

The World After Iraq

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A couple of weeks ago the National Intelligence Council – all twelve National Intelligence Officers together with their deputies – convened for a half-day conference devoted to the world after Iraq. It is the kind of thing the NIC does well, bringing a diverse group of senior experts together to look over the horizon at a focused agenda of critical issues. I cannot share all of the findings, some of which are classified, but I will try to summarize parts of the discussion and offer my own take on some of the issues. So these remarks reflect my own views, not the official views of the National Intelligence Council or of the Intelligence Community as a whole.

As we were trying to peer into the future, we began by looking back at some of our earlier forecasts to see how well they stood up

– and what lessons we might draw from them. It has been shown empirically, by the way, that those who are most successful thinking about the future also spend a lot of time thinking about the past.

Just after the terrorist attacks September 11, 2001, the NIC undertook a similar stocktaking and forecast. Most of the conclusions in the published report hold up pretty well. What that report aptly termed a “clash of civilizations *within* Muslim countries” has been manifest in both anti-American violence and new pressures within moderate Arab regimes. The report noted laconically that “consensus among the United States and its international allies about the best means to deter asymmetric threats from nontraditional adversaries is not likely to be achieved soon” – another judgment that has proved all too accurate.

Perhaps the most important judgment concerned the potentially historic shift in Russian foreign policy toward strategic alignment with the United States. This assessment, together with the forecast of a domestically preoccupied, less confrontational China, hinted at but did not explicitly forecast a realignment of the international system. So let me pick up the story there.

The International System

I launched our conference two weeks ago by posing the following question: Was the breakdown of international consensus over Iraq a temporary phenomenon or the beginning of a fundamental restructuring of the global order, in which the other powers align

themselves to counter-balance U.S. “hyper-power”? In other words, was this episode attributable to personalities and domestic politics, or was something deeper at work?

To be sure, there have been prior crises in transatlantic relations. Antipathies in Europe toward the United States were at least as great during the Vietnam War or at the beginning of the first Reagan term, and the personal chemistry between Helmut Schmidt and Jimmy Carter was as bad as anything we see now.

The idea of allies conspiring against one another is not new, either. The Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow recently released a formerly classified memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher from the fall of 1989, in which Thatcher told Gorbachev to pay no attention to the just-issued NATO communiqué supporting German unification. Here we had our closest ally conspiring with the Soviet leader about the most vital interests of another close ally, the Federal Republic of Germany.

So one needs a certain perspective lest we succumb to a counter-productive Franco-Germano-Russo-phobia. As that eminent political theorist Don Corleone put it, “It’s not personal; it’s just business.”

But the present crisis goes deeper than personalities and politics. Its roots are structural, having to do with the distribution of power in the international system, and the crisis is unfolding without the galvanizing element of a common threat. Structural

Realists – in academia as well as in government – have been arguing since the end of the Cold War that it is an immutable law of nature that when one state acquires preponderant (or hyper-) power, other states will make common cause to balance that power. There have been foreshadowings of this already; Iraq brought it into full view.

What does it all mean? Tim Garton Ash wrote in the *New York Times* on March 20, “Over the last few weeks, the geopolitical West of the cold war has collapsed before our eyes.” That judgment strikes me as too stark.

An editorial (by Jean Marie Colombai) in *Le Monde* a few days later (March 25) came closer to the mark in characterizing this crisis as “a question of redefining the balance of power in the world.” The editorial continued: “We have entered a lasting era of conflicts and repeated crises” between former allies in NATO and the EU. It pointed in particular to the damage to the Franco-British relationship, which should have been the pillar of a European defense. The editorial concluded: “These are not temporary parameters that will disappear once the war is over, when the United States needs its allies for the reconstruction.” “A whole system is at stake here.”

All this leads me to the conclusion that we are facing a more fluid and complicated set of alignments than anything we have seen since the formation of the Atlantic alliance in 1949. At a practical level, this will mean that the longstanding pattern of regular and close coordination via NATO and especially among the four key

western allies – the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany – will give way to an ad hoc “coalition of the willing” on most issues. Of course, NATO had already been receding as an instrument of American diplomacy because of the European Union’s common foreign and security policy and the growing disparity between U.S. global interests and Europe’s continental focus. But the transatlantic conflict over Iraq marks a turning point.

Now, having made a bold case, let me temper these judgments. First, the pattern of Franco-German-Russian collaboration that we saw over Iraq will be episodic, not permanent. France and Germany will continue to align themselves periodically against what they would depict as U.S. unilateralism, but it is doubtful that this united front will extend to other issues such as trade and counterterrorist cooperation.

Second, Russia’s orientation is still in flux. Having made a strategic decision to align Russian foreign policy with the United States, President Putin faces a growing backlash from Russia’s security elites. Putin navigated the diplomatic storm over Iraq rather well, but Russia’s future course is in question.

Third, China’s evenhandedness through all this was notable. From the Chinese perspective, the split among the principal Western allies was a welcome development. Although China will remain wary of U.S. global power, its leaders would prefer to avoid confrontation with the United States while they focus on domestic challenges and regional concerns.

Finally, much will depend on U.S. actions after hostilities in Iraq. Let me turn briefly to some of the critical issues that we will face.

Regional Issues

Within the region, we can expect a near-term spike in anti-American terrorist activity and an expansion of the recruitment pool of extremist groups and would-be terrorists. Over the longer term, there will be two kinds of effects: those springing from regime change in Iraq, and those coming from the U.S. military action and occupation.

A prolonged U.S. military presence would evoke in Arab minds the 13th century Mongol occupation of Baghdad. These effects would be mitigated by “nativization” via a swift transfer to Iraqi authority or by “internationalization” via the visible presence of UN and NGO representatives. The Administration has already made clear its determination to hand over power as quickly as possible to an Iraqi interim authority, and President Bush affirmed a “vital role” for the UN at his press conference this morning.

Democratic change within the region will not come quickly. In Iraq itself, it is not unreasonable to hope that an interim authority together with a stabilizing U.S. security presence will enable the country to move toward an open and participatory political system governed by the rule of law and pursuing cooperative relations with its neighbors. Stable democracy, as we know from

many examples, will not be achieved overnight, however. In Iraq and elsewhere in the region, progress will be constrained by enduring realities unrelated this conflict: lack of democratic political culture, weak civil society, and strong vested interests against reform.

However, one should not undervalue the removal of a despotic and threatening regime and its replacement with one that is more open, lawful, and cooperative. This will enhance the security environment for moderate Arab states like Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, though it may be unsettling internally at least in the near term. How it plays in Syria and Iran is harder to gauge. One hopes those regimes will conclude they should cease supporting terrorists and pursuing weapons of mass destruction, but it is an open question whether they will draw those lessons.

Regional attitudes will turn in large measure on the state of Arab-Israeli relations. Positive developments in the Palestinian leadership run up against a continuing climate of bitter hostility that militates against a breakthrough, but the perception that the United States was making a strong effort to broker a settlement would itself help to temper anti-American suspicions and animosities in the Arab world. At their joint press conference this morning, President Bush and Prime Minister Blair reaffirmed their determination to do so.

Counterterrorism and Counterproliferation

Let me say a few words about counter-terrorist and counter-proliferation cooperation. In the struggle against terrorism, some

countries will be more cautious about publicly supporting U.S. efforts, but most see this cooperation as a shared priority and will not allow differences over Iraq to interfere. (The French in particular have a high capacity for cooperating in one arena and confronting us in others.)

As to what to do about weapons of mass destruction, one of the few things on which the international community might agree is that the international nonproliferation regime has broken down. Some states may look to North Korea and Iraq and conclude that swift acquisition of nuclear weapons preempts U.S. action whereas mere development invites it. Meanwhile, we could be faced at any time with crises between India and Pakistan or with North Korea, as well as with other countries that may seek swift acquisition of nuclear weapons.

On the positive side, there may be an opportunity to fashion a new international consensus around the dangers of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons proliferation. There may also be ways to create more effective linkages among the various elements of counterproliferation strategy: preventing or slowing acquisition, rolling back or deterring use of existing programs, and dealing with the consequences of acquisition via regional security arrangements.

Transatlantic Relations

As to transatlantic relations, our differences with France and Germany are matched by major rifts *within* Europe, with the paradoxical result that the United States will be needed even more as a European power – hardly the outcome the French had

in mind.

At NATO, the Prague agenda of enlargement, command restructuring, and the capabilities commitment should be within our reach so long as we take the lead, but NATO's role out of area has obviously been severely compromised. Within the EU, France and Germany have lost credibility as reliable partners, at least for now. In the end, the rest of Europe has nowhere else to go, but this rift will slow down the development of political Union, particularly efforts to develop a common foreign and security policy.

The *Le Monde* editorial I cited earlier concluded by asking, "Beyond the legitimacy of the French reaction, have we really taken stock of the collateral damage it is going to cause?" It seems to me that having sought a "post-Yalta Europe" ever since 1945, the French may now be thinking they should be more careful what they wish for, because it may just come true.

To end on a positive note, it may be that this crisis will catalyze a more honest and realistic debate about the future of transatlantic relations. Since the end of the Cold War, we and our European partners have been clinging to the rhetoric of transatlantic solidarity even while the underlying realities have been diverging. I for one hope that such a debate will produce, over time, a new and durable consensus around the values and interests we continue to share despite current animosities.

Conclusion

A decade ago, I was involved in a project on "2010" organized by one of my predecessors as Chairman of the NIC, Joe Nye, now

dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard. We tried to look ahead fifteen years to imagine the shape of the world to come. In an essay that I wrote for the project (and later published in a book of mine called *At the End of the American Century*), I described a world that would remain militarily unipolar, with no power or group of powers capable of matching the global reach of the United States, but with a tripolar distribution of economic power among North America, Europe, and East Asia. Beneath the level of these familiar yardsticks of national power, moreover, I saw not the concentration of power but its *diffusion* among supranational, subnational, and transnational actors beyond the control of any government.

Some of my judgments were overtaken by events; others were just plain wrong. The military preponderance of the United States has become even more profound than we anticipated, and the shock of 9/11 (which my essay did *not* predict) caused us to go on the offensive against international terrorism in ways that I did not anticipate.

Yet the core argument, I would contend, remains valid. At a time when the spectacular performance of our armed forces in Iraq may tempt us to see power in predominantly military terms, it is worth recalling that our preponderance is not so great in other areas and that we continue to live in an interdependent world. We can't wage the war on terrorism by ourselves, and we can't bomb the global economy into submission. Our smart bombs aren't *that* smart.

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