

Background

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Cherry-Picking: Preventing the Emergence of a Permanent Franco–German–Russian Alliance

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It is easy to disparage the recent Paris–Berlin–Moscow alliance that opposed American action in Iraq. Separately, like Dorothy’s friends in *The Wizard of Oz*, all of these countries lack something needed to make them a great power: Russia, a first-world economy; Germany, real military power; France, raw materials and a strong industrial base.

Collectively, however, such a coalition could prove durable and coherent over more than just Iraq; certainly, Paris is making efforts to expand the scope of the anti-American coalition that emerged over whether or not to go to war with Baghdad. Taken together, the Franco–German–Russian combination has the attributes of a great power able to balance the United States on the global stage, with France providing the political and ideological leadership, Germany the economic power, and Russia the military wherewithal.

To keep this coalition from germinating into an ongoing challenge to America’s position in the world, the Bush Administration, particularly the Department of State and the National Security Council (NSC), must pursue a cherry-picking strategy as the modus operandi in Europe. Specifically, the State Department and the NSC should identify and address issues of common interest to the United States and its European allies, refrain from using inflammatory rhetoric over allied disagreements, take a leading role in the further transformation of NATO, conduct a joint strategic dialogue to narrow transatlantic differences, and—most important—establish a common modus

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- Identify and address issues of common interest to the United States and its European allies. In this case, closer cooperation regarding NATO reform, the Middle East, trade issues, and Latin America seem obvious starting points.
- Refrain from using inflammatory rhetoric geared primarily to domestic audiences.
- Conduct a joint strategic dialogue at the highest level to narrow differences in threat perceptions and develop common policies.
- Establish a common modus operandi for international decision-making based on the recognition that the cherry-picking approach, whatever the specific issue, is likely to become the most often used configuration.

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operandi for politico-military international decision-making.

The Good News from the Iraqi Diplomatic Debacle

There are two positive aspects of the European diplomatic scene in the wake of Iraq. First, it is clear that in politico-military matters, “Europe” does not exist. The British, Spanish, Italian, and most Central and Eastern European governments sided with the United States over Iraq, belying France’s overly confident assumption that it spoke for Europe as a whole. A Europe with many voices makes a cherry-picking strategy—the desire to work with European states on a case-by-case basis—the logical policy for living in a world in which the United States steers a sensible middle course between ignoring allies and allowing a perpetually divided Europe to scupper American diplomatic and military initiatives.

Second, because France, Germany, and Russia all chose to oppose the United States diplomatically for very different reasons, it is entirely possible that a cherry-picking strategy can fragment even this anti-American core. For example, while working closely with France may prove difficult in the near term, both Germany and Russia are at least as attuned to Washington as to Paris. By working with Berlin and Moscow on a case-by-case basis and not punishing them or forcing them to choose between Paris and Washington, the U.S. can minimize the likelihood that an anti-American alliance will coalesce successfully.

The Real State of Play in Europe

Germany. Thoughtful German politicians, such as Friedbert Pfluge, the shadow Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) spokesman for foreign affairs, have begun to criticize the government of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder for diverting Germany from its long-standing adherence to the foreign policy formulated by Konrad Adenauer—pro-French, pro-Europe, and pro-American. As Pfluge rightly argues, by alienating America over Iraq, Germany has lost vital influence over the world’s sole remaining superpower. Thus, it is also in Germany’s interests to find ways to heal the damaging Washington–Berlin rift.

A cherry-picking approach allows Germany to leave the political wilderness while assuring the U.S. that a firmly anti-American coalition has no future, for without Germany’s total adherence to such a point of view, France’s anti-American Gaullist dreams cannot be realized.

Russia. Likewise in Russia, President Vladimir Putin has doubtlessly reoriented Russian foreign policy in a more solidly pro-American direction than his predecessors. However, while Putin may have made this ideological leap, many former Soviet bureaucrats in the Russian government have not—they maintain a traditional hostility toward Washington.

Ever sensitive to Russian public opinion and to the perception that Moscow has become a lackey of the United States, Putin chose to side with Paris and Berlin for the primary political reasons that December parliamentary elections are looming and the U.S. did not engage Moscow enough over Iraq. (There was no visit at the Secretary of State level to confer with the Russians.)

But the larger point is that, in acquiescing in the end of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, allowing U.S. basing in Central Asia to fight the war on terrorism, accepting a significant round of NATO expansion, and desiring to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), Putin has moved Russia’s orientation westward. The Bush Administration will find in Putin a partner open to a cherry-picking strategy, particularly as Russia hopes to join the WTO soon—something it cannot do without enthusiastic American support.

Central and Eastern Europe. The states of Central and Eastern Europe have proven their generally pro-American tilt over the issue of regime change in Baghdad. Despite open threats from President Jacques Chirac that they should “keep their mouths shut” about the Iraq controversy, these countries staunchly supported America, even while their admission process to the European Union (EU) was ongoing.

These countries will enthusiastically accept a cherry-picking strategy as a way to enhance their freedom of maneuver by using close ties with America as a counterweight to feared Franco–German domination within the EU. Also, in the words of one East European statesman:

We are a highway between Germany and Russia; we don't care that they are nice for this minute. We will do what it takes to be seen as good allies in Washington to make the American security guarantee stick.¹

France. Even in France, traditional bastion of European efforts to construct a pole of power to challenge the U.S., there are opportunities to pursue a cherry-picking approach. France was the birthplace of *raison d'état*. The last thing Paris desires is to be seen as impotent.

Whatever one's opinion of the Iraq war, the reality is that the U.S. ignored French objections, decisively won the conflict, and has left France with no diplomatic role in the post-war reconstruction process. In addition, the most interesting diplomatic outcome of the conflict was not a case of Europe versus America, but of Europe versus Europe. The conflict made a lie of French pretensions to global relevance at the highest level.

Ironically, a cherry-picking strategy would serve as a way for France to end its dilemma of craving the ability to oppose America while remaining relevant. By siding with the U.S. where common interests exist—for example, in the war on terrorism—France could be perceived as a significant player on the international stage while also continuing to carp at Washington when it chooses to disagree. Such a nuanced diplomatic strategy would suit both traditional diplomatic rivals.

Making the Strategy Work

To pursue a cherry-picking strategy, the U.S. and European governments should:

- **Identify** and **address** issues of common interest to the United States and its European allies. In this case, closer cooperation regarding NATO reform, the Middle East, trade issues, and Latin America seem obvious starting points.
- **Refrain** from using inflammatory rhetoric geared primarily to domestic audiences.
- **Take** leading roles in the further transformation of NATO. The U.S. must make full use of the NATO consultation process, while the Euro-

pean states, in turn, must engage fully in the modernization of NATO's military capabilities.

- **Conduct** a joint strategic dialogue at the highest level to narrow differences in threat perceptions and develop common policies.
- **Establish** a common *modus operandi* for international decision-making based on the recognition that the cherry-picking approach, whatever the specific issue, is likely to become the most often used configuration.

Adhering to this process, given an out-of-area mission, America should always try to attain the full cooperation and support of an international institution such as NATO in line with European concerns. However, failing this, America should then try to assemble a coalition of the willing within NATO through the Combined Joint Task Force process. If that fails, the U.S. should try for a coalition of the willing outside international organizations, then attempt to bring along bilateral support, and only as a last resort take unilateral action.

Such a decision-making process ought to be endorsed by both Washington and Europe, acknowledging that while it is essential for America to bring along as many allies as it can on a particular issue, Washington simply cannot allow a cacophonous Europe to derail political and security initiatives.

Conclusion

Foreign policy is as much about heading off problems as it is about crisis management; a cherry-picking strategy is likely to stop in its tracks any chance of a French-led coalition challenging American primacy. Continental Europe presents the United States with an opportunity: It has yet to embrace the French line regarding American power. It remains divided into Gaullist and Atlanticist camps. A Europe of many voices, where the nation-state is again seen as the primary decision-making unit in formulating foreign policy, will best suit American interests well into the future.

In addition, helping to retard the perpetuation of a Franco–German–Russian alliance designed to balance the U.S. must be seen as a primary American national interest. In the particular case of the anti-

1. Statement by confidential source to the author, May 15, 2001.

American coalition over Iraq, there is ample evidence that most European countries are amenable to such a strategy.

National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice was wrong when she recently said, "Punish the French, ignore the Germans, and forgive the Russians." A cherry-picking approach would lead to a different conclusion: "Ignore the French (though work with

them where possible), and engage the Germans and the Russians." This is by far the best way to secure America's diplomatic advantage in the wake of the Iraq war.

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