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The "Trans-Atlantic Rift," Iraq, and Israel

Mark A. Heller

The long, drawn-out, slow-motion crisis leading up to the war in Iraq produced, widened, or at least exposed serious breaches in the most prominent international organizations and institutions. In the United Nations, the difficulty of reaching an agreed text of a Security Council resolution and the subsequent impossibility of reaching an agreed interpretation of the text of the resolution that was eventually adopted raised questions about the UN's future viability as a repository of international legality, arbiter of international morality, and guarantor of international peace and security. In NATO, differences over responsibility for Iraq-related contingencies such as the defense of Turkey brought to the fore doubts about the very *raison d'être* of the alliance that had begun to surface immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. And in the European Union, bitter recriminations among members about the extent to which they identified with or objected to American policy *vis-à-vis* Iraq made a mockery of EU pretensions to forge a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and raised the distinct possibility that even the Europe of 15, and especially the post-enlargement Europe of 25, will not move toward "Ever Closer Union" but is doomed, at best, to remain nothing more than a forum for mutually advantageous economic ties.

Most of these developments have been attributed to, or described as, symptoms of a trans-Atlantic rift, indeed, the most serious rift in trans-Atlantic relations since the United States bound itself politically and institutionally to Europe after the

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Second World War. In fact, the situation in early 2003, on the eve of the war in Iraq, seemed on the surface to resemble nothing so much as the realization of Soviet strategic dreams of the 1970s and '80s: a Euro-American rupture, a divided Europe with a pacifist Germany at its core, and the active recruitment of Russia by some Europeans to counterbalance the United States. For the Soviet Union, of course, the dream was fulfilled 10-15 years too late. More to the point, the dream was not the reality.

The Diplomatic Level

The term "trans-Atlantic rift" is actually a misnomer that fails to capture the complexity of developments and misleads more than it illuminates. At the governmental level, the rift was actually between two global camps, with the fault line running in zig-zag fashion right through Europe. One camp was opposed to the use of force in advance of another UN-authorized effort to certify Iraq disarmament and opposed to any finding that would sanction the use of force even if Iraq failed to comply with some of its disarmament obligations. This camp, the "coalition of the unwilling," was led by France and included Germany and Belgium as well as extra-European powers such as Russia, China, and several Arab and Muslim countries. But this was a strange collection of political bedfellows, some spurred by vested material interests in the survival of the Iraqi regime, some by ethnic or religious solidarity and/or apprehension about the implications for their own domestic stability or regime survival, and some by sincere opposition to the use of force in almost any circumstances. It also included some actors driven by world order principles, that is, by the traditional need to assert their distinct identity and independence from America or by concern that their inability to constrain the use of American power would further accelerate the drift toward unipolarity and quash their own pretensions to great power status in world affairs.

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The other camp, the "coalition of the willing," supported coercive diplomacy based on the credible threat of the use of force, and then shared in one way or the other the American conclusion that Iraq would never be peacefully disarmed so long as Saddam Hussein remained in power and that force was therefore justified even in the absence of explicit authorization by the Security Council. Its most prominent European member was Great Britain and it included, in varying degrees, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, and Bulgaria, as well as extra-European supporters or sympathizers like Australia, Kuwait, and Israel, and non-state elements such as the Kurds and Iraqi exiles. This camp, too, attracted various members for various reasons. Some had been victimized by Saddam Hussein in the past and feared his future actions, some believed that the character of the Iraqi regime or its violation of past Security Council resolutions overrode procedural objections to the use of force against it now, and some were motivated by a desire to preserve good relations with the United States (or at least not to alienate it). Some of "the willing" were also prompted by concerns about the regional hegemonic aspirations of those who were leading the resistance to American action against Iraq that outweighed any concerns they might have had about American global hegemonic aspirations.

This latter factor was particularly relevant in eastern Europe, where many states that had recently escaped Soviet domination had little desire to replace it with French or Franco-German domination of the European institutions they were about to join. Nor did they display confidence in French or German benevolence or in Franco-German ability to protect them against a possible future resurgence of Russian power. As one Czech diplomat remarked, "We will not trust again in French security guarantees." These considerations explain their resistance to Franco-

German efforts to organize opposition to American policy in the name of Europe. This resistance was expressed in the January open letter of support for the United States signed by the heads of government of eight European NATO members – the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom – and in the subsequent letter of the so-called "Vilnius 10" – ten other eastern European governments (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), of which seven are EU candidate countries. These countries, which US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described as the "New Europe," insisted that the Europe they were in or were about to join act in harmony with the United States. Moreover, they refused to align themselves with, much less subordinate themselves to, countries that sought to combat unipolarity by creating a counterweight to America, an aspiration attributed to states that in Rumsfeld's terms, formed the core of the "Old Europe." As a result, the majority of European Union governments, counting both current members and "accession" countries, were more closely aligned with the United States than with the traditional Franco-German "core" or "engine" of the EU, to the immense irritation of the latter.

The Societal Level

In short, at the governmental level at least, what has been described as a trans-Atlantic split is really an intra-European split about trans-Atlantic relations. At the inter-societal level, however, the term "trans-Atlantic split" may come closer to capturing reality. For while the leaders of the "coalition of the unwilling" have enjoyed massive domestic support for their plan, those governments that aligned themselves with the United States faced very strong and sometimes majority opposition at home. This was less true in the eastern parts of the "New Europe," where government policies more closely mirrored public attitudes: prickly defense of new-found independence, affinity for the United States and admiration for its historical role in confronting the Soviet Union, historical suspicion of Russia and Germany, and even resentment of France for the same arrogance and condescension widely ascribed by France to the United States. For example, French President Jacques Chirac responded to applicant countries' support of the United States by declaring that they were not "well brought up" and had missed a good opportunity to "be quiet," and intimating that their outspokenness might jeopardize their applications for EU membership – to which Romanian President Ion Iliescu responded, "Jacques Chirac should regret such expressions, which are not in the spirit of friendship and democratic relationship."

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But in western Europe, among veteran EU members, governments that supported the United States did so in the face of widespread and very vocal opposition. London, Madrid, and Rome were rocked by anti-war demonstrations as huge and frequent as any that took place in Brussels, Paris, and Berlin. This cannot be explained only by the presence of very large local Muslim communities, numbering several millions and constituting as much as 10% of the populations of France and Belgium. Nor can it be attributed solely to substantive differences over the true character of the Iraqi regime or the threat that it posed. It was not even just the product of a crazy-quilt coalition of pacifists, humanitarians, third-worlders, anti-globalizers, anti-imperialist leftists, anti-American rightists, anti-Semites, and conspiracy theorists of various other persuasions. In addition to all these factors, it was very much a function of a "values gap" separating America and western Europe, not only at the mass level (where some opinion polls suggest that the gap is actually not as great as is widely presumed), but also, and especially, at the level of the intellectual, cultural, and media elites

and activists that set the tone for public discourse.

The Ideological Divide

At the societal level, the ostensible issue dividing the Atlantic was the American threat to use force against Iraq. But that was only the most dramatic and concrete manifestation of a more profound divergence of fundamental political values. This divergence can be illustrated through the contrasting views about how international relations ought to be conducted and even defined. After almost fifty years of experimentation with the European project, Europeans profess to have transcended the stage of nationalism and transferred at least part of their sense of identity to supranational or multinational entities. From their dealings with each other, they have also developed a template for the conduct of international relations whose main elements include the renunciation of the single-minded pursuit of national interest and the partial sacrifice of sovereignty in favor of multilateral consultation and cooperation under the ever-expanding umbrella of international law as codified by multilateral institutions. According to this template, force is to be used only in clear cases of self-defense or under the cover of some collective or multilateral legitimacy, first and foremost the United Nations. This ideological bent is particularly evident with respect to the Third World, perhaps because a lingering sense of guilt about their colonial history obliges Europeans now to show great solicitude for views of Third World leaders or other spokesmen.

Americans, by contrast, have a much stronger sense of collective self and show much less inclination to submerge it in overarching identities. This is clearly evident from the flag-waving and other remarkable manifestations of patriotism, particularly after September 11 but not only since then. By the same token, Americans are far more protective of their sovereignty and much less willing to see its exercise constrained by multilateral procedures and international organizations, especially when those procedures and organizations produce prescriptions for paralysis.

> A "values gap" separates America and western Europe, especially at the level of the intellectual, cultural, and media elites.

In part, this difference stems from a divergent view of the mankind for whose opinions Americans profess to have a decent respect. They are not burdened by pangs of post-colonial conscience, and in their view, the fact that the United Nations was dominated for so long by coalitions of communist regimes, totalitarian dictators, and assorted other autocrats renders it unfit either to legitimize or delegitimize what America does. But even when the democratic credentials of others are beyond reproach, which is the case with the Europeans, the United States shows greater willingness to go it alone and less compulsion to join in or feel bound by ideas to which "everybody else" subscribes.

One explanation for this ideological divide is structural. Unilateralism is a viable option for those with the power to act alone; multilateralism maximizes the leverage – is a "force multiplier" – for those who don't (and constrains the margin of maneuver for those who do). The United States clearly falls in the first category; all the Europeans, including the post-Soviet Russians, are in the second. So, too, are the Chinese, at least thus far. This has been evident for more than a decade, since the collapse of the Soviet Union left a kind of vacuum which only the United States was able to fill. In this sense, the more muscular rhetoric of the Bush administration is simply an extension, however tactless some may see it, of trends that emerged under an ostensibly more "Euro-friendly" Clinton administration. After all, Clinton also resisted the Kyoto Protocol on environmental standards, it was his Secretary of State who declared the United States "the indispensable nation," and it was his behavior that provoked a French Foreign Minister to complain about the dangers of the American *hyper-puissance.*

Structuralism, however, provides only part of the answer. Another part surely lies in the realm of norms and values. The European preference for multilateralism in policy flows logically from an ideology of moral equivalence, that is, from the conviction that moral truths may not exist at all and are in any case too complex to be self-evident or determined unilaterally and can only be sanctioned by consensus, if not unanimity. Americans have fewer inhibitions about investing their policy debates with a moral dimension, perhaps because their concept of multiculturalism does not extend to politics, that is, to the belief that diversity of political systems is as legitimate as is diversity of religious beliefs or culinary, musical and sartorial preferences. Instead, American ideology insists that the principles of democracy are universally valid and it dismisses any rejection of democracy on grounds that it is a "western" or "American" construct incompatible with authentic cultural traditions elsewhere in the world. Perhaps this rejection of equivalence, which Europeans characterize as "naive" or "simplistic," is the obverse of the European "cynicism" deplored by many Americans. In any event, it permits Americans to take seriously a formula like George W. Bush's "axis of evil" while Europeans feel compelled to cite it with the same undertone of irony provoked by Ronald Reagan's denunciation of the "Evil Empire" fifteen years ago.

This moral contrast, of course, is considerably overstated. Moral equivalence and multicultural relativity do not dominate the discourse of the "New Europe," especially of its eastern parts, to the same extent. Nor are they entirely absent from the American debate. But there, they prevail mostly in the intellectual strongholds of post-modernism and they do not travel well outside the humanities, much less beyond the confines of the academy into the mass media, the general public, or the political system. In Europe, especially "Old Europe," they are at the core of elite belief systems. In this sense, there is a significant trans-Atlantic values gap underlying the highly visible policy disputes during the crisis leading up to the war in Iraq.

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It is possible that the aftermath of the war will cause that gap to shrink. This could happen if political success (palpable progress in the reconstruction and democratization of Iraq, the spread of reform elsewhere in the region, and movement toward the resolution of regional disputes), on the heels of military success, discredits the values underlying the policies of "Old Europe" and precipitates a Euro-American reconciliation. Alternatively it could happen because a dramatic failure according to any of the criteria for success erodes American self-assurance, strengthens "European" values in the United States, and produces an American administration and/or foreign policy more in keeping with European views. Finally, it is also possible that the gap will persist regardless of the war in Iraq, in which case the intra-European split will widen, with some elements acting on the basis of "variable geometry" to assure the distinctiveness of "their" Europe from the United States, even if that entails some rivalry, and others acting to ensure that "their" Europe remain a close partner of the United States. Even before the end of the fighting in Iraq, the declared intention of France, Germany and Belgium to deepen the integration of their security and defense policies served as a possible harbinger of this sort of development.

The Israel Effect

Any of these possibilities will have a profound impact on Israel. If the gap shrinks because of a "successful" war, then America's international primacy will be further strengthened and Europe, itself transformed both by the enlargement of "New Europe" through accession and the more cooperative approach of "Old Europe," will act to complement rather than compete with the United States in the rest of the Middle East,

including the Israeli-Palestinian arena. This will not necessarily relieve the pressure on Israeli governments to accept the substantive contours of a peace agreement already endorsed, in large measure, on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, some of America's European allies and even America itself may be inclined after the war to pursue Euro-Atlantic and intra-European reconciliation through the mechanism of more activist (i.e., coercive) intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. Overall, however, it will probably relieve the pressure to implement the substance of an agreement before the Palestinians themselves embrace changes both in the objectives they pursue and the ways they pursue them. Furthermore, it may even precipitate a greater Palestinian willingness and ability to make those paradigm shifts.

In contrast, if the gap shrinks because of an "unsuccessful" war that is understood to have vindicated the approach of America's critics, then the United States may be less assertive in resisting the policies pursued by "Old Europe," whether individually or through the European Union, and might even be more inclined to embrace those policies. Again, this will not be reflected in monumental changes to the substance of a peace agreement, but it may well be translated into pressures to accept changes in the process, sequencing, and even content that almost any Israeli government will resist endorsing, even at the cost of tensions not only with Europe but also with the United States.

> The European preference for multilateralism in policy flows logically from an ideology of moral equivalence.

Finally, if the gap persists regardless of the outcome of war in Iraq, then Israel will continue to be subjected to exhortations and pressures from parts of "Old Europe," but those parts will matter even less than they do now. To some degree, that is because European policy will either be renationalized or at least reconfigured, especially after expansion, to reflect more the orientations of "New Europe." But to a larger degree, it will be due to even greater American disdain for the international institutions, especially the European Union and the United Nations, so strongly influenced before the war by "Old Europe." In that case, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy may effectively be consigned to the ranks of historical curiosities even if it persists in rhetorical inertia; Europe as a whole will be further marginalized; the UN will lose any hope of representing anything other than a global organization for distributing humanitarian relief and convening extravagant seminars; and American concessions to multilateralism in political-security affairs, such as the Quartet and the UN/EU/Russian version of its "roadmap," will become part of the history of the world before American-sponsored regime change in Iraq.

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