

Germany Need Not Stay France's Junior Partner

written by: [Christian Hacke](#), 10-Aug-04.

Germany must return to its classic mediating policy between Paris and Washington

The Iraq war has brought developments to light that otherwise might have been neglected: Germany's diminishing role in the Atlantic community and America's strengthened leadership in the world. Without a doubt, American primacy has even more expanded in the last months and remains the major dynamism in international relations. Criticism of certain arrogant American attitudes might be legitimate, but France's increasingly tiresome rhetorical effort to transform Europe into a unified balancer of American power seems not only arrogant but impotent as well. America will continue to lead in transatlantic and world affairs, and it is questionable what role Europe will choose to play.

During the Iraq debacle, President Chirac—following the tradition of Richelieu, Talleyrand, and de Gaulle—tried to assume the role of the continent's leader. His pompous "le roi c'est moi"-attitude is directed against all who hold a different view of what Europe should look and act like. Since Chancellor Schroeder distanced himself in the most undiplomatic manner from the Bush administration, the French president has accomplished what his predecessors could not achieve: to diminish Germany's rank and role in Europe and in relations to the U.S. by closely binding it as a junior partner to the side of France. For decades, Germany asserted that neither a purely Anglo-Saxon, nor a purely Francophile Europe emerged. Germany was the watchful guarantor of a firmly transatlantic Europe. Today, Germany has lost its role as mediator between London, Paris, and Washington.

Luckily, there are forces opposing this continental drift, filling the vacant spot. Most of all, it is Tony Blair's government that substitutes Germany as mediator. Blair nimbly keeps his distance from the U.S. and just recently suggested an interesting step-by-step model for a common European foreign and security policy *within* the transatlantic alliance. The election of the conservative Portuguese Barroso as new president of the EU commission is another sign for the rekindled strength of the Atlanticists in Europe. Europeans realize that the continent cannot be unified and renewed *ex negativo*, against the United States. European identity and integration can only be understood in reference to the example of American liberty and the history of responsible American power politics. The young democracies in Eastern and Western Europe are particularly aware of that. Therefore, Europe's enlargement towards the East is also a strengthening of its transatlantic ties and heritage.

It is high time for Germany to step out of the shadow of Paris and support Britain's positions. If the issue was only the disagreement over Iraq, the conflict of interests could be solved rather easily. For Paris, however, a more fundamental development is at stake—the row over Iraq is merely a symptom caused by deeper misgivings: France is working to establish an alternative model of the international landscape beyond American unipolarity, with a French-led Europe as balancing power. The relatively insignificant France of today wants to return to the global influence and greatness of yesterday on the shoulders of Europe by using Germany to weaken the U.S. This concept is anachronistic and inimical to Germany's interests.

Europeans should remember Hannah Arendt's vision of the Atlantic Civilization as the last best hope for occidental culture. The American historian Robert Palmer has written lucidly about how the term was coined in the wake of the American and French Revolutions at the end of the 18th century. Still, because of the World Wars, the idea of a common Atlantic civilization remained sheer theory until the downfall of Nazism in 1945. The implosion of the Soviet Empire 1989/1990 and the end of the division of Europe gave the Atlantic Civilization and its ideals of freedom, democracy, prosperity, and progress another, decisive boost. This chance for a political and cultural renewal needs to be used more vigorously by a united Germany in a united Europe, mediating between Anglo-Saxon and Francophile interests.

It is not appropriate for Germany to act as France's junior partner, but the role of America's junior partner in an Atlantic Civilization is powerful and agreeable. Such a cooperation would also restrain some of the more imperial impulses in Washington, because the U.S. had to pay more respect to its European partners in such an ambitious and far-reaching alliance. The Europeans, on the other hand, would have to restrain their hypocritical impulses and address the "forbidden question": Isn't the world better off with an American primacy, embedded in the context of an Atlantic Civilization, than with the loose talk about a multipolar world order with a non-existing, common and united European pole?

In the framework of an Atlantic Civilization, Europeans had a very good chance of becoming a true partner again, taken seriously by the Americans, whereas the French vision would bring international isolation and weakness. Germany and the other Europeans could do more justice to their international responsibility in a true partnership with the U.S. than they could independently.

This vision of an Atlantic Europe as a pillar of the Atlantic Civilization must be realized. The precondition is that Berlin detaches itself from the self-serving leadership of France and returns to its traditional role as critical and prudent mediator.



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