand firmly on the side of the democrats, but we want to see a political solution here.

Foreign policy, security policy and defence policy, you seem to suggest, are closely interlinked.

When he presented the plans for the reform of our armed forces the day before yesterday, Federal Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière said: "German security interests are a result of our history, our geographic location in the centre of Europe, the international political and economic relations of our country, and our resource dependency as a centre of high technology and an exporting nation with few natural resources." That's something that differed hardly at all from the comments made by Federal President Horst Köhler last year to one of our journalists, which had such fateful consequences. Köhler said: "In my estimation, though, we – that is, [German] society as a whole – are generally coming to understand that, given this [strong] focus and corresponding dependency on foreign trade, a country of our size needs to be aware that, where called for or in an emergency, military engagement, too, is necessary if we are to protect our interests such as ensuring free trade routes or preventing instabilities in entire regions, which are also bound to adversely affect our ability to safeguard trade, jobs and incomes. All this should be discussed, and I think the path we're on is not so bad."

That was Horst Köhler on 22 May 2010 on Deutschlandfunk, almost exactly a year ago.

In other words, German security interests are a result of our resource dependency. That's how the Minister responsible for our armed forces puts it. Is that official government policy?

First point, the primacy of public policy remains unchanged. German foreign policy is peace policy. We have a clearly defined parameter here – our culture of military restraint – and on that, too, there's been no change. As far as your question about protecting our interests is concerned, last year I was one of the few people who spoke up also publicly for Federal President Köhler. Safeguarding the security of trade routes is of course something we're already doing – by combating piracy, for example. What we're doing to defend our interests in this area is both legitimate and necessary. It's not just because we're an export nation but also to protect our citizens that our navy is participating in anti-piracy operations. They're making a major contribution to this effort.

Did you notice in fact that there's not much difference between Thomas de Maizière's recent statement and what Horst Köhler said?

Yes, and at the time of course I agreed with the Federal President, he was being harshly criticized, after all, just for pointing out the facts. We're participating in the anti-piracy effort in order to protect our ships, our trade routes, our German crews and those of our allies from

piracy, from terror. That's not only legitimate, it's also necessary. But at a more fundamental level, let me emphasize again, our armed forces are becoming increasingly efficient. That's something the German Government rightly sees as an important overall priority. But we continue to insist on the primacy of public policy, on German foreign policy as peace policy. We remain adamant, too, that our soldiers will only be deployed on operations abroad when there's no alternative, no reasonable alternative. In other words, we regard our culture of military restraint as one of the parameters of German foreign policy.

Even if that puts you in the same company as China and Russia?

I've already pointed out, I think, that many countries in Europe see things in the same light. You've forgotten Brazil and India, too, by the way. But what's crucial is that we all recognize now the need for a political solution. Political solutions are what we're seeking to achieve also by taking a clear and unambivalent line on sanctions, for instance. Take Syria, for example. We have a situation right now where, despite the bridges built for President Assad the crackdown continues. Here, too, Germany is taking the lead on the sanctions issue. Next week I believe we'll not only impose further sanctions on the regime, we'll also add President Assad to the list of those targeted. He's the person responsible for the brutal repression of freedom rallies by his government, by authorities acting on his orders. That calls for a reaction on the part of the international community.

Let's end with another subject. Dominique Strauss-Kahn has been released – or is due to be released – on very strict conditions and after posting a large bail sum. He's to be formally indicted.

The

IMF

is looking for a new Managing Director. Let's not forget Brazil and India!

Isn't it now time for someone from an emerging economy country?

I'm not going to speculate about that now, these discussions are difficult enough and they still have to take place. We Europeans are keen not to see European influence wane, that goes without saying. That this is something we need to discuss is understandable.

Would you care to name any names?

No, no names. Of course I understand that you ask, but you

'll understand, too, that I won't name any names.

That was Federal Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle on Deutschlandfunk

’s “Informationen am Morgen” programme.

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/110520-bm-dlf-243632