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# Review Essays

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## **The Iraq War and U.S.-European Relations by Leslie S. Lebl**

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*Friendly Fire: The Near-Death of the Transatlantic Alliance.* By Elizabeth Pond. European Union Studies Association: Pittsburgh, 2004. 141 pp. \$16.30 paper

*America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy.* By Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003. 246 pp. \$22.95

*Allies at War: America, Europe and the Crisis over Iraq.* By Philip H. Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2004. 266 pp. \$19.95

The key to success in advertising is name recognition: getting your name repeated often is a plus, regardless of whether the context is positive or negative. By that measure, Europe profited greatly from the Iraq war. It went from being the continent that didn't even merit a mention in speeches by President Bush to being the *bête noire* of much of the American public and many American experts in foreign policy. Beyond this, though, what impact will the Iraq war have on U.S.-European relations? How will the dispute over the war affect NATO in particular? How has it affected Europe's goal to develop its own foreign policy and increase its autonomy from the United States? And how has it affected public opinion on either side of the Atlantic?

The three books under review were all written by committed Atlantacists. The authors value the many benefits that accrue from close U.S.-European cooperation: all clearly hope that relations within NATO can be repaired and that transatlantic tensions will subside. However, without firm political leadership on both sides, this could prove difficult. The dispute over Iraq brings together various transatlantic tensions that have existed for many years: differences in threat perception, disagreements over Iraq and the Middle East in general, the impact of widely differing military capabilities and of an emerging "Europe," and growing transatlantic estrangement.

In the past, NATO allies overcame transatlantic crises of this order because of their mutual need to counter the Soviet threat. Today, that constraint has disappeared. Had the Iraq crisis come to a rapid conclusion, these tensions would most likely have subsided, at least in the short run. However, the situation in Iraq is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. In the absence of any serious effort on either side of the Atlantic to manage tensions and influence public opinion, the risk of permanent damage is very high.

### **Differences in Threat Perception**

The disagreement within NATO about Iraq occurred against the backdrop of a long-running transatlantic disagreement over the dangers posed by international terrorism, as well as the proliferation of WMD. Reaching consensus on a common threat perception has been elusive since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but is critical to the long-term survival of the alliance.

The U.S. government had been arguing unsuccessfully since the 1990s that the principal threats to the West were terrorism and WMD. The lack of European interest in these topics contributed to growing American disillusionment with Europe and to a preference for unilateral actions to combat global problems. In the words of one frustrated U.S. State Department participant in a transatlantic seminar on global threat perceptions in 2001, "The Americans were interested in terrorism and WMD; the Europeans were interested in food safety."

The effect of 9/11 and the Iraq war, as well as the Madrid bombings of March 11, 2004, on European threat perceptions is ambiguous. The authors of *Allies at War* conclude, after reviewing the policy divide starting in the mid-1990s, that while the outpouring of sympathy surrounding 9/11 was sincere, "it is now also clear that the terrorist attacks exacerbated rather than attenuated the trends that were dividing the alliance."

Europe, Gordon and Shapiro report, was "reluctant to join America in its strategic revolution." Some Europeans felt that America had brought this woe on itself; most did not agree with Washington that the threat from terrorism called for a "war." While the allies committed themselves to fight against terrorism, they continued to maintain quite different views of how important the threat was, as well as how to combat it. This perception certainly matches poll data reported by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. They found that "a small majority (55 percent) of Europeans think that U.S. policies contributed to the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Craig Kennedy and Marshall M. Bouton, "The Real Trans-Atlantic Gap: US and European Public Opinion Differences," *Foreign Policy*, Nov.-Dec. 2002.

The analysis of the allies' common threat perception is considerably murkier in *Friendly Fire*. Pond, a long-term resident of Germany, plays down any transatlantic policy differences. With no reference to the many years of sterile debates in the 1990s, she says that, in 2002, the Europeans knew that terrorism and WMD were serious threats and that international law would have to be revised to take care of these new concerns.<sup>2</sup> However, she later identifies one of the European challenges after the Iraq campaign as "how to move toward an acknowledgement in principle that Europe shared America's fears about terrorism and WMD." Then she describes the EU's European Security Strategy paper, prepared in late spring 2003, as going "much further than any previous EU statement in accepting America's post 9/11 threat assessment." A reader could be forgiven for not understanding the extent to which the lack of responsiveness from Europe encouraged the United States to disregard European views.

So, will the Europeans in the end agree with the United States on the threat posed by terrorists, possibly armed with WMD? To some degree, they already have, as witnessed in the EU security strategy referred to by Pond, to which EU leaders agreed in December 2003. And EU law enforcement and intelligence officials clearly agree with the United States, as evidenced by their outstanding counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, and among themselves, since 9/11. This agreement, unfortunately, does not extend to the question of possible links between Saddam's regime and Al Qaeda. As a result, that controversy has tended to obscure the positive trends in U.S.-European cooperation.

Initial European responses to the March 11 bombings in Madrid were similarly mixed. Whether the Spanish meant primarily to punish Prime Minister Aznar is irrelevant; the terrorists received a clear signal that it is worth their while to use terror to influence the outcome of democratic elections in Western countries.

Other European leaders appeared to understand the danger. At an EU summit later in March, they quickly took action to reinvigorate various counterterrorism initiatives.<sup>3</sup> Later, they hastened to publicly reject Osama bin Laden's reported offer for a "separate peace." Similarly, French interior minister Dominique de Villepin, who as foreign minister was highly critical of U.S. foreign policy, is now engaged in trying to evict radical Muslim clerics from France.<sup>4</sup> European leaders, though, will have to work hard to overcome

<sup>2</sup>One of the transatlantic battles the Europeans decided not to fight, in order to maintain solidarity with the United States after 9/11, was the looming struggle over a proposed protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. The protocol had been under negotiation for six years when the Bush administration announced that it was rejecting it as unworkable. Prior to 9/11, the Europeans had overwhelmingly rejected this position.

<sup>3</sup>See "Declaration on Combating Terrorism," Brussels, Mar. 25, 2004, available at <http://ue.eu.int/>.

<sup>4</sup>See Craig Smith, "France Planning to Deport Turkish Man for Advocating Violence," *New York Times*, May 4, 2004.

years of willfully ignoring the terrorist threat and allowing their publics to do the same. It is simply too early to tell whether Europeans will conclude that the Islamist terrorist threat is aimed at them too, or if they will try to deflect it by distancing themselves from the Iraq conflict and/or from the United States.

The WMD question was, unfortunately, considerably muddied in the Iraq war. The failure to find stockpiles was extremely useful for critics of Bush and/or the war. The widespread assumption, most likely wrong, that the Iraqi WMD problem was either overblown or imaginary is now set in stone. Discoveries in Libya and Pakistan during the same period, arguably induced by the Iraq war, have in fact proven illegal WMD programs to be quite advanced and dangerous, but the public discussion has not connected the dots. This is one impact of the Iraq war that will likely bedevil transatlantic relations for some time to come.

### **Out-of-Area Disagreements**

Since the founding of NATO, its members agreed on the Soviet threat but frequently were unable to agree on threats outside Europe. The 1956 Suez Crisis was perhaps the most acute example of transatlantic differences; it was the only case in which one NATO member (the United States) actively opposed the actions of others (France and Britain). In fact, the Alliance survived, in part, due to its ability to agree to disagree on out-of-area operations undertaken by its members. The decision, at the end of the Cold War, to take NATO itself “out of area” meant that future disagreements would have a direct impact on NATO’s operations—and that great care would have to be taken to manage Allied differences.

The 1991 Gulf War posed the first post-Cold War test of consensus on out-of-area operations. While the war was conducted by a large multilateral coalition, European public support was far from unanimous. In Germany, a “widespread peace movement. . . treated the American-led international coalition against Iraq as an expression of a malicious imperialist design”<sup>5</sup>—in retrospect, a sign of more trouble ahead.

Gordon and Shapiro provide a useful, brief summary of the emerging pattern of splits over rogue states, particularly Iraq, and the effect of these splits on U.S.-European ties. “[T]he striking feature of the Clinton years was the increasing frequency with which policy disagreements over rogue states took place along U.S.-European lines.” Of all these disputes, the most acute concerned Iraq:

<sup>5</sup> Russell A. Berman, *Anti-Americanism in Europe: A Cultural Problem* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 2004), p. 31.

[B]y the end of the Clinton presidency, the failure to agree on Iraq had become one of the most divisive issues in the Atlantic alliance. The clashes at the UN created a legacy of bitterness and betrayal that seriously damaged both sides' belief in the other's good faith as well as the belief that the UN could effectively cope with problems like Iraq.

A sobering analysis indeed. *Allies at War* goes on to do an excellent job of tracing the various stages of the dispute over Iraq. The authors offer by far the fairest presentation of both sides' views, although repeated assertions that Franco-German policy was driven purely by non-commercial interests look rather foolish after the allegations of corruption and personal enrichment by, among others, senior UN and French figures, during the life of the UN Oil-for-Food program. They argue that the Iraq dispute arose from a mix of bad moves and bad luck. Regardless of one's political views, it is impossible to argue with their point that vituperative outbursts, particularly on the part of French and U.S. officials, wrought unnecessary damage. Their plea is for more civility in transatlantic relations. Certainly, it is hard to imagine the relationship prospering without this.

What about transatlantic cooperation on policies towards other rogue states, particularly members of the "axis of evil"? Of the three books, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* is the only one that goes beyond Iraq to discuss recent U.S. policy toward North Korea and Iran, as well as Syria. Unfortunately, though, it does so in a manner that reduces its basic thesis to incoherence. In the introduction, the authors state that the United States generally now acts more preemptively against threats. They describe Bush as relying on "the unilateral exercise of American power rather than on international law and institutions" and preferring regime change to "direct negotiations with countries and leaders that he loathed." This implies a continuation of such policies well into the future—otherwise, how could it be the "revolution" described by the authors?

However, in the penultimate chapter, Daalder and Lindsay detail Bush administration policies toward Syria, North Korea, and Iran that are clearly at variance with this analysis. In the case of Syria, they conclude that, far from being evidence of intentions to strike that country, the administration's axis-of-evil rhetoric was intended to bully it into closing its borders with Iraq, shutting down terrorist offices in Damascus, and toning down official anti-American pronouncements—which approach, they note, appears to have worked. With regard to North Korea, they fault Bush for ducking and weaving: "So instead of taking responsibility for North Korea, the Bush administration tried to shift responsibility onto the shoulders of others." Indeed, they appear to fault Bush for not cleaving to his initial martial instincts. And their criticism of U.S. policy toward Iran completely fails to mention the extensive and successful diplomatic coordination between the United States and the EU. Whether or not these diplomatic efforts alter Iranian behavior, they have at least attenuated a painful dispute with the Europeans—and they certainly do not fall into the categories of "unilateralism" or "regime change."

Also of little importance is the question of whether the change in U.S. policy toward Syria, North Korea, or Iran reflects administration preferences or the lack of alternatives. All that matters is that the changes in policy have occurred. If one adds to these three examples the Proliferation Security Initiative (aimed at inhibiting illegal WMD shipments) mentioned by Daalder and Shapiro only in passing and the recently agreed-to UN Security Council Resolution 1540 on the prevention of proliferation of WMD,<sup>6</sup> a fuller picture emerges.

Failing to depict these issues clearly, the authors of *America Unbound* have little to say about the future. Yet future trends could, with proper management, be quite positive. One striking aspect of recent U.S.-EU relations has been the largely positive cooperation on foreign policy and counter-terrorism at a technical level that developed simultaneously with the dispute over Iraq.<sup>7</sup> The war did not disrupt this cooperation; in fact, the dispute led the Europeans to agree on the first-ever European Security Strategy (to which Pond referred) that emphasized the dangers of terrorism and WMD. The challenge for the Europeans now will be to break out of their traditional, automatic rejection of U.S. policy toward “rogue states” as well as terrorists. The challenge for U.S. diplomacy will be to keep the positive trends on track.

### **The Gap in Military Capabilities**

European, and some American, participants at a U.S.-sponsored conference on NATO last January were startled and disturbed to hear some American speakers referring to NATO as “they,” not “us.” That speakers used that construction should hardly be surprising, given the growing technological gap between U.S. and European military forces, and the American focus on global, rather than European, security concerns. Transferring U.S. bases to the periphery of Europe to address extra-European threats will only sharpen this trend.

Europeans have for some time lamented that the capabilities gap means “the Americans do the cooking, and the Europeans wash the dishes.” That trend began in Bosnia and has continued in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Afghanistan. NATO is trying to solve the dilemma by developing a NATO Reaction Force with high-end war-fighting capabilities in which both Europeans and Americans would participate.

In this context, it is also significant that the dispute over Iraq spurred the EU to develop its own security policy. That, if anything, signals that the member states have no wish to return to the *status quo ante*, in which security

<sup>6</sup> Press Release SC/8076, “Security Council Decides All States Shall Act to Prevent Proliferation of Mass Destruction Weapons,” Apr. 28, 2004, <http://www.un.org/>.

<sup>7</sup> Spring 2003 saw significant and often unprecedented progress in U.S.-EU relations virtually across the board on political and law enforcement issues—except for Iraq.

policy was essentially the unique purview of NATO and in which Europeans interacted bilaterally with the United States rather than coordinating first among themselves. American policymakers who think that the United States can continue to reach transatlantic consensus by working informally with individual allies at NATO are increasingly likely to stub their toes on previously agreed-upon EU positions.

Moreover, outward appearances of NATO harmony can in fact mask profound and growing differences. Kosovo offers a perfect example of this dynamic. The Kosovo air campaign was remarkable for its unexpected display of Alliance unity. No one had expected the bombing to take so long, and there was a serious difference of views over the need for ground troops. Nevertheless, the Alliance did not break ranks, and it subsequently installed a NATO peace-keeping force under European leadership in the disputed province. For years afterwards, at least in NATO circles, this has been cited as an Alliance success story.

The Kosovo air campaign, however, came just shortly after British Prime Minister Tony Blair's December 1998 decision to agree to an autonomous EU military force, thus reversing fifty years of British policy. Prime Minister Blair no doubt had a number of reasons for doing this, including the fact that the UK was better positioned to exert leadership within the EU on military rather than fiscal or monetary affairs. But why would this most faithful ally of the United States embark on a process so likely to arouse U.S. suspicions?

Blair and others, particularly the French, argue that the development of an EU force will improve transatlantic relations, as it will encourage member states to increase military spending. But there are other motives, which were only reinforced by the Kosovo air campaign. In that campaign, the Europeans were humiliated by their relative lack of military capabilities and their exclusion from true NATO decision-making. They also had differed with the United States about the use of low-level bombing and ground forces versus bombing at 15,000 feet. They appear to have concluded that they no longer want to be pulled along by the United States into military operations over which they have so little control.<sup>8</sup>

Since December 1998, the EU has moved steadily ahead with its military project. In 2003, EU forces replaced NATO forces in Macedonia, thus providing the United States with an exit strategy there. EU forces are expected to assume a similar role this year in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, after its first African operation last summer in Bunia, the EU can be expected to make a stronger contribution to UN peacekeeping.

The Europeans continually reaffirm that they see the EU force as complementing, rather than competing with, NATO forces. However, the United

<sup>8</sup> For a European view, see Frederic Bozo, "The Effects of Kosovo and the Danger of Decoupling," in Jolyon Howorth and John T. S. Keeler, eds., *Defending Europe: The EU, NATO and the Quest for European Autonomy* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2003). For a description of how the war was fought, see Michael Ignatieff, "The Virtual Commander," *New Yorker*, Aug. 2, 1999.

States should anticipate that, as the EU military force gives them more options, Europeans may feel less bound to follow the U.S. lead at NATO, particularly if doing so involves controversial operations such as Iraq. Efforts to mount out-of-area NATO operations may also become more complex, as both NATO and the EU will be drawing largely on the same pool of soldiers and military capabilities for their missions. Successful “deconflicting” of EU and NATO operations will be the prerequisite to smooth transatlantic relations. Observers may well look back in ten years at the Iraq invasion as the defining moment in setting limits on NATO’s out-of-area operations.

These EU developments, as the obverse of increasingly unilateralist U.S. policy, are important to any analysis of the U.S.-European relationship. Pound discusses the EU strategy paper, although she does not appear to recognize its potential impact on NATO decision-making. Gordon and Shapiro understand the need for the EU and NATO to work together, as well as for improved European military capabilities and a coherent global policy. But none of the authors seems aware of the extent to which European efforts to develop a separate foreign and defense policy could affect NATO or transatlantic relations. It is disappointing enough that the U.S. State Department is largely oblivious to these EU developments, but even more disappointing when little new thinking emerges from prominent scholars.

So what will happen to NATO? Even successful development of the NATO Reaction Force will not answer the question of when it can be used. Nor did the Iraq war resolve the tension arising from the discrepancy between America’s vast military might and Europe’s capabilities. Even if NATO agrees to a role in Iraq, these issues will remain under the surface, and Europeans will continue to develop a European-only defense policy.

Many Europeans (and some Americans) hope that the Iraq war will lead to a better understanding in Washington of the limitations of the American military machine and a corresponding greater appreciation of European militaries. That could happen, and if so, would be welcome. However, there is a catch: the lesson that “success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan” applies to Iraq in spades. If the United States fails in Iraq, Europeans may savor the (considerable) pleasure of being right. If the United States succeeds, however, the Europeans’ reticence may come back to haunt them, as it will only reinforce the argument that, for waging war, multilateral alliances are more of a burden than a blessing to the United States.

### **Anti-Americanism and Anti-Europeanism**

When the United States engaged in Western Europe after World War II, it did so with the clear understanding that a good part of the battle would be for the hearts and minds of Europeans. America’s political dominance and its direct military presence in Western Europe were thus accompanied by a range

