



Franco-American Discord

To the Editor:

Mr. Hodgson's view of historical U.S.-French relations (Godfrey Hodgson, "Great Vote, Grisly Result': Europe's Reaction to the Reelection of George Bush," *WPJ*, winter 2004/05) misses the central fact that these two nations were never "married" in the first place. Therefore, this "old couple" could not possibly be headed for a divorce. Instead, a brief account of French-American relations indicate two countries separated by common values, who have been, and continue to be, competitors during important international events. Consequently, U.S. policymakers and foreign policy experts should be focusing on how to secure American national interests and global leadership. History has shown France has the same goals of global leadership as the United States, but not the same will or means to accomplish this goal. This results in obstructionism, envy, and in recent times, the ill-fated manipulations by France during the lead up to the war in Iraq.

In contrast to Higonnet's belief that U.S.-French relations soured during the 1840s, the facts prove otherwise. During the American Revolution, the government of France actively conspired against American interests, despite offering aid, as any reading of the interactions between the Comte de Vergennes, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin will show. Republicans and Federalists lined up for and against England and France during the first days of the U.S. republic. Despite the assistance that France gave to the United States during the Revolution, President Washington maintained a policy of neutrality when France declared

war on England during the days of the French Revolution. It should be recalled that Washington fought the French during the French and Indian War. During the presidencies of Washington and Adams, the Citizen Genet and XYZ Affair shook the very foundations of the fledging U.S. government and nation. Mr. Genet had the temerity to challenge President Washington's power, and broke all diplomatic conventions.

During the First World War there was considerable tension between General Foch and General Pershing on who would lead American troops, with the French believing in their superiority, despite three years of inconclusive war with Germany. Generals Girard's and de Gaulle's obstructionism during the Second World War, and the treachery of Marshal Pétain are well known. French obstructionism led to needless Allied deaths during the landings at Oran. President de Gaulle's conflict with the United States over the Suez crisis and NATO, and French atrocities during the Algerian insurrection, also support the argument.

It cannot be said that the United States and France were ever close allies. Like all countries, France has been "with us" when it has been to its advantage. Therefore, the current "outrage" on both the French and American sides may simply be a process of bringing out in the open something that has always been there.

In this regard, the so-called neoconservatives may very well be correct in "calling a spade a spade" and arguing for powerful American global leadership, regardless of

continuing tension with the French, and regardless of who approves or disapproves of our global leadership. If not the United States, who will lead the world?

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Mr. Hodgson replies:

Dr. Greenberg makes some valid points about the long history of disagreement and conflict between France and the United

States. Of course such friction can usually be found between what used to be called “the Powers.” So long as it does not lead to war, it can be seen as healthy. Certainly the record of suspicion and conflict between Britain and the United States is at least as long and as bad-tempered as that of Franco-American discord. Dr. Greenberg’s last sentence is interesting. Why must anyone “lead the world”? ●