

U.S. AND EU DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT MANAGING THE MIDDLE EAST

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Introduction

Half-a-year after the Anglo-American-led war in Iraq, we are reminded that no matter how such wars become critical turning points in altering the political status quo, deeply ingrained sentiments and cultural norms held before their unfolding remain, for the most part, unchanged afterwards. Attitudes are more difficult to change than are physical realities. The main purpose of this essay is to show that European and U.S. differences over Middle Eastern issues that were present before Saddam Hussein's overthrow remain deep in the war's aftermath.

Saddam Hussein's brutal regime is unseated, but debate swirls about whether the Anglo-American invasion was justified for the ostensible objective of neutering Saddam's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Absent "smoking guns" about the Iraqi dictator's weapons of mass destruction, the administrations of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and U.S. President George W. Bush remain under intense domestic scrutiny. More than whether Blair or Bush will have their administration's ended prematurely because they were unable to translate their foreign policy success of Saddam's demise into domestic electoral successes, the war's preparations, unfolding, and aftermath revealed deep chasms between Europe and the United States about how to manage the international order in a post-Cold War environment and their differing views of the Middle East in particular.

Before the war in March 2003, wild speculation abounded from mostly European analysts, commentators, and political scientists that a brash American unilateralism was at hand. The Bush Administration was accused of adopting a doctrine of pre-emption in international relations. It was summarily tossing out the policy of "collective action and collaboration across the North Atlantic;" it was tossing out consultation in favor of unrestrained use of force.

In European capitals, among politicians and in the media, accusatory tones toward the Bush Administration included personal attacks on President Bush for wanting to finish what his "daddy" did not accomplish, American desire to control Arab oil, dire predictions about the end of the North Atlantic Alliance, and that a holy alliance of neo-conservatives, the Christian religious right, and pro-Zionists in America were driving American foreign policy. American-led policy in Iraq meant the demise of the United Nations. The U.S. was on the brink of a new imperialism, redrawing the map of the Middle East in a more dramatic and colonial fashion than imperial France and Great Britain did by secret design without the consent of the governed in the May 1916 Sykes-Picot Treaty. Just as Great Britain and France pushed through the trusteeship/mandate systems for Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, Washington was on the brink of doing the same to the Persian Gulf in particular and the Middle East in general. Without European and American collective action required to stem the tide of threatened territorial aggression by the Soviet Union as had been the case since the end of World War II, Washington was going its separate way as the world's policeman and enforcer. European opinion did not matter; collective action and reasoned debate in international affairs was over. A breach of unprecedented proportions in the North Atlantic Alliance was at hand. While most of these exaggerated predictions remain unrealized, they still litter the political debate and will influence EU-U.S. relations for years to come.

How the EU as an organization and/or individual European governments and their populations relate to the United States about international relations and the Middle East transcended the war. Uneasiness and mutual frustrations in the North Atlantic Alliance that preceded the war have not dissipated; anxiety about future multilateral or unilateral actions remains at the top of the North Atlantic Alliance agenda. Efforts to patch up grave differences have not succeeded,

though the rancor of half-a-year ago has dissipated. Parts of the North Atlantic Alliance have been shaken and brought into sharp relief by the “Iraqi war-earthquake,” but none, it is argued, are sufficient to end the North Atlantic Alliance or cause Europe and the United States to enter a collision course with catastrophic results, where democracies will attack each other over national pride or fulfillment of territorial appetites. Indeed, tensions in the Alliance and in bilateral relations between European capitals and Washington have been somewhat reduced over common undertakings, such as rebuilding Iraq (though who leads that undertaking remains at issue). Other cooperative endeavors have emerged, such as trying to push Palestinian-Israeli negotiations uphill, management of international terrorism, stabilizing weak economies, curbing the spread of disease, and eliminating weapons of mass destruction. However, collaboration on specific policy objectives alone has not remedied or narrowed the breach in European and American views of each other. Along with structural and behavioral differences within the North Atlantic Alliance, an uncontrollable level of cynicism remains all too abundant. The basic issues remain: who determines criteria for international behavior, how are responses shaped, and who enforces them in a post-Cold War world? What role should the UN or other deliberative bodies have in policy-making?

Issues that Divide

The foremost issue that divides Europe and the U.S. is a lack of historical understanding of one another. Neither Europeans nor Americans are fully sensitized to each other’s recent history or to psychological uncertainties that presently prevail. Both Europeans and Americans are reeling from rapid change and they have not taken the time to understand the other’s outlook or to reform the mechanisms through which they made collective decisions in the past. Europeans did not fathom that the most powerful economic and military power on earth feels anxiety and senses vulnerability. Having experienced and managed splotches of terrorism for decades (Red Brigades, Bader-Meinhoff, Basque separatists, etc.), Europeans did not fully comprehend that Americans lost their virginity of insulation or isolation on September 11, 2001. Osama Bin-Laden’s al-Qaeda operatives unleashed unforeseen consequences. They energized a sleepy domestic-oriented American President into action and gave his presidency definition. An unbridled out-pouring of patriotism, if not chauvinism, in defense of national and personal self-interest evolved almost spontaneously. That found expression in the establishment of U.S.-led coalitions configured against the Taliban in Afghanistan and against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Terrorism as a concept and terrorists as doers of evil unified vast segments of the American population. Even without sufficient hard evidence that there was a Saddam Hussein-Taliban link, or incontrovertible proof that the Iraqi leader had weapons of mass destruction, the American people saw Saddam as an equivalent evil-doer in need of being dispatched from office.

The Bush Administration’s anti-terrorist reaction to September 11, 2001, became its mantra for operation. Defending America and Americans against terrorism (“either you are with us or against us”) was the over-simplified but usefully populist definition for determining allies and foes in this struggle. Still residing in the back of many American minds was the 1979-1980 Iran hostage crisis and the killing of Americans in Beirut in 1982 and 1983. Both alone would not have generated an urge to do something physical, but after September 2001, the American people wanted their president to lead them in this “war” against those who would deny individual freedoms. Since September 2001, no word has appeared more often in George Bush’s foreign policy speeches than “terror” or “terrorism.” It appeared 33 times in the Joint Session of Congress speech that month, 40 times when he addressed the UN in November 2001, 36 times in the State of the Union Address in January 2002, 26 times in his “The Future Itself is Dying (in) The Middle East” speech in April 2002, 18 times when he introduced the “Road Map” for Middle East peace in June 2002, 23 times in the State of the Union Address in January 2003, 19 times in the speech he delivered after landing on the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* in May 2003, and 20 times in his September 2003 speech at the United Nations. During all this talk of terrorism and remembering September 11, 2001, Europeans, in general, could not fully fathom how the most powerful country on earth could have such lingering fears about terrorists and terrorism. Many would argue that the U.S. administration had no other focus and that combating terrorism became a license for either targeted assassinations, unilateral intervention, or adoption and promulgation of a new international relations behavior, namely a “doctrine of pre-emption.” That was an over-reactive foreboding, not proven by reality of the U.S. moving into a new era of feared reckless engagement in international affairs. Little attention was paid to America’s historically isolationist foreign policy that started with Washington and Jefferson and continued well into

the 20th century. Many Europeans saw the U.S. as abandoning multilateral engagement in foreign affairs in favor of some unilateral cowboy activity that would abandon international law and multilateral institutions and organizations like the UN or the European Union.

Americans generally remain ignorant or merely unaware of how recent European history remains embedded in the continent's collective psyche. And specifically, Americans fail to see that Europe is passing through its own identity crisis while thoughts of recent European history resonate everywhere. Americans do not understand that Europeans focus their international relations behavior to avoid the thoughts of occupation and wars on their continent. As the geographic place between Eurasia, the Middle East and North Africa, Europeans are conflict-averse. Avoiding confrontation is a continent-wide preference. Instead, over-arching in their outlook are integration, cooperation, and collective action. Seen as inter-connecting mechanisms aimed at preventing one country or a group of countries from rising up to overwhelm and dominate neighbors, they emphasize coordination as the best way to pursue international relations. Too much recent history reminds Europeans of the blunders of national chauvinism and leadership egotism. For Europeans, multilateralism translates into using the UN, the EU and other international organizations to adjudicate problems with patience through discussion. Americans do not understand that European countries are in the midst of shedding, to some degree in a reluctant fashion, some aspects of their national identities as century-long adversaries, creating a European entity. When Europe had the USSR as an external threat, it was easy for Europe to stay glued together when Germany reunified itself in the early 1990s and EU countries were worried about whether there would be a German Europe or a European Germany. With the EU to become twenty-five members by 2005-06, each state is wondering how the EU will define itself. It is apparent that Germany and France want to play a major role in defining and leading the EU. So the question becomes for everyone else in Europe how to manage the assertiveness of Paris and Berlin. Meanwhile, Paris is not enthusiastic about expanded European presence on the UN Security Council or a reduction of European presence on the Security Council to one seat, where France might have to relinquish its seat to England or even Germany. French President Chirac seeks the UN as a counter-weight against the United States in resolving future international problems, for elevating French leadership in the EU, and for staying abreast of Great Britain. Some European countries have not forgotten how Hitler was appeased in 1939 and will, therefore when necessary, look to the U.S. to offset power or influence grabs within the EU by establishing or enhancing bilateral relations with Washington. While in a decade or less, Europe may have a unified security and defense policy, it lacks one at present while issues of national identity and assertiveness are under differing degrees of redefinition.

While Europe figures out how to preserve states' rights vs. federal ones, the United States has entered a period of profound patriotic identity and defense of particular national interest. Most Americans have little understanding of how powerful the U.S. really is, how central our actions are viewed, or how dominant our cultural values are evident elsewhere in the world. Moreover, as compared to our European counterparts, the American people still remain relatively naive, if not ignorant, about foreign affairs and foreign policy in general. One merely has to go only as far as to see how few Americans speak foreign languages to realize how parochial Americans still are, even in an age of rapid communication and globalization.

Second, how international problems are to be solved has affected the behavior of both Europe and the United States. No matter how brutal and oppressive the evidence was for Saddam Hussein's republic of fear, the fact that he had killed and tortured tens of thousands of his own people, eliminated civil society, suppressed individual rights in favor of his all powerful personality cult, looted billions of dollars from his country, impoverished Iraqis, and failed to comply fully and openly with the weapons inspectors, these facts were dismissed with "there are plenty of bad leaders and dictators in the world" and "what right does the United States have to be judge and jury about a leader's political behavior?" Besides, it was argued repeatedly and at times with great accuracy that Washington has protected and defended many retrogressive autocrats and dictators, including those in Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, many in the Americas, Ferdinand Marcos and the Shah of Iran, so what right did the U.S. have to single out the nefarious undertakings of Saddam Hussein? Attitudes about using force and the availability of a military option have shaped major differences in how to approach and solve international problems. Unlike the U.S., without a European military option or without the UN in possession of divisions of troops, the EU is a prime advocate of using multilateral action and collaborative undertakings as the prime mechanism for the EU to offset America's unparalleled military strength. In addition, many Europeans are simply opposed to the use of war to resolve

any international dispute under virtually any circumstances. In a post-Iraqi War French public opinion poll published by *Wall Street Journal-Europe*, it was reported that even if the UN passed a resolution endorsing the use of force against Iraq, a third of the French public still opposed participating in military action against Iraq. While anti-war protests have emerged each time America has gone to war in the 20th Century, roots of the European anti-war movement run deep in center-left and leftist political European history. European social democrats, those who remain part of the working class offshoots, generally believe that ruling elites and conservative establishments are oppressive, self-serving, power hungry, and inextricably linked to a military-industrial complex. For example, some believe that George W. Bush went to war against Saddam Hussein just so Vice-President Cheney's former corporate relationship with Haliburton could benefit from the inevitable post-war reconstruction of Iraq; or the belief persisted that America went to war to generate business for itself; it went to war to enhance the power of American capitalism. Overthrowing a brutal and dictatorial regime was not the real issue, argue some Europeans, but the need to use force to solve the problem to strengthen the military-industrial complex. It was argued that Americans assented to such a policy and joyfully allowed its sons and daughters to be put in harm's way for the purpose of enhancing American imperialism! On the American side, most do not understand that Europeans prefer verbal solutions to foreign policy matters, using power, force, and war only with great reluctance as a last resort. Europeans are passionate about process; they accuse America of being more interested in results and impatient, not willing to use diplomacy first before invoking a power/force option. On managing Iraq and Iran in the 1990s, a policy of "constructive engagement" was Europe's answer to Washington's preference for physical containment.

Third, on both sides of the Atlantic before and after the war, there was an inability or unwillingness to let the facts get in the way of the outcome one wanted. In the deeply heated debate in Europe prior to the 2003 war in Iraq, general European opposition to the use of force discounted Saddam Hussein's violation of seventeen Security Council Resolutions in the last twelve years. During a lecture tour before Italian and French media, university, and foreign policy audiences in early March 2003, prior to the war's outbreak, when I pointed out that the American Congress, which included liberals and democrats, was almost unanimously supportive of the U.S. president in the use of force against the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, those facts got in the way of how audiences wanted to see George Bush and his administration. Bush himself was viewed as ignorant and unsophisticated in world affairs, an inarticulate, unsophisticated and bumbling governor with a yearning for blazing six-guns from Texas, lacking both Kennedy and Clinton-like language or intellect, or Reagan's charisma. When Europeans were reminded in lecture or conversation that in the Kosovo and Serbian wars, the removal of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic was added to earlier goals, and that the UN Security Council did not authorize an attack, in which most of Europe participated, blank stares came back not understanding their inconsistency in criticizing the U.S. for not obtaining a second UN resolution to use force against Saddam Hussein. When European audiences passionately accused America of a new brand of imperialism, and were then reminded of the U.S.'s very limited imperial history, I receive more blank stares. It was as if American history began with the Viet Nam War. Then when audiences were reminded that it was the French who colonized North Africa from the 1830s to the 1960s, that it was the British in Egypt from the 1880s to the 1950s, that it was the French that truncated Arab nationalism in Syria in the 1930s, more blank stares and rolling eye-balls were provided, even in a debate at the French Parliament and at a presentation in the French Foreign Ministry. Not to be outdone by the facts getting in the way of purpose, six months after the war ended, both the Blair and Bush Administrations and their advisers acknowledge that they lacked the smoking gun of Saddam Hussein's connection to weapons of mass destruction. It is all too evident that on both sides of the Atlantic, understanding and articulating nuance in arguing the facts has given way to selective recall of telling history the way you want it to be, not the way it was. It is too embarrassing for most to adjust their intellectual paradigm to fit the facts. That reality reinforces exaggeration, enhances dire prediction, and reduces opportunities for down-reasoned judgments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Fourth, Europeans and the United States differ wildly about the Palestinian issue, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Middle East in general.^[2] While Europeans and Americans both rely on Middle Eastern oil to turn industrial engines, for Europe, Middle Eastern oil and commerce from the Middle East is much more important than for the United States. Furthermore, European proximity to the Middle East means being closer to the manifold frustrations which most Arab regimes bequeath to Europe: the inability to provide indigenous

Middle Eastern and North African work opportunities for their own populations. Many European populations fear an onslaught of mass immigration from Arab states, or with large Arab populations already residing in Europe, EU countries are much more sensitive to any externally inspired action in the Middle East which will have potential negative ramifications upon domestic governance or generate unwanted political protest. For example, prior to the Anglo-American led attack on Iraq, European audiences were replete with fear that war in Iraq would unleash bouts of "Islamic terrorism" on Europe soil. In essence, Europeans had far greater fears than Americans did for the consequences of forced political change in Iraq. In actual fact, those anticipated fears were highly exaggerated.

Despite George W. Bush's repeated assertions to see the establishment of a Palestinian state, with the collective will of the United States, the EU, the UN, and Russia intimately pursuing that course through the "Road Map," passionate European cynicism for the Bush Administration's promises about supporting a Palestinian state remained. It is true that it is difficult for the Bush Administration, or any U.S. administration for that matter, to be simultaneously a fair mediator and a strong friend of Israel. European media, politicians, and the EU in general remain overwhelmingly aligned in favor with the Palestinian quest for self-determination, not the least of which has to do with a fervent belief that the Palestinians are the victims and vanquished. Like U.S. administrations, the EU criticizes Israel regularly for building or expanding settlements. For imposing collective punishment or demolishing homes of the families of Palestinian terrorist perpetrators, the EU has tended to be more strident in its tones toward Israel. Further separating Washington and European capitals on Israel's responses to Palestinian terrorism, the EU sees Israel's use of military power and force in response to such acts to some degree offensive, objectionable, and easily identifiable with what they dislike about this American Administration: its willingness to use force to solve a problem or to deter it from occurring. After September 11, 2001, when the Bush Administration adopted a more activist policy of attacking terrorist bases or terrorists themselves in pre-emptive strikes, Israel was no longer regularly chastised by the Bush Administration for engaging in "targeted assassinations." Closer proximity of American and Israeli views of managing the terrorist threat caused European commentators to feel even more comfortable about putting George Bush and Ariel Sharon in the same political bed.

Furthermore, most Europeans make no distinction between the terms "Zionism," "Jewish," and "Israel." Thus anti-Israeli feeling can easily be transferred into anti-Jewish sentiment. Many younger Europeans feel that Israel is the culprit. For a continent whose history was so long occupied by bullying neighbors, those memories were transferred easily to labeling Israel as the "occupier." The term "Zionism" remains easily equated with settlers in the West

Bank; "Zionism" is not viewed or understood as a term that defines the Jewish struggle for national liberation. History of the Arab-Israeli conflict, for most Europeans, begins with the first Palestinian uprising in 1987. Little, if any, knowledge is understood about the origins of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Palestine other than the Palestinian narrative that is repeated virtually verbatim: Jews pushed Arabs off their land. When audiences are informed of Palestinian-Arab complicity in assisting the evolution of Zionism, or of the plethora of mistakes made by Arab leaders in the late 1940s in their management of the independence war against Israel, or of Nasser's mistake of taking Egypt into war in 1967, little comprehension of historical fact is apparent. Unlike in the United States, where the Palestinian leadership is often criticized for cronyism, corruption, and political opportunities missed, among younger European audiences, the burden of responsibility for Palestinian inadequacies rests entirely on Israel's shoulders. Said the President of the University of Messina in Italy to me in March 2003, "European students have no idea that the United Nations called for a two-state solution in 1947 and the Arabs of Palestine and surrounding Arab states rejected the idea." For a continent that constantly remembers its own history in hopes of avoiding additional physical control and occupations by stronger neighbors over smaller and weaker ones, it is remarkable how selective recall of history and facts underlie fossilized assumptions.

When it is pointed out to European critics of America that we want to assist the Iraqi people or the Palestinian people by having leadership changes, Europeans acknowledge that they have fallen in love with Arafat because he stands as the leader of an "occupied and oppressed people." When asked about his siphoning of European-provided funds for his use and denied to his people, European interlocutors shrugged their shoulders and say, "you have a point," but nonetheless refuse to jettison their support for him. His association with terror or terrorism is a mental leap that many Europeans will not make, at least in public.

And finally, domestic constituencies in Europe and the United States are dramatically different. In Europe, there are not large concentrations of Jewish populations who shape domestic public policy priorities. Besides large Jewish involvement in grass roots politics in America and not Europe, there is a preponderance of more regular American church-goers who place considerable importance on the substance, viability, and even blind support for the Jewish State. American public opinion polls reveal, in marked contrast to similar polls in Europe, that the American people support Israel over the Palestinians by a significant margin. According to a 2000 Report by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, a key element in these consistent poll findings is an overwhelming support for Israel among Evangelicals. On many public occasions, including at rallies and meetings and on TV and radio appearances, Evangelicals have become a pro-Israel presence alongside the Jewish community. While such support is evident from other significant parts of the body politic, support from Evangelicals is especially consistent and unreserved. Such Jewish and non-Jewish support for Israel in Europe is simply not as strong and certainly not as politically active as it is in the U.S.

Conclusions

Despite non-disappearing differences about how to resolve international problems, the U.S. will remain close to Europe for decades to come. While over-riding issues contribute to major European-American policy disagreements, none of them are so great that either individually or collectively they will jeopardize the future of the North Atlantic Alliance, the future effectiveness/legitimacy of the UN, or put the major democracies on a collision course that would be irreconcilable and spin out of control toward physical conflict between them. Because national and common interests prevail, the coalition built against the war on terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and limiting famine and disease will still efforts to find affordable and common solutions.

Americans, perhaps because they remain the sole surviving super-power, are less worried about some major long-term hiccup in America's relationship with Europe. For many Americans, Europe remains the origins of their ancestry and heritage. Other reasons bond the ties: deep commercial connections, technological revolution, globalization, and deeply held European belief that the United States remains the beacon and protector of liberty, freedom, and human rights. All these together make it impossible for America and Europe to disengage for very long, even with disagreements about how to manage Iraq or other non-behaving states in a uni-polar world. Both sides of the Atlantic would be better off if each learned more about the other's perceptions and hang-ups and possessed open minds rather than those closed by ideology or impeded by ignorance.

Evident from the hand-wringing before the war about the negative consequences for the international order of American-led action in Iraq, the consequences were not as dire regionally and unsettling internationally as European pundits would have led us to believe. The international order has not been turned on its head, the United Nations has not died, and the U.S. has not gone off half-cocked to intervene unilaterally in Korea, Iran, and elsewhere. Rumors about a changing international system because of American cowboy action were zealously oversold. In essence, the U.S. has stayed true to its intention not to allow the United Nations to gain full control over Iraqi reconstruction. Washington's justifiable fear is that consensus decision-making which endlessly stretches out key policy-making would only foster reconstitution of the status quo ante and encourage appeasement in Iraq.

In another publication two years ago, I argued that American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War was best described as "Selective Engagement" and predicated on four pillars: [\[3\]](#)

Can intervention be defined as serving the national interest? Can a coalition be formed to share physical and manpower burdens? Will the area or region be better off after America's

engagement? And can the US get in and remove itself from a foreign intrusion within a limited period of time? Despite the cynicism to the contrary, half-a-year after the Iraq war, those axioms remain true about when Washington will become engaged in a foreign arena.

[1] Kenneth W. Stein is the William E. Schatten Professor of Contemporary Middle Eastern History, Political Science and Israeli Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. His scholarly publications include Mediniut Amitza [Courageous Policy], (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2003); Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace (New York: Routledge, 1999); Making Peace Among Arabs and Israelis: Lessons from Fifty Years of Negotiating Experience (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 1991); The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1985), in collaboration with former President Jimmy Carter; and The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 1985, 2003). At Emory University, he is the Director of The Middle East Research Program and The Institute for the Study of Modern Israel. This article was initially offered as "American Foreign Policy and the Middle East Since September 11, 2001: Are Europeans from Venus and Americans from Mars?" at a Conference sponsored by the Helmut Kohl Institute for European Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, May 2003.

[2] For an earlier analysis of why Europe and the U.S. differ over the Middle East, see Kenneth W. Stein, "Will Europe and American Ever Agree," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. IV, No.1, March 1997, pp. 39-47