

I R A Q

VIEWPOINT

Collateral Damage

Schröder's antiwar policy has ruptured

Germany's historic alliance with the U.S.

Josef Joffe

LET'S DOFF OUR HATS TO THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE West: Saddam Hussein. The war against him is still a few weeks off, but it has already claimed three prominent casualties: European unity, NATO and the U.S.-German relationship.

EUROPEAN UNITY: When French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, hoping to refurbish their creaking "axis," pledged to join forces to oppose the American-led effort against Baghdad, other European heads of government were not amused—either by the duo's attempt to grab the crown of Continental leadership or by the implicit anti-American thrust of their strategy. The counterthrust came in the form of two open letters, splashed across the front pages of Europe's newspapers, in which 18 countries agreed to stand together against Saddam—and at the side of the U.S. There went the European Union's grand vision of a common foreign and security policy.

NATO: Round 2 seems to be going to Chirac and Schröder. Supported by the great power of Belgium, they inflicted swift revenge on the U.S. by vetoing Washington's request to start planning for the defense of Turkey in case of an Iraqi attack. Mind you, it was only planning, not execution—a no-cost symbolic gesture to reassure the most exposed member of the alliance. It was still too much for the axis-turned-triangle, and there went the "all for one, and one for all" rule at the very heart of the alliance. NATO's new motto is: "Some for one, some of the time."

THE U.S.-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP: What a sad denouement! Bound by solid mutual interest, the U.S. and the Federal Republic were cornerstones of the Atlantic alliance for 50 years. Alas, no more. For reasons perhaps not fully fathomed even by Schröder himself, the Chancellor moved from injury last summer to insurrection this winter. What began as a desperate domestic ploy to save his sinking electoral campaign has escalated into full-blown antagonism. Schröder seems like a man on a mission to stop the war—together with the French, Russians and Chinese. He could have taken a far cheaper way out by telling Mr. Bush: "Look, we don't have the military manpower and the public support. You leave us alone, and we'll give you benevolent neutrality plus the

use of our air space and your bases in Germany." That would have earned him sour smiles in Washington, but not clenched teeth. Why this refusal to heed the lessons of Diplomacy 101?

Perhaps the answer is as old as international politics itself. Perhaps Schröder, Chirac *et al.* have become too uncomfortable with Gulliver Unbound, with an American giant whose strength is no longer stalemated by the Soviet Union. They may see America's power play, let alone its triumph, in

Quelle: TIM

Montag

Nr:

Seite:

Time (international)

24.02.2003

8

28

the Middle East as a greater evil than Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction. If so, the name of the game is to put the ropes back on Gulliver.

Will Schröder's electorate go along? The mood is curiously ambivalent. Seven out of 10 oppose the war, but 7 out of 10 would also vote against his

Social Democrats if there were elections today. Schröder's popularity has dropped 23 points since his re-election in September. Voters are deeply disappointed by Schröder's domestic failures: unemployment and taxes are up, growth is at a standstill. But

there is also the gnawing sense that Schröder has taken them a bridge too far. To ditch the cozy American alliance was not part of the deal. Presumably, this was also the message Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer delivered to Schröder in a widely reported shouting match behind closed doors.

If the alliance is at an end, the new game is the old game of nation states. No more privileged relationships, just ever-changing marriages of convenience. The history of international politics whispers that this was bound to happen once the balance of power tilted as drastically as it did when the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving America the last remaining superpower. Saddam Hussein has scored three victories just by sitting tight. As the intra-Western war continues, his prediction to the Egyptian weekly *Al-*

Usbou last November may yet come true: "We have to buy some more time, and the American-British coalition will disintegrate."

Josef Joffe is editor of the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit

ISOLATED Schröder's antiwar stance hasn't helped his popularity at home

ARND WIEGMANN—REUTERS