

# *Occasional Papers*

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December 2002

# n° 39

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## Iraq: the transatlantic debate

*published by*  
*the European Union*  
*Institute for Security Studies*  
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The European Union Institute for Security Studies  
Paris

*Director: Nicole Gnesotto*

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ISSN 1608-5000

Published by the EU Institute for Security Studies and printed in France by The Imprimerie Alençonnaise, graphic design by Claire Mabilie (Paris).

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### Iraq: the transatlantic debate

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*Most Americans see the regime of Saddam Hussein as a major threat to regional and international security that must be thwarted, even if that means threatening or even using military force. If Saddam were to acquire nuclear weapons, they fear, he would seek to use them to dominate the Middle East, possibly invading his neighbours as he has in the past and perhaps deterring the United States from stopping him. His nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, moreover, might end up in the hands of Islamic terrorists who would show no compunction about using them against the United States, or Saddam himself might do so out of a thirst for vengeance. Whereas failure to act in Iraq would make a mockery of the United Nations Security Council and international law, a decisive action to topple Saddam would liberate the Iraqi people, allow the United States to lift sanctions on Iraq and withdraw its forces from Saudi Arabia, and perhaps make progress toward a freer and more democratic Middle East.*

*Europeans do not deny that the Iraqi regime is a threat, but they question whether that threat is so pressing that the international community should run the risk of invading an Arab country in the heart of the Middle East. They fear that a war in Iraq could be extremely bloody – both for the invading forces and Iraqi civilians – especially if it led to urban combat or Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction. Even if the initial invasion went well militarily, they doubt that the international community would be able to impose stability and democracy in place of Saddam and worry instead about internal conflicts over resources and power, possibly leading to civil war. Europeans also fear that an attack on Iraq would distract from and possibly undermine the war on terrorism, and that it would set a dangerous precedent for the unilateral use of preventive force.*

*It will not be easy to overcome these differences in perspective – which result from a range of deeply rooted historical, cultural, strategic and domestic political factors. But it should not be impossible either. The United States has an interest in reaching agreement with Europe on Iraq because of the legitimacy and potential political and financial benefits that European support would bring. Europeans have an interest in agreement, because a US decision to invade Iraq unilaterally would undermine the UN Security Council, severely damage transatlantic relations, expose the weakness of Europe's common foreign policy and exclude European countries from influence in Iraq afterwards. By going to the United Nations on 12 September 2002 to demand fulfilment of UN Security Council resolutions, President Bush implicitly recognised the importance the United States attaches to winning allied support. And while Europeans may be sceptical that Bush will ever agree to anything short of regime change, they should know that their own policy decisions will strongly influence the debate in Washington: the more they can convince Americans that they are serious about demanding an end to Iraq's weapons of*

*mass destruction programmes, the more likely the United States will be to accept an outcome short of war.*

*This paper proposes a common US-European strategy: joining together to demand, under the threat of an invasion that would change the Baghdad regime, Iraq's full compliance with UN Security Council resolutions calling for an end to its weapons of mass destruction programmes. If Iraq failed to comply with a new UNSC resolution reiterating these demands and setting forth a new verification regime, the United States and Europe would together overthrow Saddam Hussein and undertake a major reconstruction and peacekeeping effort in Iraq. If, on the other hand, Saddam did give up his weapons of mass destruction under the credible threat of military force, the United States would forgo plans for invading Iraq so long as Baghdad complied with existing and new UNSC resolutions. Neither Americans who are determined to change the Iraqi regime nor Europeans resolutely opposed to war will be entirely satisfied with such an approach – the former because it might mean deferring regime change and the latter because it implies a readiness to go to war. But it is a far better course than either of the main alternatives: a potentially very costly US invasion of Iraq (even more costly if the United States has to bear responsibility for it alone) or having to live with a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein.*

## Introduction

It would be wrong to stereotype the positions of 'Americans' and 'Europeans' in the Iraq debate; in fact, there are a range of positions on both sides – and especially on the American side. It is, none the less, possible to speak broadly about predominant views on each side of the Atlantic. These differences are among the most powerful pieces of evidence for the now widespread thesis that Americans and Europeans are growing apart.

Most Americans see the regime of Saddam Hussein as a major threat to regional and international security that must be thwarted, even if that means threatening or even using military force. Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator who has ordered the invasion of several of his neighbours, killed thousands of Kurds and Iranians with poison gas, turned his own country into an impoverished police state and demonstrated an insatiable appetite for weapons of mass destruction. He funds Palestinian terrorists who attack Israeli civilians, tortures dissidents, and tries to disrupt world oil supplies. He is also almost certainly still trying to build nuclear weapons, and has been free of interference by UN weapons inspectors for nearly four years. While there may be no proof that Hussein has ties to the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation or was involved in the 11 September terrorist attacks, those attacks clearly demonstrated the kind of damage that could result if Iraq were to provide terrorists with biological or nuclear weapons. If Saddam had nuclear weapons himself, he could seek to dominate the entire Middle East, and the United States might in those circumstances be deterred from trying to stop him. These are the reasons why the US Congress overwhelmingly support-

ted a resolution authorising President Bush to use force in Iraq if he considers it necessary (the most expansive such resolution since before the Vietnam War), and why a majority of Americans support sending US combat forces to the region to do the job.<sup>1</sup>

Europeans do not deny that the Iraqi regime is a threat to the region or to the Iraqi people. They question, however, whether that threat is so pressing that the international community should run the risk of invading an Arab country in the heart of the Middle East. In contrast to the confidence of many Americans that using force to overthrow Saddam Hussein would be relatively easy and quick, Europeans fear that the invaders would inflict heavy casualties on the Iraqi civilian population, provoke Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against invading forces or neighbouring countries, or become bogged down in urban combat. Any of these scenarios would, in this view, have a disastrous effect on the attitudes of Muslim populations around the world, including the very large ones within Europe itself. Europeans also have serious concerns that a preventive war not explicitly authorised by the UN Security Council would sap the authority of the UN, undermine international law, and set a precedent for the unilateral use of force for other states in other regions, such as India, Israel, Pakistan or Russia. Perhaps most important, Europeans – who have their own histories of long and not always happy involvement in the Middle East – feel they know the region well and are dubious that even the powerful Americans can impose democracy and stability on a country that has never had much of either. These are the reasons why

<sup>1</sup> According to Gallup polls, since June 2002 the percentage of Americans supporting an invasion of Iraq has ranged from about 53-61 per cent, with those opposed ranging from 31-41 per cent. See 'Top Ten Findings About Public Opinion and Iraq', *Poll Analyses*, 8 October 2002 ([www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021008.asp?Version=p](http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021008.asp?Version=p)). See also note 29.

majorities in European populations oppose war, and why even those European governments that support the threat of force to bring about disarmament do not support the objective of regime change.<sup>2</sup>

Given all these differences, finding common ground between American and European views will not be easy. But it should not be impossible either. By going to the United Nations on 12 September 2002 to demand the fulfilment of UN Security Council resolutions, President Bush implicitly recognised the importance the United States attaches to winning allied support and legitimacy for an operation against Iraq. He also, at least in theory, held out the prospect that if Iraq demonstrably gave up its WMD programmes and stockpiles, the United States might forgo, at least for the time being, an invasion of that country to bring about regime change. While senior American officials including Vice-President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld have shown great scepticism that weapons inspections could ever provide enough assurance of Iraqi disarmament to make an invasion unnecessary, the President himself has never taken this line.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Bush's frequent assertions that 'Saddam Hussein must disarm' (as opposed to 'must

be removed') suggest that the non-negotiable US demand is disarmament, not regime change.<sup>4</sup> Both Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell have even put forward the notion that an Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein that did respect UN resolutions and disarm would in itself be a form of 'regime change'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while it is possible that Bush intends to overthrow Saddam Hussein this winter no matter what happens on the disarmament front, it is also possible – indeed probable – that if Iraq genuinely does begin a serious disarmament process the United States would put off plans to attack.<sup>6</sup>

Given all the American talk about the need for regime change, Europeans are understandably suspicious that the United States will seek to take advantage of the slightest sign of Iraqi non-compliance with weapons inspectors as a pretext for using force. But they should also understand that the outcome of the US debate between those who demand regime change and those who would settle for disarmament will be determined not only by the degree of Iraqi compliance but also by European actions themselves. The more Europeans are prepared to support a tough weapons inspections regime and the more prepared they are to credibly threaten force to implement it, the harder it will be for the

<sup>2</sup> Much is made of the different positions of main European governments, and it is true that Britain has expressed strong support for the United States, Germany is strongly opposed to war, and France is manoeuvring a careful course between the two. But it is also true that these different governmental stands operate within a broad European consensus – almost all Europeans would prefer to avoid war, want to see UN approval for any military action, and share the goal of Iraqi disarmament rather than regime change. For European opposition to war, see the polls cited in Tanya Willmer, 'European say no to war on Iraq', AFP, 2 October 2002; 'Polls show Europe divided over Iraq', BBC News, 1 October 2002, [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); Roland Eggleston, 'Germany: Schroeder Reiterates Berlin's Opposition to War on Iraq', Radio Free Europe, 12 August 2002, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org); and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Worldviews 2002: Comparing American and European Public Opinion on Foreign Policy* (Washington: October 2002), pp. 9-10. The GMF poll also showed that 86 per cent of Americans but only 57 per cent of Europeans believed Iraq's development of nuclear weapons was an 'extremely important threat'.

<sup>3</sup> In August 2002, Cheney argued that 'A return of inspectors would provide no assurance whatsoever of [Saddam's] compliance with UN resolutions. On the contrary, there is a great danger that it would provide false comfort that Saddam was somehow back in his box.' See Cheney's 26 August speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, excerpted as 'In Cheney's Words: The Administration Case for Removing Saddam Hussein', *New York Times*, 27 August 2002. A few weeks later Rumsfeld similarly questioned whether inspections could ever contain Iraq's pursuit of WMD. See his testimony to the Hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, 18 September 2002.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, 'President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat', Remarks by the President on Iraq, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, OH, White House Press Release, 7 October 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Powell has said that if Iraq were fully disarmed 'Then in effect you have a different kind of regime no matter who's in Baghdad'. See 'Powell: Disarmament, Not Hussein's Removal, Is Top U.S. Priority on Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2002. For Bush, see his comment in the Cincinnati speech cited above that 'Taking these steps [i.e., fulfilling the UN resolutions] would also change the nature of the Iraqi regime itself.'

<sup>6</sup> For a good assessment of the sometimes contradictory explanations of the Bush administration's main goals in Iraq, see Anthony Lewis, 'Bush and Iraq', *New York Review of Books*, vol. XLIX, no. 17, 7 November 2002, pp. 4-6.



United States to walk away from the disarmament process and act alone. Put differently, the more the Europeans resist tough disarmament measures and threats, the easier it will be for hawks in the US administration to argue that weapons inspections cannot be trusted, that finding serious allies is a lost cause, and that the United States should, if necessary, unilaterally use force to eliminate Saddam Hussein.

The main argument of this paper is that Europeans and Americans have a mutual interest in joining together to demand, under the threat of an invasion that would change the Baghdad regime, Iraq's full compliance with UN Security Council resolutions calling for an end to its WMD programmes. If Iraq failed to comply with a new UNSC resolution reiterating these demands and setting forth a new verification regime, the United States and Europe would together overthrow Saddam Hussein and undertake a major reconstruction and peace-keeping effort in Iraq. If, on the other hand, Saddam did give up his WMD under the credible

threat of military force, the United States would forgo plans for invading Iraq so long as Baghdad complied with existing and new UNSC resolutions. Neither Americans who are determined to change the Iraqi regime nor Europeans resolutely opposed to war would be entirely satisfied with such an approach – the former because it might mean deferring regime change and the latter because it implied a readiness to go to war. But it would be a far better course than either of the main alternatives: a potentially very costly US invasion of Iraq (even more costly if the United States had to bear responsibility for it alone) or having to live with a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein.

The next two sections of this paper provide context for the US-Europe discussion by looking at the cases for and against war. Subsequent sections seek to explain why the United States and Europe tend to disagree on Iraq; why the United States needs European allies; and how the United States and Europe might pursue a common approach.

## The case for war

**M**any Europeans who are critics of regime change profess to be baffled at the Bush administration's strategy. They question why there is an imperative to deal with it now, and hypothesise that the case for war is primarily about 'unfinished business' from the administration of the current president's father, or a political diversion from economic difficulties. In fact, however, while the costs and risks of a war on Iraq should not be underestimated, there is a serious case for using force to disarm Iraq, even if that means regime change.

### *2.1 Nuclear weapons could lead Saddam to risk aggression against his neighbours and seek to dominate the Middle East*

The central case for action in Iraq is that, if nothing is done, Saddam Hussein will eventually acquire nuclear weapons, and that such an outcome is so dangerous that it is worth using force now to prevent it. The argument is not that Saddam is so aggressive or crazy that he would undertake an unprovoked nuclear attack on the United States. Rather, it is that nuclear weapons would provide Saddam the means to fulfil his long-standing — and so far thwarted — ambitions to dominate the Arab world. While opponents of regime change argue that even Saddam could be deterred from invading his neighbours by American conventional and

nuclear power (much as the United States deterred the Soviet Union), it is not clear that Saddam would believe American threats and shy away from testing them. If Iraq did have a nuclear arsenal and launched an invasion of Kuwait, Jordan or even Iran, would Washington really oppose it if faced with a credible threat of nuclear retaliation against deployed US forces, Saudi oilfields and Tel-Aviv? It should be remembered that, after Iraq's 1991 invasion of Kuwait forty-seven US senators did not believe it was worth risking American lives to eject Iraq, and that was in the absence of Iraqi nuclear weapons. Even if this time it might be different, Saddam might not know this, and his miscalculations could prove horribly costly.<sup>7</sup> Finally, if Saddam is allowed to develop nuclear weapons, one can be certain that Iran would rapidly accelerate its own nuclear programme, potentially setting off a very dangerous cascade of overt nuclear proliferation throughout the region.

### *2.2 The risk of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists*

A second danger, if nothing is done to stop Saddam Hussein's continued development of WMD, is that some of these weapons might be transferred to Islamic terrorists — or used by the regime itself for terrorist actions against the United States. Contrary to the arguments of some proponents of war (and often the Administration itself), Saddam Hussein is highly

<sup>7</sup> For a good statement of the risks of relying on deterrence, see Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002). For a cautionary tale of what the 1990-91 Gulf war might have looked like if Saddam had had nuclear weapons at the time, see Barry Posen, 'U.S. Security Policy in a Nuclear-Armed World (Or: What if Iraq Had Had Nuclear Weapons?)', *Security Studies*, Summer 1997, pp. 1-31.

unlikely to transfer WMD to Islamic radicals who are as much his enemy as ours.<sup>8</sup> Yet that is hardly a reason to be complacent about the potential that at least some of the biological weaponry that Iraq is likely to possess could end up in the hands of a terrorist group like al-Qaeda. As the anthrax attacks on Washington, D.C. and other American cities in September-October 2001 demonstrated, even a very small amount of one of these substances can potentially be lethal and severely disrupt a modern society. We know that al-Qaeda has shown a great interest in procuring chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological weaponry in the past, and also that they have the resources to purchase it – from a place like Iraq (whether from the regime itself or individuals within it).<sup>9</sup> Even beyond the potential transfer to other terrorist groups, Saddam himself has shown that he is capable of the ruthlessness and desire for vengeance that could lead him to conduct a biological attack on the United States – especially if he thought he could get away with it (as the perpetrator of the East Coast anthrax attacks has so far).

### *2.3 Maintaining an effective inspections regime may be impossible*

The threats posed by Saddam Hussein's regime would clearly be significantly diminished if there were a credible way to ensure that he did not possess WMD – and particularly nuclear weapons. But it is difficult to be confident about that, at least in the absence of an extremely rigorous inspection regime. Iraq is a big country – roughly the size of Texas or Germany – in which

it would be fairly easy to hide WMD facilities. This is particularly true for biological agents, which are not difficult to preserve once produced and can be manufactured in relatively small or mobile laboratories. Thus there is a significant risk that, even if he agrees to inspections and turns over some of his prohibited weaponry, Saddam Hussein could successfully hide significant enough amounts of it to pose a continuing danger. That danger would become even greater if Saddam's apparent cooperation with UN inspectors led to the lifting of sanctions, leaving the regime in control of oil revenues that could be used by it to pursue its WMD programmes. Even short of that, however, it should be recognised that sanctions have become so porous that the regime is already earning some \$3 billion per year from illicit oil sales, and managing to import significant amounts of industrial goods across largely unmonitored borders with Iran, Jordan, Syria and Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Those who argue against regime change thus somehow need to demonstrate that some combination of weapons inspections and reinforced sanctions can effectively prevent Saddam from developing his WMD programmes over the long term.

### *2.4 The costs of the status quo*

A further case for regime change is that the status quo – Saddam's vicious rule, sanctions on Iraq, humanitarian suffering, threats to Iraq's neighbours, the need for troops in Saudi Arabia, the no-fly zones, Saddam's support for Palestinian terrorists and periodic disruption of oil markets – itself poses dangers for the region and the West. Those who (rightly) argue that an invasion could provoke instability in the region often fail to acknowledge that Saddam's rule –

<sup>8</sup> For a good case that Saddam is unlikely to cooperate with Islamic terrorists, see Daniel Benjamin, 'Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda are not Allies', *New York Times*, 30 September 2002. See also Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, pp. 178-80.

<sup>9</sup> See Judith Miller, 'Lab Suggests Qaeda Planned to Build Arms, Officials Say', *New York Times*, 14 September 2002.

<sup>10</sup> See Martin Indyk, 'Don't Ignore the Sanctions', Saban Center for Middle East Policy, *Iraq Memo* no. 2; and Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, especially pp. 211-31.

which has led to an invasion of and eight years of war against Iran, an invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf war, the use of missiles against several neighbours, the use of chemical weapons against Kurds and Iranians, support for terrorists, and repression of Kurds, Shia and other opponents in Iraq — has hardly been a source of stability. So long as Saddam is in power, moreover, sanctions will have to be left in place (unless one wants to run the risk of trying to deter an Iraq that has access to tens of billions of dollars of oil revenues each year) and US troops will have to remain deployed in the region, including in Saudi Arabia. Both of these factors have been sources of the resentment that has fuelled Islamic terrorism against the West. An invasion of Iraq might or might not lead to a more stable situation, but it should be acknowledged that not doing anything would leave a very unstable and even dangerous situation in place.

## *2.5 Upholding international law and the authority of the Security Council*

Proponents of regime change might not always be sincere when they evoke international law and the authority of the Security Council as motivations for the need to act in Iraq, but that does not mean that such justifications are false. For the past 11 years, the Saddam regime has flouted the authority of the United Nations, defying some 16 Security Council resolutions, 15 of which were passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In this sense, Bush's 12 September challenge to the Security Council — act to enforce past resolutions or go the way of the League of Nations — is not far off the mark. If Iraq is allowed to get away with its refusal to abide by its own commitments and the Security

Council's resolutions — resolutions passed only after Iraq invaded Kuwait — it will be difficult to expect enforcement of other resolutions or the implementation of other WMD non-proliferation regimes.

Europeans often challenge this argument by claiming an American 'double standard' that allows Israel, but not Iraq, to get away with violating UNSC resolutions, but the situations are not analogous. Whereas the Security Council acted under Chapter VII of the Charter to order Iraq to (among other things) give up its WMD after it invaded Kuwait, all Security Council resolutions pertaining to Israel have been passed under Chapter VI, which requires negotiations among the concerned parties. In the cases where Israel's adversaries — Egypt and Jordan — were willing to negotiate land for peace, peace treaties resulted, and Israeli governments have sought to negotiate withdrawals from other territories to the 'secure and recognised boundaries' called for by the UN. During the 1990s, Israel withdrew unilaterally from all of Lebanon and offered to withdraw from more than 95 per cent of both the Golan Heights and the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, whatever one thinks of Israel's policy, it does not represent the sort of defiance of international law and the authority of the UN Security Council that Iraq's does, and even if it did that would hardly be a reason not to insist on respect for the UN's authority in the case of Iraq.<sup>11</sup>

## *2.6 Pressure to disarm*

Finally, even if one believes that actually using force in Iraq would have highly negative effects — some of which are discussed below — it must be admitted that only the credible threat of military force has any chance of getting Saddam to abide by his disarmament commitments. For

<sup>11</sup> For a good recent discussion, see 'Special report: Iraq, Israel and the UN', *The Economist*, 12 October 2002.

months during the course of 2002, as the debate over Iraq proceeded, European leaders expressed their 'insistence' that Saddam must disarm, and called for the use of 'maximum pressure' on him to do so. However, in the absence of a credible threat of military force – indeed, a threat not only to use limited force but actually to eliminate Saddam and his entire regime – the prospect of that pressure having any real effect was almost nil. It was only when the threat of force became credible – in the form of a direct war-

ning from the President of the United States backed by advisers who seemed determined to act and actual military deployments in the region – that Saddam even began going through the motions of accepting a new inspections regime. Clearly, if the goal is really to attempt to win Iraq's WMD disarmament, the prospect of regime change must remain credible – which will only be the case if the international community, and in particular the United States, is willing to threaten force.

## The case against war

If Europeans are sceptical about American arguments for war, many Americans are frustrated with what they see as Europe's apparent refusal to take seriously the threats posed by Saddam Hussein's regime. They see Europe as overly focused on its internal challenges (enlargement, the euro and the European Convention) and unwilling to accept that some international problems need to be dealt with by force.<sup>12</sup> In fact, however, one need not be disposed toward appeasement or instinctively against the use of force in international relations to come to the conclusion that attacking Iraq is a bad idea. In fact, just as there is a good case that Saddam should be removed even at a high cost, there are good arguments against doing just that — arguments that are shared by many Americans themselves.

### 3.1 *The potential military risks and costs are too high*

Many proponents of regime change argue that the military part of the operation will be relatively easy, because Iraqi armed forces are in poor

shape and unlikely to be loyal to Saddam.<sup>13</sup> Both of those points may well be true — the first one certainly is — but that does not necessarily mean that an invasion of Iraq will be easy or low-cost. Regime change against Saddam will not be a repeat of the Gulf war, when the battles were fought in the open desert and the objective was limited to driving the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. This time, Saddam's very existence will be at stake, and his only hope for survival may well be to inflict as many casualties as possible on invading forces — and making those forces cause as many civilian casualties as possible — as he can. This probably means hunkering down in central Iraqi cities like Baghdad and Tikrit, and forcing the invading forces into urban combat — or alternatively into extended air campaigns that would take a very high civilian toll.<sup>14</sup> If Saddam's élite forces — mainly the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard — refuse to fight, urban combat might well be avoided, but if they do fight the casualties could be in the thousands.<sup>15</sup> The other wild card, of course, is WMD. Knowing his neck was on the line this time, Saddam might not refrain from employing the chemical and biological weaponry he almost certainly has in his arsenal. While deployed American forces in protective

<sup>12</sup> For a good example, see Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness', *Policy Review*, June/July 2002.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ken Adelman, 'Cakewalk In Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 13 February 2002; Patrick Clawson, 'Why Saddam is Ripe for a Fall', *The Washington Post*, 1 January 2002; Richard Perle, 'Should Iraq Be Next?', speech to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, distributed by Copley News Service, 17 December 2001; James M. Woolsey, 'Should the United States Go to War with Iraq?', CATO Institute Forum, Washington, DC, 13 December 2001; and the discussion in Michael Dobbs, 'Old Strategy on Iraq Sparks New Debate: Backers Say Plan Proven in Afghanistan', *The Washington Post*, 27 December 2001.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Barry Posen, 'Foreseeing a Bloody Siege in Baghdad', *New York Times*, 13 October 2002; Michael Quinlan, 'There are alternatives to war on Iraq', *Financial Times*, 24 September 2002; Philip H. Gordon and Michael O'Hanlon, 'A Tougher Target', *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2001; Philip H. Gordon and Michael O'Hanlon, 'Is Fighting Iraq Worth the Risks?', *New York Times*, 25 July 2002; Daniel Byman, 'Get Ready for a Nasty War in Iraq', *International Herald Tribune*, 11 March 2002; and Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, 'U.S. Refines Plans for War in Cities', *New York Times*, 22 October 2002.

<sup>15</sup> For estimates of possible casualties in such a campaign, see Michael O'Hanlon, 'Estimating Casualties in a War to overthrow Saddam', *Orbis*, Winter 2003, pp. 1-19; and O'Hanlon, 'Overthrowing Saddam: Counting the Costs and Casualties', Brookings Saban Center *Iraq Memo* no. 1, 9 October 2002.

suits might well be able to deal with such contingencies on the battlefield, biological or chemical attacks on other forces in the theatre, Israeli cities or the United States through forward-deployed terrorists could take many more lives.<sup>16</sup> In addition (and perversely), attacking Iraq to prevent Iraqi WMD from falling into the hands of Islamic terrorists could actually increase that very risk, by breaking up Saddam's system of control and making it impossible to keep track of very small but highly lethal amounts of biological agents or mobile laboratories.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.2 The 'day after' problem

Another strong argument against invading Iraq is that it would be difficult to put a stable regime in place once Saddam Hussein was removed. Since it was somewhat arbitrarily put together as a state out of three Ottoman provinces in 1921, Iraq has never been democratic but instead always subjected to the repressive rule of a monarch or minority Sunni military dictator. Under Saddam Hussein, all civil society has been crushed, and enormous resentment has built up among repressed ethnic groups, be they Kurds, Shia, Turkomans or others.<sup>18</sup> Thus, even if and when Saddam is successfully removed, the international community will be faced with the enormous and costly challenge of imposing some form of stable regime on the country. One option, following the model used recently by the

United States in Afghanistan, would be to install some form of new government – led by either Iraqi exiles who have been living in the West or a domestic-based coalition – and withdraw from Iraq as quickly as possible so as to avoid any impression of imperialism. The risk, however, is that such a government would have no way to prevent local uprisings, reprisals against those who had assisted the minority Sunni rule or, most importantly, violent struggles over resources such as are almost certain to take place in oil-rich regions like Kirkuk – claimed by Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans alike. Without a massive American or international military presence, the risk of civil war – including meddling by neighbours such as Iran, Syria and Turkey – is great. The alternative to the Afghan model, however, is equally perilous and certainly much more costly: a massive Western occupation force of tens of thousands of soldiers, who might have to remain in Iraq for years. Such an occupation would cost tens of billions of dollars per year and might well lead to a backlash against the West, including in the form of greater support for anti-American terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3 Undermining the war on terrorism

Many critics of war on Iraq – not only in Europe but in the United States as well – worry that it will prove a distraction from what should be the

<sup>16</sup> According to former UN weapons inspector Charles Duelfer, Saddam Hussein had predelegated orders to Iraqi forces to launch chemical and biological warheads (including aflatoxin, anthrax and nerve agent) on missiles and bombs if the allied coalition had marched on Baghdad, which would of course be the case this time around. See Duelfer's testimony, 'Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq', Testimony before the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate, 27 February 2002; as well as Amatzia Baram, 'An Analysis of Iraq's WMD Strategy', *Nonproliferation Review*, Summer 2001, pp. 34-5; and the discussion in Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> See Daniel Benjamin, 'In the Fog of War, A Greater Threat', *The Washington Post*, 31 October 2002.

<sup>18</sup> For a good review, see International Crisis Group, 'Iraq Background: What Lies Beneath', 1 October 2002 (ICG Middle East Report no. 6, Amman/Brussels); and Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La Question Irakienne* (Paris: Fayard, October 2002).

<sup>19</sup> For the cost estimates, see Congressional Budget Office, 'Estimated Costs of a Potential Conflict with Iraq', (Washington, DC: CBO, September 2002); O'Hanlon, 'Overthrowing Saddam', *Iraq Memo* no. 1; and Michael O'Hanlon, 'The Price of Stability', *New York Times*, 22 October 2002. See also the discussion of options in Patrick Clawson (ed.), *How to Build a New Iraq after Saddam* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2002).

top national security priority: the war on terrorism. If the invasion of Iraq goes well – Saddam’s forces are quickly defeated, the Iraqi people visibly liberated and some form of stable government quickly put in place – war on Iraq will arguably have made a major contribution to the war on terrorism rather than the opposite. If things go less well, however, there is a significant risk that invading Iraq will not only be a distraction but could actually make things worse. These scenarios would include a difficult military campaign that ends up with weeks of US-led bombing of Arab civilians, broadcast incessantly throughout the Arab world; an Israeli incursion into the West Bank under cover of the Iraq war leading to high Palestinian casualties; or a long and potentially violent occupation of Iraq that fuels resentment of the West in general and the United States in particular. Invading Iraq could also divert key resources – the best trained special forces; intelligence assets including satellites, operatives, and analysts; and simply the time and political capital of top officials – away from the war on terrorism.<sup>20</sup> This might be less true for actual military forces themselves – though even US forces could find themselves stretched thin if they are occupying Iraq, facing continued operations in Afghanistan and augmenting forces in South Korea to deal with the growing threat from the north.

### *3.4 Unilateral invasion would set a dangerous precedent*

Another concern often expressed by opponents of war on Iraq, particularly European ones, is that it would be illegal, unless explicitly authorised by the United Nations Security Council. Even worse, a unilateral decision by the United States to overthrow the Baghdad regime would set a terrible precedent that other states with less laudable motives might emulate. If the United States can take it upon itself to decide which states threaten it and to act to remove their governments, they argue, who is to stop China, India, Israel, Russia or anyone else from doing the same? And might the United States not follow up on successful regime change in Iraq by then launching a similar attack on other potentially hostile regimes – say, in Iran or North Korea – leading those regimes to take countermeasures such as accelerated development of nuclear weapons or efforts to undermine US power? Unilateral American action might therefore be a step forward in the short term but in the long run it could destroy a critical pillar of order in the international system, with consequences that would be hard to control.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On the military resources, see Michael O’Hanlon, ‘War Against Saddam’s Regime: Winnable but No Cakewalk’, Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, 2 October 2002. For the case that success in Afghanistan requires continued US attention and resources, see James Dobbins, ‘Afghanistan’s Faltering Reconstruction’, *New York Times*, 12 September 2002.

<sup>21</sup> For some of the many arguments along these lines, see Anatol Lieven, ‘The Push for War’, *London Review of Books*, 3 October 2002; Michael Howard ‘What Friends are For’, *The National Interest*, Fall 2002, pp. 8-11; and Pierre Hassner, ‘Definitions, Doctrines and Divergences’, *The National Interest*, Fall 2002, pp. 30-4.



## The sources of US-European disagreement

As already noted, it is a caricature to suggest that all Europeans are against a war in Iraq and all Americans are for one. In fact, some Europeans — Tony Blair or Silvio Berlusconi, for example — are sympathetic to the Bush administration's arguments for using or threatening force in Iraq, and even more Americans apparently including some leading figures in the Bush administration — are sympathetic to European arguments against war. Still, there are clear differences, both between American and European public opinions and between the Bush administration and most European governments. In the transatlantic dialogue that has been taking place for at least the past year, Americans tend to focus on the first set of arguments presented above, and Europeans tend to focus on the second. Why?

The most immediate cause of the divergence in viewpoints on Iraq may be that the 11 September terrorist attacks took place not in Europe but in the United States, where they had a huge psychological impact on a population that had long held and cherished a notion of territorial invulnerability. Again, this is not to suggest that Iraq was behind those attacks (although it is worth noting that many Americans *believe* that Iraq had something to do with them),<sup>22</sup> but rather to note the psychological link between the two. Before 11 September, even the Bush administration, replete with long-time Iraq hawks, was having trouble making the case for an active policy of regime change, and the

Iraq 'policy review' that the Administration had launched upon coming into office was bogged down in bureaucratic wrangling. After 11 September and the anthrax attacks that followed it — seen as a demonstration of what WMD in the wrong hands can do — the balance of public opinion tipped in favour of acting against Iraq, and the balance between hawks and doves within the Administration tipped with it. Europeans might not agree with the logic of linking 11 September and Iraq, but they should at least understand that such a link exists in many American minds, and that it is a reality with which US politicians must deal.

These proximate factors only exacerbated some more long-standing differences in American and European perceptions and strategic culture that had already done much to split the two sides on Iraq.<sup>23</sup> Due to their long history of relative invulnerability (a product of friendly neighbours and protective oceans) and unprecedented relative power in the world, Americans have developed a much lower tolerance for vulnerability than their European counterparts. This has been true for decades — it was evident in the Cold War debates of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, as Americans increasingly sought alternatives to détente and mutually assured nuclear destruction with the Soviet Union while Europeans were reconciled to living with both — and has only grown, along with American power, in more recent years. During the 1990s, America's determination to take forceful action

<sup>22</sup> According to an August 2002 Gallup poll, 53 per cent of Americans said they believed 'Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the 11 September attacks' and 34 per cent thought not (13 per cent had no opinion). In that same poll, 86 per cent said they thought Saddam was involved more generally in supporting terrorist groups that have plans to attack the United States. See 'Conflict with Iraq: Iraq's Possible Links to Terrorists', Americans and the World, Public Opinion on International Affairs, Program on International Policy Attitudes, [www.americans-world.org](http://www.americans-world.org).

<sup>23</sup> Some of these are discussed in Philip H. Gordon, *The Transatlantic Allies and the Middle East* (London: IISS, 1998); Kagan, 'Power and Weakness'; and Gordon, 'Bridging the Atlantic Divide', *Foreign Affairs* (forthcoming, January/February 2003).

against 'rogue states' such as Iran and Iraq, and willingness to spend billions of dollars in an effort to protect Americans from the unlikely event of a ballistic missile attack on US territory, were further examples of a low threshold for living with vulnerabilities and a readiness to expend significant resources to deal with them. These factors are relevant today, as Americans insist on removing the threat from Iraq — and put their faith in their technology and military prowess to do it — whereas Europeans seem much more comfortable with accepting, containing and trying to deter that threat.

It is also relevant that both Americans and Europeans believe that a nuclear, biological or chemical threat from Iraq would primarily be an American problem, not a European one. If Iraq were to develop nuclear weapons and decide to launch an attack on Jordan, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, US forces would be expected to take the lead in containing that threat, which may help explain why Americans are so determined to stop Saddam before he acquires such weapons. Similarly, for all the talk of 'the West' being the target of Islamist terrorism — and it is certainly true that Europeans have been targets in the past and could be targets in the future — the United States is probably target number one. It is the symbol of Western 'repression' of the Islamic world, the country with troops in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the region, the lead actor in maintaining sanctions and no-fly zones in Iraq, the country that bombed Afghanistan, and Israel's most resolute ally. Unless and until Europe experiences its own 11 September, Europeans will probably remain less worried than Americans about even the remote possibility that WMD developed in Iraq might find their way into the wrong hands.

Diverging American and European historical perspectives also influence the debate. Americans imbued with the experience of creating

democracy in Japan and Germany after the Second World War cling — perhaps naively — to the belief that if one can just get rid of the current Iraqi dictator, democracy and freedom will flourish in the region.<sup>24</sup> European countries — particularly France and the United Kingdom — have a somewhat different historical perspective. Both know what it is like trying to rule foreign societies from a distance and trying to set up stable structures so that they can govern themselves. France, for example, lost tens of thousands of soldiers while trying to rule Indochina from 1945-54 and tens of thousands more in Algeria from 1954-62 (several times that many locals also died in the process). After French forces left, neither place was exactly stable or at peace. Britain's colonial experience was less bloody, but the departure from India and a number of places in the Middle East — including Iraq — hardly left the British with more optimism that outsiders can impose democracy or stability in places that have no history of either. Germany's historical baggage is different, but no less relevant — Germans learned in the twentieth century that war is bad and aggressive war is worse — and few in that country believe military intervention in Iraq will be a positive contribution to peace. This European historical pessimism (or realism, depending on one's perspective), contrasts significantly with Americans historical 'can-do' optimism and helps explain why some Americans believe that invading Iraq would be a first step toward creating a new and better Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, no one should ignore the two sides' domestic politics, both in terms of how they influence leaders and how they shape the public debate. In Europe, leaders must be conscious of the restiveness among their poorly integrated and very large Muslim populations (including 4-6 million in France, over 3 million in Germany, and 1.5 million in Britain), and worried that an

<sup>24</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, to take just one example, argue that 'A devastating knockout blow against Saddam Hussein, followed by an American-sponsored effort to rebuild Iraq and put it on a path toward democratic governance, would have a seismic impact on the Arab world—for the better.' See Robert Kagan and William Kristol, 'What to do about Iraq', *The Weekly Standard*, 21 January 2002.

<sup>25</sup> For a good example of such American thinking, see Ronald D. Asmus and Kenneth M. Pollack, 'The New Transatlantic Project', *Policy Review*, October/November 2002.

American invasion of the Arab heartland could provoke unrest. High civilian casualties or a lengthy and difficult Western occupation of Iraq could radicalise Muslim populations that have already proven themselves potential breeding grounds for al-Qaeda. In late 2001 and early 2002, clashes between Israelis and Palestinians spilled over into Europe itself, and in France and Belgium led to clashes between their Muslim and Jewish populations, as well as acts of anti-Semitic violence and vandalism. In the

United States domestic politics push in the opposite direction. Influential Jewish and other pro-Israel groups are worried about the threat Saddam Hussein poses to Israel, and tend to be on the side of action, even if that means using force to topple Saddam Hussein. Whereas European leaders will have to worry about maintaining political and public support if they act against Iraq, American leaders will have to worry about their support if they fail to do so.

## Does the United States need European allies in Iraq?

As the Bush administration prepares for possible war, one of the many essential questions it will need to answer is whether, or at least to what extent, it should go out of its way to seek support from European allies. Some Americans believe that Europe has little to offer the United States militarily, and that Washington should thus determine its Iraq policy alone.<sup>26</sup> Others accept that Europeans might well have an important role to play in the stabilisation and reconstruction of a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, but argue that they will play such a role on the basis of a calculation of their own political and economic interests, independently of whether Washington involves them in the policy-making process or makes important concessions to win their support.<sup>27</sup>

It is true that US leadership on Iraq is essential, and that if the United States acts there will be strong pressure on Europeans to follow. Indeed, it is almost certainly the case that in the absence of a credible American threat to act alone most Europeans would not even be engaging in the current debate about enforcing UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>28</sup> Europeans know that a unilateral American intervention – even if backed by Britain and a few other European allies – would be disastrous for Europe: the Europeans who opposed action would be marginalised politically and economically in the region, the authority of the UN Security Council

and international law would be undermined, transatlantic relations would be severely damaged, and the EU's common foreign and security policy left in a shambles. This pressure will strongly motivate at least some of them to back an eventual US action, even if they are not enthusiastic about the course being pursued.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that all or even most Europeans will back an American military intervention in any circumstances simply out of fear of being left out. Given the widespread opposition to war among most European publics (and voters), European leaders will have to be able to credibly claim that the United States was willing to give diplomacy and weapons inspections one last try, that its decision to go to the UN was not just a ruse to find a predicate for war, and that it had a credible plan for 'the day after'. It is impossible to say precisely where on the spectrum the threshold for likely European support lies, and for which countries, but the point is that the bandwagoning effect that American unilateralists count on will not be automatic or complete.

There are also important differences between an operation in which the United States decides to act alone that a couple of resentful European states feel obliged to support and a collective action backed by the UN that has genuine support in Europe. Most Americans, in fact, understand this: for all the talk of Washington being

<sup>26</sup> See Charles Krauthammer, 'The Myth of "UN Support"', *The Washington Post*, 4 October 2002; and 'The Axis of Petulance', *The Washington Post*, 1 March 2002.

<sup>27</sup> See Robert Kagan, 'Iraq: The Day After', *The Washington Post*, 21 July 2002; and William Safire, 'In Material Breach', *New York Times*, 28 October 2002.

<sup>28</sup> As one senior Bush administration official put it, reflecting a widely held American view, 'You could argue that the best way to get the UN to act decisively is to convince everyone that the president will do the same thing with a resolution, or without one'. Quoted in David E. Sanger, 'Iraq Makes U.N. Seem "Foolish", Bush Asserts', *New York Times*, 29 October 2002.

willing to act alone if necessary, opinion polls (and the debate in Congress) show a strong preference for making Iraq a multinational operation with UN and allied support.<sup>29</sup> Bush himself implicitly recognised this point with his decision to present the case on Iraq to the UN on 12 September, rather than simply announcing the American approach, as some inside and outside the Administration had counselled.

European allies for the United States on Iraq are important not primarily for what they bring militarily, but even that should not be completely dismissed. At a minimum, the United States would need European base and port access and overflight rights lest it have to stage the operation entirely from the continental United States, aircraft carriers or whatever Middle Eastern bases it could find. Beyond bases, a European offer to provide certain specialised military capabilities — special forces for raid operations, in-flight refuelling, forward-deployed target designators for laser-guided bombs, WMD detection units — might well come in handy to American military planners. Ideally, Europeans might even offer significant numbers of troops — perhaps even coordinated through NATO — that might be used to seize and stabilise a sector of Iraqi territory once military action had begun. Even if the United States deploys the vast bulk of military assets to the region, it is not impossible to imagine difficult decisions about resource allocation having to be made — say between preventing a Kurdish-Turkish-Arab clash over Kirkuk, the centre of oil production in northern Iraq, and mounting an all-out assault on Baghdad — that could be alleviated if large numbers of the best European troops were available.

More important than military assets would be the legitimacy that European backing would

confer on the operation, which would prove most important if unexpected challenges were to arise, as they almost certainly will. If the initial military operation went better than expected, unilateral American action might be forgotten quickly as others lined up to share in the credit and the spoils. But should it not go so well — if Saddam, for example, managed to bog American forces down in urban combat, provoke massive civilian casualties or successfully use WMD against Israel, Jordan or Turkey — the resentment against the United States for acting alone would be deep and long-lasting. A mess in Iraq in these sorts of circumstances would at least be the world's mess — requiring world resources to clean it up — rather than America's own.

Another advantage of the multilateral approach is the financial support that could be expected from European allies for the massive tasks of occupation, peacekeeping, and reconstruction in Iraq. After the first Gulf war, and to a large degree because the operation had broad international support and a mandate from the United Nations, the United States was able to collect over \$50 billion from other countries whose interests were directly or indirectly at stake. Similarly, after the war in Afghanistan, Washington was able to drum up significant international financial support for Afghan reconstruction, with the European Union pledging some 600 million Euros for 2002 and 2.3 billion Euros over the next four years — approximately 45 per cent of the total amount pledged.<sup>30</sup> While the Europeans may have their own interest in trying to keep Iraq stable after a war this time, European leaders will surely find it more difficult to ask their publics to make contributions to an effort that they did not support and were not involved in than they would a

<sup>29</sup> According to a September 2002 Gallup poll, 79 per cent of Americans said they favoured US military action against Iraq 'if other countries participate', or 'if the United Nations support invading Iraq', but only 38 per cent supported US action 'if the United States has to invade Iraq alone' and 37 per cent 'if the United Nations opposes invading Iraq'. See [www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021008.asp?Version=p](http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr021008.asp?Version=p). The results of the September 2002 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations/German Marshall Fund poll were similar: whereas a majority of Americans supported using US forces to change the regime in Iraq, 65 per cent said they only supported doing so if the operation had 'UN approval and the support of allies'. See *Worldviews 2002: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Washington: October 2002), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> These figures include both EU pledges and EU member state pledges. See 'The European Union and Afghanistan', [www.eurunion.org](http://www.eurunion.org), May 2002; and Clay Chandler, '\$4.5 Billion Pledged for Afghan Renewal; Gathering in Tokyo Stresses Need for "Rapid Disbursement"', *The Washington Post*, 22 January 2002.

collective effort authorised by the UN. The same is true when it comes to material contributions in the form of the peacekeepers that would be necessary on the ground after the initial conflict was over. In Afghanistan, 11 NATO countries were willing to participate in the International Security Assistance Force because they saw the US effort there as legitimate and appropriate, and the British, the Turks, and soon Germany and the Netherlands, were willing to take the lead role in commanding that force. After an Iraq invasion, some European countries might want to be present on the ground to assure their own interests in the region, but if the stability mission turned out to be dangerous – and if it followed an invasion that European governments and publics did not support – finding the troops for such a mission would not be so easy. A multilateral peacekeeping force – perhaps organised by NATO or at least involving significant numbers of NATO troops – would not only be much cheaper for the United States

to maintain but it would have a better chance of succeeding and being accepted by the Iraqis than a US-led force alone.

Finally, getting support from Europe – and much of the rest of the world – will increase the likelihood that Saddam Hussein would give in to rigorous disarmament demands or that Iraqi armed forces would give up without a fight. If the United States were isolated and clearly acting in the face of international opinion, Saddam and his henchmen might just think that they could force Washington to back down if only they could inflict enough casualties on Americans, or get the Americans to kill lots of civilians. Saddam would almost certainly be wrong in making this calculation, but it would not be the first time his miscalculations had proved costly. Solid European support behind the American threat of regime change would be the best way to minimise the chance of that happening.

## The way ahead

Reconciling American and European positions on Iraq will not be easy. Yet it is also clear that both sides have an interest in a common approach if possible. Europeans know that if they rule out the use of force and fail to engage in the debate Washington might well launch a military operation without them, with all the negative consequences for Europe and world order already discussed. But Americans also know that this scenario is not in their interest either: stabilising a post-Saddam Iraq will be hard enough with the support of the international community; no one should wish to bear responsibility for it alone. The fact that France – reluctant as it is to see a war – and the United States – reluctant as it is to see new constraints placed on its ability to threaten one – have been willing to engage for weeks and weeks at the Security Council on a new resolution is a sign that people on both sides of the Atlantic know this.

What would a joint US-European policy on Iraq look like? The basic deal that both sides would have to agree to has been obvious for some time: Americans will agree to give newly empowered weapons inspectors a chance to eliminate Iraq's WMD capability if Saddam agrees to cooperate with them, and Europeans will agree to support the use of military force to change the regime in Baghdad if he does not.<sup>31</sup> This is, in fact, the implicit deal that has been at the core of the difficult negotiations over a new Security Council resolution in New York: in exchange for Security Council agreement on a toughened inspections regime with tight timelines to test Iraqi compliance, the United States would at least temporarily forego military action to change the Iraqi regime.

Many on both sides of the Atlantic are of course reluctant to accept such a deal, and it is true that the implementation phase is likely to prove even more challenging – both with the Iraqis and between Americans and Europeans – than the negotiation of the resolution itself. On the American side, many (including key figures within the Bush administration) argue that inspections cannot work. Even with a toughened new regime, they fear that after a few weeks or months of apparent cooperation Iraq will announce that certain 'sensitive sites' are off-limits to inspectors, quibble with the make-up of one of the inspections teams, or claim to be unable to find a handful of weapons scientists that UN officials want to interview. They argue – rightly – that it will be difficult to go to war over such apparently minor issues – and thus worry that even engaging in the process in the first place might have been a mistake. The international community will tire of the struggle to fully enforce resolutions long before the Iraqis will (as has always been the pattern in the past), and an opportunity to finally resolve the Iraq issue will have been missed.

Even if Saddam does not interfere with inspectors, an alternative but equally dangerous scenario is also plausible: that Iraq will turn over some WMD but hide much more. Then, after an initial period, inspectors will have to admit that they are not finding anything, and eventually calls to lift sanctions will be made – leaving Saddam in possession of WMD and tens of billions of dollars of oil revenues with which to develop them.

To convince the Americans that these all-too-plausible scenarios will not come about, the Europeans will need to convince them – and

<sup>31</sup> See Philip H. Gordon and Michael O'Hanlon, 'Tony Blair has a chance to bridge the gap on Iraq', *International Herald Tribune*, 5 April 2002.

Saddam Hussein — that they are serious when they say that they support ‘serious consequences’ for Iraq if it fails to disarm. This means backing not only the threat of force — the only hope of winning Iraqi compliance — but also all of the elements necessary to give weapons inspections an opportunity to work: insistence on a full declaration of Iraqi WMD programmes within a short and defined period of time; unfettered and immediate access to all suspected weapons sites that UN inspectors want to visit (including ‘presidential palaces’); the ability to interview Iraqi weapons scientists without the presence of an Iraqi ‘minder’ and if necessary the ability to take them out of the country; full UN control over the make-up of the inspections teams; and reinforcement of the sanctions regime. Already, Germany’s outspoken opposition to the use of force and France’s tough bargaining at the UN over the modalities of new inspections come perilously close to convincing Americans that inspections will not be serious and that the United States must go to war. With the debate in Washington finely poised between those willing to give disarmament a chance and those who call for regime change, Europeans need to recognise that the more they can do to make inspections credible the more likely it is that war will be avoided.

Europeans of course are also reluctant to accept such a deal. They know that the chances are high that Saddam will not really cooperate with inspectors and that he will either block their access to key sites, hide prohibited weapons, or both. They also worry that the Bush administration will seek a pretext for war even if Saddam does give up some of his WMD programmes. To overcome these doubts, Bush needs to convince Europeans that the US approach to the UN is more than a cynical ploy to get international backing for a predetermined war.<sup>32</sup> The Europeans, in any case, should realise that it is hard to imagine Bush going to war in Iraq while inspectors are operating effectively in the country and WMD are being identi-

fied and destroyed. The debates of the past year have proven that it is hard to launch a preventive war — even for an administration as hawkish and determined as the current American one. The United States needs its European allies, the Administration knows that, and the more strongly the Europeans insist on serious, unfettered inspections the less likely the United States will be to go to war. In this sense, the more the Europeans want to avoid a war in Iraq, the more they need to threaten one.

There are no guarantees. But if Saddam Hussein can be convinced that a US-led coalition with international support and legitimacy is poised to unseat him, he may well give up his WMD rather than relinquish his hold on power — or his life. Even if weapons inspectors can never guarantee that Iraq will be fully disarmed, they can at least ensure that Saddam’s nuclear programmes are eliminated, which would deal with the most important part of the problem.

To be sure, there are more important aspects of the Iraq issue than whether the Americans and Europeans can agree. If the United States feels sufficiently threatened that it is willing to run the risks of a unilateral intervention to remove Saddam Hussein, it should do so whether it has initial European support or not. And Europeans who are convinced that an attack on Iraq would create more problems than it would solve are perfectly within their rights to oppose such a war. Both sides, however, need to recognise that their own actions and decisions will have a large impact not only on their relations with each other but on the outcome of the Iraq case itself. By pursuing a common strategy along the lines outlined here, Americans and Europeans would not only significantly improve the chances for success in Iraq but would be launching a joint endeavour that would do much to put the transatlantic alliance back on track. If they fail to do so the consequences could be severe both for policy on Iraq and for the alliance itself.

<sup>32</sup> The Administration’s recent statements that disarmament is Washington’s main goal — along with the willingness to do without an ‘automatic trigger’ in the new UN resolution — have arguably gone far in this direction — correcting the suggestions by Cheney and Rumsfeld over the summer that sending weapons inspectors back to Iraq might even be worse than doing nothing.





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