

Who Is with Whom: The United States, the European Union, and Russia on the Eve of War in Iraq

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In the first few months after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, America basked in expressions of sympathy from its friends and allies. Both the European Union (EU) and Russia went out of their way to assure President George W. Bush of their full support and determination to join in the common struggle against world terrorism. The United States discovered new strength and determination to stand up for itself against the scourge of terrorism. One could hear assurances that NATO was as strong as ever and that American armed forces were second to none. U.S. deputy secretary of defense Paul Wolfowitz praised the unity of NATO member states.¹ There was nothing to worry about.

However, even then fundamental disagreements divided the United States and its key allies. The idyllic unity turned out to be a mirage. A year and a half after 11 September the cracks in the alliance have turned into irreconcilable differences. Let us face the facts: The allies are not really allies anymore. Not only did one key NATO member, Germany, publicly declare that it would not support American action in Iraq, but another key ally, France, announced that it would lead the opposition to the American war on Iraq.

Relations between the United States and France are worse than they've been since the Suez crisis of 1956. For the first time since World War II, Germany dared to openly challenge U.S. policy. Russia was promoted to the status of a trusted partner after 11 September, but then wound up in the camp of the staunchest opponents of the United States. Moreover, all attempts to formulate a joint European posture have collapsed. The former Soviet bloc countries back U.S. policy but applied to join an EU led by France and Germany. Spain supports the United States, and Italy cannot decide. The EU is as divided as NATO and its future is bleak. There is no military alliance between the United States and Europe as a whole. All attempts to paper over differences in NATO have led nowhere. Instead

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of a united NATO there is a de facto alliance of France and Germany, backed by Russia, directed against the U.S.-led war. Old alliances are breaking up and new alliances are emerging. Instead of NATO, there is a military alliance of the United States and the willing. And there are very few willing, chiefly Britain, and reluctantly at that. Let us face the new reality: NATO is not engaged in the war with Iraq. NATO was not engaged in the war in Afghanistan. NATO is not a part of the most important military action since 1991. In the second major international conflict of the twenty-first century, NATO has been playing no role at all.

The United States has entered a period of unilateral decision making and self-confident assertion of its military might, disregarding the views of its allies if they are opposed to its chosen course. The United States does not need NATO, Russia, or the UN, as the latest pronouncements show. The United States can handle it all alone. The question here is not whether America can disregard friend and foe alike, but why it is in the mood to do so.

The system of international relations is going through a period of dissolution and reconstitution. What is the cause of the deep crisis in America's relations with France, Germany, and Russia? How serious is the damage? Will NATO, the UN, and the EU survive this crisis?

The New World View in Europe

The current crisis in relations between the United States and some of its key Western allies is rooted in the new understanding in Europe and in the United States of the tasks and challenges facing the world after the end of the cold war. The EU leaders—and that means France and Germany—saw their main task as furthering integration of a larger Europe, and they moved quickly in that direction. The creation of the Euro zone was the crowning result of fifty years of hard work started by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and President Charles De Gaulle. A united Europe, led by France and Germany, seemed to be the reality in 2002.

The difference from the situation at the time of Adenauer, however, is that then Germany could not afford to alienate the United States, since Soviet armies were stationed in the middle of Germany. When danger ceased to loom from the east, Germany continued to play the role of an obedient and subservient ally out of gratitude and habit. Germany had to remain humble. However, under the leadership of the Social Democrats, Germany has slowly become much more aware of its central place in Europe, and the role it has chosen is that of economic engine and pacifist leader, together with France.

France was not tied by the consequences of World War II and limitations on its sovereignty as Germany was. Moreover, after De Gaulle, France realized that it could play a leading role in Europe only in alliance with Germany. German economic might was necessary for France's own development. Both countries needed the other and synchronized their policies a long time ago. A truly historic change has occurred slowly—an economic, political, and military merger of Germany and France.

Far more important was the rise of a new *Geist*, as the Germans say, or *Esprit d'temps*, in French. A change of generations has taken place in Germany. The cur-

rent leaders see the world in a much different way than their fathers. Germany went through nothing less than a cultural revolution in the 1980s. Joschka Fischer, the foreign minister and a leader of the Greens, is the product of the peace movement of the 1980s, which in Germany was a period of national questioning of what Germany is and what it had done wrong. The members of this generation grew up feeling guilty about their own country. They spent their formative years in universities where the crimes of the Nazis were seen as their own shame. In the 1980s almost every town in Germany opened a holocaust museum; universities established chairs in holocaust studies; and Jewish studies were back on the curriculum. Nazi crimes, taboo for decades, became a subject of national debate. The Greens and the Social Democrats raised the question of their own responsibility for today's world. The answer was unequivocal: to take the lead in environmental protection, to prevent racial prejudice, to preserve peace.

A national debate about morality, responsibility, humanism, and the role of Germany as a nation in the heart of Europe dominated the scene. As a result, a new generation of Germans grew up in a new culture. Its key values excluded the search for strategic superiority. Victory in the cold war was not a matter of pride. It was a culture where the very concept of war or use of force was alien, where emphasis was put on reconciliation, and where a joint responsibility for peace (*verantwortungsgemeinschaft*) was expected. Pacifism became the main ideology in the country. Despite the fact that noisy gangs of skinheads there regularly attack Turks and other Asians and Africans, the mainstream public opinion is profoundly tolerant of other cultures and pacifist in its world view. Since the Social Democrats and the Greens depend on each other to retain a slight majority in the Bundestag, German foreign policy became even more pacifist and anti-American. A rift between the United States and Germany was long in the making; it was bound to happen. The coming to power of the Bush administration only hastened the process already under way.

The new Republican administration could only despise all this pacifist German rhetoric. The United States regards Europeans as weak, incapable of action, succumbing to appeasement of terrorists, and trying to act as if they had moral superiority. The German press writes about the anti-Europeanism of Americans and a deep division in values. Americans are seen as indifferent to the plight of poorer countries, to the problems of the environment, and to human rights. The new element in today's estrangement is that it is mutual. The alleged anti-Europeanism of Americans is well matched by anti-Americanism in Europe. Bush's program of strategic defense caused the opposition of the Germans long before 11 September. They perceived American strategic initiatives as a search for military superiority over a nonexistent enemy. The German press denounces American "universalism," that is, a propensity to dictate to the world what is good for it.²

If in Germany the new anti-American posture can be explained by the rise of a new pacifist generation, in France the same was a result of a long-lasting Gaullist tradition. President De Gaulle led France out of the NATO military structure in 1966. That the French army would take orders only from the French was the essence of the Gaullist approach. The priority for the French was to pre-

serve independence of action in foreign affairs and thus sustain its status as a Great Power.

In France, U.S. assertiveness caused an even more hostile reaction. The French perceived Bush's projection of force as typical American arrogance that had to be opposed. The French press criticized the American incomprehension of other cultures and other countries, total preoccupation with its own needs, and excessive readiness to use force at every opportunity.³ As a result, commentators write that France "would prefer to replace NATO with united armed forces of Europe."⁴ As in the time of De Gaulle and Adenauer, one often hears proposals for the creation of a separate Franco-German army as an armed force outside NATO or U.S. command. The policies of President Bush made the conflict break out into the open sooner, but it had been ripening for a long time.

The Russian Policy

The role of Russia in the current drama boils down to three fundamental questions: Why did Russia pursue a policy of seeking partnership and even an alliance with the United States in the wake of 11 September? Why did this spirit of cooperation turn out to be so short-lived? What is Russia seeking now with its policy of cautious opposition to the U.S. war on Iraq?

To answer these questions one would have to explain first how Vladimir Putin defined the national interests of Russia when he became president. His priority, just like that of his predecessor, was to preserve as much of the Great Power status for Russia as possible. The difference in his approach was that where Yeltsin tended to assert Russian claims by unilateral action and occasional threats, Putin resolutely decided to pursue a policy of cooperation with the West. He rightly calculated that much more would be achieved by partnership than by confrontation or reckless pressure by a bygone superpower. As a result, Putin sought first and foremost a new arms control agreement, which has long been associated with Great Power status.

The Bush administration was very reluctant at first to be tied to any formal arms control agreement. In the end, however, the arms control agreement was signed, although its provisions were so flexible that the treaty did not control anything. Each side could have enough missiles to satisfy their most ambitious needs for many years to come. Yet appearances were preserved and Putin was seen shaking hands with Bush at several summits.

Despite this, it was clear to attentive observers well before 11 September that the Bush administration policy toward Russia lacked compromise. On the two matters of fundamental importance to Russia—the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and the expansion of NATO—the United States made no concessions at all. Both issues were symbolic. The ABM treaty was a reminder that Russia was still a nuclear power on equal footing with the United States. The Russians perceived abrogation of the treaty as a naked assertion of U.S. military superiority. The public outcry was not loud, yet one could feel that the military establishment was incensed by the U.S. action. Putin subdued that reaction and made the treaty less of a public priority than it otherwise would have been.

NATO expansion likewise was a matter not so much of strategic importance as of symbolic appearance. It underscored the fact that former satellites distrusted Russia and still craved protection chiefly from the United States. So on the eve of 11 September, U.S.–Russian relations were marred by what the Russians saw as unilateral assertion of American military superiority and tactless expansion of NATO.

The events of 11 September gave Putin a chance to set aside those grievances and redefine the national agenda. Now he claimed that the fight against terrorism united U.S. and Russian policy objectives. That gave him a chance to portray the Chechen colonial war as a war against terrorism and sell it as such to the U.S. administration. In this Putin was largely successful, and a short period of partner-

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ship and cooperation between the United States and Russia followed during the Afghan campaign. However, even then the Russian General Staff was unhappy with the presence of U.S. troops in Central Asian republics. What caused an angry outcry was the stationing of the American contingent in Georgia. The view in so-called patriotic circles was

that the United States was just using the new partnership to advance its military presence everywhere, including former Soviet republics.

What turned Russian irritation into opposition was the way the Bush administration handled the United Nations. As early as summer 2002 the Bush administration acted as if it did not need a UN Security Council resolution to go to war against Iraq. The administration sought UN support but always made it clear that it reserved the option to act without the Security Council if it chose to do so. That was unacceptable to Russia.

For Russia the UN has been and still is very important. Russian permanent membership on the Security Council and veto power is one of the very few remaining vestiges of its former Great Power status. The decline of the UN and of the Security Council is a decline of Russian importance in world affairs. Every time the Bush administration denied that it needed a UN mandate to go to war with Iraq, Russia felt that its prerogatives and rights were being impinged on.

Putin tried to pursue a very cautious course. On the one hand, he sent a signal of understanding to the United States by saying that every country had a right to pursue its own foreign policy, which was widely understood as tolerance of the U.S. pressure on Iraq to open itself to inspections. On the other hand, Putin made it clear that Russia would oppose disregard for the UN Security Council. So the Russian position coincided for different reasons with those of France and Germany. All three wanted to preserve the leading role of the UN Security Council in matters of war and peace. All three were opposed to the use of force and especially to unilateral American military action.

New Priorities of the Republican Administration

No doubt the American military machine was put into motion by the tragic events of September 2001. However, it is worth remembering that U.S. foreign policy was assertive well before 11 September. Right after coming to power, President George W. Bush defined the priorities of his Republican administration as abandoning the antimissile defense treaty with the Russians, building a space shield against ballistic missiles, and expanding NATO. This agenda certainly exceeded what was acceptable to the Clinton administration. It was the beginning of a new phase of American foreign policy.

There are several major causes for this new Republican assertiveness. The first is the strong dislike of the liberal policies of President Bill Clinton. The enmity between Democrats and Republicans had seldom reached such levels of hostility as were seen during the years of the Clinton administration. It seemed that there were no visible causes for this. The economy was flourishing. The cold war was won. There were no threats to the United States on the horizon. However, it was then that the Republicans launched a bitter opposition to Clinton's course. He was accused of being too lenient toward Yeltsin's Russia, of not pursuing missile defense, and of taking a soft stance toward North Korea.

The second contributing factor to the new assertiveness of American foreign policy was the unheard-of positive balance of payments. It appeared as if there would be enough money for everything. The economy looked like it would generate hundreds of billions of dollars in revenues that could pay for expensive rearmament programs. America was basking in a self-congratulatory mood. It had the strongest armed forces in the world, the most powerful economy, and the most advanced technology. It was the envy of the entire world. Typical was a feeling of superiority over Europe and the rest of the world.

The Democrats managed to focus public attention during the 2000 election campaign on social issues: pensions, elderly health care, and education. It is almost forgotten now that President Bush, as candidate Bush, styled himself as an education president, cultivating the support of the needy and of the Hispanics. The Republican strategy was to win the White House on the platform of educational reform and strong defense by attracting voters from the traditional constituencies of the Democrats. The plan worked. This feeling of confidence generated the new agenda; to secure missile defense and offensive capability equal to none.

The third contributing factor to the new Republican foreign policy is their profound aversion to the role that America played under Clinton, the role of a pacifist peacekeeper. The Republicans reiterated that the United States was not responsible for maintaining order in distant lands. The United States should not be sending peacekeeping missions to separate warring national minorities in the Balkans. The U.S. armed forces should be deployed only in defense of American national interests. Humanitarian missions, peacekeeping, and arms control agreements were to be done away with. America could not be responsible for feeding the hungry all over the world and for maintaining peace and democracy everywhere.

One could sense well before 11 September an emphasis not on cooperation with the allies, not on the search for a new arms control agreement with the Rus-

sians, but on the desire to build a shield around fortress America, to disengage from world problems of poverty, the environment, and human rights. This policy can be called assertive disengagement. The United States would assert its military presence anywhere in the world, yet it would disengage from the Kyoto protocol and from famine and civil wars in Africa.

To convince the public that the enormous expenditure for missile defense was necessary, the Bush administration focused on the so-called pariah states—Iran, North Korea, and later Iraq. These countries allegedly were building weapons of mass destruction, and the United States had to respond by providing a defensive capability for itself and its allies. Critics maintained that the danger from the rogue states was much exaggerated and that the real reason for the weapons of mass destruction scare was the desire of some corporations to receive lucrative defense contracts. Although clearly no missile defense could have safeguarded the United States from the terrorist attacks in September 2001, President Bush declared that missile defense was still a top priority. At the end of 2001 the United States officially announced that it was abandoning the ABM treaty.

The events of 11 September sped up the process, already under way, of asserting American military might everywhere in the world. The terrorist acts in New York and Washington made it possible to justify dispatching American troops to a dozen countries where they had never been present before. The troops were stationed not to maintain local peace or distribute food, but to chase terrorists and to create the technical capability to monitor missile launches anywhere in the world. The United States has never sent troops to so many countries with such ease before without clearly defining their mission and duration of engagement. The goal in Washington after 11 September was to end states' harboring terrorists.

The relative ease of the Afghan campaign made U.S. policy more ambitious. Next in line were the pariah states, and Iraq was first among those. Why was Iraq chosen as the next target of American anger? Its involvement in 11 September was never proven and its possession of weapons of mass destruction did not appear to be an immediate threat to the United States. The United States has lived with the Soviet and North Korean threats for decades. Was it a desire to teach American foes a lesson? Was it a move to finish the job started in 1991? Whatever the cause of the decision to go to war, it was evident to attentive observers that Bush set out on that course in fall 2002.

During the presidential election campaign in fall 2000, candidate Bush, in a televised debate with Vice President Al Gore, said that the United States had to be a humble power, to which Gore responded that he agreed. The point of that exchange was that the United States, as the only world superpower, carried a special responsibility in world affairs. It could not afford to throw its weight around. It had to remain humble to preserve the respect of others. However, Bush's foreign policy can hardly be called humble. Today America is asserting its military might. It is projecting its power all over the world. It has sent its troops to Yemen, the Philippines, Central Asian republics, and Georgia, not to mention Afghanistan. It has threatened to use force against North Korea and China. It has offered billions of dollars in compensation for permission to station troops in Turkey. It has

placed North Korea on the blacklist of the pariah states. It has literally bought votes at the Security Council of the United Nations. It has embarked on a full-scale war on Iraq. All these measures are said to be necessary to fight terrorism.

Terrorism has existed for many decades. It can be defined as a struggle of a group of people to achieve political objectives by violent means. In Ireland, Spain, and Russia the war with the terrorists has been waged for many years, if not decades. Is Bush waging a war on terrorism as such, or on each and every manifestation of terrorist activity in any and all countries? Judging by the experience of the United Kingdom, Russia, or Spain, the latter war cannot be won. If, however, the United States is waging a war on Al Qaeda or on Islamic fundamentalists, then why is there a war on Iraq? Henry Kissinger in his book *Diplomacy* noted that an American president, before sending American troops anywhere, must clearly define the mission and the ways and means of achieving victory.⁵ How will deposing Saddam Hussein guarantee the capture of Osama bin Laden? Are we going after the secondary objective for the second time? Without a clear-cut definition of what constitutes victory, it will always be elusive and new enemies will continually appear. The fact is that, due to the new world view of the Republican administration on the one hand and the new consensus among Germany, France, and Russia on the other, neither side can accept the other's policy priorities.

The Rift among the Allies

As we have seen, fundamental differences in foreign policy objectives divided the United States and pacifist continental powers. However, the expansion of NATO was taking place on schedule. In fall 2002 another bunch of eager former Soviet satellites flocked into NATO. This was the time to celebrate. Despite the self-congratulatory speeches, the problems of NATO started with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the cold war, NATO was set up to keep Russia out, Germany down, and the United States in. Under NATO command were all German troops, no French troops, and only some U.S. troops. This was an effective formula that suited all the parties concerned. It worked well to contain a possible Soviet thrust into Central and Western Europe, if that idea was ever tried by the Politbureau. As soon as that threat disappeared, NATO was left without a purpose. The alliance tried to define its new role as a peacekeeper, and that worked as long as one could still identify imperial ambitions of Russia or the need for a peacekeeping mission in the Balkans. Yet the pacifist European public was increasingly skeptical about the usefulness of NATO. In Germany there have been many articles about a serious crisis of NATO, which is increasingly called a relic of the cold war. Quite popular is the expression "*NATO zu Grabe*," NATO to the grave.⁶

The real test of NATO as a military alliance was when the United States tried to enlist NATO in the Afghan campaign. As is well known, that campaign unfolded with the minimal participation of NATO countries, as Afghanistan is, of course, outside of NATO's sphere of responsibility, a convenient excuse. Only Britain chose to play the role of a U.S. ally. As for Germany and France, they sent token support as a gesture of symbolic participation. NATO as a military alliance

did not take part in the Afghanistan campaign, which in retrospect looks like a precursor to the clash over Iraq. Paul Wolfowitz wanted to put the best possible face on that apparent lack of cohesion and phrased it like this: “different coalitions for different missions.”⁷ He meant that for the war against terrorism there was one coalition, and for other missions there may be others—an admission that the United States was moving away from the model of a U.S.–European united front in favor of allying itself with various countries that could prove useful for a particular mission, as Pakistan and Russia did for the Afghan campaign.

In France and Germany this willingness to act alone was perceived as American arrogance. The French commentators summarized the new U.S. policy as “a right to act without support of the allies.”⁸ In France the feeling was well expressed by Jacques Isnard, who wrote, “[A]lliances are nothing more than Kleenex paper which can be thrown away to satisfy special interests of Americans and no one else in the world.”⁹ It is not so much the goal of fighting terrorism that so upset the European allies as the way the U.S. administration went about it, in a manner that was perceived as unilateral, arrogant, and heedless of the views and ideas of others.

By summer 2002, the lines were drawn fairly clearly. Paris and Berlin knew that Washington would launch a military strike against Iraq. In response, France and Germany pursued their own courses of action, and Britain pursued another. All this was taking place in the context of election campaigns in France and Germany and of the fear of Britain to be left as the only ally of the Americans.

From the British perspective, both France and Germany were in the grip of abstract principles rather than national interests.¹⁰ Germany, the British rightly perceived, was becoming a militantly pacifist country, likely to oppose any use of force anywhere. However, a militantly pacifist Germany was something the Western powers sought after World War II. The French, from the British perspective, were so afraid of the domestic conflict over the religious and national issues that Jacques Chirac chose a policy of nonconfrontation with Iraq as a way to subdue national and religious tensions with the Arabs at home. The British commentators noted that the Arabs in France were upset not over the prospect of war with Iraq, but over discrimination at home. The French thus engaged in appeasement at home and pacifism abroad.

The British claim to have prevailed on Bush in August 2002 to abandon plans for military action against Iraq before exhausting the possibilities of UN inspections. So the British policy was to tread a careful line, balancing between the U.S. desire for action and the EU’s insistence on inspections. In their alliance, the United States and Britain were not on equal terms. Britain served as a reluctant follower that backed U.S. policy not because of identical understanding of the threat, but out of loyalty to the United States and because U.S. friendship was, as Blair put it, in the interests of British security.

From the point of view of Berlin in 2002, the United States was ignoring the allies and NATO. Some Greens put it in harsher terms, saying that the United States was treating Germany as a satellite, the way the Soviets had treated the East Germans. *Die Zeit* said, “They have neither time nor desire” to build the coalition of countries as in 1991.¹¹ As the election campaign in Germany gained

momentum and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder seemed to be trailing somewhat in the polls, he stepped up criticism of the Americans. Schroeder's comments were perceived in Washington as an affront, and the U.S. ambassador started openly criticizing the chancellor. The Germans took this as an unheard-of intervention into German domestic politics on the eve of the elections. The reaction was swift and uncompromising. Schroeder announced that Germany, if he were elected chancellor, would not take part in the war against Iraq under any circumstances, with or without the UN sanction. This was the first time after World War II that Germany defied the United States openly. It was a clear signal that if the United States was inclined to act alone, Germany would too. Right after the elections in France, Chirac joined Schroeder and both challenged Bush together. The rift among the Western alliance was now in the open.

The problem for Paris and Berlin was that the Central European countries turned out to be much less pacifist than Germany and much less interested in separate European policy than France. Not without some encouragement from the United States, they sided with a tough policy toward Iraq, which caused angry comments from Paris and Berlin. Eager not to be left with Britain as its only ally, the United States courted each and every tiny country it could find to enlist its symbolic support in the so-called coalition of the willing against Iraq. As a result, not only was NATO split, but the EU was split as well, with ever more acrimonious debate among its leaders. The German press referred to Blair as Bush's puppet. As one German commentator put it, "It has been clear for a long time that the Iraq crisis is no more than an accidental catalyst of a larger clash with the United States over its universalist ambition and that no country in the world other than France could afford to lead it."¹² As French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin said at the UN Security Council, at stake is much more than the Iraq campaign or the future of Saddam Hussein. At stake is the future of the world order, of the UN, of NATO, and of the relations between the Great Powers.

A historic decision was made on 5 March 2003: France, Germany, and Russia announced at the Security Council that they would vote against the war resolution, thus forming a new alliance. The chief purpose of that alliance was to restore the role of the UN Security Council, to curb what they perceived as American ambition to turn the UN into a rubber stamp for its unilateral policy, and to curtail America's excessive willingness to use force.

From the American perspective, France, Russia, and Germany have been engaged in obstructionist policy stemming from their envy of American power and influence. The United States is determined to reap the fruits of victory in the Iraq war and not surrender decision-making to UN bureaucracy. Consequently, the positions taken by the two camps seem to be drawn fairly clearly. In the coming months we shall probably witness the unfolding of the process to recast world institutions and the entire architecture of international relations.

NOTES

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3. Jacques Isnard, "La nouvelle doctrine nucleaire Americaine et L'Europe," *Le Monde*, 28 March 2002.

4. Constanze Stelzenmeller and Michel Thumann, "Kein Feind Kein Her &Apos," *Die Zeit*, 20 March 2002.

5. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

6. Stelzenmeller and Thumann, "Kein Feind Kein Her &Apos."

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8. Isnard, "La nouvelle doctrine nucleaire Americaine et L'Europe."

9. Ibid.

10. Anatole Kaletsky, "Idealists Shouldn't Be Allowed to Run the World," *Times* (London), 13 March 2003.

11. Stelzenmeller and Thumann, "Kein Feind Kein Her &Apos."

12. Joffe, "Irak-Konflikt Die Stricke reißen Europa, Russland, USA."