Sometime during the Cold War, transatlantic relations became a dialogue about appeasement. They were always about much more than that, of course, and even the appeasement argument ran in both directions. Well before Richard Perle complained of the West Germans, ‘you couldn’t get past the “Guten Morgen” before they would urge the abandonment of one NATO position or another’, West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt was complaining about John F. Kennedy’s cautious response to the raising of a Berlin Wall: ‘Inaction or merely defensive action could provoke a crisis of confidence in the Western powers.’

Accusations of appeasement were, of course, also a big part of internal American politics. When Kennedy settled the Cuban Missile Crisis by tacitly trading some obsolescent Jupiter missiles in Turkey, he invoked a kind of politician’s horse sense: ‘to any man at the United Nations or any other rational man it will look like a very fair trade’. In response, Paul Nitze told the president to his face: ‘I think you’ve got to take a firmer line than that … We cannot get into the position of selling out an ally to serve our own interests.’ Nitze later became a leading critic of Nixon–Kissinger détente with the Soviets, and the critique of détente as a moral and strategic sell-out was a central element of the fledgling political philosophy known as neo-conservatism.

But the projection of this argument onto Europe was fundamental. If their first political targets were Americans (and indeed, Republican Americans), the neo-conservatives’ strategic alarm depended crucially on the notion of inherent European debility in the face of Soviet blackmail. The supposed impending ‘Finlandisation’ of Western Europe is what made it possible to argue, as late as 1980, that the global ‘correlation of forces’ was shifting against the United
States and in favour of the Soviets. That in fact it was Eastern Europe that was being Finlandised, through a patient policy of containment and the evident successes of Western social democracy, has had no discernable impact on a neo-conservative historiography in which only Ronald Reagan’s fortuitous election saved us from Europeans’, and American liberals’, fecklessness. To be sure, the appeasement rap against the Europeans was at times embraced by a somewhat wider ideological spectrum of Americans both during and after the Cold War. In the 1990s, for example, American liberals were deeply frustrated by the manifest inability of European states to handle Balkan wars of ethnic cleansing on their own. (These American frustrations were matched by Europeans’ – particularly British and French – anger at what they deemed hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the American position.)

‘Americans just don’t trust Europe’s political judgment’, wrote Walter Russell Mead in 2002. ‘Appeasement is its second nature.’ American power and moral prestige has suffered greatly through war and failure in Iraq, but if the assertions of Meade and others about ‘Europe’s second nature’ are correct, then there is not much point in seeking recovery through restored relations with our traditional allies. The transatlantic divorce is structurally determined, and inevitable.

This critique of alliance relationships – we can call it, for lack of a better label, the ‘neo-conservative’ critique – holds that consultation and consensus with European allies will only entangle the American Gulliver in restraints that prevent the United States from doing what it can and should be doing on the world stage. There is a culture of appeasement that is bred and propagated from Europe, according to the critique, and there is a process of appeasement that is the inevitable consequence of lowest-common-denominator decision-making of taking the alliance seriously. That process was demonstrated in NATO’s air war for Kosovo, where targeting decisions were seen as hostage to an Alliance committee, to the immense frustration of much of the Pentagon. When it came time to wage war in Afghanistan, US officials made it clear that they would not allow a coalition tail to wag the dog of deciding what the mission was and how to complete it. Then, in the diplomatic manoeuvrings at the UN Security Council in the run-up to the Iraq War, American critics perceived the apotheosis of the culture and process of European appeasement. Seeking Security Council approval for action against Iraq was, according to the neo-conservative critique, a trap: opponents of military action, led by France, abetted by Russia, China and Germany, could tie America up in knots of procedure and uncertainty (since UNSCOM inspectors’ absence of evidence for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons could never be accepted as evidence of absence). Happily, the George W. Bush administration escaped
this trap, waging war and toppling Saddam Hussein without a second UN Security Council resolution.

Or not so happily. There is, of course, a counter-argument: that America’s current predicament is not the predicament of appeasement but the consequence of narrow, insular-to-the-point-of-delusional decision-making process. Unwillingness to accept the cautionary advice of allies was part of the same syndrome that led the highest levels of the Bush administration to dismiss the concerns of generals, the caveats of intelligence analysts and the counsel of the State Department. Washington Post reporter Thomas E. Ricks quoted an American four-star general who described the syndrome in these terms:

> There was a conscious cutting off of advice and concerns, so that the guy who ultimately had to make the decision, the president, didn't get the advice. Well before the troops crossed the line of departure [i.e., invaded Iraq] concern was raised about what would happen in the postwar period, how you would deal with this decapitated country. It was blown off. Concern about a long-term occupation – that was discounted. The people around the president were so, frankly, intellectually arrogant. They knew that postwar Iraq would be easy and would be a catalyst for change in the Middle East. They were making simplistic assumptions and refused to put them to the test … They did it because they already had the answer, and they wouldn't subject their hypothesis to examination.\(^9\)

Listening to allies and taking their counsel seriously is like listening to one’s other advisers. In principle it can have one of two effects. Excessive attention to their conservatism can inhibit America from upholding its role as a global ‘security guarantor of last resort’.\(^10\) Or, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind can restrain the United States from doing something reckless. The question to be answered is this: in the aftermath of debacle – and maybe defeat – in Iraq, which is the more likely danger?

Wrong template
A sophisticated version of the appeasement accusation came from Robert Kagan in his article ‘Power and Weakness’.\(^11\) Kagan’s argument was compelling not least because it expressed a thoughtful understanding of the European world-view. He posited a simple explanation for America’s greater readiness for military interventions: America possessed overwhelming, and historically unprecedented, military power. Europe, far weaker in military terms, was more prone to seek diplomatic solutions, even to the point of ignoring grave threats
such as the one posed by Iraq. Europe was also, in Kagan’s view, the conceptual victim of its own astonishing success: having created, in the European Union, a ‘post-modern’ paradise of law, institutions and cooperation, it had lost touch with the Hobbesian realities of the real and more ‘modern’ world. Americans operated in that world, and understood it much better.

The timing of publication was fortuitous, and unfortunate. Kagan’s article appeared in summer 2002, as the Bush administration was planning for the war in Iraq. The article attracted massive attention and became the intellectual template by which many Americans – but also, actually, many Europeans – understood the subsequent debacle at the United Nations. It remains the template for much of the discussion about whether transatlantic relations can be restored. Yet for all of the article’s – and subsequent book’s – undeniable brilliance, its continuing influence is pernicious, for two reasons.

First, the idea of a fundamental divergence between American and European strategic cultures is unproven, to say the least. Kagan’s essentially static analysis of attitudes and tendencies on opposite sides of the Atlantic failed to capture a countervailing trend: after the Cold War, there had been a demonstrable convergence of transatlantic perspectives on reversing Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and applying military force in the Balkans. It is certainly true that the idea of European union has always rested on two impulses that were in some tension with one another. These might be identified, in category terms, as acting on the lessons of the First and Second World Wars. The first category contains the idea that Europe’s history of internecine war created an imperative for a new form of state relations that would render war, in effect, obsolete. The second category was the idea that the totalitarian ideologies and genocidal programmes that swept Europe through the Second World War could never again be tolerated – and if such evils could not be prevented they would have to be opposed. Since the original European Coal and Steel Community was, in the first instance, an economic scheme for pooling, especially between France and Germany, the heavy industries of war, it is fair to say that the French architects of the scheme were not only emphasising reconciliation but acknowledging a degree of mutual responsibility for Europe’s twentieth-century disasters. In another words, it was a project based on an ideology of the first category. Germany was still feared, along with the threat further east from Stalinism, but the military measures for containing both were left to the specifically military alliance of the North Atlantic Treaty. So Kagan was on to something insofar as the ideology of the European Union is very much about understanding and avoiding the dangers of mutual suspicions.
and preparation for war (the prelude to the First World War) at the expense of understanding and avoiding the dangers of appeasement (the prelude to the Second World War).

Yet the savagery of wars in the Balkans significantly transformed European complacency about the scope for non-military solutions to large-scale projects of ethnic cleansing. Yugoslavia constituted Europe’s category-two epiphany. Throughout Europe – including its pacifist heart of Germany – comparisons were drawn between Serb-run concentration camps and ethnic cleansing and the genocide of the Second World War. Green Party leader Joscka Fischer was emblematic of this German transformation: in the mid 1990s, urging the use of military force to counter Serb aggression, he also emphasised the key necessity of relying on American military power, and used a vocabulary closer to Paul Nitze than to the more familiar German discourse. Three years later, as foreign minister of an Social Democratic–Green government, Fischer played a key role in committing the German military to its first combat role since the Second World War, when the Luftwaffe took part in the air war over Kosovo (albeit in limited support missions). The transatlantic allies learned a lot and started to get many things right. It took three years of dithering to get to the military and diplomatic exertions that made the Dayton Accords possible. From the beginning of the Kosovo crisis it was about a year until Rambouillet and the military intervention that followed. Subsequently, Macedonia was a real example of successful preemptive engagement that may well have prevented a civil war. The point is hardly to argue that transatlantic statecraft was brilliant throughout the 1990s. But Washington, Paris, London and Berlin did come to agree, with varying degrees of support from their publics, on some bedrock principles of coercive diplomacy, military force and humanitarian intervention. Other European countries joined the consensus, at least tacitly. This was the bedrock upon which the Alliance responded to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 – a fundamentally unifying event in transatlantic relations. The *Le Monde* headline ‘We are all Americans’ was genuine, and the solidarity was not just emotional. This convergence of attitudes about the use of military force has to be seen as a factor in the unreserved support that all the major NATO countries, including Germany, gave to America’s decision to drive the Taliban from power. The only problem, it turned out, was more offers of direct military support – through NATO – than the Pentagon was inclined to accept. To sell this support in some European countries it was necessary to stress the humanitarian imperative of rescuing the Afghan people from a heinous regime, rather than the harder geopolitical motives of retaliation and future deterrence. It is nonetheless worth noting that European governments supported, unreservedly, the
American decision to destroy a regime that was only indirectly responsible for 11 September.

The second reason for doubting that disagreement about Iraq reflected fundamental transatlantic divergences is that the Iraq War was a mistake. It has been a counter-strategic diversion that has weakened America, strengthened global jihadist terrorism and has arguably failed, so far at least, to bring humanitarian betterment to the Iraqi people. This of course is no longer a very lonely argument to make. But it has implications, which often go unexamined, regarding any facile judgements about an irreconcilable transatlantic divorce.

Francis Fukuyama conveyed those implications in an article he published for the fourth anniversary of 11 September. ‘Neither American political culture nor any underlying domestic pressures or constraints’, Fukuyama insisted, ‘have determined the key decisions in American foreign policy since Sept. 11’.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Americans would have allowed President Bush to lead them in any of several directions, and the nation was prepared to accept substantial risks and sacrifices. The Bush administration asked for no sacrifices from the average American, but after the quick fall of the Taliban it rolled the dice in a big way by moving to solve a longstanding problem only tangentially related to the threat from Al Qaeda – Iraq. In the process, it squandered the overwhelming public mandate it had received after Sept. 11. At the same time, it alienated most of its close allies, many of whom have since engaged in ‘soft balancing’ against American influence, and stirred up anti-Americanism in the Middle East.

If it was counter-strategic, even in America’s own terms and interests, to roll the dice in a big way over Iraq, then it is hard to sustain the notion that the Iraq disagreement somehow reflected an inevitable, culturally determined disagreement between Americans and continental Europeans over the gravity of the threat that we may face from nuclear or biological terrorism, or indeed, about the role and necessity of military force in facing this threat.

None of this is to deny the obvious. The end of the Cold War did make the alliance more vulnerable to disputes. The shift in focus from central Europe, about which American and European governments generally agreed, to the Middle East, where they have often disagreed, has caused trouble. The bitterness of the Iraq crisis has caused a mutual collapse of confidence, especially in public opinion, which will be very difficult to recover. The point, however, is to emphasise that it was statecraft, not fate, that took a fragile alliance and very
nearly smashed it. Repair will be difficult, but that does not justify a kind of self-fulfilling, sullen fatalism – unless one takes the view that one’s allies across the Atlantic can safely be disregarded. This attitude doesn’t really work for either side. The United States, in practicing such disregard, has seen a haemorrhaging of its global prestige and influence. Yet the Europeans are unable to construct or support a security order without a central role for the United States – which will remain, for the foreseeable future, the world’s only superpower. The unavoidable conclusion is that America’s critics will have to better appreciate and address the concerns that drive America, but the United States at the same time will need to understand, and build into its global strategy, the different concerns that drive much of the rest of the world.

Wrong war

The concept of a ‘global war on terror’ is, in this regard, highly problematic. It does not make sense to Europeans or, indeed, to most of the world. It has been tainted, in large part, by the war in Iraq – a fair enough result, since US policymakers justified the war very much on the basis of that template. Yet the problems with GWOT (the US government’s ungainly acronym for ‘global war on terrorism’) will exist even if Iraq itself becomes more peaceful and as controversy over the invasion continues to subside.

Beyond Iraq, the ‘war on terror’ is polarising rather than unifying for three broad reasons. First, the tactics that the United States has used have tended to accentuate the overweening aspects of US power and America’s perceived disregard for international law and global norms. The Bush administration’s argument that torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib was a matter of isolated behaviour by out-of-control enlisted personnel has failed to convince the global audience; and indeed, the Pentagon’s own investigating commission concluded that the abusive ‘interrogation techniques’ used at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere had ‘migrated’ after they were debated at the highest levels of the White House, Pentagon and State Department, and approved for use on terrorist suspects at Guantanamo.16

Secondly, whereas America’s terrorism problem is mainly external, for others it is very much internal, and it is a problem of infectious ideology rather than hardened enemies.17 It is not possible for America’s European allies to declare ‘war’ against a sizeable element in their own large Muslim minorities. In the wider Muslim world, authoritarian and quasi-democratic states must avoid alienating non-violent fundamentalist political constituencies.

Thirdly, terrorism is nowhere near the top of the list of concerns for most of the world. This is not a matter of blind complacency; other threats and worries do
in fact loom larger. American solipsism on this score is, to be sure, understandable. The large loss of life and horrifically successful theatre of 11 September had a profound effect on American perceptions of the world. Americans intuited, correctly, that a line had been crossed by terrorists who now harboured genocidal – rather than more narrowly political – ambitions. If al-Qaeda or its imitators acquire and master the use of nuclear or biological weapons, then the ambition to kill not thousands, but hundreds of thousands or even millions, would be within their reach. Europeans would also be likely targets; and, of course, terrorist use of, say, engineered smallpox would blow back to kill millions of Muslims and others.

There is debate in the expert community about whether these nightmare scenarios are plausible. But plausible or not, they are simply overshadowed for much of humanity by more immediate threats. Terrorist-engineered smallpox might kill millions, but so could natural avian flu, which stands on humanity’s doorstep and is likely to race first through vulnerable societies in East and Southeast Asia. These societies lack the resources and infrastructure to contain the pandemic in its crucial early stages; if the rich West stepped up to fill the void, the money spent would probably save more lives than the many billions that have been devoted to the ‘war on terror’. Of course, millions are dying already from AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases; again, this is an area where the simple investment of more resources would make a substantial impact.

Global climate change is yet another threat that could disrupt and destroy many more lives than global terrorism – yet it is a threat towards which the US leadership, in particular, has adopted an attitude of ostentatious indifference. For America and other rich countries in temperate northern latitudes, such complacency might be justified in strictly utilitarian terms. The exact consequences of mean global warming are hard to predict, and it may indeed be more cost effective to spend wealth on mitigating those consequences after the fact, rather than broadly curtailing carbon dioxide emissions now. Yet for poor countries in tropical or arid regions this consequence management will not be an option: they lack the resources; they have no reason to imagine that the rich northern countries will bail them out; and they are, in any event, more directly exposed to the increased storms, floods, drought and disease of a warming planet.

A few days after the December 2004 tsunami that devastated the coastal areas of Southeast Asia, Fareed Zakaria reflected on the perspective of the hardest-hit countries.
It's not that they don’t understand the problem of terrorism. They have all dealt with it for decades … This is not, however, the big picture for these countries. The big picture is that large numbers of people here still live on less than $2 a day, that infant mortality and malnutrition are still at unconscionably high levels, that for large parts of the population, life is not that different than it was 200 years ago … This is the war they are waging.20

In principle, American championship of democracy would be a large part of the solution to their plight. It is plausible to argue that better governance is more important than extra aid. There are problems, however. Iraq has shown, once again, the intractable difficulties of the democracy-building project; opposing or even destroying despots is not nearly enough. In any event, the world can see clearly enough that the Bush administration’s proclaimed vocation for spreading democracy was born of its focus on terrorism, yet there is little or no evidence democracy is really a solution to terrorism in any time frame shorter than generations. There is in fact evidence – for example, from the July 2005 London bombings – that democracy and modernisation compound the sense of cultural and personal alienation that inspires acts of terrorism.21 So it is reasonable to wonder how consistent the American commitment to radical democratisation can actually be. For a big power like the United States, inconsistency is hard to avoid – but also impossible to hide, and sure to raise charges of hypocrisy.

The problem of hypocrisy highlights another universal yearning – beyond personal freedom and dignity – that America’s leaders find hard to take seriously, yet neglect at their peril. This is the yearning for a kind of democratic global governance – an international order that promotes ‘even-handedness’ and reciprocity among states, whatever their relative power. So, for example, while Washington is correct to argue than nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran would be far more dangerous than their current possession by Israel, it is curiously indifferent to how this double standard is perceived throughout the world. The perception of double standards compounds the difficulty and danger of the current international diplomacy over Iran’s nuclear ambitions. If handled badly, without respect for the problem of even-handedness in international relations, Washington might drive important powers such as China and Russia onto Iran’s side – creating what François Heisbourg has called a ‘greater East’, united in part by a sense that the current global order is simply unfair.

The United States finds it hard to take this complaint seriously. Ingrained among its elites is the ‘exceptionalist’ view that American power and virtue are inextricable: what is in America’s strategic interest must also be good for the world. There are sufficient examples of this being true to lend it plausibility.
But it will not always be true, and it is the special perspective of the weak that they are more likely to perceive and resent the exceptions. America’s leaders often do not hear this complaint because, as Kishore Mahbubani notes, most of their international interaction is bilateral, with officials who have good, rational reasons of state to emphasise amicable relations with the world’s superpower. Moreover, many ideologists of American democracy sincerely find it bizarre to define the legitimacy of any international order on the basis of a convocation that gives equal say to undemocratic or even despotic regimes.

This American position is morally defensible but psychologically untenable. Francis Fukuyama is correct to complain that, in expecting that success in Iraq would dispel the massive opposition to its invasion, the Bush administration grossly underestimated the resentment that American hegemony – aside from American behaviour – had already generated.

Herein lies a paradox of American power after the Cold War. America in the Cold War had stupendous economic and military resources, but facing competition from the Soviet bloc it did not feel like it possessed a surplus of power. What America did have were natural allies. Its waging of the Cold War was hardly a benefit to everyone: Africans probably experienced more harm than good, as did, arguably, Latin Americans. But Western Europe was protected, rebuilt and supported in such a way that East Europeans could see obvious benefits in a Pax Americana. In East Asia, as post-colonial nationalism subsided, more and more countries became wedded to the Western-dominated economic order. Even Communist China moved into tacit alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union, China’s more natural Eurasian enemy.

Today, a decade and a half after the Cold War, the United States enjoys a position of global military power unprecedented in human history. Yet it has fewer allies that are intrinsically on its side.

Do allies matter?
Following Bush’s re-election in 2004, the protagonists of the transatlantic train wreck – notably Paris and Berlin on one side and Washington on the other – have tried for reasons of state to restore relations, but we can only speculate on whether such raison d’état constitutes sufficient basis for an ambitious alliance of democracies. The ideological acrimony has subsided into a mood of businesslike, if sometimes sullen, accommodation. In the United States, neo-conservative radicalism is largely discredited (though not repudiated by the Bush administration). The Europeans, having stared into the abyss of an end to Atlanticism, are for their part ready to welcome even more or less symbolic signs of US moderation.
Substantive cooperation, which in truth never ended, has been helped by this new mood. Paris and Washington worked together closely at the UN to fashion a resolution that preceded Syria’s April 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon, and again in summer 2006 to fashion a ceasefire between Israel and Hizbullah. Over the course of 2005, the Bush administration and key European governments were finally able to craft compatible, if not quite congruent, policies for confronting Iran’s nuclear ambitions. The problem for both sides, however, is that they were coming back together on the basis of profound mutual weaknesses. While this dictates that each needed the other, it also underscores the limits of what they can accomplish, even if united. It is no longer a transatlantic world, if ever it was.

What does seem clear is that, if the United States remains fixated on its current definition of a permanent ‘war on terrorism’, it will be difficult to restore the moral basis of transatlantic relations. That definition has changed the face that the United States presents to the world: Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and a ‘compromise’ bill on detention and torture are part of a bitter transformation in our conception of ourselves and the world’s conception of us. They are now tied intrinsically to the ‘war on terrorism’.

On this difficult foundation, what should the United States expect or hope for from European allies to help restore its position? In theory at least, Europe offers three things. First, capacity: the Europeans are not over-endowed with military power, to be sure, but America does need their troops in Afghanistan, Lebanon and beyond. Second, legitimacy: this is an elusive commodity to be sure, and not one that Europeans are specially privileged to grant. But if the United States cannot bolster the perceived legitimacy of its foreign policy by way of a common moral vocabulary with France, who seriously expects to find it with Russia, China or even India? Third (and very much related to the second), restraint: the embedding of American power in the imperfect order of global institutions and governance. This does not mean an abrogation of US sovereignty or autonomy – America is too powerful to sacrifice these in any meaningful sense. It does mean allowing itself to be restrained by international opinion – a restraint that would have been better had it been accepted in 2003.

American self-restraint is supposed to be built into the constitutional system. Checks and balances were built in by a group of founding drafters who were worried probably more than anything else about the national accumulation of executive power in wartime, and how this would threaten the new American democracy. As it
happens, during the Second World War and then the Cold War, for good reasons and bad, these checks and balances on executive power were very significantly eroded. But there was another, more amorphous system of checks and balances the American executive branch itself had built up – the post-Second World War system of alliances and international institutions. As David P. Calleo, G. John Ikenberry and others have argued, these became an organic part of the American constitutional system.  

This is certainly not to suggest that US administrations always deferred to these institutions; the American executive could and did ignore them if it chose. But the default position was to defer. There was never such an ideological commitment to ignore them as in the run-up to the Iraq War. That period was characterised by a highly abstract philosophical argument about multipolarity, unipolarity, legitimacy and force. But the prior judgement was a more practical one. Was it wise to go to war in the spring of 2003 or not? A majority of the Security Council believed it was unwise, and the majority was, in this instance, right.

America’s Iraq adventure has turned into a quagmire. The consequences for America’s reputation, for American hard and soft power, for the struggle against extreme Islamist terrorism, have all been disastrous. The consequences for American democracy have also been damaging. They start with the premise of a national state of emergency so dire, and so indefinite, as to require abandoning basic principles and rights to humane treatment and habeas corpus. As Mark Danner put it to a group of graduating American university students:

The significance of what we know about Abu Ghraib, and about what went on – and, most important, what is almost certainly still going on – not only in Iraq but at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, and other military and intelligence bases, some secret, some not, around the world – is clear: that after September 11, shortly after you all came to Berkeley, our government decided to change this country from a nation that officially does not torture to one, officially, that does.

Dangerous world
To this line of argument, there are two possible objections. First, it will be objected that the world has indeed become too dangerous for such fastidious concerns. This is one version of the ‘11 September changed everything’ argument. It is naïve, according to this argument, to imagine that the United States can accept multilateral restraints when it faces unrestrained terrorist enemies, with a geno-
cidal ideology, who are actively seeking nuclear and biological weapons to kill on a mass scale, and have even offered a ball-park figure for the number of millions of Americans who must die before the score is settled.\textsuperscript{26} The second objection is that international law – at the high end of regulating the use of military force – is a dangerous illusion anyway. No sovereign with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force stands above the anarchy of international relations, and the UN Security Council – often posited as the sovereign decider in these matters – has shown itself incapable of confronting the threats to international peace and security that are its essential remit.\textsuperscript{27}

Both of these objections have some validity, but their validity pertains to hypothetical scenarios that might play out; they are more or less irrelevant to the real scenario we have suffered through since 2003. The threat of terrorist use of nuclear or biological weapons may or may not make the world a more dangerous place than during the nuclear confrontation of the Cold War, but whatever the truth, it has little to do with Iraq in 2003. This is not just the conclusion of hindsight: even granting what was suspected about stocks of biological and chemical weapons, it is difficult to conclude that the rush to war, with a heedless disregard for physically securing weapons dumps, was superior to the UN inspections process the war interrupted. As for the objection that international law at the high end of regulating the use of force is a snare and a delusion, it is true enough that there are times when the United States in particular – by virtue of its power and international role – will stand outside the multilateral and legal framework.

But it is perverse to insist on this exception when it goes against America’s own interests. The Iraq case was one in which the hybrid mix of exceptional American power within the framework of multilateral restraint could have served both US interests and international security. There were inspectors in Iraq, who were there, as President Jacques Chirac conceded, only because US troops were massing on Iraq’s border, and also because of the whiff of unilateralism – the threat that they might be used with or without UN authorisation.\textsuperscript{28} Some degree of unilateral impulse – one might call it ‘leadership’ – was helpful. But if the US default position had then been to defer to the judgement of the Security Council, those inspectors could have established what we have now established at a much higher cost – and one we are still paying.

* * *

Any suggestion that the United States, for its own good, needs to be restrained by its allies is unlikely to be a winning argument in American political or strate-
gic debates. The idea is too easily caricatured, as when Bush, in a 2004 election
debate, accused challenger John Kerry of wanting to give other countries a veto
over America’s right to defend itself.29

In practice, allied restraint works best when the allies can successfully
appeal to the Americans’ better and wiser nature by offering plausible policies
that both serve European goals and address American concerns. E3 diplomacy
to head off Iranian development of a nuclear-weapons capability is the prime
current example of such a policy, though it is far from certain that it will avert a
military conflict between the US and Iran (which could be the source of, among
other huge problems, the next big rift in transatlantic relations).

Whether or not it succeeds, the E3 diplomacy on Iran does illustrate a larger,
and much misunderstood, truth about Europe. The Europeans and the EU are
often depicted, both by Americans and by Europeans themselves, as hopelessly
divided – with intra-European fight over the Iraq War as the most dramatic
and painful recent example. But the reality is rather different. On most all of the
hot-button issues of transatlantic politics – including Iran and non-proliferation
more broadly, international action against global warming, the Israel–Palestine
conflict, the role of the United Nations Security Council and the International
Criminal Court – European governments and publics are quite united. There
is a broad European foreign-policy perspective and culture that unites govern-
ments and publics of such countries as France, Britain and even Poland.30 Where
European governments often do disagree is on two big matters. One is relations
with the United States, and the second is the future shape and direction of the
European Union. These are obviously important (and related) disagreements,
and the United States might be able to exploit these divi-
sions in the future as in the past.

But is it in America’s interest to do so? Playing with
European disunion facilitated the American rush to war
in March 2003, but that war hardly furthered American
interests. A strong and united Europe – pursuing distinctly
European policies and values – would be pursuing inter-
est that were generally aligned, if not always congruent,
with American interests. Where interests diverge, the art of
bridging them could have a positive impact on America’s
own policy formulation. In the long run, this process might help the United
States pull itself out of the hole it has dug for itself.

In the short and medium term, however, there are well-known institutional
and political obstacles to the vision of a united, autonomous European foreign
policy. These obstacles have been aggravated by the Iraq argument and by the
failure of the EU’s proposed constitutional treaty in French and Dutch referendums in May and June 2005. In any event, European allies cannot do much to help the United States with its current wrenching problem of Iraq. It is obvious that there is no European troop solution to a war for which the American public itself has lost the stomach.

Because of catastrophic mistakes in Iraq, the US has yet to emerge from a long tunnel: Middle East chaos and domestic recriminations are likely to occupy the United States for years to come. When it does emerge, America will not find that European allies have any greater monopoly on wisdom than it has. But it still might be useful to listen to advice.

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Notes


4 Yet even this anger carried an implicit assumption, which came to be articulated more or less explicitly by French left-wing intellectuals and German Greens, that American military power was still needed to confront genocide in the middle of Europe. For a general survey, see Dana H. Allin, NATO’s Balkan Interventions, Adelphi Paper 347 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2002). On the evolution of attitudes on the German and French left, see Paul Berman, Power and Idealists, or, The Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath (Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press, 2005).


6 NATO commander Wesley Clark was also frustrated, but gleaned very different lessons, recognising as he did the immense importance of alliance legitimacy: ‘in the end, the strategic adaptation was all the more powerful because it represented a unified Alliance, not a single nation … We paid a price in operational effectiveness … but the price brought significant strategic benefits that future political and military leaders must recognize.’ Wesley K. Clark, Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat (Oxford: Perseus, 2001), p. 426.


Author interview with Joschka Fischer, Bonn, February 1996. See also Berman, *Power and Idealists*.


More than three years after the Iraq war, only 37% of Germans held a favourable opinion of the United States, compared to 78% of those surveyed in 2000. The corresponding figures for France were from 62% down to 30%; for Spain, 50% to 23%; for the UK, 83% to 56%; and for Turkey, 52% to 12%. ‘America’s Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas’, Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2006, http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252.


The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 1 draft report of February 2007 argues that climate change is now unequivocal, and that it is highly likely that this change is anthropogenic: see http://www.ipcc.ch/SPM2feb07.pdf. The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (October 2006) claims that climate change could ‘create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the 20th century’, http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/8A8/C1/Summary_of_Conclusions.pdf.

The Stern Review disputes this argument, instead positing that immediate investment could reduce the eventual costs of climate change to around 1% of global GDP per annum, as opposed to losing 5–20% of annual GDP in perpetuity if no action is taken. Stern Review, p.vi


Of the four suicide bombers in the London attacks of July 2005, three
were second-generation British citizens. One of them had worked as a learning mentor, and another was academically successful and played for a local cricket team. Only one of the four could be said to have come from a deprived background. See Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005, pp.13–18, http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/7-july-report.pdf.

On the general link between democracy and terrorism, see F. Gregory Gause III, ‘Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?’, Foreign Affairs, vol. 84, no. 5, September–October 2005.


‘By the time of the Iraq war … the idea that non-Americans would react favourably or at least acquiesce in an American assertion of benevolent hegemony was more a hope than a fact … The violently negative feelings that emerged after the war had their roots in developments that preceded the Bush administration, signs of which could and should have been picked up in the years preceding.’ Francis Fukuyama, America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p.103


Al-Qaeda spokesman Sulaiman Abu Ghaith once argued that al-Qaeda has the right to kill four million Americans, ‘including one million children, displace double that figure, and injure and cripple hundreds of thousands’. See Graham Allison, ‘Not If, but When: Imagining a Nuclear 9/11’, In the National Interest, vol. 1, no. 7, 23 October 2002.


In an interview in March 2003, Jacques Chirac said that ‘it is indeed thanks to the pressure of British and American troops that the Iraqi authorities and Saddam Hussein himself have changed, have shifted their position and have had to agree to cooperate with the inspectors’. ‘Chirac: A Lot of Progress has been Achieved’, CNN.com, 16 March 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/03/16/sprj.irq.amanpour.chirac/index.html.


For example, the EU at the latest NPT conference was a united group of 25 countries, with candidate members also following its line. A series of formal papers tabled by the EU included new rules on restricting access to fuel-cycle technology, plus the famous French non-paper on tough treatment of countries that withdraw from the NPT, which was put forward as an EU proposal. The EU now sees itself as the only bloc of countries that are true and consistent advocates for the treaty, including such concessions to the disarmament agenda as the ‘13 steps’. The United
States, by contrast, is no longer willing to accept the 13 Steps, is more likely to differentiate between ‘rogue proliferators’ and the more acceptable kind, and at least flirts with the argument that the NPT and other multilateral regimes are flimsy Maginot Lines. The public in France, Germany and the UK all strongly oppose Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons: Germany 97%, France 92%, UK 89%. See ‘America’s Image Slips, But Allies Share U.S. Concerns Over Iran, Hamas’, Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2006, http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252. In another area, an overwhelming majority of Europeans agree that humans are contributing to climate change, and would be prepared to accept changes to their lifestyles in order to mitigate global warming. See Ed Crooks, ‘Europeans “would accept climate change curbs”’, Financial Times, 19 November 2006.