

National Sovereignty & Universal Challenges: Choices for the World After Iraq

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“The Aftermath of War”

- Sir Timothy Garden

The rapid military victory by American, British and Australian combat forces, with limited support from a few other nations, has left a wider reconstruction task than just rebuilding Iraq. The diplomatic damage in the run up to the war has caused deep divisions between old allies. These rifts were reinforced as nations decided on whether to give tangible support to the military operation. Now in the post-conflict phase, disagreements have simmered over the role of international institutions in the work of nation building in Iraq. Yet the need for a coherent international approach has rarely been more important. The threat from al-Qaeda linked terrorism remains. The Middle East is still an area of potential future conflict. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains a problem, particularly as North Korea throws off international restraints. In looking for paths to renewed co-operation between old allies, the United Nations and the European Union must both play a part in mending fences.

The United Nations

When the historians look back at the past year, they may conclude that the tactical success in bringing the UN into the debate over a war in Iraq was a strategic mistake. The diplomatic process, which eventually achieved a unanimous Security Council vote for UNSCR 1441, encouraged many to believe that the UN was back in the driving seat for dealing with Iraq. But President Bush had also made it clear that he believed: *"the world must move deliberately, decisively to hold Iraq to account. We will work with the UN Security Council for the necessary resolutions. But the purposes of the United States should not be doubted."*

The United States was impatient for decisive action; the United Kingdom wanted UN authority for military action; Germany and France led the call for more time for the inspection process. The attempt to achieve a further resolution to give authority for military action was unsuccessful. Hard bargaining by the US failed to achieve the necessary 9 votes, and in any event it was clear that France would exercise a veto if necessary. The US and UK opted to use UNSCR 1441, and previous resolutions on Iraq, as their authority for military action.

This failure of diplomacy has had a series of unfortunate consequences. In the USA, antipathy towards the UN has increased. In answer to President Bush's question on the future of the UN, many in his Administration had their beliefs in its irrelevance confirmed. Although unexpected countries like Canada and Mexico had taken a tough stand in the Security Council, the real anger was directed at France and Germany. Both American and British politicians chose to use anti-French feelings in the run up to the conflict as a way to deflect public interest from the issue of whether military action was legitimate. Russia has also remained unconvinced by the rush to war.

Questions about the legitimacy of the intervention are increasing as the weapons of mass destruction continue to prove elusive.

However, the UN has a major role in legitimising whatever form of government emerges. It must eventually verify that weapons of mass destruction are no longer there. It can draw on its expertise for dealing with humanitarian needs, making the battlefields safe, and encouraging the involvement of non-governmental organisations. The near unanimous agreement by the Security Council on UNSCR 1483 on 22 May 2003 is perhaps the first sign that the international community is ready to move forward together in a more coherent way over Iraq, whatever the previous differences.

The European Union

While leaders were falling out in New York, the European Union managed to have a more refined dispute. The Greek Presidency, Javier Solana and Chris Patten had all made clear the EU's support for a diplomatic rather than early military solution to Iraq. Yet the embryonic common foreign and security policy mechanism could do little to paper over the wide division between its members. The UK, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Portugal were strongly supportive of the US push for military action. At the end of January, their leaders, together with those of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, signed a joint note for the Wall Street Journal expressing their unity. France, Germany, and Belgium were strongly against a rush to war.

In a more complex set of divisions, the prospective new members of the EU were brought into the dispute. The declared coalition of 44 countries supporting military action was Afghanistan, Angola, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan. This gave rise to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's unfortunate characterisation of a division between "Old Europe", represented by France and Germany, and "New Europe" drawn from grateful eastern European states. President Chirac added fuel to the flames by suggesting that pro-US candidate countries were "badly brought up", and hinting that their EU membership applications might need reviewing.

EU optimists hope that the crisis over Iraq policy will promote a greater push for developments towards coherent European foreign policy positions. Some small hopeful signs emerged even during this turbulent period. The EU took over the modest but important task in Macedonia from NATO on 1 April 2003. If this goes well, there is an expectation in the longer term that the EU will progressively take on the Balkans task, although this is now looking more problematic. Despite the megaphone diplomacy between the UK and France over Iraq, some reinforcement of their joint push for a more serious European defence capability has been seen during the meeting between Blair and Chirac at Le Touquet in early February.

Pessimists however point to the lack of progress in providing the new military capabilities which Europe needs. After the initial rush of enthusiasm to allocate standing forces to the Helsinki Headline Goal process, little seems to have happened to provide extra funds for the missing enabling capabilities. The latest agreement to go ahead with procuring 180 A400M transport aircraft is a very small step. Iraq has also taken its toll in highlighting the divisions over a key foreign and security policy issue. At the end of April, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg held an exclusive summit to look at how they might develop the EU defence capability. Their proposal for an independent planning headquarters deepened suspicions that this was an initiative designed to separate the Europeans from NATO.

It is too early to judge how important these different strands will be in the longer term. There is an opportunity for the EU to use the Convention on the future of Europe to move forward in the defence and security policy area. Few believe that progress will be rapid or coherent. Despite the strong rhetorical support from some parts of Europe for the US strategy in Iraq, only the UK and Poland provided any military capability. For the operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, the overwhelming fighting capability was provided by the US. There is a danger that many European nations may decide that they can get by in any future coalition operations with support on a level with Micronesia and the Solomon Islands. This will not be good for the future of the EU.

NATO

The diplomatic machinations over Iraq were also bruising for NATO. Afghanistan had shown the future: the US expects to lead coalitions of the willing. In any event, there would have been little chance of consensus among member states over mounting a NATO operation. Even with a sidelined role, the divisions between the various national players managed to cause excitement. NATO found itself in difficulties over authorisation for planning for the defence of Turkey in the event of a conflict in Iraq. The diplomatic temperature rose as France, Germany and Belgium saw themselves being pressured into giving a stamp of approval for US early moves on Iraq. To general surprise, Turkey in the end did not allow ground operations to be launched against Iraq from its territory. There were no attacks by Iraq on Turkey. Nevertheless, the concern in NATO was real, and the public name calling between members was undoubtedly damaging.

While injured feelings will doubtless heal with time, Iraq reinforced questions about the future relevance of NATO. The Alliance has had a remarkable success over the past decade in the way that it has stabilised the Balkans. It has also done great work in its programme of enlargement, which has brought greater stability to Europe. Yet, NATO is still working to its 1999 strategic concept, which looks dated in the light of recent events. The US produced its national security strategy in September 2002 in the light of the new threats from terrorism and proliferation. Yet few relish the thought of the arguments that would arise in any attempt to update the Alliance concept.

At Prague last year, the commitments by member states to a new NATO Response Force seemed to be accepting that the Alliance needed to be able to spearhead high intensity operations in distant parts at short notice. NATO is already working well

beyond its traditional area of interest. The stabilisation force in Afghanistan has been drawing on NATO support for the joint German-Dutch leadership. Despite the differences over Iraq, members have agreed that NATO should take over this ISAF commitment for the longer term. Afghanistan remains a problem, and a force of 5000 in Kabul is inadequate to promote the rule of law throughout the country. This could be a task for a much enlarged NATO peacekeeping force in the longer term. As Poland looks for backers in its bid to join the US and the UK in providing security within Iraq, the obvious solution is to draw on NATO capabilities and expertise. There is more than enough to do in post-conflict stabilisation tasks.

There remains a tension between the practice of deploying NATO on post-conflict tasks, and the rhetoric of successive Alliance summits, which look for the most modern warfighting capabilities. Some suspect that the US sees NATO as a useful forum to encourage individual members to update capabilities. This then allows coalitions of the willing to be built through bi-lateral arrangements. The NATO role becomes little more than setting equipment standards and sharing military doctrine. The lessons from the Iraq conflict of 2003 will undoubtedly reinforce the importance of precision weaponry and network centric warfare. Yet investment in these capabilities may be at the expense of the troops that are proving so vital after the fighting is over.

Future Paths

As tempers cool, political leaders will need to work at rebuilding these key international institutions. The UN has many tasks, and has survived previous spats. It will have to become re-engaged in Iraq. The EU also has more to bind it together than just foreign and security policy. It has much work to do on its own programme of enlargement. Yet, it cannot put off for ever the development of a coherent approach to international action. Only as a regional actor can it expect to be taken seriously by the United States. What the EU still has to decide is whether it wants to work at the hard power end of the spectrum. At the meeting of EU foreign ministers in Greece on 2 May 2003, there was encouraging support for the idea that Javier Solana should begin the development of a security doctrine.

Without new thinking on strategy, collective EU defence efforts will at best remain focused on the Petersberg Tasks. Some nations will continue to want to be able to project military power independently or as contributors to transitory coalitions. NATO may then have greater difficulty with its own role. If it is not needed for intervention operations like Afghanistan or Iraq, then initiatives to generate modern warfighting capabilities will seem less urgent. After its success in the Balkans, its future may come to be seen as more concerned with post-conflict security work than in tasks appropriate to a NATO Response Force.

Many fear such a division of labour across the Atlantic, which would broadly find Europe cleaning up after US interventions. Without some serious strategic thinking by the EU and NATO, this may be the outcome. The US with a few allies would produce the hard warfighting capability when needed (and preferably when asked for by the UN); NATO would provide a ready peace enforcement force for immediate post-conflict problems; and the EU would be left to police and rebuild civil society. A more balanced sharing of global security responsibilities must be a better route. If the

EU develops its new strategic concept to include the use of hard power, then it can work with NATO to ensure that the US is not left to police the world on its own.

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