

Transatlantic Relations after the War in Iraq

By Thérèse Delpech

After the war in Iraq, there is a troubling difference between the internal and the external assessment of the transatlantic relations. To most Americans and Europeans, the transatlantic bond has been badly damaged. Cooperation in some shape or form still appears possible on a number of issues, but months after the end of hostilities, the stubborn willingness of the different actors to find their position on the war vindicated by events, continues to spoil the atmosphere. Worse, dangerous questions for the Alliance have now surfaced concerning the indivisibility of European and American security.

More than ten years after the end of the Cold War, we would now have, more than different views on security, diverging interests. And to some observers, the choice appears to be between an amicable separation and a nasty divorce. To measure the extent of the damage, it suffices to note that a senior British diplomat, Rodric Braithwaite, wrote in the May issue of *Prospect*: « The special relationship is now supported only by Prime Ministers, submariners, and code breakers ».

By contrast, transatlantic disputes are not only senseless but worrisome to many outsiders. They are but a luxury that rich and prosperous nations can afford, as a luxury precisely, not without contempt for the more difficult situation faced by a large part of the world (« the West and the rest »). Some Iraqis may be the most vocal in expressing this feeling openly « Stop quarrelling and start rebuilding our country for good! ». Already in March, when a second resolution was discussed, the non permanent members of the Security Council made it clear that they did not see any reason to take a firm stand on the issue, when major powers, and in particular Western nations, could not agree among themselves. Later on, India also expressed dismay at the sharp division among democratic nations. At a time when New Delhi was leaving the post colonial mindset to adopt a more proactive and responsible foreign policy, the transatlantic inability to agree on the way to enforce a UNSC resolution was disturbing.

One is hardly surprised by such reactions. It was not dignified to undertake diplomatic campaigns for votes in countries like Guinea, Cameroon, Angola and Chile. Among allies, it should have been possible to reach at least one of the two far better following outcomes: either collective pressure on Saddam strong enough to convince him to give up, or collective action against Baghdad. Unity was important because the alliance of Western democracies is needed to provide stability far beyond Iraq.

Even if America and its allies would be well advised to come back together again for the rebuilding of Iraq, and even if success or failure there would have more than regional consequences, the task is much bigger. In a turbulent world, significant international responsibilities come to the West with being an island of peace, wealth and democracy, with three permanent seats at the Security Council. Western powers should therefore not only recognize that they are all affected by post Cold War turbulences - this could already justify

continued cooperation among them -, but especially that they are in the driving seat when it comes to responding to crises and reducing international tensions.

With the evolution of Western demography -- the significant ageing of the US and - even more - European populations -- the temptation to care only about national interests with a relative indifference to the rest of the world may increase. But in light of globalization, international terrorism and WMD proliferation, it will also become increasingly difficult to escape international responsibilities.

Globalization does not end geopolitics. It makes it more complex. Everything tends to affect everything else: Madrasas in Pakistan, SARS in China, sensitive exports by North Korea. International terrorism, with its ruthless regard for human life and its rigid fanaticism, is aimed at values democracies hold dear. And as far as proliferation is concerned, it appears that one crisis will continue to follow another. Yesterday it was Iraq. Today it is Iran and North Korea. Tomorrow, it may be Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Japan. Iraq will still be with us for at least a decade, and Iran and North Korea have the ability to pose a problem that could affect security far beyond the region to which they belong. Their access to nuclear weapons would simply mean the explosion of the non proliferation regime: a nuclear Iran would most probably lead Cairo and Riyadh to rethink their international commitment concerning the NPT and a nuclear North Korea could have the same effect on Japan. The consequences in terms of increased instability in two of the most volatile regions of the world are not difficult to foresee.

Although Americans often forget it, most of the problems are abroad. Europe knew it all too well for centuries, but it should now come again to the same conclusion. This will not be easy. Why? Because after having been devastated by war for centuries, with approximately one significant conflict per generation, Europe's deep wish is to feel unthreatened. Though the idea of Europe may have originally been conceived to make conflict impossible among its members, security has in many ways been an afterthought. Reform of EU governance, enlargement to the East, and completion of the euro-currency zone have taken precedence over security issues. Until recently (1998), the European security debate has been focused on institutional progress.

It took the decade long Balkan wars to awaken Europe to new security challenges. In principle, the European Defence Policy will make Europe increasingly capable of taking care of itself, allowing (at least in the best scenario) a new division of labor on global security issues, with more European involvement than in the past. However, the huge demonstrations that took place across Europe against the war in Iraq signalled a wider problem than just disagreement on Iraq. They also show that there might be more than just financing difficulties and low and declining defense budgets on this side of the Atlantic. Europe has entered the 21st century safer than at any time in its history and wants to remain that way, come what may. Reluctance to look beyond European borders or rather beyond the immediate European periphery (the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Russia) is still widespread. The problem here is not too much American military power, but rather insufficient European capabilities and lack of sufficient will to share responsibilities for solving international crises.

As it is well known, until today documents on European defense include no threat assessment because the subject remains far too divisive. Contrary to what happens in the United States, where threats are often overemphasized, in Europe they tend to be overlooked. This characteristic

is reinforced by the presence within the European Union of countries like Austria, Ireland, Sweden and Finland, who believe that any common security and defense policy should be restricted to peace keeping operations outside EU territory. There is an additional reason for this situation. Although threat assessment is not a science, it does rely on military, technical and political knowledge, which requires good intelligence. And strategic intelligence is hardly a European strength, particularly at the collective level –although September 11 has encouraged significant intelligence sharing. From this viewpoint, it may be encouraging to learn that at the end of June, Javier Solana was asked to produce, for the first time, a European strategic doctrine, which is supposed to be formulated by December 2003. But what will be actually possible for all Europeans to agree on remains to be seen.

More than three years ago, on April 1999, the aim of the NATO Washington Summit Communiqué was to define « an Alliance for the 21st century », taking into account the major strategic changes of the past ten years. At the time, the most important transatlantic debate was on missile defence and it was already a very sour discussion. The plan was extremely controversial in Europe, and criticism has been toned down only when Russia accepted - without much noise - US withdrawal of the 1972 ABM Treaty. Then there was no way to be « more royalist than the king », as the French use to say. But since 1999, two major events have occurred : September 11, 2001 and the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The latter has left the Alliance deeply wounded both within Europe and across the Atlantic. The former has profoundly changed America by introducing a strong feeling of vulnerability at home and abroad. Europeans have seldom understood the magnitude of the change either within America or in the radical nature of the phenomenon itself. The ability of non state actors to pose strategic, not only tactical, challenges to the most developed nations is indeed a major strategic change and one that will be with us for decades.

True, transatlantic cooperation on non-proliferation issues has been improving dramatically in the last ten years. Although non-proliferation is widely perceived in Europe as primarily an American invention, it was adopted by all European nations gradually over the last decade. The non-proliferation fight became a diplomatic objective and a growing security concern for both the United States and Europe, and respective policies became increasingly intertwined.

As recently as June 2003, a joint US-EU statement on WMD proliferation reaffirmed the transatlantic collective view on the subject. But as a matter of fact, difficulties arise when nations face the famous question raised by Fred Iklé in his seminal article published in 1961 in *Foreign Affairs* : « After detection, what ? ». Violation of its obligations by Iraq was recognized in November 2002 by the fifteen members of the UNSC and Baghdad's December 7 declaration was unanimously found lacking: answers to the numerous questions asked by the UN since 1991 were not there. North Korea withdrew from the NPT in January 2003 after having been found in violation of its obligations under the Treaty. Useless to say that withdrawal in such a situation is illegal. And there is no doubt that Iran has violated both its safeguards agreement with the IAEA and its NPT obligations.

The lack of willingness to enforce treaties by collective diplomatic pressure before other means are contemplated is one of the main reasons for military action against proliferators. Procrastination and indecisiveness are the causes. In addition, it is a most dangerous trend in

terms of the multilateralism that Europeans rightly cherish. Multilateralism should not be a way to delay solutions or diffuse problems, but rather to solve them.

There are other issues where transatlantic cooperation would be needed. Let's mention a few of them. In Afghanistan, as NATO takes over by mid-August the Kabul-based International Security Assistance Force, the opportunity should be seized to extend the peace-keeping role beyond the capital to regions dominated by local warlords. In the Middle East, the cooperation on peace making has achieved some progress with the presentation of the Quartet's « road map » to the parties. The process has entered a new phase with significant steps towards ending the cycle of violence. However, the extent to which it will succeed will depend not only on the Israelis and the Palestinians, but also on the sustained involvement of the main external actors. Last but not least, cooperation on making development aid more effective and bringing down trade barriers would fulfil a significant responsibility of wealthy nations. Through the Millennium Challenge Account, America and Europe should increase development assistance and direct it where it will make a difference. The Doha round should also lead the transatlantic partners to limit trade barriers and to help the Middle East to diversify its industry beyond oil.

A number of unpleasant surprises may be lying ahead, but international cooperation remains the surest choice to face them. The ability of potential adversaries to challenge Western powers in surprising ways is increasing. Alliances are needed perhaps more than ever to prevent them from succeeding. America requires the consent of others, the Europeans in the first place, to succeed in implementing a complex security agenda. But on the other side, the Europeans should also draw the necessary conclusions about the consequences of the strategic landscape as it now stands: insecurity having been globalised, a global vision and adequate projection forces are required to meet the threat. And if WMD use is more, not less, likely than during the XXth century, non and counter proliferation policies should get a higher position on the security agenda and in the minds of Europeans leaders.