A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING: FRANCE'S STRUGGLE WITH PREVENTIVE FORCE

Jacques E. C. Hymans
Smith College
Department of Government
2006-4

About the Matthew B. Ridgway Center

The Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies at the University of Pittsburgh is dedicated to producing original and impartial analysis that informs policymakers who must confront diverse challenges to international and human security. Center programs address a range of security concerns – from the spread of terrorism and technologies of mass destruction to genocide, failed states, and the abuse of human rights in repressive regimes.

The Ridgway Center is affiliated with the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) and the University Center for International Studies (UCIS), both at the University of Pittsburgh.

This working paper is one of several outcomes of the Ridgway Working Group on Preemptive and Preventive Military Intervention, chaired by Gordon R. Mitchell.

A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING: FRANCE'S STRUGGLE WITH PREVENTIVE FORCE

Jacques E. C. Hymans

The George W. Bush administration has shown a marked preference for bypassing multilateral security institutions in favor of "coalitions of the willing"—variable line-ups of states that choose to fall in line behind one or another American initiative. The administration argues that traditional multilateralism is incompatible with a new world of emerging threats from "rogue states" and "terrorists," where credible signaling of military options and, on occasion, quick recourse to military action are essential.[1] A considerable number of eminent practitioners of American diplomacy have, however, strongly criticized the administration's eagerness to bypass established decision-making processes in the UN Security Council (UNSC) and even in NATO.[2] These critics argue that by rejecting traditional multilateralism so openly, the administration has offended its traditional alliance and great-power partners, thus complicating its ability to tackle emerging threats.

The administration and its domestic critics have different foreign policy prescriptions, but they share at least one perception: France, our so-called "oldest ally," is incorrigible. Indeed, the idea that France is still chasing after a Gaullist fantasy of leading Europe and the world against the American "hyperpower" is a key pillar of each side's assessment of the merits of multilateralism. Those who support forming "coalitions of the willing" argue that since France is incorrigible, its current importance in both Western and world diplomatic fora dooms any effort to build a muscular multilateralism.[3] Meanwhile, those who support continuing to work within traditional structures suggest that France's incorrigibility is the very reason why a serious American effort at multilateralism is so important—to push France into a diplomatic corner and thus keep its global ambitions in check.[4]

This working paper argues that the general American impression that our "oldest ally" is a wolf in sheep's clothing is basically wrong. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that France today is a *sheep* in *wolf's* clothing. Behind the rhetorical flourishes, French elites understand that the country they lead is, at best, merely a "residual great power."[5] They know that it simply does not have the resources to lead Europe, let alone the world, as a durable counterpoise to the world's only superpower. That France briefly found itself in that very position during the Iraq crisis of 2003 was, paradoxically, a testament to its basic weakness. Therefore, a more supple American diplomacy, one that reflected a truer understanding of the sources of French foreign policy, might well have been able to avoid the intense Franco-American tussle of that period even without abandoning the ultimate objective of cashiering Saddam Hussein. This suggests in turn that a

renewed commitment to multilateralism—at least, to the mini-multilateralism of NATO—would not necessarily greatly constrain U.S. freedom of maneuver on the international stage.

The working paper is organized as follows. Section two explains France's pre-9/11 position for lifting the Iraq sanctions as deducible from its traditional Gaullist foreign policy outlook. Section three then charts France's steady post-9/11 abandonment of much of its principled stance on Iraq. It explains this movement as a consequence of the U.S. policy shift, and of France's desire to maintain good relations with the world's only superpower. Section four focuses on the crucial turning point, mid-January 2003, when France refused to join the American war effort. It explains France's refusal as a downstream consequence of the categorical anti-war stance of Germany. The crucial German dimension of France's choice to stand up to the U.S. at this juncture is something that has not been fully recognized by previous analyses. Section five then looks at the period of intense diplomatic conflict from mid-January to the formal beginning of the war on March 20. It shows that even at this late date, French diplomacy was still endeavoring to minimize direct confrontation with the US. That Paris in the end could not avoid the confrontation is explained again by the country's weakness, this time relative to the United Kingdom. Finally, Section six draws lessons from this case for U.S. foreign policy.

FRANCE'S STANCE AGAINST THE IRAQ SANCTIONS

From today's vantage point it takes no small effort to recall that the international debate in the mid-1990s was over whether and when to *lift* the sanctions on Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The UNSC, including France, had approved heavy sanctions on the Saddam regime in the wake of the Gulf War. In 1994, recognizing that the international oil embargo was strangling the country, Saddam finally agreed to submit to those UNSC resolutions that related to arms control. But instead of welcoming this development, the U.S. and UK began arguing that Iraqi conformity with the arms control resolutions was not enough; Iraq had to comply fully with *all* of the UNSC resolutions before the oil sanctions could be lifted. France—and many others—took issue with this stance, which the *New York Times* editorial page stated amounted to "changing the rules" on Iraq. As the *Times* put it, "The resolution's direct linkage between arms control and oil sanctions is not simply a technicality. . . . Indefinite, symbolic sanctions—punishing a regime simply for being loathsome— tend to lose their meaning and effectiveness over time."[6] This was the French position, too, and over the years the French (joined by Russia and China, among others) became increasingly insistent that the sanctions had to be curtailed.

Why did France refuse to go along with the US-UK determination to continue containing Saddam? It has become all too common for journalistic accounts to stress the French economic

interest in ending the sanctions. French oil companies did stand to benefit, but it is just as simplistic to say that they dominated French Iraq policy as it is to say that U.S. oil interests dominated U.S. Iraq policy.[7] In fact, the French position on the sanctions was easily deducible from France's basic tradition in international affairs. This tradition can be labeled "Gaullist," as it was codified by Charles de Gaulle after his return to power in 1958—though Gaullism has deeper lineages going back all the way to Cardinal Richelieu.[8] Gaullism is not just a synonym for French nationalist ambition. It also offers a particularly French, "political" vision of international order, at the heart of which sits the rational state, unpenetrated by private interests and unmoved by religious fervor.[9] The Gaullist vision of international affairs naturally produces relative sympathy for secularist and nationalist states such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, though of course the French did not endorse Saddam's bloody excesses. In particular, as Jacques Beltran has explained, successive French governments of different political parties promoted an end to the sanctions regime in order to promote the following core French foreign policy objectives: (1) stability in the Arab world and between the Arabs and the West, to which the French thought a chastened Saddam could contribute; (2) avoidance of an even greater humanitarian disaster in Iraq—an important goal not only in itself but also for the fulfillment of the first goal of stability; and (3) respect for the letter of UNSC resolutions by all states, be they great or small.[10]

Until September 2001, France held fast to its principled Iraq policy even though this produced a certain level of Franco-American tension.[11] France notably withheld its assent from Operation Desert Fox, the four-day bombing of sensitive Iraqi facilities that the U.S. and UK carried out in December 1998, as well as from UNSC Resolution 1284 of December 1999, which created a new UN inspection commission for Iraqi illicit weapons. Indeed, over the 1990s France's consistent and coherent defense of its position gradually gained more adherents internationally, so that by the early days of the George W. Bush administration there was widespread international support for ending the sanctions regime entirely. In order to counter this trend, the Americans and British found it necessary to propose a new, "smart sanctions" formula that would significantly lighten the burden on Iraqi civilians, while reinvigorating the export controls hampering Iraq's military reconstruction. France not surprisingly supported the UK-U.S. initiative, since the shift to "smart sanctions" represented a major victory for French diplomacy.[12] Indeed, the Iraqi propaganda machine even singled France out for violent criticism as the true originator of the UK-U.S. "smart sanctions" idea.[13]

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEPTEMBER 11

The George W. Bush administration regained the diplomatic offensive after September 11, 2001, however, and it used its new political capital to push for a major shift in the set of internationally legitimate Iraq policy options. Before 9/11, the limits of mainstream international debate were, on the dovish extreme, reintegrating Saddam Hussein's Iraq into the international community, and on the hawkish extreme, maintaining the "dumb sanctions" regime. The even more hawkish official U.S. policy of "regime change" was widely seen outside the U.S. as mere rhetoric. But as early as November 2001, Bush and his team began to assert a new spectrum of legitimate policy options: continuing the sanctions as the dovish extreme, and preventive war with the objective of regime change as the hawkish extreme.[14]

The longstanding, coherent, and consistently defended French stance for a rapid end to sanctions clearly stood outside the new discursive limits defined by the Bush administration. In the face of Bush's discursive maneuver, the French wilted.[15] The French policy reversal would eventually be consolidated in the "yes" vote on the famous UNSC Resolution 1441 of November 2002. What explains this change? The answer, in short, is that the French felt they were too weak to do anything else. It is often claimed that French foreign policy is driven by an exaggerated sense of national power, with its leaders fancying themselves as the heirs of Charles de Gaulle—or even of Napoleon Bonaparte.[16] French leaders undoubtedly overindulge in what the French call "cocorico," or crowing over their domestic and external successes. But in fact, the broad trajectory of French foreign and especially defense policy over the 1990s was toward an acknowledgement of France's diminished position in the international system.[17] France's post-9/11 cave-in on Iraq was just one more indication of this growing modesty.

During the 1990s, France still held on to its self-image as a "residual great power," in Ulrich Krotz's formulation,[18] but the accent was increasingly on the word "residual." For many French, especially those close to the military, the first Gulf War had already demonstrated the superiority of American power and the need for greater French "interoperability" with that superior force. A decade later, the U.S. was spending more on its national defense than the entire national budget of France. French decisionmakers were not ignorant of these facts, and they responded to them with a sometimes rocky, but nevertheless ever-closer reintegration with the NATO alliance: rejoining the Military Committee in 1993; attending the Defense and Foreign Ministers' meetings beginning in 1995; signing a joint declaration with the UK for a European Union (EU) defense capacity "in conformity with our respective obligations in NATO" at Saint-Mâlo in 1998; and sending significant French forces to serve under NATO command in the 1999 Kosovo war—a war that, like the Iraq war of 2003, was not sanctioned by the UNSC.[19]

9/11 accelerated this pre-existing French tendency to come back into the American fold. France's participation in the American war on terror went far beyond the atmospherics of *Le Monde*'s front-page editorial "Nous sommes tous Américains"[20] or President Jacques Chirac's September 18 visit to the White House. France made a strong contribution to the enhancement of international counterterrorism policing cooperation, and indeed it would eventually make a major biological terror bust in the midst of the diplomatic fight over Iraq. It also contributed significant troop strength, including crack special forces teams, to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan—essentially accepting the principle of participation in an ad hoc, US-led "coalition of the willing." Though the Afghan war was not without some of the usual Franco-American friction, the fact that the French were there at all testified to their recognition that hyperpower has its privileges.[21] This recognition was more broadly reflected in the French defense budget plan that was (not coincidentally) released on September 11, 2002. The clear objective of the plan was to make France's military more "British"—that is to say, more useful to the US.[22]

The very day after the release of the French defense budget plan, President Bush gave a speech to the UN General Assembly explicitly challenging the UN to stand up to Saddam Hussein. In so doing, he forced the French to choose definitively between their traditional, principled stance on Iraq and their desired partnership with the US. France chose partnership. To be sure, the negotiations over UNSC Resolution 1441—the resolution on returning weapons inspectors to Iraq—were long and arduous.[23] For the French and many other Council members, the main sticking point was the U.S. desire that the resolution threaten the use of "all necessary means"—meaning military force—to secure its enforcement. The French, Russians, Chinese, and several non-permanent members wanted to require a second resolution to authorize force. Though the issue was serious and the debates were proportionately intense, at no time did the French threaten a veto. This was a sign of their willingness to play by America's rules, though not to rubber-stamp America's desires.[24] In the end, on November 8, 2002, the UNSC unanimously approved a compromise resolution declaring that Iraq was being given "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations." The resolution warned of "serious consequences" in the case of Iraqi noncompliance, but it did not automatically condone the use of military force. In retrospect, some have viewed this compromise as a mere papering-over of fundamental differences on Iraq, a simple postponement of the inevitable Franco-American clash. But President Bush, for one, told Bob Woodward after the fact, "In the end, we got a great resolution."[25] Bush's satisfaction with 1441 reflected the great distance that the French (as well as the others on the UNSC) had moved to get even within shouting distance of his hard-line position on Iraq.

GERMANY STIFFENS FRANCE'S SPINE

The fact that the French moved so far in the direction of the American position on Iraq was particularly remarkable because in so doing, they were leaning away from the position of their major European partner, Germany. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder issued a categorical "no" to an eventual Iraq war—even, he said, if it were to receive the UNSC's blessing—with increasing insistence over the course of his electoral campaign in the summer and fall of 2002. Fearing that France would be tarred with the same brush that Washington had begun vigorously applying to Schröder, Chirac and de Villepin hastened to put some daylight between them and their German partners on the Iraq issue. In late August, de Villepin told the French ambassadorial corps, "We Europeans know all too well the price of weakness in dealing with dictators…. We must thus maintain as firmly as possible our demand of an unconditional return of UN inspectors."[26] In a long interview with the *New York Times* published on September 9, Chirac backed up his foreign minister, stating that for France, the military option was indeed on the table, and that Schröder had gone overboard because he was "very close to the election."[27] These statements may have encouraged Bush to take the UN route, which he announced in his General Assembly speech of September 12.[28]

Some have suggested that the hints of flexibility sent out by the French at this juncture were simply meant to ensnare the U.S. war machine forever in the cobwebs of international diplomacy. That the French wanted a bona fide diplomatic process is beyond doubt; but it is also beyond doubt that they were seriously considering participation in an eventual war. On December 20, France announced that the aircraft carrier "Charles de Gaulle" would be ready for a voyage by late January—a significant date because the inspectors were to make their first report to the UNSC on January 27.[29] The next day, a French general visited the Pentagon to discuss a potential French contribution of 15,000 troops, 100 aircraft, and naval support. This proposal amounted to about the same level of commitment as the French had made in the first Gulf War.[30] Then, on January 7, Chirac stated portentously in his annual address to the French military that they should get ready; he was seconded on the podium by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Henri Bentegeat, who said that the stars were aligning for a military mobilization in the year 2003.[31]

Even so, in early January the French were still not ready politically or militarily for war, and indeed they were shocked to learn that the Americans were. When Chirac's diplomatic adviser, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, visited Washington to sound out the administration on January 13 and 14 about its intentions, the administration put its cards on the table. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Deputy

Secretary of State Richard Armitage, in separate meetings with the envoy, ridiculed the French desire to give more time to the inspectors. Wolfowitz flatly labeled the French position as "irresponsible."[32] Incredibly, such beating about the head appears to have been necessary for the French finally to understand that the administration was dead set on war.[33] With weapons inspector Hans Blix's first report to the UNSC due on January 27, the time for French decision had arrived.

The decision Chirac made was to stand up against the Americans. On January 20, de Villepin "ambushed" Powell by inducing him to come to a meeting on "terrorism" that, contrary to what had been promised, quickly devolved into a debate on Iraq. After the session, an energized de Villepin told the press that "Nothing! Nothing!" justified this war. The break between the diplomats was now open—and personal.[34] A few days later, during the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty that links France and Germany, Chirac informed Schröder that France was joining Germany in its anti-war posture on Iraq.[35] Then, in front of the media, with Schröder at his side, the French president indulged in the near-pacifist statement that "war is always the worst solution."[36] This turn of events was a surprise to many observers. Even American conservatives with a deep mistrust of France were surprised that it had replaced its typical diplomatic smoothness with anti-war tirades.[37] Why, after giving so much ground to the American position, did Chirac and de Villepin finally decide to stand and fight?

A number of factors were clearly at work in this decision, including a genuine distaste for what they saw as an unjustified rush to war; shock and disappointment over France's treatment at the hands of the Americans; and perhaps a natural political impulse to run to the front of the increasingly vocal anti-war parade in European mass opinion. But the elephant in the room, which other accounts of this story strangely have tended to obscure, is the incredibly close Franco-German relationship. It was not by chance that Chirac took up the anti-war cause with Schröder standing at his side. For to choose to be "with" Bush in mid-January 2003 was to choose to be "against" Schröder. And in fact no French president could have made such a choice.

Even when American post-mortems of the diplomatic crisis over Iraq do not ignore the Franco-German "couple" (as it is called in France), they tend to warp its impact on events. For instance, the Brookings Institution's resident France experts have written that "Bush's isolation of Schröder may have actually pushed him into the arms of Chirac at a time when his preference might have been to mend fences with the United States."[38] This statement misfires on two levels: (1) it reflects an outdated, Cold War understanding of the relative commitments of Germany and France to Atlanticism; and (2) more fundamentally, it reflects an outdated assumption that the foreign policy choices of Germany and France are truly independent of each other—that they

reflect traditional "hard-shell" state sovereignty over foreign policy. I will elaborate on these two levels in turn.

The Cold War pattern of Atlanticist devotion of Germany and truculence of France no longer holds. In the case studied here, clearly it was Chirac who seconded Schröder's categorical anti-Iraq war position, not the other way around. As one British official recalled, "We weren't looking closely enough at the Elysée anniversary. We misunderstood the Germans. It suited them to have Chirac as political cover. We have had a consistent problem misreading Franco-German intentions going back through the 1980s."[39] The problem stems from a failure to update Cold War understandings of France and Germany's relative commitments to the Atlantic alliance. During the Cold War, Germany indeed straddled between starkly contrasting French and U.S. positions on the nature and function of the West. But the Cold War ended a long time ago. We have already seen how far France moved toward American theses during the 1990s.[40] Germany moved, too—but in a different direction. During the Cold War, the Federal Republic had kept a relatively low international profile because of its security dependence on America, as well as its desire to avoid inflaming still-vivid memories of Nazi atrocities. But Germany and the world changed in 1989, and the new, reunified Germany subsequently displayed much greater self-confidence on the international stage. This independent streak was particularly evident in the leftist coalition government that came to power in 1998 promising to build a Germany that can "say no."[41] Heavily influenced by the German peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s, contemporary left-of-center German elites evince no small degree of skepticism about the true motivations behind U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, they have a positive agenda of ending the dominance of violence in international affairs (though they also increasingly send German troops abroad, in peacekeeping or peacemaking capacities).[42] Given this background, it is not surprising that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Chancellor Schröder privately stated that he thought the Bush team was going to try to use this as a pretext for invading Iraq, and that he was going to try to stop them from doing so.[43] This crucial piece of evidence demonstrates, contrary to the opinion of many American observers, that Schröder's campaign against the Iraq war was *not* mere election-year opportunism. Rather, it reflected strong convictions, which he was gratified to learn on the campaign trail that most Germans shared.

That Chirac signed up with Schröder's policy on Iraq, rather than vice versa, is clear. But why did he do so? Why didn't he let the Schröder government bear the full consequences of its self-righteousness? Many American and British observers had expected him to do just that.[44] Such expectations were based on the second major misconception noted above: that France and Germany are independent foreign policy actors. They are not.

The Franco-German "couple" is not just a cute journalistic turn of phrase; it is an institutionalized fact of life.[45] Ironically, it was Charles de Gaulle, the champion of French foreign policy "independence," who fathered the 1963 Elysée Treaty that has ended up binding France irrevocably to Germany. De Gaulle had thought the treaty signaled Germany's willingness to show unstinting support for French foreign policy initiatives; when this belief turned out almost immediately to have been erroneous, he essentially acted as if the treaty had never happened.[46] But the treaty had indeed happened, and slowly but surely the twice-yearly leadership summits it envisioned have become no less than "joint Franco-German cabinet meetings,"[47] where all government ministers and hundreds of civil servants hold detailed discussions of all major aspects of the two countries' foreign and domestic policies. Of particular relevance to the concerns of this working paper are the discussions of the Franco-German Defense and Security Council, which is a top-level decision-making body whose "formal legal authority is so wide-ranging that it could decide to create a joint Franco-German army without special parliamentary procedures."[48] Moreover, the formal cooperation of the summit meetings has spilled over into a large number of other collaborative activities, including permanent secretariats for the Franco-German Councils, joint ministerial trips and ambassadorial conferences, exchange programs for diplomats and other civil servants, and many informal contacts. To manage all of this activity, each side appoints a full-time, very senior "coordinator" of cooperation, whose tasks include managing the multitude of cooperative endeavors, reporting regularly on the state of cooperation, and proposing further areas for cooperation.

In short, given the realities of the Franco-German "couple," once Germany had turned left, France had to follow. The Bush administration in January 2003 was essentially asking for the immediate surgical separation of two Siamese twins connected at the head. It is no wonder that the twins in question, France and Germany, did not agree to the operation. But this raises another question: if France had known all along that it could not break with Germany, and if it knew that Germany had placed itself in a position of categorical refusal of any future Iraq war, how could Chirac have waited until January 2003 to come out also against such a war? The answer to this question lies in the delicate power balance inside the Franco-German "couple." For although France today is clearly becoming the junior partner by most measures of power, it still has a claim to leadership in matters of international high politics. This claim is largely based on France's permanent seat at the UNSC.[49] But even here with each passing year the bases for French leadership are slipping away, as Germany develops its diplomatic and military muscle and as the French permanent seat appears increasingly anachronistic. Thus, when—as in the case of Iraq—Germany decides to take a strong stand, France is in a bind. In such cases, to reassert its

leadership Paris generally must do two things: first, it must appeal over Germany's head, to the authority of the UN; and second, it must assert ownership of the issue through a much greater investment of thought and energy than the Germans have done. Often this means becoming "more German than the Germans," at least for a while, until the French lead on the issue is secure. For their part, the Germans are generally willing to play along with the French desire for leadership because it produces a force multiplier effect for their preferred position in the short term, while handing off most of the diplomatic and military risk.

The Franco-German dance over Balkan diplomacy in the 1990s was an early iteration of this basic pattern. Over France's objections, Germany unilaterally recognized Slovenia and Croatia in December 1991; France, still cherishing its historic alliance with Serbia, grumbled but followed suit in early 1992; by mid-1992, France had retaken leadership on the issue—but with a markedly "German" twist, as President François Mitterrand declared Serbia responsible for the war and made a dramatic visit to besieged Sarajevo. Thereafter Paris was clearly in the foreground.[50]

The French were following the same script in the recent Iraq crisis, but the Bush administration—in spite of France's desperate pleading, right up to the last minute, for even a mere few extra weeks—did not give Paris the time it needed to reclaim ownership of the issue from Berlin.[51] Therefore France in the spring of 2003 ended up with the sucker's payoff: it was pursuing Germany's, not its own, preferred policy; and for this the Bush administration was punishing it severely, indeed more severely than the administration was punishing Germany.[52] Such are the wages of weakness.

THE WEAK SUFFER WHAT THEY MUST

Bush had forced France to choose sides, and France had chosen Germany and its anti-war position. But even so, the French well understood that they could not stop the war from happening, and they also understood Donald Rumsfeld's dictum that when you are in a hole, stop digging. The best they could hope for at this late stage was a replay of December 1998, when the U.S. and UK failed to get France, Russia, and China to agree to a UNSC resolution for Operation Desert Fox but went ahead with it anyway. That episode had been difficult, but the Franco-American relationship had recovered soon thereafter. The French thus suddenly became converted to the American thesis that Resolution 1441 provided the U.S. and UK with sufficient grounds for war against Iraq. According to Charles Grant, beginning in January "the thrust of the French message was: 'If you must go to war, do it on the basis of 1441; we would criticize you, although moderately. However, if you seek another resolution to authorize war, we shall fight

against it.'"[53] This was an ironic twist, considering France's strong push for a two-resolution requirement during the negotiations over 1441. But it made perfect sense in the context of French damage limitation.

France expected that its proposal would find receptive ears in a Bush administration aching to get out of the UN and into Iraq. But Tony Blair, fighting a rebellion within his own Labour Party, felt he needed the second resolution, so on January 31 Bush gave it to him.[54] In yet another demonstration of French weakness, Washington again was inclining toward London, even though this time it was Paris that was telling it what it wanted to hear.

The stage was thus set for a fight to the finish. Still, the French were backing into it. In particular, they were very worried about having to use their precious UNSC veto, which they know is an anachronism. And—despite all the bad blood that had accumulated by this point—they especially wanted to avoid using the veto against their Western allies, something France has not done since 1956.[55] France's desire to avoid a veto—which, again, was born of its profound sense of weakness—led it to undertake a lobbying effort among other UNSC members, a step that probably angered the Americans even more than a veto would have. By early March, the lobbying effort had escalated to the point where de Villepin was literally running around Africa in an attempt to round up a blocking majority against the second resolution (Colin Powell, saving himself the trip—and the indignity—limited himself to telephoning those same leaders in advance of de Villepin's arrival).[56] The race was very tight until March 10, when Chirac declared in a television interview that, "whatever the circumstances," France would vote no. After Chirac's seemingly categorical statement, Council support for a second resolution evaporated and the resolution was withdrawn.[57] In the end, then, France had succeeded in avoiding a veto only by threatening to use it—a Pyrrhic victory, at best.

Pyrrhic though the French victory may have been, clearly the Americans and British also did not emerge from this fight unscathed. This raises the question of why they picked it. It is often said that Blair "needed" the second resolution for domestic reasons. But, despite his fabled optimism,[58] in calling for a second resolution Blair had to consider the possibility that the Council would not give it to him. Whereas going to war without trying to get a second resolution would have raised questions in Britain, going to war after failing to get a second resolution would be viewed in many quarters as wholly illegitimate. So was not Blair courting even further domestic problems by taking his second-resolution gamble? Not necessarily.

Blair appears to have calculated that a knock-down, drag-out fight with the French at the UNSC—even one that Britain ultimately lost—would in fact leave him strengthened at home, at least temporarily. For in a pinch, he could always count on Britain's deeply ingrained anti-French

sentiment.[59] In an interview with Bob Woodward, Bush gave a revealing explanation for his decision to back Blair's second referendum request: "Blair's got to deal with his own Parliament, his own people, but he has to deal with the French-British relationship as well, and its context within Europe. And so he's got a very difficult assignment. Much more difficult, by the way, than the American president in some ways. *This was the period where slowly but surely the French became the issue inside Britain*."[60] Indeed, Blair knew that his second-resolution bet was a winner because the more "the French became the issue," the stronger his domestic position would become. Even so, he did not leave to chance the scapegoating of France for the failure at the UNSC. In the weeks leading up to the war, British Cabinet ministers were given "the highest authority" to say whatever they wished about the French. Meanwhile, Blair's spinmeister, Alastair Campbell, let loose the hounds of Fleet Street. The tabloid *The Sun* notably featured "separated-at-birth" photo spreads of the French and Iraqi presidents.[61] Pillorying the French for the disaster at the UN was all too easy, and it smoothed the way for British participation on the side of the Americans.

But as Bush also indicated to Woodward, Blair's anti-France play was not merely domestically oriented. It also was part of his bid for a leadership role in Europe. On January 29, Blair held a rare private meeting with French ambassador Gérard Errera in his Downing Street office. The two men exchanged ideas in a cordial and apparently unguarded way. Then, a few hours later, the media was handed an open letter challenging French and German leadership and signed by eight European Union states, including ringleader Great Britain. "France's ambassador," John Kampfner writes, "had been spectacularly double-crossed."[62] The publication of this letter—and a second one signed by 10 Eastern European NATO partners—revealed how dramatically the tables had turned between Britain and France since the mid-1990s even on France's supposed home turf of Europe, and even when France and Germany were working together. Chirac may have been hailed by the masses that packed European streets on February 15.[63] But, like his mentor de Gaulle, Chirac understood that appealing to the street was an act of political desperation, the consequence of having lost the elites.[64] In the only opinion poll that mattered in the short run—that of European chancelleries—Britain and America finished far ahead. As one of Blair's aides put it, "You must admit that as insults go, this one was well-judged."[65] Indeed, during February and March only Belgium and Luxembourg proved reliable friends of the self-proclaimed Franco-German "motor" of European integration.[66] Chirac's frustration boiled over in his comment that the eastern Europeans had "missed a good opportunity to keep quiet…. Remember that all it takes is for one country not to ratify by referendum, for [EU

enlargement] not to happen."[67] This unfortunate statement rendered France's difficult situation even more so.

It is necessary to plumb beneath Blair and Chirac's tactical maneuvering to understand why France lost this fight too. The waning of French (and waxing of "Anglo-Saxon") influence in Europe is another phenomenon with deep structural roots, in this case the "reuniting" of Europe east and west after the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the eastern Europeans are anxious to ensure their security against Russia and overwhelmingly view NATO, not the EU, as the means of achieving that goal. Given France's still-tentative reintegration into NATO, it has little to offer the east on this issue of central importance, while as America's best friend in Europe, Britain can offer a great deal. On the other hand, the eastern Europeans also want economic development, and they overwhelmingly view the EU as the means of achieving that. This desire for EU membership gives France some political capital; but, bowing to domestic political imperatives, it consistently spends most of that capital on one issue: the protection of its farmers. Because of the tenacious French defense of its agricultural entitlements in EU accession negotiations, in enlargement after enlargement, new member-states have arrived in Brussels eager to settle scores with Paris (and indeed, more than a little euro-skeptical).[68] Thus, over time Britain, the first applicant to be mistreated by France—its candidacy was twice suddenly halted by French vetoes—has a natural opportunity to gain adherents to its camp. Britain has long enjoyed this structural advantage, but the inability of its Tory governments even so much as to feign commitment to the European idea had prevented it from cashing in. Having been told by Bill Clinton that his usefulness to America stood in direct proportion to his ability to carry Europe, Tony Blair did not make the Tories' mistake.[69] As a result, by 1999 he and Gerhard Schröder, not Jacques Chirac, were the clear leaders of Europe.[70] The Iraq crisis demonstrated that in the new, wider Europe, when Britain joins forces with America its stock in Europe can stand higher even than the combination of France and Germany.[71] And France knows it.

LOOKING FORWARD: DIPLOMACY AND PREVENTIVE WAR

This working paper has focused primarily on the diplomatic maneuvering in the prelude to the Iraq war. But the Iraq war is simply the most dramatic instance to date of the general American doctrine of preventive war. Given that the preventive war doctrine is likely to stick, are we therefore fated to four more years of international, and in particular Franco-American, tension? Not necessarily. This working paper has argued that although France was opposed on principle to the Iraq war and to the wider preventive war doctrine, its behavior was not fundamentally driven by principle. Rather, the zig-zagging policy the French pursued reflected

their deep sense of weakness on the international stage, notably vis-à-vis the US, Germany, and the UK. This conclusion is more in line with the available evidence than the "incorrigible France" picture that most commentators have painted. As a result of this study, therefore, we can derive some novel lessons for U.S. diplomacy.

First, *the preventive war doctrine in and of itself does not mandate a Franco-American clash.* The fact that France was not primarily guided by principle in the Iraq crisis suggests that even if the U.S. decides to go to the mat with Iran, North Korea, or some other so-called "rogue state," a repeat of the Franco-American train wreck of 2003 is not inevitable. France recognizes its weakened international power position and determines its policy accordingly. On the other hand, the present diplomatic context is not the same as the context of late 2002. Then, the French position was muted and ambiguous; now, it has been broadcast to the four corners of the earth. It will not be easy for the French to extricate themselves from the principles they have so loudly proclaimed, even if they want to do so. Moreover, Franco-American relations today are in an execrable state. Not only did the misunderstandings and doubts of the 1990s give way to open contempt and accusations of bad faith in 2003; even now, many of the emotions that were stirred by the crisis of 2003 have yet to dissipate. Nevertheless, there is some cause for optimism in the conciliatory noises that started coming from France almost as soon as the war began.

Second, *the road to Paris leads through Berlin.* Many have criticized the vindictiveness toward France that is suggested by Condoleezza Rice's tripod formulation for U.S. diplomacy after the Iraq crisis: "Punish France, ignore Germany, and forgive Russia."[72] But in fact, the worst miscalculation in that phrase is Rice's injunction to "ignore Germany." If it had not been for Germany's categorical refusal to countenance an Iraq war, France probably would have bowed to its inevitability. More research is needed on the precise sources of the German "no," but in any event a deep and intensive German-American dialogue is clearly essential for Western unity.

Third, *U.S. diplomacy needs to adjust to the reality of the new Europe.* The point here is not that France can be ignored. If the U.S. wants NATO at its side in the future, it has to open the lines of communication with *both* sides of the Franco-German "couple"—for, like most couples, each side has influence over the other. For instance, in the case of Iraq, if the U.S. had given the French more time—perhaps even just the few more weeks they were asking for—it is not inconceivable that they could have reclaimed leadership over the issue from Germany and then gradually reshaped the "couple's" policy in a less confrontational direction.

There is a deeper lesson for U.S. diplomacy here as well. Not just the Bush administration, but also most U.S. foreign policy elites appear to view the EU still today as they did de Gaulle's squabbling "Europe of States."[73] But that Europe is in reality a distant memory,

even in the areas of foreign policy and defense. Therefore, a diplomacy of divide and rule—seemingly endorsed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's infamous comment about "old" and "new" Europe—is destined to fail. But at the same time, it is evident that the EU is far from becoming a truly supranational state, so there is no need to treat it as a potential peer competitor. Rather, the EU is best described as a set of national capitals bound together by strong, heavily trafficked transgovernmental networks.[74] As we have seen, this networked relationship is especially close between Paris and Berlin. The key to U.S. influence in Europe is to take active part in those networks. Because of the continuing centrality of NATO, this is still possible in the security issue area. The U.S. has tremendous resources at its disposal. If it uses them wisely, it can have both the international freedom of maneuver it desires, and the international legitimacy that the mini-multilateralism of NATO can provide.

---

[1] United States, White House Office of Homeland Security, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>.

[2] See, for instance, Madeleine Albright, "Bridges, Bombs, or Bluster?" *Foreign Affairs* 82 (September-October 2003): 2-19; Wesley Clark, "Broken Engagement," *Washington Monthly* 36 (May 2004): 26-33; Brent Scowcroft, "Don't Attack Saddam: It Would Undermine Our Anti-Terror Efforts," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 August 2002, <http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110002133>.

[3] For instance, Thomas Friedman, "Take France Off the Security Council: India, the World's Largest Democracy, Deserves a Seat as a Permanent Member," *The Guardian*, 11 February 2003, 17.

[4] For instance, Charles A. Kupchan, "Continental Rift," *The Start-Ledger*, 27 April 2003, <http://www.cfr.org/pub5910/charles_a_kupchang/continental_rift.php>.

[5] Ulrich Krotz, "National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared," Program for the Study of Germany and Europe Working Paper 02.1, Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002, <http://www.ces.fas.harvard.edu/working_papers/GermanSeries.html>.

[6] "Iraq Sanctions Cannot Be Forever," *The New York Times*, 1 August 1994, A14. For the French perspective, see Eric Rouleau, "America's Unyielding Policy Toward Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 74 (January/February 1995): 59-72.

[7] See Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis Over Iraq* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 77-78.

[8] Stanley Hoffmann, *Decline or Renewal? France Since the 1930s* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), esp. ch. 11.

[9] An appreciation of this French concept of the "political" underscores just how misguided are the attacks on the French state as simply the lapdog of French oil interests. The concept is well depicted in Bertrand Badie, "Le jeu triangulaire," in *Sociologie des nationalismes*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

[10] Jacques Beltran, "French Policy Toward Iraq," US-France Analysis Series, Center for the United States and France, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, September 2002, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/cuse/analysis/beltran.htm>.

[11] On the importance of such "Cartesian" thinking in French foreign policy generally as well as in the specific case of French Iraq policy, see Charles Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003).

[12] Russia scotched the first "smart sanctions" proposal with a veto threat in June 2001, but after further negotiations the UNSC approved the new sanctions formula in May 2002.

[13] "Iraq: Bagdad s'en prend à la France," *Le Figaro*, 22 May 2001.

[14] See Robert Holloway, "Revision improbable des sanctions contre l'Irak après le discours de M. Bush," *Agence France Presse*, 27 November 2001.

[15] The beginning of their cave-in was their immediate embrace of Bush's call for a return of international inspectors to Iraq as a precondition for lifting the sanctions. "Paris soutient les propos de Bush sur les inspecteurs, souhaite un accord," *Agence France Presse*, 27 November 2001.

[16] Dominique de Villepin did not help matters by publishing an adulatory, 600-page account of Napoleon's "hundred days" in 2001. See David A. Bell, "Dominique de Villepin's Idea of Glory: The Napoleon Complex," *The New Republic*, 14 April 2003, <http://jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu/~dabell/villepin.htm>.

[17] There is a parallel here with a broader loss of national self-confidence among French elites in the 1980s and 1990s. For a powerful account of this trend, see the two essays by Perry Anderson, "Dégringolade," *London Review of Books*, 2 September 2004, 3-9, and "Union Sucrée," *London Review of Books* 23 September 2004, 10-17.

[18] Krotz, "National Role Conceptions."

[19] Jolyon Howorth, "La France, L'Otan et la sécurité européenne: statu quo ingérable, renouveau introuvable?" *Politique Etrangère* 4 (2002).

[20] Jean-Marie Colombani, "Nous sommes tous Américains," *Le Monde*, 13 September 2001, 1.

[21] Tom Lansford, "Whither Lafayette? French Military Policy and the American Campaign in Afghanistan," *European Security* 11 (Fall 2002): 126-46.

[22] Howorth, "La France, l'Otan et la sécurité européenne."

[23] See Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior*, 197-205; Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 108-114; and Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 220-227.

[24] French UN Ambassador Jean-David Levitte, cited in Cogan, "French Negotiating Behavior," 199.

[25] President George W. Bush, quoted in Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 227.

[26] De Villepin, cited in Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 104.

[27] "Jacques Chirac: French Leader Offers America both Friendship and Criticism," interview excerpts published in *The New York Times*, 9 September 2002, A1.

[28] At a meeting in Washington the day the Chirac interview was published, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage noted what he termed the French evolution in the right direction. Patrick Jarreau, Sylvie Kauffmann and Corinne Lesnes, "Paris-Washington: les dessous d'une rupture," *Le Monde*, 27 March 2003.

[29] Jarreau, Kauffmann, and Lesnes, "Paris-Washington."

[30] Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior*, 206-7.

[31] Jarreau, Kauffmann, and Lesnes, "Paris-Washington."

[32] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 120.

[33] Much has been made of the bad British and American intelligence about the state of Saddam Hussein's illicit weapons programs; but equally bad was French intelligence about the state of British and American military preparations. Of course, these preparations had been intentionally dissimulated by the military and the administration through the summer and fall of 2002, but the deeper sources of the French failure lie in the continuing inability of French officials to get inside, or even to understand, the circles of power in Washington. See Stanley Hoffmann, *L'Amérique vraiment impériale? Entretiens sur le vif avec Frédéric Bozo* (Paris: Audibert, 2003), 18-25. On the dissimulation of the military preparations, see Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 83-4.

[34] Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 284-5.

[35] Marc Champion, Charles Fleming, Ian Johnson and Carla Anne Robbins, "Allies at Odds: Behind U.S. Rifts with Europeans—Slights and Politics—Schroeder and Chirac Discover How Popular Tweaking a Superpower Can Be—Brushoff at a NATO Meeting," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 2003, A1

[36] Hoffmann, *L'Amérique vraiment impériale?*, 86-7.

[37] See, for instance, William Safire, "Bad Herr Dye," *The New York Times*, 23 January 2003, A25.

[38] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 173.

[39] Quoted by John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars* (London: The Free Press, 2003), 289.

[40] This is not to suggest that the American stance was static during this period.

[41] Karl Kaiser and Hans Maull, quoted in Anne-Marie le Gloannec, "German Power and the Weakening of States in a Globalized World: Deconstructing a Paradox," *German Politics* 10 (April 2001): 118.

[42] A penetrating and prescient article on this topic is Harald Mueller and Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Origins of Estrangement: The Peace Movement and the Changed Image of America in West Germany," *International Security* 12 (Summer 1987): 52-88.

[43] Author's interview with a German journalist who was present for Schröder's private remarks. Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 2003.

[44] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 126.

[45] Ulrich Krotz, "Structure as Process: The Regularized Intergovernmentalism of Franco-German Bilateralism," Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies Working Paper 02.3, Harvard University, 2002.

[46] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 60.

[47] Krotz, "Structure as Process," 3.

[48] Krotz, "Structure as Process," 17.

[49] One might also invoke France's nuclear arsenal here, but it is highly unclear that the *force de frappe* confers any prestige today. Certainly it does not do so in Germany.

[50] See Alex Macleod, "French Policy toward the War in the Former Yugoslavia: A Bid for International Leadership," *International Journal* 52 (Spring 1997): 243-264.

[51] On March 16, Chirac floated the idea of a 30-day deadline for Iraqi compliance, which the Americans and British immediately shot down. Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 154.

[52] In Condoleezza Rice's notorious formulation, the U.S. postwar policy has been to "forgive the Russians, ignore the Germans, and punish the French." Condoleezza Rice, quoted in "US-German Ties on the Mend," *Deutsche Welle*, 27 February 2004, <http://www.dw-world.de/english/0,3367,1430_A_1124825,00.html>.

[53] Charles Grant, "Iraq War: Iraq Post-Mortem 1," *Prospect*, 19 May 2003. This story has been confirmed by France's UN Ambassador of the period, Jean-David Levitte. See Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior*, 210-11.

[54] Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 297.

[55] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 148.

[56] Hoffmann, *L'Amérique vraiment impériale?*, 29-30.

[57] Interview with Christopher Meyer (British ambassador to the U.S. until February 2003) for *Frontline* program "Blair's War," available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/blair/interviews/meyer.html. This section was also enriched by off-the-record comments of Inocencio Arias, Spain's UN ambassador during this period, at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, Harvard University, March 2004.

[58] Grant, "Iraq War."

[59] As could Bush and his allies, who coined the notorious term "freedom fries."

[60] Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 297. Italics added.

[61] Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 288.

[62] Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 253.

[63] Stefaan Walgrave, "Transnational Movements and National Opportunities: The Case of the Worldwide Anti Iraqi War Protest on February 15th, 2003," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 2004.

[64] It was also a dangerous game, for the street is fickle and often casts down its former idols—as de Gaulle himself experienced. Suri, *Power and Protest*, 194.

[65] Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 254.

[66] The first letter was signed by EU members or soon-to-be members Britain, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Spain. The second was signed by NATO applicants Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania.

[67] Gordon and Shapiro, *Allies at War*, 134.

[68] Attila Agh, "Smaller and Bigger States in the EU 25: the Eastern Enlargement and Decision-Making in the EU," *Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs* 21 (Winter 2003/4), esp. pp. 5-6.

[69] Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 12.

[70] This was symbolized by their joint presentation of the "Third Way" document in June 1999, and by the subsequent success of "Third Way" ideas at the 2000 Lisbon European summit.

[71] But Britain's meteoric rise in Brussels can only be sustained by a continued demonstration of commitment to Europe, which in turn requires an American foreign policy that encourages rather than undermines the goal of integration. For the Franco-German "motor" still has some gas in it.

[72] John Leicester, "Europe Remembers Rice's 'Punish France' Quip," Associated Press Online, 16 November 2004, Lexis-Nexis news wire database, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>.

[73] I made similar points with respect to Washington's misperceptions on the birth of the euro in "Raízes do eurocepticismo Americano: as consequências perceptivas da identidade nacional" ("Roots of American Euroskepticism: The Perceptual Consequences of National Identity"), *Estratégia: Revista de Estudos Internacionais*, No. 17 (Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, 2002).

[74] Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).