INSTITUTE NOTE

THE DECISIVE INTERVENTION
TRANSATLANTIC BRAINSTORMING ON IRAQ

Paris, 25 November 2002

Following the annual transatlantic conference held on 8 June in Madrid, the Institute organised another transatlantic meeting on the more specific subject of Iraq, on 25 November 2002, in Paris. The meeting was organised in cooperation with The Brookings Institution (Saban Center for Middle East Policy), Washington DC, and brought together more than forty officials and experts from both sides of the Atlantic. The discussion was organised in three broad subjects.

1. How to deal with Iraq?

Although American and Europeans recognise that the Iraqi regime represents a threat to both the Iraqi population and the Middle East region, there is no agreement as to the way to tackle that threat. In the seminar, American and European speakers presented different options, ranging from Security Council-sponsored inspections to military intervention and occupation of Iraq. Two lessons can be drawn from that exchange.

On the one hand, the adoption of Resolution 1441 (8 November 2002) has not led to a common transatlantic approach to the Iraqi issue. The resolution being the product of a compromise, various interpretations of its provisions can be made. Future Iraqi breaches of the resolution will therefore prompt diverse reactions on the part of both permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council. Indeed, the question of how each individual country would specifically react to Iraqi breaches of the resolution was left unanswered in the seminar. All this means that verifiable violations by Iraq will probably lead to discussions in the Security Council and new collective measures, but those same violations may also be considered 'further material breaches' that, in spite of Resolution 1441, could directly provoke military action.

On the other hand, while the positions of American participants were not totally coincident, a consensus amongst them as to the need to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime by force was visible. The impression, thus, was that the Americans were more united than the Europeans on this issue. Even if the Europeans share some scepticism regarding the medium and long-term consequences of a war, some Europeans seem to be opposed to the war, some would

only participate with a mandate from the Security Council and some are in favour of following an American-led intervention without such authorisation.

The case for war was presented mainly by Americans, whereas Europeans focused on the possible drawbacks of the military option. Their respective arguments for and against military intervention can be summarised as follows.

(a) *WMD threat assessment*. Both Americans and Europeans believe that Iraqi WMD pose a direct threat to its neighbours and that those weapons (especially biological, chemical and radiological) could easily be smuggled to terrorist groups. However, Americans tend to emphasise that, unless a quick intervention impedes it, Saddam Hussein is ready to use or transfer his WMD immediately. Europeans do not have the same sense of urgency and, therefore, do not think that instant military action is needed.

(b) *Inspections versus military action*. Most Europeans believe that UNMOVIC and IAEA inspections can eventually disarm Iraq, and therefore that they should be given an opportunity to find and destroy Iraq's WMD. Conversely, many Americans consider that allowing time for inspections amounts to playing Saddam's game of 'buying time'. Intervention must be undertaken 'now, before it is too late', it was said. If current inspections were working at all – Americans maintained in the seminar – it was precisely because the American threat of the use of force was serious enough. Ultimately, different points of view concerning the efficacy of inspections are based on different assessments of the period from 1991 to 1998, since Americans and Europeans make divergent evaluations of the accomplishments of UNSCOM and IAEA during that period.

(c) *Military operations and their aftermath*. Although everyone agrees that military occupation of Iraq would be feasible, the Europeans stress that the real difficulties would start afterwards. Roughly speaking, Americans are quite optimistic not only on the outcome of the war but also on their capability to rebuild the economic and political life of Iraq, and this sentiment underlies any other argument in favour of war.

(d) *Regional environment*. Americans contend that regime change in Iraq and the establishment of democracy would lead to a more secure and stable regional environment, and would provide the opportunity to start similar processes in other countries of the region. The Europeans, for their part, point out that the region cannot be transformed so easily, and that more attention should be paid to the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some Europeans underlined that a war on Iraq would represent a 'risk of military escalation' in the whole region.

(e) *Terrorism*. In the American discourse, overthrowing Saddam Hussein is linked to the fight against international terrorism, whereas Europeans fear that war and occupation of Iraq would probably lead to increased terrorist activism in the West.

(f) *Legitimacy*. Most Europeans stress that unilateral intervention might set a dangerous precedent, and could upset the international order. Therefore, a war should be started only with the authorisation of the UN Security Council. If that authorisation cannot be obtained, there must be a general consensus as to the need to use armed force, as was the case in Kosovo. The notion of 'pre-emptive action' that Americans are proposing to apply to Iraq is linked to self-defence, which means that the pre-condition of that type of 'defensive' action is the American threat perception rather than a decision by the Security Council. Americans also argue that the list of UNSC resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter with which Iraq has not complied, as well as recent history of Iraqi aggressions, must be also taken into account.

2. The 'day after'

If intervention on Iraq is eventually undertaken – be it unilaterally, through a small coalition, or collectively – nobody doubts that the military campaign should in theory be relatively easy. However, the perspective of a Western occupation of Iraq none the less leaves many important issues unresolved. In the short term: how will the Iraqi population react to an attack? Will it be possible to capture Saddam Hussein? Will Iraq be able to attack Israel, and how will Israel react? Will social unrest in some of Iraq's neighbours give way to civil strife? What kind of coalition will occupy Iraq and supervise the political reconstruction of the country? In the longer term: how long international occupation will be necessary? Will the new situation affect Iraq's territorial integrity? What role will allies that did not participate in the hostilities, and the United Nations, play? What type of oil resources management will be required? Will a new situation in Iraq imply a new, more peaceful order in the Middle East?

The American response to those questions is neither exhaustive nor unanimous. Drawing from a generally optimistic attitude towards a war on Iraq and subsequent reconstruction, Americans seem to think that, with a reasonable effort on their part, all the issues mentioned will be resolved favourably in any foreseeable scenario. One participant in the seminar explained that, after a rapid war, American involvement in the political reconstruction of post-Saddam Iraq would probably be organised in three stages: the military phase, transitional authority under international supervision, and establishment of a new government – but he did not specify any timeframe for those stages. In both American official and academic discourses, the most quoted parallel is American occupation and tutelage of post-Second World War Japan. The fact that allied presence in post-Second World War Germany and Japan led to democratisation and stability in those countries (and in their respective regions) is frequently cited by Americans as a useful precedent for the Iraqi case.

The European attitude is more cautious. Many European participants in the seminar stressed the idea that 'mistakes of the past should not be reproduced'. The Europeans probably have in mind recent cases in which state-building has been very difficult indeed. From a European point of view, it seems as if Americans have suddenly developed a keen interest in state-building, which nevertheless ignores the lessons learned from the 1990s. In current American doctrine, the idea of state-building is referred directly to the post-Second World War experience, on the ground that the situation in Iraq is more similar to that of an 'enemy state' than to a 'failed state'. This may be true as far as the international political status of Iraq is concerned – the Europeans argue – but not regarding the enormous difficulties that any state-building process will encounter in the post-Cold War world environment (which is very different from that of 1945).

The Europeans also emphasise that, in order to prepare the 'day after' properly, adequate attention should be paid to coalition-building prior to the attack. A European participant pointed out: 'What will happen on the "day after" will largely depend on what happens on "the day" and on the "day before"'. In this context, a negative consequence of lack of transatlantic cooperation on Iraq might be less coordination in the fight against terrorism. Moreover, the aftermath of a war and occupation of Iraq could be hazardous if violence erupted in other focal points of the region, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, if state-building is not satisfactory for the Iraqis themselves, including the various Iraqi minorities, unrest and terrorism might equally spread across the country, the region and elsewhere.

3. Implications for the transatlantic alliance

Both sides of the Atlantic are confronting different dilemmas now. The United States may, on the one hand, follow the path of multilateralism initiated by negotiations conducted in the Security Council prior to Resolution 1441. If UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors report that Iraq is hiding WMD, or if the Iraqis do not comply with Resolution 1441, the United States may decide to discuss with the other members of the Security Council which course of action should be taken, even though this might imply a reinforcement of inspections and an abandonment of the military option. On the other hand, however, the United States may decide to attack and occupy Iraq with a small coalition, without an explicit authorisation from the Security Council. The dilemma that the Europeans are facing basically is whether or not to follow the Americans if in the end they decide to intervene without a mandate. Obviously enough, some of the various scenarios that stem from those possibilities represent a hard test for the transatlantic alliance.

During the seminar, some American participants pointed out that 'unilateralism should not be an option for President Bush', because, even if its power is unmatched, the United States needs allies. Other Americans suggested that regime change in Iraq and a 'new order' in the Middle East could indeed be imposed by the United States alone, and allies would follow naturally. Nevertheless, the most interesting debate was about the options left for the Europeans. One school of thought maintained that the Europeans should play a role in the postwar reconstruction of Iraq and should contribute to the design of the planned 'new order' in the Middle East, particularly offering imaginative solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a consequence – it was argued – the Europeans cannot leave the United States alone in any conceivable case, and should intervene if the Americans decide to do so. Another European point of view rejected the former position on the ground that it reduced the European role to that of a mere advice-giver that, in addition, was ready to give up its convictions and principles. Another drawback of that position, it was mentioned, was that joint action in the absence of common ground was just a provisional solution that would give way to more serious misunderstandings between allies sooner rather than later. The second European point of view therefore proposed that a coherent European attitude would be to opt out from war on Iraq if there were not enough justification or an authorisation from the Security Council.

4. Conclusion

This transatlantic brainstorming was the first of a series of activities on the Iraqi issue that the Institute has planned for the following months. The Institute commissioned an *Occasional Paper* from Philip H. Gordon, The Brookings Institution, which was published in December (no. 39, 'Iraq: the transatlantic debate'), and Martin Ortega has written another *Occasional Paper* (no. 40, 'Iraq: a European point of view'). Since international action to tackle the Iraqi threat is going to be high on the American and European agendas in the near future, the Institute will continue to organise meetings and publications on this issue.

For the time being, the transatlantic seminar has shown that the American and European standpoints on Iraq are quite distant. In the concluding remarks, the Americans declared that the threat of the use of force against unfriendly countries, and in order to change regimes involved in WMD proliferation, had to be credible. When Resolution 1441 was adopted, the Europeans accepted this idea as well as a causal link between WMD proliferation and the use of force. For their part, the Europeans underlined that, conversely, the United States had agreed to utilise the multilateral road fully and to allow the inspections to work when it

endorsed Resolution 1441. Moreover, it was argued that the debate on Iraq in the last few months had shown that Europeans make an effort to understand the point of view of the United States, while Americans do not make the same effort.

So far, the Iraqi issue has demonstrated that further dialogue between Americans and Europeans is necessary in order to try to harmonise the various positions. However, disagreement is still possible, mainly because different objectives and motives underlie American and European stances on Iraq. While everyone agrees that WMD disarmament is the first objective that must be pursued, the way to attain that goal (either the use of force or coercive inspections) is not the object of transatlantic consensus. But a second American objective is more divisive still: regime change by armed force. Nor is a third American goal, the establishment of a 'new order' in the Middle East, a priority for the Europeans, bearing in mind that, in the view of the current Republican administration, this amounts to an 'American order', with a lot of question marks as to whether or not 'order' means peace as well.

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