

The World

The Alliance is Dead. Long Live the New Alliance.

By JOSEF JOFFE

WHAMBURG, Germany
HERE are those Bolsheviks when you need them? It was only a matter of time before the First Law of Alliances would kick in for NATO: Alliances die when they win. This is the underlying reason for Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's coldly calculated anti-American gambit in the run-up to last Sunday's German election.

Of course, Germany and America won't sulk in their corners forever. In the end, President Bush will talk to Chancellor Schröder again; in the end, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld will stop snubbing his German counterpart, Peter Struck. Undoubtedly, Joschka Fischer, the old and new German foreign minister who was one of Madeleine Albright's darlings, will soon descend on Washington to chat up Condi Rice and Colin Powell.

If there is a war against Iraq, the Germans won't close their air space or American bases on their soil to the United States Air Force. And if the United States wins, Germans will show up afterward in a mission of peace and reconstruction. This is the post-election consensus, as it is now shaping up in Berlin.

Nonetheless, the tear in the German-American relationship won't be patched up soon. Alliances die when they win: this truth is more enduring than this particular flare-up.

No German chancellor would ever have dared to refuse a call from Washington, as Mr. Schröder did, while Moscow's armies were still poised at the gates of Hamburg and West Berlin. Nor would any German chancellor have deliberately pushed the button of anti-Americanism and pacifism for electoral gain.

That it was done in the year 2002 has structural rather than ideological or personal reasons. Germany no longer needs American strategic protection; at least the rent Berlin is willing to pay for this shelter has plummeted. Nor is this the end of the story, for the price America is prepared to pay for alliance cohesion has also dropped.

AMERICAN recalculation of alliance benefits is concisely reflected in the Rumsfeld Doctrine: "The worst thing you can do is allow a coalition to determine what your mission is." Peel off the outer layer of this phrase, and you detect a more ominous message: NATO is dead. At least, "NATO I," the anti-Soviet alliance formed in 1949, is dead.

NATO I, dedicated to the Three Musketeers' principle of "all for one, and one for all," is being replaced by "NATO II." This new alliance is no longer the embodiment

of a unilateral security guarantee by the United States to the Europeans, but a collection of nation-states from which Washington draws coalition partners ad hoc.

Or put it this way: NATO II is not a pact, but a pool. Accordingly, in NATO II's first war — in Afghanistan — some, but only some, members acted as chosen hand-maidens, not as foreordained beneficiaries of American might.

NATO II will have a variable geometry. Those willing and able will form the coalition du jour when America comes calling. Yesteryear's fixed menu will be replaced by one that allows the United States to pick and choose à la carte.

In 1999, the alliance took in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. This year, at its summit in Prague in November, it is set to induct seven more: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, according to American and European officials.

With its 19-plus-7 members, NATO II is going to look like a small United Nations, with the tiny and weak like Latvia coexisting with medium-sized giants like Britain, France and Germany. This is where the Second Law of Alliances comes in: "The larger, the weaker." This heterogeneous apparatus is far too cumbersome to draw strength from sheer numbers.

BUT let's not forget the largest (though informal) newcomer of them all: Vladimir V. Putin's Russia. In what diplomatic historians would (almost) call a reversal of alliances, Russia has (almost) become America's best partner-in-arms.

Without Moscow's consent, American bases in Central Asia, the soft underbelly of the former Soviet Union, would have remained out of reach during the Afghan campaign.

Also, the moment Mr. Putin dropped Russia's hostility to missile defense, opposition in China and Europe was all but neutralized.

So, "poisoned" or not (as Ms. Rice characterized it at the low point last week), the German-American relationship is but a small chink in America's new armor. For the alliance is now a moveable coalition.

Washington can play Russia against the rest of Europe and, within Europe, the smaller countries against the larger ones.

Poland and some of the other East European newcomers certainly like the Americans in the game because it gives them some leverage against Berlin and Paris.

Nor is this the end of what you might call a "Kissingerian Game." While Germany will not participate directly in a war against Iraq, France and Britain will in the end go along. These ex-imperial powers have not forgotten their realpolitik.

Quelle: NYT

New York Times

Sonntag

29.09.2002

Nr:

52.256

Seite:

D3

The World

Meanwhile, the Europeans are anxiously looking at their economies (down) and at the price of oil (up). And they are anxiously peering at the American Gulliver across the sea, trying to figure out what is worse:

an America that does go to war, or an America that will go on debating the issue, now and forever.
Josef Joffe is editor of the German weekly Die Zeit and an associate at the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard.

Associated Press

Flanked by American and German flags, an American soldier stands guard at U.S. Army headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany.