

The French-American War Over Iraq

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WHEN CHARLES DE GAULLE FINALLY decided that France had to get out of Algeria, he told his countrymen that “L’Algérie du Papa est mort;” he meant that the old colonial Algeria their parents knew was gone, replaced by a rebellious Algeria that would soon be independent. The French have recently questioned whether “L’Amérique du Papa est mort.” Have they lost the internationalist ally and leader of “the West,” the United States of the Truman doctrine, the Marshall Plan and NATO that led them through and won the Cold War, and again came to Europe’s rescue in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999? Since 11 September, 2001, the pundits of the French have been telling them that the old United States is gone, replaced by a new unilateralist United States, willing to dispense with the United Nations and ignore NATO, trying to divide a Europe that it once did so much to unify, destroying the international order that it built after World War II. This is the lesson widely drawn in France from U.S. actions in Iraq and the wave of anti-French feeling sweeping the United States. The French conclude from this that the unity of Europe is more urgent than ever. The economic giant the European Union must build a corresponding political and military-strategic component and develop the will to use it. Only then can Europe become a “counterweight” to U.S. power and form a genuine partnership of equals. Europe must be an independent force in a multi-polar world, a leader in the construction of international institutions and a force for democracy, assuming the role that the United States has now apparently renounced. Churchill once said he would call upon the New World to save the Old; France is calling upon the Old World, or at least “old Europe,” to save the New.

France’s aspirations for an active role in Europe and the world have always been part of its Gaullist foreign policy, but they have never been as widely accepted by

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French policy analysts and the government as they are now. These maxims of French foreign policy come as close as possible to representing a national consensus. One may find them in the many edited books on the recent Iraqi crisis that crowd the bookstore shelves, in the policy papers of France's two major foreign policy study organizations, The French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) and the Institute of International and Strategic Relations (IRIS), and in the public opinion journals in France such as *Commentaire*, *Débat*, *Esprit*, and *Le Monde Diplomatique*, as well as in the major policy journals, *Politique Internationale*, *Politique Etrangère*, and the semi-official *Défense Nationale*.¹ They are forcefully articulated by former Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, who coined the term "hyperpower" to describe the United States while he was still in office, and the present Minister of Defense, Michèle Alliot-Marie.² And they are representative of public opinion: 91 percent of the French today say they want the European Union to become a superpower equal to the United States, as opposed to 61 percent of Europeans who say they want the same thing.³

RECOUNTING ANTI-AMERICANSIM

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This analysis comes in the context of a long tradition of anti-Americanism in France, but it is not simply a reawakening of that tradition. There are two historic currents of anti-Americanism, but both were largely extinguished by the mid-1980s. The first was based on a conservative critique of a U.S. society said to be prosperous but mechanical, uniform, and dreary, as well as culturally disadvantaged and lacking individuality, refinement, intelligence, and taste.⁴ This view reflected suspicion of the United States as a model of modernization, and it clearly reflected an understanding that a similarly uniform France would be the consequence of the importation of the U.S. model of the consumer society. But France became prosperous by the 1970s, the consumer society arrived and was assimilated, France achieved one of the world's highest standards of living, and the French have certainly remained very much themselves. The anti-modern critique of the United States has largely disappeared. The second current was that of the left, spearheaded by the once powerful Communist Party. The left's United States was capitalist, imperialist, and militarist, bent on dominating the world, colonizing the countries of Western Europe with the Marshall Plan and NATO, and seeking to destroy the historic homeland of the world's proletariat—the USSR. That critique of the United States was badly shaken by the 1970s, as the French left underwent a process of disillusionment with Soviet society. It disappeared a decade later, when the Communist Party in France went into a tailspin and was eliminated as a serious political force.

A new anti-Americanism has emerged in France recently in the form of the anti-globalization movement and its popular hero Jose Bové, who made his reputation torch-

ing McDonald's franchises. Bové's message links globalization with Anglo-American domination of world markets, unmatched military power, and cultural hegemony. However, France is a major player in globalization; it is the fourth largest exporter in the world, and as of 1997 France had more money invested in the United States than the United States had invested in the French economy. France seeks better regulation of the globalized economy, not its abolition, and the public overwhelmingly puts its faith in the European Union to protect it from the frightening effects of unregulated world markets.⁵ There are still in France and apparently always will be, a fringe group of conspiracy theorists who demonize Americans, Jews, and other forces as responsible for the world's ills. A well-known example is the popularity of Thierry Meyssan's best-seller which maintains that no plane ever crashed into the Pentagon on 11 September 2001, and that the planes that hit the twin towers were guided by honing devices placed in the buildings themselves. The plot was masterminded by the CIA (who employed Osama bin-Laden) and the purpose was to galvanize the United States for its new mission of universal imperialism.⁶ The book sold well, but its absurdity speaks for itself.

However, if traditional anti-Americanism is dead, the United States of President Bush still troubles France. French analysts cannot answer whether it is what the United States has apparently become or its current policies that bothers them. Perhaps it is a little bit of both. One can see the origins of this feeling prior to the events of 11 September. The French are the self-styled leaders of the European movement for unification. They want a politically united and militarily strong Europe with a foreign policy based on international consultation and democratic principles, that relies on the UN, in which France sits on the Security Council. France today contributes over six percent of the UN budget although it accounts for only three percent of the world's wealth.⁷ The French have reacted very negatively to the recent trend in the United States toward unilateral action. They object to the construction of an anti-missile defense in the United States, the move to scrap existing anti-missile treaties, the refusal of the United States to sign the Kyoto treaty on limiting noxious industrial emissions, and the U.S. rejection of the International Criminal Court (ICC).⁸ The French increasingly see the United States as drunk with its excessive military power. They wonder whether the commonly trumpeted shared values with the United States in a democratic "West" still prevail. They object to the death penalty, criticize the numbers of prisoners in the United States (2 million, versus 55,000 in France), and dislike the rampant unregulated capitalism of the United States. They reject the U.S. critique of their own welfare state, even as the present French government, in order to please its trade union critics,

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appears to be in the process of dismantling it.

But the deepest undercurrent in terms of French-American relations may lie in the equal if not opposite claim of the two countries to be the carriers of a universal mission of democracy and the consequent competition between them in world affairs. The French see a new aggressive strain of messianic universalism in U.S. policy, a will-

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ingness to impose democracy by use of the U.S. military. They regard this policy as misguided and prefer their own policy of reliance on multilateral institutions, particularly the European Union and the UN, as more realistic and effective. The French have strong

views regarding the work of U.S. analysts. They reject Samuel Huntington's conflict of civilizations thesis and Robert Kagan's notion of a European Kantian era of universal peace versus a U.S. understanding of the world as a Hobbesian contest between each and all.⁹ In contrast, they see themselves as more realistic in world affairs than Washington. They accept Joseph Nye's insistence on the difference between "hard" and "soft" power, military force versus moral authority and persuasion, and the superiority of the latter to the former.

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As the historic French anti-Americanism has weakened or disappeared, a wave of anti-French feeling has swept the United States, where a vulgar form of "French-bashing" has become commonplace and acceptable. It seems to permeate government circles and receive encouragement implicitly from the White House and explicitly from the Defense Department, and is echoed by prominent columnists like Thomas Friedman, who wrote of "Our War With France," accused Paris of deliberately undermining U.S. policies, and called France an "enemy" of the United States. There is no question that a serious erosion in U.S. public opinion about France has occurred. French newspapers are full of anguished reports on the comments of sarcastic U.S. politicians, and they recount the often vulgar and tasteless jokes about themselves made by U.S. late-night comedians. The French have subjected this "French-bashing" to extensive analysis.¹⁰ They are aware that they are accused of being ingrates with regard to a United States that has twice liberated them in the twentieth century. Their Ambassador goes around the United States declaring the opposite, that France is eternally grateful to the United States.¹¹ But privately one can hear that France is resentful of a United States that waited three years to enter World War I while France bled, and waited two years to enter World War II, doing nothing while France fell.

There are many causes of the current Francophobia in the United States, and it

was evident before the clash of the two countries over Iraq. There is a right-wing critique of the French welfare state, which is seen as bloated, wasteful, and an inhibition to economic growth and competitiveness. There is a parallel liberal critique of French centralization and alleged repression of minorities, which stems from their rigid insistence that immigrants assimilate and the lay tradition in French public schools. The high vote received by M. Le Pen, an extreme rightist and Holocaust denier, in the spring 2002 elections, and his consequent emergence as the sole challenger on the second ballot to President Chirac, raised the ugly specter of anti-Semitism. An increased number of anti-Semitic incidents took place during the election campaign reaching an all-time high in the spring of 2002 with synagogue-burnings and physical attacks on Jewish persons. U.S. Jewish groups called for boycotts of French products and the cancellation of tourist travel to France, while Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon charged that France was the most anti-semitic country in Europe. Most of the incidents, however, did not come from traditional sources but were perpetrated by immigrant Arab youth radicalized by the Intifada and Israel's repressive response; French Jews were made to pay the price of guilt by association.

The French today by most indices are less anti-Semitic than at any time in their history, and they not any more anti-Semitic than other European populations.¹² It is arguable, however, that the French response to the wave of anti-Semitic incidents was lax until recently; the problem was attributed to juvenile delinquency stemming from unemployed youth in suburban slums and hence was dismissed. There is also a tendency in France to excuse "anti-Zionist" behavior even when it imperfectly masks apparent anti-Semitism.¹³ Many French accuse the Israeli government and Jewish circles in the United States of exaggerating these incidents in order to force the French to moderate their legitimate sympathy and support for the plight of the Palestinians.¹⁴ But the recent crackdown by Interior Minister Sarkoszy to prevent recurrences seems a tacit admission that previous policies were insufficient. Anti-Semitism cannot be excused, whatever its source.

In all this the French perhaps do miss the most basic element. They are seen in Washington as systematic obstructers of U.S. policy, and they are resented for their attempts to lead a united Europe in an independent foreign policy that would implicitly challenge the United States. Of course the French dissent more often from U.S. policy than the British, the Germans, or the Italians. But the British have a special relationship with the United States, to which they bequeathed their laws and their institutions; and the Germans have a postwar history of dependence on Washington which occupied their country after the war and built their institutions. The French, unlike the rest of Europe, lack a national constituency in the United States. What is clearly politically incorrect and unacceptable when said of other national groups is

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permissible with regard to the French. Despite all this the French never forget their own special tie with the United States: every French schoolchild learns that France intervened in the U.S. War of Independence against England, making the victory of the United States possible. Most importantly, the French take seriously their claims that in the last analysis they have always sided with the United States when the chips are down: witness the Cold War crises from Berlin to Cuba to Afghanistan. After 11 September it was in France that one heard the refrain: "we are all Americans."

MARCHING TO DIFFERENT DRUMMERS: DISJUNCT APPROACHES TO WAR

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The differences between the two countries have been aggravated in the past during various wars. The United States supported France as an ally in Indochina from 1947 to 1954. For France it was a colonial war of re-conquest, but for the United States, it was a struggle against communism, similar to the war in Korea. Washington financed the war, tried to stop the French from settling it in 1954, and pushed them aside after the Geneva agreements. The U.S. criticized France's Algerian War as a colonial conflict and threatened to intervene at least twice in order to force a settlement. Washington pressured the French into ending it themselves and helped Charles de Gaulle come to power in the process.¹⁵ When France joined England and Israel in an attack on the Suez Canal in 1956, which had been nationalized by Egypt, President Dwight D. Eisenhower forced a halt to operations. Stung by this, France resolved to push for European unity and an independent nuclear deterrent, policies it has continued since.

Differences became increasingly bitter during the U.S. war in Vietnam from the early 1960s through 1975, against which the French radically dissented. De Gaulle warned Kennedy not to become involved, protested the U.S. bombing of the North, and all but advocated a victory for the Viet Minh. Through all this the French remained allies of the United States in NATO. But each side in each war accused the other of failing to meet its obligation as an ally, and the high point of their differences was reached in 1966 when Charles de Gaulle withdrew French forces from NATO's integrated command. After 1975 French-U.S. differences became more a function of the Cold War, but the disagreements were evident even after the fall of Communism, during the Gulf war of 1991, the Bosnian crisis of 1992 to 1995, and the Kosovo war in 1999. With all this as backdrop, should it be any surprise that the two sides have diverged in their approach to the Iraq crisis?

The anti-French invective heard in Washington privately during these various crises and wars paralleled the French-bashing that has been characteristic of the current argument. But it was never previously allowed to surface; publicly French-U.S. relations remained correct, President Kennedy would make no statements other than to

characterize the French position as “unhelpful” in Indochina or the Congo. The same policy of silence was followed by President Johnson; the only cross he had to bear, he said, was the cross of Lorraine. In this respect, the Bush administration has introduced a new element to an already difficult mix by carrying polemics into the public realm. The French government has carefully refrained from following suit.

Curiously, the best moment in French-U.S. relations occurred under President Chirac in 1995, when France decided to rejoin NATO’s integrated command.¹⁶ The negotiations, however, came to grief, foundering on a misunderstanding. The French asked that the Southern Mediterranean command go to a European (read: French) officer. President Bill Clinton was constrained by his military to refuse, because in the United States, the French demand was wrongly construed as a clumsy attempt by Paris to get control of the U.S. Sixth Fleet. Chirac could not successfully conclude the negotiations before he lost the parliamentary elections of 1997, and the Socialist-led government of Lionel Jospin preferred to drop the issue. It was Jospin’s vocal Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine who wrote a book terming the United States as a “hyperpower,” and warned his ambassadors that France had a duty to “say no” to the United States when its policies deserved that response. Védrine was never popular in Washington, and after the French pressured the Clinton administration to become involved in the operation to save Kosovo, relations became worse. Clinton ruled out at once the possibility of deploying ground troops, upsetting both the French and the British, who preferred to leave all options on the table, and the U.S. refusal to accept casualties meant a bombing war from above, with which everyone was uncomfortable. British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chirac concluded that Europe needed its own rapid reaction force, hence the European Strategic Defense Policy was born. Washington had long pushed the Europeans into doing more for their own defense. But now the State Department balked, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned that the force must be subject to NATO command and avoid duplication of arms and equipment, or Washington would oppose it.¹⁷

So even Washington’s skittishness about the European integration it had once so enthusiastically supported was evident before the Bush administration took power. Nevertheless, Bush rapidly worsened relations with his unilateral policies. The administration’s hostility to the use of U.S. forces for peacekeeping, and the implicit threat to withdraw the few remaining forces in Bosnia, did not inspire European confidence. 11 September won Washington a respite; the world rallied behind the United States, NATO invoked Article 5 committing all its members to their mutual defense, and offers of support were proffered for the administration’s war to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan when the latter refused to surrender Osama Bin Laden. The Afghan war was of a new type, however, in which Special Forces supported by air

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power and precision bombing dominated; the administration clearly signaled its NATO partners that it preferred to conduct this struggle itself. Victory was rapid but much of

the good will engendered by 11 September was lost. Whatever remained was squandered by a series of events: the Bush declaration that there existed an "axis of evil" in the world consisting of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the administration's stated goal of

dealing once and for all with the Iraq question, and the publication of the administration's National Security Strategy declaring that the United States was prepared to engage in preventive war when necessary. This was met with a widespread chorus of disapproval, and in Paris it seemed to have caused genuine alarm.

The Quai d'Orsay, France's Foreign Ministry, does not seem initially to have become alarmed over the U.S. call for regime change in Iraq; after all, that had been Clinton's stated policy since 1998. There seemed no reason to suppose that the Bush administration would be more focused on it than its predecessor.¹⁸ There was great fear in France that weapons of mass destruction in Iraq might fall into the hands of terrorist groups willing to use them. Saddam Hussein was in flagrant violation of UN resolutions, and the return of inspectors to Iraq seemed a legitimate goal for Washington to demand. Chirac encouraged Bush to take the problem to the UN, offering the appealing prospect of international legitimation of whatever action might be taken with regard to Iraq. In retrospect one may wonder why the administration, if it was determined to act militarily against Iraq, ran the risk that the UN would refuse to sanction invasion. Washington had carried out regime change unilaterally many times in the past: Guatemala in 1952, Iran in 1953, the Dominican Republic in 1965, Chile in 1973, to mention only a few instances. Moreover, the French had carried out numerous military interventions in their former African colonies for the purpose of regime stabilization or regime change; the latest was already under way in the Ivory Coast. But Iraq threatened to dwarf these operations and require a major military operation with potentially destabilizing effects in the Middle East; during the lengthy preparations for war opposition was bound to grow. If the UN authorized the use of force against Saddam Hussein the opposition would abate.¹⁹

France had a history of successful economic penetration of Iraq dating from the period before the Gulf War. The French policy was to coax Saddam Hussein into compliance with UN resolutions so that sanctions could be lifted and trade resumed.²⁰ Throughout the 1990s, France and the United States clashed repeatedly over UN Se-

curity Council resolutions on Iraq.²¹ If the United States could be constrained from attacking Iraq by a successful UN inspections regime, Paris hoped that the goal of reintegrating Iraq might still be achieved. But if inspections failed and the United States invaded Iraq with UN authorization, France would play its role as a great power and participate in what were expected to be lucrative postwar reconstruction projects.

A serious clash of French and U.S. policies—U.S. arrogation of the right to unilateral action versus French attempts to constrain it through international institutions—underlay the attempt to forge a compromise, which took the form of UN Resolution 1441 in November 2002. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin both participated in the drafting and signed off on the result, each apparently expecting that his own interpretation of the resolution would be implemented. Paris hoped for Iraqi compliance and the lifting of sanctions; the United States hoped for clear evidence of an Iraqi “material breach,” leading to Security Council authorization of military invasion and the fall of the regime. In that sense, the resolution was not so much “bathed in ambiguity” as it was a contest of wills.²² The French faced the realistic possibility that the inspections would fail: it seemed likely that Saddam would stop the inspectors once they got too close to his weapons, in which case Paris was ready to join Washington in military action. The carrier *Charles de Gaulle* was deployed to the Middle East by President Chirac for that eventuality. On the other hand, the French hoped that, in the event of successful inspections accepted by Saddam, sufficient pressure could be brought to bear on Washington so that war could be averted. Chirac, Quai d’Orsay confidential sources insist, genuinely feared war and would accept it only as a last resort. He feared its destabilizing effect on the Middle East and its potential to spur the recruitment of terrorists rather than deterring them. He felt repugnance at the Bush administration’s doctrine justifying preemptive war, and he was afraid that a united western campaign against Iraq would be considered by the Muslim world a new crusade against Islam.²³

Curiously, two men, Saddam Hussein and Chief UN Weapons Inspector Hans Blix, had the ability to give satisfaction to either the France or the the United States. But neither would do so. Saddam Hussein declined to cooperate by accounting for whatever weapons either existed or had been destroyed. However, Secretary Powell could produce no satisfactory proof during his dramatic Security Council expose of 5 February 2003 that hidden weapons of mass destruction in Iraq existed. Saddam Hussein did not obstruct the inspections, and when the inspectors found missiles to be in violation of permissible pre-determined range the Iraqis proceeded to destroy them. Blix termed the Iraqi response passive cooperation with the inspections regime; the Iraqis neither obstructed nor assisted the inspectors. For the French, this was sufficient; the inspections were working, and the UN had been able to force compliance with its

resolutions on a “rogue state,” a critically important precedent for the future.²⁴ Under these circumstances, there seemed to Paris no clear justification for war.

Background interviews at the Quai d’Orsay confirm the account of the last days of the crisis that appeared in the *Financial Times* of London, 26-29 May 2002. Dominique de Villepin called the Security Council meeting of 20 January to discuss terrorism, but it should have been clear to everyone that Iraq would come up for discussion and the situation was clearly reaching crisis point. At a Directors’ Meeting of the Quai d’Orsay on 8 January 2003, several diplomats told de Villepin their belief that the United States could not be dissuaded from military action. De Villepin refused to accept this; he would do everything possible, he said, to prevent war so long as the inspections were working. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw claimed that there was still a 60-40 chance for diplomacy to settle the crisis without war. De Villepin did, however, dispatch a special envoy, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, to Washington to assess the U.S. position. U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice took him to lunch on 13 January and told him bluntly that the decision had been made in December that the war must proceed. De Villepin was reportedly shocked at this news. Prior to the Security Council Meeting on 20 January, he dined with Colin Powell and pleaded for more time for the inspections to work; war could not be fought because Iraq was cooperating passively instead of “actively.”²⁵ But Powell was impassive; the French underestimated the administration’s determination. In anger de Villepin told a journalist after the Security Council meeting that “nothing justified a resort to force.” According to this point on, relations were poisoned. Paris had set a trap for Washington: the administration had been dragged to the UN Security Council in the expectation that authorization for war against Saddam Hussein would be forthcoming.²⁶ Now, the French were giving notice that they would refuse any legitimization of war. And France had a veto on the Council, which it openly threatened to use.

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Powell was further angered by the show of French and German unity in opposition to the war in Paris on 22 January. Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, celebrating the French-German Elysée treaty of 1963, affirmed an identity of views that prompted U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to dismiss them as “old Europe.” The French faced several choices, all of them bad. They could join the United States in the war, but this would be embarrassing, given the confrontation that had just occurred, and it smacked of “suivisme,” playing follow-the-leader, which was taboo for any self-respecting French government. Realistically, the United States was likely to monopolize the reconstruction effort anyway once they controlled Iraqi oil. France could abstain in the UN, or encourage the United States not to bring the matter up at all, but the French had earlier insisted on the need for another vote before Iraq could be found non-compliant with UN Resolution 1441. This option was blocked by Tony

Blair, who needed a second resolution for reasons of public opinion at home. The Quai wanted to temporize, but President Chirac decided to confront the United States.

One can only speculate about his motives. He is said by sources in the Quai d'Orsay to have felt that it was a genuine matter of principle; war must be a last resort, and preemptive war was unacceptable. To go along for the sake of "saving" the UN from division was to turn it into a rubber stamp for U.S.

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policy and to render it worthless. By denying Washington the legitimacy it sought, Chirac hoped to make the United States hesitate before once more attempting a preemptive war. There were also less lofty considerations at work. By championing the movement against the war, Chirac put himself at the head of a vast majority of opinion in Europe. There were between 5 and 6 million Muslims in France who were bitterly opposed to the war, and Chirac wanted to improve relations with Algeria and avoid incurring the enmity of the Muslim world. Then there was the German question. Washington had set Germany adrift and rebuffed its efforts to restore relations, following Chancellor Schröder's declaration during his election campaign that he would never support a war against Iraq. Germany pressured France not to approve of the war, and provided Chirac with what appeared to be a golden opportunity to win it definitively from its dependence on Washington into an enduring relationship and alliance with France, a goal of French policy since the 1950s. Moreover, the Russians preferred to align themselves with Paris and Berlin on this issue, as did the Chinese.

Washington made concerted efforts to get support from the Europeans where it could, and isolate the French and Germans. It won a declaration of support from eight European nations, including some of the largest—Great Britain, Spain, Italy, and Poland—and a declaration of ten smaller nations, most of them candidates to join the EU. The declarations were drafted by the United States; the first by the *Wall Street Journal*, the second by an itinerant U.S. ambassador to Eastern Europe, Bruce Jackson.²⁷ They were preceded by Secretary Rumsfeld's scornful contrast between the "new Europe" of the Eastern bloc and the "old Europe" of France and Germany, neither of whom had been informed about the declarations before their publication. Furthermore, the EU's official in charge of security, Xavier Solano, had not been approached or informed. The EU had just hammered out a compromise resolution on Iraq calling for the inspections regime to continue. The instances of the supposed common European foreign and defense policies had been deliberately by-passed by

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Washington, and the administration was aware that the project for a European constitution was under discussion and bound to be jeopardized by the divisions over Iraq. To add to the French fury, the declaration mentioned the “convincing” presentation of Secretary Powell to the UN Security Council, but it was signed and made ready for issuance before that presentation had been made. Chirac now blundered by declaring that the Eastern European candidate members of the EU had “missed an opportunity to keep quiet.” This genre of scolding exacerbated the existing divisions, and if the French had won their struggle for the hearts of the Germans, they had lost the Spanish, Italian, and Eastern European governments if not their peoples.²⁸

The U.S. victory in the Iraq war was more rapid than expected. When the war concluded, Paris sought to restore relations, ignoring talk of “punishment” or “consequences” that continued to come out of Washington. Officially, the Quai d’Orsay does not accept that there has been a revolution in U.S. diplomacy, that Washington has abandoned the UN, NATO, or the European Union, and the U.S. embassy in Paris denies any such radical agenda as well. The Quai insists that the two countries are still working together on 95 percent of the questions on the agenda between them. These questions include the war against terrorism, efforts to block nuclear proliferation, and the reconstruction of Iraq. France disapproved of the invasion, but no one can seriously want the United States to fail in the occupation.

Privately, some Quai officials are a little less sanguine. The U.S. administration does not speak with one voice with regard to relations with France. Bush, Powell, and Rice may be cordial, but all warned of lasting consequences of the French “betrayal,” and Rumsfeld “punished” the French by pointedly leaving them out of military maneuvers and reducing U.S. participation in the Paris air show. These were minor irritants, but they did not go unnoticed. The U.S. embassy tried to claim that relations were back to normal, and Ambassador Howard Leach wrote an article to that effect that appeared in *Le Figaro*.²⁹ But privately, embassy officials admitted that the Defense Department has some “loose canons” in it, including Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz. The Defense Department is thought to have leaked various postwar rumors suggesting that France helped spirit Saddam Hussein and other top officials out of the country, and that France stocked Iraq with weapons of mass destruction in the immediate past. Ambassador Levitte was instructed to protest formally in Washington against what he termed “a campaign of disinformation in the U.S. press.”³⁰

An ambiguous détente has followed since in relations between the two countries. The French assumed a cooperative attitude in the UN once the war was over,

voting for a resolution authorizing the U.S. military occupation. But they continued to argue that the UN must have a central role in Iraq and actually assume sovereignty there and oversee its transfer to Iraqi authorities without delay. During the war's early aftermath, Washington appeared determined to go it alone in Iraq, angrily rejecting French suggestions and retaining sovereignty there for itself; however, despite a brilliant victory on the ground, U.S. forces were unable to restore security in Iraq, and terrorist incidents costly in U.S. lives mounted in scale and intensity, ultimately targeting not only the United States but Jordan, Spain, and even the UN itself. U.S. forces, moreover, were stretched thin; with 140,000 troops in Iraq and possible crises (or interventions) looming in Iran, Syria, or North Korea, while President Bush was constrained to request 87 billion dollars in supplemental appropriations for the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq in the face of unprecedented budget deficits caused by the administration's tax cuts. The administration appealed for international help, but other nations would commit neither funds nor troops in the absence of explicit UN authorization.

Washington turned again to the UN in early September, hoping for a resolution that would keep U.S. control of the transitional process in Iraq while providing justification for other nations to contribute funds and troops. The projected resolution was submitted just as Chirac and Schröder were holding one of their periodic Franco-German friendship meetings in Dresden. The meeting was unusually harmonious, one diplomat sarcastically complaining that, since agreement was total, there remained nothing to discuss.³¹ Agreement between the two was immediately reached on the insufficiency of the U.S. resolution as well, as Schröder joined Chirac in calling for an immediate transfer of sovereignty to Iraq under UN control. *The Financial Times* reported a "resurrection" of the Franco-German alliance against the United States of the previous winter, a story which was reprinted in *Le Monde*.³²

During September, indeed, the climate between the two nations deteriorated once again, and Chirac and Bush delivered directly contradictory speeches to the UN. Chirac defended the earlier French opposition to the U.S. war, arguing that no use of military force should be tolerated unless explicitly authorized by the UN Security Council. This proved popular with the UN delegates and this time the isolation of Washington appeared total. If the war was unpopular, the U.S. occupation of Iraq was even more so, and the apparent support for the French position in the world body prompted President Bush to accuse the French of enticing other nations into a systematic opposition to everything the United States was trying to do in Iraq. Moreover, Bush's charge coincided with a resurrection of U.S. French-bashing. It was at this point that Friedman wrote his column accusing France of deliberately undermining U.S. policy in the hope it would fail. This is not to say that some French commentators have not replied

in kind; Alain Gresh, in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, delivered a particularly harsh critique of U.S. policy, noting that if the United States was interested in restoring services to Baghdad, they had only to call on Siemens, which installed the electricity grid, and Alcatel, which did the telephones. But Washington wanted to “punish” old Europe, and in the meantime punished itself (while rewarding Halliburton).

But Chirac had made it clear from the outset that although he would seek to amend the U.S. Security Council resolution, he had no intention of blocking it; there would be no repeat of the French “veto” of the previous March. Underlying this is the French realization that ultimately the United Nations cannot be effective without the United States, and while the United States are unlikely to participate in an organization that seeks to limit the exercise of U.S. power.³³ For a time the Bush administration appeared once again to want to abandon its renewed appeal to the UN. But it remained clear that to do so was to forgo foreign troops and funds.³⁴ But the resolution that was passed, although seeming to meet U.S. demands for the most part while calling for an enlarged UN role, did not seem to promise the scale of assistance from the international community for which Washington was hoping; nor was it clear that it would help achieve stability in Iraq, even if the unanimity of the Council seemed a clear statement that such stability was in everyone’s interest. For in the last analysis, the U.S. war in Iraq, as so many predicted, destabilized Iraq and the region, and was part of a deliberate U.S. project to do so. And despite the difficulties Washington has encountered in its occupation of Iraq, it is not yet clear that the destabilizing with the eventual achievement of “democratization” of the region has been abandoned as a goal of U.S. policy.

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DIFFERENCES CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH

The substantive issues between France and the United States have been present since the immediate postwar period. France has consistently pushed its agenda of independence of the United States on a reluctant Europe. To the administration’s annoyance it continues to advocate “multi-polarity” in international relations, a pointed way of saying that multiple foci of power will one day characterize the world as opposed to the contemporary U.S. hegemony, and that this will be beneficial and desirable. This has brought a pointed rejoinder from the British, who argue instead for a single center of power emanating not from Washington but from the European-U.S. partnership.³⁵ When divisions over Iraq threatened to paralyze the existing European defense policy, the French tried to create a smaller force based on the cooperation of the dissenters on Iraq policy, France, Germany, and Belgium. This brought an immediate condemnation from the U.S. embassy and from Tony Blair.³⁶ These reactions are in themselves somewhat mystifying. There is no single European defense policy; rather, there are

three of them, as one observer has recently noted, reflecting the continent's three largest military powers, England, Germany, and France. The British project is to make Europe the junior partner of the United States. The German project seeks to make of Europe a Switzerland. The French are alone in their project to make Europe a superpower and the French are unlikely to succeed at this given the materials in Europe of the 25 different that they will have to work with.

And supposing they did succeed; suppose Charles Kupchan is right, that a united Europe will emerge and take its place as a superpower alongside the United States in an increasingly multi-polar world.³⁷ It is hard to see in any such development a threat to U.S. interests as far as Europe is concerned. That such a world might resemble the Europe of 1914 does not mean that it need repeat Europe's folly of World War I. Even a united Europe is unlikely to spend on its military anything remotely resembling what the United States spends, and if it did it is hard to conceive of its using its power except in alliance with the United States. French and U.S. policies diverge, but their divergence is hardly substantive. Even if the French succeed in their European strategy there is no guarantee that the policy of a united Europe of the 25 would even reflect any of the major thrusts of French policy. The French-U.S. argument strategically is about very little; the differences, as a recent book argues, are indeed reconcilable.³⁸ Pragmatically, however, the countries will continue to disagree. If history is any guide, neither is likely to always, or even often, approve of wars initiated by the other. Economic spats will continue about bananas and chickens and mutual European and U.S. agricultural policies, and cultural arguments persist concerning language, film, and television as well as about values and the policies reflecting them, including the death penalty. But these are now more European-U.S. arguments than Franco-U.S. ones, despite what Washington may think at times. There are bound to be such arguments about policies toward each other and toward the rest of the world as well, and these are likely to be more pronounced when they involve military action. It is sad to have to say that the United States must still learn to expect and tolerate disagreement with its allies; and sadder still to have to reflect that the United States, which has a virtual monopoly on power, has no exclusive claim to wisdom. France believes its the equal of the United States in devising policies and strategies toward the less-developed world. If Washington were a bit more willing to entertain that possibility, a good deal of grief between the countries might be avoided. 

NOTES

1. *Les Relations Transatlantiques, 8èmes conférences stratégiques annuelles de LIRIS* (Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques), Paris, Maison de la Chimie, 6 Mardi et 7 Mercredi, Mai 2003, papers to be published September 2003; *Le 11 septembre: Un an après*. Sous la direction de Pascal Boniface (PUF-

IRIS 2002, 12-13 Mar., 2002); and *L'Europe face au nouvel ordre américain*, (Le Monde/Editions de l'Aube, 2002). For IFRI (Institut Français des relations internationales) see the special edition of *Politique Étrangère*, vol. 67, no. 4, 2002 (Hiver 2002-2003), "Quelle politique étrangère pour la France."

2. Both Vedrine and Alliot-Marie made comments in this sense at the IRIS conference, *Les Relations Transatlantiques*.

3. Jean-François Bureau, "L'Étranger dans le champ de vision des Français," *Politique étrangère*, 67, 4/ 2002 (Hiver 2002-2003): 899-914. Special issue sponsored by IFRI, "Quelle politique étrangère pour la France."

4. Philip Roger, *Rêves et cauchemars américains: Les États-Unis au miroir de l'opinion publique française (1945-1953)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996).

5. Sophie Meunier, "France's Double Talk on Globalization," *French Politics Culture and Society*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 20-34; Sophie Meunier, "The French Exception," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 4 (July-August 2000): 104-16.

6. Thierry Meyssan, *11 Septembre 2001: L'effroyable imposture* (Chatou, France: Editions Carnot, 2002).

7. Pascal Boniface, *La France est-elle encore une grande puissance?* (Paris: Presses de la Sciences Po, 1998): 44-57.

8. François Duchêne, "Mars, Venus et l'Olympe," *Commentaire*, 100 (Hiver 2002-2003): 773-780.

9. For a scathing critique of Kagan and approval of Nye, see Pierre Hassner, "Puissance et Légitimité," *Commentaire*, 100 (Hiver 2002-2003): 785-89; Duchêne, "Mars, Venus et l'Olympe."

10. See Justin Vaïsse, "États-Unis: le regain francophobe," *Politique Internationale*, 97 (Automne 2002): 97-117; Jean Guisnel, *Les pires amis du monde: Les relations franco-américaines à la fin du xxe siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1999); Pierre Hassner et Justin Vaïsse, *Washington et le Monde: Dilemmes d'un superpuissance* (Paris: CERI/Autrement), 2002); Simon Serfaty has also done an excellent analysis in French that appeared as a publication by IFRI: *La France vue par les États-Unis: Réflexions sur la Francophonie à Washington* (Paris: Ifri, 2001).

11. "The U.S. and France in a World Transformed," address by Ambassador Jean-David Lavitte, Rice University, 22 May, 2002.

12. See the dossier antisémitisme "Sondages et interprétations," *L'Arche: le mensuel du judaïsme français*, 543 (mai 2003): 51-53; "Antisémitisme: un hit-parade européen," *L'Arche: le mensuel du judaïsme français*, 543 (mai 2003): 58-59.

13. Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Nouvelle Judéophobie* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2002).

14. Pascal Boniface, *Est-il permis de critiquer Israël?* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2003): 155-57.

15. Irwin Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Irwin Wall, *France, The United States and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

16. Michael Brenner and Guillaume Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences: U.S.-French Relations in the New Era* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

17. Brenner and Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences*, 62-68.

18. See Entretien avec François Heisbourg, "Les Risques de la Toute-Puissance," *Politique Internationale* (Printemps 2003), 53-68.

19. Many of the points made here are either my own reflections or emerged during background discussions with officials at the Quai d'Orsay. In addition I benefitted from insights gained in personal interviews with Simon Serfaty, Guillaume Parmentier, Pascal Boniface, and Thierry de Monbrial.

20. Guisnel, *Les pires amis du monde*, 65-70.

21. See the article by Patrick Jarreau, Sylvie Kauffmann, and Corine Lesnes, "Les dessous de la rupture Chirac-Bush," *Le Monde*, 27 March, 2003.

22. The ambiguity is stressed by Jarreau, Kauffmann, and Lesnes, "Les dessous..."

23. Paul Marie de la Gorce, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2003.

24. These points are made in two articles, Abderrouf Ounaïes "Dangereuse expansion du non-droit," *Défense Nationale* (Mai 2003): 117-25, and Georges-Eric Touchard, "L'intervention en Irak: un faux débat pour de vraies questions?" *Défense Nationale* (Avril 2003): 71-89.

25. I am supplementing the account in the *Financial Times* here with material gleaned from my own

interviews.

26. This argument emerged from sources in the U.S. Embassy in Paris.

27. See the account in the *Financial Times*; although said by sources in the U.S. Embassy to be inaccurate in some details, nobody cared to deny the account of the resolutions' origins.

28. A remarkable comment by Prime Minister Tony Blair followed Chirac's outburst in a telephone call of reassurance to Prime Minister Leszek Miller of Poland: "He must not do that," Blair said of Chirac's implied threat to keep the East Europeans out of the European Union, "He has been very clearly warned by us and the Americans that he can't do that. He has to be told that in no uncertain terms." Peter Stothard, *Thirty Days: Tony Blair and the Test of History* (London: Harper Collins, 2003): 41.

29. See IBN News, <http://news.ibn.net/newsgen.asp?url=fracme>.

30. *Le Monde*, 17 May, 2003.

31. *Le Monde*, 6 September, 2003. Agreement included a joint refusal by the two nations to respect the EU pact of stability that underlies the euro; both allowed their budget deficits to exceed the limit 3 percent of GDP.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Thomas G. Weiss, "The Illusion of Security Council Reform," *The Washington Quarterly*, 24, 4 (Autumn 2003): 152.

34. *The New York Times*, 17 October, 2003.

35. Blair also told the Polish Prime Minister, according to Stothard, "Yes Leszek, Europe must not be an anti-American alliance. Schröder does not want that either. But if Europe wants to be a rival, count us out. If it wants to be a partner, count us in." *Thirty Days*: 42

36. *Le Monde*, 27-28 April, 2003. *Le Monde* itself questioned how Europe could construct yet another defense initiative without the British, who were at the origins of the European Defense Policy adopted at St. Malo.

37. Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

38. Brenner and Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences*.

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