



National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Where Leaders Meet

The Middle East: Islamic Law and Peace

Iraq: A Present Danger

April 2003

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy's Task Force on the Middle East considers that Iraq's present regime constitutes a threat to the peace and security of the region and the rest of the world.

Curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and defeating terrorism are of paramount importance for ensuring international security and constitute a cardinal interest of the United States. Saddam Hussein is well known to be a brutal dictator. His use of weapons of mass destruction (e.g., in the war against Iran and against his own people), his support of terrorism (e.g., sheltering and training terrorists and rewarding families of militant Islamic suicide bombers), and his flouting of UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 1441, are actions representative of his regime.

Efforts to orchestrate an international response to Saddam Hussein's scorn of the UN are laudable and welcome. But the United States, as a victim of militant Islamic terrorism, has the sovereign right and responsibility to defend itself and to defeat terrorism, a right that also accords with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and the actions of the Security Council to date. President George W. Bush, like President John F. Kennedy in 1962, is acting decisively to ensure the security of the United States pursuant to a policy initiated in 1998 by President Bill Clinton and the U.S. Congress in the Iraq Liberation Act and now embodied in the Joint Resolution adopted on October 11, 2002, that authorized the use of U.S. armed forces against Iraq.

The removal of the threat represented by Saddam Hussein and his regime must not be the only goal. It is in the vital interests of the United States as well as the rest of the world to build a civil society in Iraq that is committed to the values and practice of political, cultural, and religious pluralism and to human rights as well as to bring stability to the region and foster an atmosphere that can promote a peaceful resolution of other issues.

"The real bond between the United States and Europe is the values we share: democracy, individual freedom, human rights and the Rule of Law.... The attacks of 11 September showed just how far terrorists—the enemies of our common values—are prepared to go to destroy them. Those outrages were an attack on all of us.... Today more than ever, the transatlantic bond is a guarantee of our freedom. We must remain united in insisting that Saddam Hussein's regime be disarmed." So goes the letter, highly gratifying to the Bush administration, signed by the leaders of eight European nations and published by leading European newspapers (though not in the American newspaper of record, *The New York Times*) on January 30, 2003. These nations include five members of the



European Union (the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Denmark) and three about to become members (Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Leaders of ten member states of the European Union (including, notably, France and Germany), however, were not asked to sign because they oppose American policy on Iraq and may even question the assumption that the United States and Europe share basic values. The transatlantic community is now in its deepest crisis since World War II and may be in danger of dissolving. Why is this happening? What can be done about it?

These questions were addressed by a roundtable on "Reinventing the Transatlantic Partnership" sponsored by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, which met in New York in October 2002. The core members of the roundtable are American and European researchers, specialists, and former officials. Additional members will participate in future meetings depending on the agenda. We envisage a long term series of roundtables meeting twice a year, alternating between New York and Europe. The second roundtable is scheduled to meet in Geneva in June 2003.

The underlying cause of the present transatlantic crisis, according to both European and American participants in the roundtable, is that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no longer a threat of a massive attack against the West by a hostile superpower. The danger now comes from terrorist networks and regional instability outside of Western Europe. There is less felt need on the part of the United States for European allies and on the part of the Europeans for an American security shield and no sense of urgency in working out compromises.

Many Europeans believe it is time to renegotiate the transatlantic security compact. Because they see no need for massive armed forces, they contend that the American military buildup is irrelevant and even counterproductive. Rather, the need is for small, mobile rapid reaction forces, which the Europeans will shortly be able to deploy by themselves. Given the nature of the threat, which is from shadowy terrorist networks rather than a superpower, Europeans believe that they are the equals of Americans militarily. They also believe that the European Union is becoming more adept than the United States in managing crises, promoting democracy, and tackling the profound causes of terrorism. Hence Europeans might well be more, qualified than Americans to assume the responsibility of leadership.

For American participants in the roundtable, the ability to project overwhelming military power is as necessary as ever. The destruction of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan required the use of massive force. Elite units were effective only because they coordinated action with precision—guided munitions delivered from the air, via aircraft carriers, aircraft based in nearby countries, and long-range bombers. U.S. military primacy within the transatlantic alliance will continue in the foreseeable future. In addition, the European Union has a long way to go before creating effective rapid reaction forces as well as structures through which to formulate a coherent foreign policy.

Sharp differences have emerged across the Atlantic on almost every international issue today, notably: the conduct of the war (or campaign, as Europeans prefer to see it) against terrorism; the management of relations between the West and the Islamic world; the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict; the promotion of human development in the third world; the integration of Russia and former communist nations into the Western and global economies; and how to deprive Iraq of weapons of mass destruction.

What can be done to repair the transatlantic breach? It is not enough to pay lip service to transatlantic unity; we must go beyond banalities. The emergence of the European Union as an increasingly integrated economy and its aspiration to speak with one voice on foreign policy is changing the terms of engagement between the two sides of the Atlantic. Europeans and Americans



have different perceptions of their respective interests. Given the extent and intensity of existing policy differences, the coordination of American and European policy will be difficult if not impossible. Devising new structures for policymaking or even policy coordination at this time is not likely to be an important item on anyone's agenda.

Policy Recommendations

Several steps could be taken immediately by the U.S. government in order to create more propitious conditions for dialogue. The U.S. mission to the European Union should be reinforced so that it might communicate more effectively with officials of the European Union in Brussels as well as with European journalists, researchers, and the public. Even though the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSFP) may be more of a legal fiction than a reality, it has created structures that should be used by the United States as an efficient and convenient way of consulting with widely scattered national capitals. Meetings between American officials and the high representative of the CSFP and his staff have been highly effective in clearing the air and making interests on both sides of the Atlantic better understood. These meetings should be continued on a regular basis. But it would be unrealistic to expect such consultation to lead to consensus or common policies.

The roundtable participants agreed that transatlantic relations are now so contentious that well-known and contested techniques of conflict resolution might be useful. The group decided to try to identify interests that the United States and Europe have in common, propose actions that have a chance of succeeding, and then build on even limited accomplishments in order to create climate of greater confidence. Among the immediate issues to be addressed at forthcoming roundtables will be redesigning NATO and adapting it to new challenges and ways of cooperating in dealing with terrorists, mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict, and managing relations between the West and Islam. A critical role in exploring possibilities involving new initiatives and policy coordination can be played by civil society and in particular this series of roundtables sponsored by the National Committee that brings together analysts and former government officials for far-ranging, free, and frank discussion. Much hard work lies ahead of us.

