

H-France Review Vol. 4 (August 2004), No. 76

**Philip Gordon and Jeremy Shapiro**, *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution and McGraw-Hill, 2004. vi + 266 pp. \$19.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 0-07-144120-4.

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Although not a work of history, this book should be of great interest to historians, particularly American historians of France, for whom Franco-American relations are presumably a matter of concern. It is not a work of history insofar as it seeks to answer a policy-making and not a historical question, namely, "Should the Atlantic Alliance be saved?" The authors vigorously argue that the Alliance should be saved, contrary to numerous analysts who question its further usefulness in the absence of the Cold War. Historians will likely have opinions about this question, but they can hardly answer it. It will rather be the job of historians of the future to explain whether or not today's policy-makers chose to save it.

A second point of the book is that the Iraq war, which threatens to rupture the alliance, was not "inevitable." Of course, for historians, nothing is or can be inevitable, or we would have no craft, except to explain why everything that happened had to happen just as it did, in this best of all possible worlds. But hidden behind this awkward formulation there is a historical question that the authors do address: Did the Iraq crisis reveal a fundamental shift in the basic structure of Atlantic relations since World War II, or was it rather the result of poor leadership, contingency, and bad diplomacy? The authors include here Iraqi unpredictability, but I take that as a given, and "bad luck," which--assuming one knows what it means--must be taken as irrelevant. Their answer, however, is clear and straightforward: poor statesmanship by France and the United States, rather than any fundamental shift underlying international relations, underlay the crisis; hence the differences between Europe or France and Germany on the one hand, and the United States on the other, still remain reconcilable after the Iraq war. I believe the authors make their case, but just barely.

Despite its overwhelming power after World War II, the U.S. chose to embed that power in a complex web of Atlantic and world relations as it faced the Cold War and constructed the postwar world. The axes of this structure were the NATO alliance, support of the emerging European Union, and the United Nations. Almost from its inception these diplomatic relationships faced crises, many of which raised the same doubts about their viability as the Iraq crisis does now. In my view, the authors' claim that the current crisis in Franco-American relations is worse than any other in the postwar era is wrong. In 1956, for example, the Suez Crisis put the U.S. at odds with France and Britain, and the Eisenhower administration did not hesitate to join with the Soviet Union in condemning the invasion of Egypt by Israel, France, and the U.K. The Americans also used their economic power to force British and French withdrawal by embargoing oil and threatening to force devaluation of the British pound. Following the Suez Crisis, the U.K. resolved to align itself with the U.S. come what may, while the French endeavored to use an independent nuclear force, a special relationship with Germany, and an integrated Europe to amplify French influence and counterbalance U.S. power. This stance has been a consistent aim of French policy ever since, and the Iraq crisis was no different in this respect.

An early result of this French policy was France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command in 1966, a move that caused a crisis arguably even worse than the present one because the Americans believed it weakened NATO's ability to respond in the event of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. In 1973, the European powers refused to join the U.S. in its support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war, causing Henry Kissinger to characterize their inaction as "craven" and "contemptible." In the 1980s, the Reagan administration questioned whether having Communists in the French government was consistent with NATO's objectives, while the Europeans ignored American references to the "evil empire" and built a natural gas pipeline through the Soviet Union to secure their future energy supplies. In the early 1990s, the Clinton administration markedly disdained the European Union's attempt to cope with the Bosnian crisis as it seemingly put overseas sales of American arms and technology ahead of the interests of NATO.

The alliance survived all these crises and is widely credited with winning the Cold War. The Clinton administration affirmed its commitment to Europe with a flourish in 1995, settling the Bosnian crisis where the Europeans could not, leading in the expansion of NATO to East Europe, and finally taking decisive leadership in forging a NATO response to the Kosovo crisis in 1999. The Bosnian success even stimulated the French in 1996 to seek re-entry into NATO's integrated command, but these negotiations broke down when the French demanded--not unreasonably since the critical commands were British or American--a critical military command of their own, specifically the Mediterranean. Clinton was disposed to grant this, but he would not overrule his military advisors, who recommended its refusal. Differences again became apparent in the 1990s between the European and American response to "rogue states." After supporting the U.S. during the Gulf War, the Europeans preferred a policy of "enticing" Libya, Iran, North Korea, and Iraq back into the international order, while the Americans opted for a policy of confrontation. When Saddam Hussein forced U.N arms inspectors to leave Iraq in 1998, the U.S. resorted to unilateral air strikes which the French and Russians condemned. The U.S. Congress also called for "regime change," which President Clinton signed into official policy. However, these differences did not outstrip those of the past, and there was every reason to expect that NATO would flourish under Bush as it had under Clinton. The chief worry, if one believed Bush's campaign rhetoric of pursuing a "humble" foreign policy if elected, was a possible return to American isolationism rather than neo-Wilsonian internationalism.

But the Bush administration alarmed the Europeans with early unilateral actions that boded ill for future relations. It quickly withdrew from disarmament agreements and test-ban treaties, rejected the Kyoto treaty on global emissions, and refused to recognize the World Court. The neo-conservative writer Robert Kagan characterized European-American differences as a contrast between alleged European pacifism and American power-based optimism. Meanwhile, the Bush administration moved toward a doctrine of pre-emptive war and unilateralism based on the premise that given the exceptional nature of U.S. power, the Europeans, indeed the world, would have no choice but to follow wherever the U.S., in its own eyes a force for good in the world, chose to lead. This position was clear before September 11, 2001, even if pre-emption was only enshrined as official policy a year later. Gordon and Shapiro inexplicably fail to evaluate or analyze the influence of the neo-conservatives in or close to the Bush administration such as Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle in all this, a rather remarkable omission given the fact that the French have focused on them almost obsessively in their own attempts to explain the recent transatlantic rift.[1]

Of course, 9-11 nevertheless brought the Americans a wellspring of sympathy in Europe which the Bush administration rapidly squandered when it peremptorily dismissed European offers to collaborate in the Afghan campaign while declaring a war against "terror" replete with all-who-are-not-with-us-are-against-us rhetoric. French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine condemned this notion as "simplistic," while analysts pointed out that one makes war against countries and people, not against methods of war such as terror--the use of which is well-nigh universal in international relations and can easily be attributed to the United States itself. What was the bombing campaign of "shock and awe" against Iraq, for example, if not an attempt to terrorize the Iraqis into a swift surrender? But we are ahead of ourselves here: there was equal rejection in Europe of Bush's reference to an "axis of evil" in the 2002 State of the Union address; the announcement of the doctrine of pre-emptive war in September 2002; and what appeared to be an American decision to go to war with Iraq as early as August of that year, when Vice-President Dick Cheney declared that Iraq definitely had weapons of mass destruction, there was a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda, and containment of Iraq was simply not possible.

Underlying all this was a growing U.S. conviction that the status quo was unacceptable and that the U.S. had the power, and heretofore had lacked only the will, to change it for the better. The Bush administration was apparently resolved to accomplish that change, and war on Iraq seemed an irrevocable decision taken in Washington without consultation with its allies. Frustration with that fact must have motivated Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to campaign against it and foreswear German participation in any war, although electoral concerns were clearly paramount as well. In my opinion, Gordon and Shapiro are unnecessarily harsh with Schröder; faced with a unilateral decision by the Americans to invade Iraq, the Chancellor was certainly justified to state, equally forcefully, that Germany would not participate this time, as it had done in Afghanistan.

Curiously, it was President Jacques Chirac of France who initially took a more sympathetic stance toward the American plans and signaled that France would probably follow Great Britain and the United States in forceful action against Iraq if that action were authorized by the United Nations. The Bush administration acceded to British

pressure to approach the United Nations as American military deployments in the Middle East proceeded ahead in fall 2002. France and the United States reached a compromise on Resolution 1441 in November 2002, which demanded that Iraq accept U.N. inspectors and disarm or face “serious consequences.” The French insisted on this phrase instead of the harsher “use of all necessary means” to force Iraqi compliance, which in U.N. parlance clearly spelled military force. They also insisted that if the Iraqis failed to comply with the resolution, the Security Council would have to take another, separate resolution to authorize the use of force.

The Americans rejected this proposal, arguing that in the case of non-compliance the use of force would not require a second resolution, but they agreed that the Security Council could again convene to consider the situation. This muddied the waters considerably and allowed each side to draw differing conclusions about what would happen if the Iraqis did not comply, an eventuality that was further complicated by the lack of criteria in the resolution by which non-compliance might be defined. The French apparently accepted that ambiguity because they expected, with resignation, one of two possible outcomes: Iraqi interference with the inspections or discovery by the inspectors of weapons of mass destruction, either of which by any definition would have constituted a *casus belli*. In anticipation of one of these outcomes, the French cautiously began their own military deployments to the Persian Gulf.

It is here that Iraqi unpredictability entered the equation: Saddam Hussein did not impede the inspectors, who began to ransack the country in a seemingly futile search for weapons of mass destruction. When they discovered missiles of a longer range than previous U.N. resolutions had allowed, they ordered the missiles destroyed, and the Iraqis began to comply. Given these facts, the French concluded that going to war, according to the terms of Resolution 1441, was not in fact justified so long as the inspections continued unimpeded. But all the while the Bush administration, in numerous statements, derided the inspections, while military deployments continued to grow in a menacing way. Officials at the Quai d’Orsay had earlier drawn the same conclusions as Chancellor Schröder in August 2002 and pressed these upon a skeptical Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin. The U.S. had in fact already made two decisions for war, the first to invade whatever the U.N. might do, and the second to do so no later than March 2003, before the heat became bad enough to impede smooth and successful military operations.

In their interviews at the Quai d’Orsay and elsewhere, the authors have obtained the same basic story that enterprising reporters for the *Financial Times* and *Le Monde* recounted and which appears in some existing narratives by Charles Cogan and the author of this review.[2] In early January 2003, de Villepin sent a counselor at the Quai, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, on a special mission to Washington to ascertain American intentions; he returned after being told by the highest sources, including National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, that war would indeed occur no later than March. An angry de Villepin confronted Powell with this news at a dinner prior to the Security Council meeting of 20 January, which de Villepin in his capacity as president of the Council had called to discuss the general question of terrorism. During the discussion at dinner, Powell alluded to the lack of active cooperation on the part of the Iraqis in efforts to disarm; Hans Blix, the head of the inspection mission, had rather termed their response “passive cooperation,” which for the Americans was clearly not enough. De Villepin protested that countries “do not go to war over an adjective,” to which Powell retorted that the French had apparently underestimated American determination. Following the Security Council meeting de Villepin blurted out to a journalist that nothing under the present circumstances, in the French view, justified a resort to war, and he clearly threatened a French veto of any second U.N. resolution in favor of war that the Americans might present. This turn of events led to the American charge that de Villepin had had the effrontery to “sandbag” Powell on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a time when Powell would have preferred to be out in the country making civil rights speeches rather than attending to the dreary and unpleasant duties of Secretary of State.

Gordon and Shapiro do well to stress that despite the explosion of anti-French feeling in the United States, with French wines being poured down sewers in various parts of the country while French fried potatoes were renamed “freedom fries” in the House of Representatives dining room, the French still sought accommodation. They now pleaded with the Americans not to seek a second resolution in the U.N. Security Council, whose authorization Washington had argued all along it did not need anyway, in order to avoid embarrassing France, which would have to oppose such a resolution or cast a veto. But British Prime Minister Tony Blair had meanwhile prevailed upon Bush to seek such a resolution, and the two leaders went ahead, apparently in the conviction that they could isolate France in the Security Council, which would enable them to ignore a “veto.” But the Russians and Chinese soon signaled their support of the French position, while Chirac and Schröder affirmed Franco-German solidarity against

Washington rather ostentatiously as they celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the Elysée Treaty in Paris. This show of opposition led Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to rail against “old Europe,” while Washington, in a clear attempt to split the European Union, sought and obtained resolutions first of eight and then ten European Union countries and candidate countries in support of the American position. I cannot believe Gordon and Shapiro’s assertion that these resolutions, the first the inspiration of the European edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, the second of itinerant American Ambassador Bruce Jackson, were undertaken without the connivance of Washington. But whatever the underlying reality, and one may doubt here that with today’s reliance on e-mail and cell phones that the future disclosure of diplomatic documents will ever reveal it, the way was clearly open to one of the most--if not the most--serious Atlantic rifts of the postwar era.

Gordon and Shapiro tell the story well, and they manage to reveal some new information while reaffirming other established versions of these recent events. Theirs is probably as reliable an account as anyone can construct in the immediate aftermath of the crisis; indeed, it is hard to imagine that, given modern technology and means of private communication, future historians will be able to improve much upon it. But it is easy to take issue with some of the authors’ painstaking efforts to be “fair” to both sides in apportioning responsibility for a crisis they assert was mainly the result of blunders, an abysmal lack of statesmanship and diplomacy, an abundance of ill will and petulance, and “bad luck on both sides.” They assert that the United States sincerely believed that Iraq constituted a threat in the context of 9-11. But almost daily revelations since the war of willful misinterpretation of doubtful “evidence” both by the CIA and the Defense Department’s jerry-built “intelligence” services, if not bald-faced lies by high officials of the Bush administration, including the White House, seem to occur with such great regularity as to indicate that the crisis with Iraq was manufactured in Washington out of whole cloth. The 9-11 Commission has concluded that there were neither weapons of mass destruction in Iraq nor was there a demonstrable link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, but Bush to this day continues to insist against all evidence that there was such a link. To be sure, the Europeans did not take 9-11 with the same seriousness as the United States obviously did, and they were more resigned to living with the threat of terrorism than placing faith in efforts to eliminate it, as the impatient Americans were wont to do.

This does not, for all that, substantiate Kagan’s thesis about Europe’s supposed transition to a Kantian era of universal peace; the Europeans have troops on the ground in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, and the French can hardly be faulted for hesitating to invade and occupy a large Arab country given their experience a half-century ago in Algeria where Chirac himself served. Even setting Algeria aside, the Israeli experience in the West Bank and Gaza is sufficient caution against such a forceful occupation. Indeed, one can only wonder at the fantastic nature of neo-conservative theories according to which the road to an Arab-Israeli peace lay through Baghdad, as if such a peace were possible given the Bush administration’s both ideological (the Christian right) and self-interested (the blatant attempt to accomplish a historic shift to the Republican party of both the Jewish vote and political contributions in the U.S.) support for Ariel Sharon. I disagree also with Gordon and Shapiro’s assertions that oil was not a motive for either France or the U.S. in the crisis. On the contrary, France and Russia had much to gain, starting with the repayment of loans by Iraq, followed by the promise of lucrative contracts if war could be avoided and Saddam enticed back into the international community with oil development full steam ahead as in the past. Meanwhile, the Americans appeared to believe their own rhetoric about oil paying for the costs of occupation as U.S. oil companies, led by Halliburton, stepped in to rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure. The authors think the Bush administration was initially sincere in its motives, and Bush did once say, early on, that if Saddam disarmed that would be sufficient evidence of regime change. They might have added that the goal of regime change need not have caused European alarm at U.S. policy, for after all the U.S. in Latin America and elsewhere, and France for that matter in Africa, had both accomplished a good many regime changes in the past (the most recent together in Haiti), most of them without mutual consultation. The belief that Iraq constituted a threat to the U.S. still strains credulity, and the Bush administration has sacrificed much U.S. credibility throughout the world. The U.S. is unjustified in charging the Europeans with “betrayal,” as the authors assert, but I dissent from their parallel view that the Europeans are unjustified in charging that the U.S. undertook a reckless war without regard to consequences. In my opinion, that is an apt description of what Washington in fact did.

A few other caveats and areas of agreement if I may: French-bashing was much more than “silly and inappropriate” or even “ugly and counterproductive,” as the authors state. It was a blatant and crude attempt to coerce the French into submission, curiously by unleashing the same forces in the Republican party right wing that led the attempt to destroy Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky scandal.[3] It was hardly disingenuous of the French to demand Security

Council authorization for an action because they held a veto in the Council when they fully expected to grant that authorization at the outset of the crisis. Nor is it “moralistic arrogance” for Chirac to prate about a “multi-polar” world which it is in neither his power to accomplish nor the Americans’ power to prevent. While saving the alliance may be a matter for statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic to decide, the possible development of a multi-polar world depends on neither Bush nor Chirac but on historical forces and outcomes that cannot now be foreseen. This is not to say that Chirac is incapable of moral arrogance, as he revealed by his lecturing to the East Europeans about missed opportunities to “shut up” and generous charges that certain people are “mal élevé.” I agree that the Iraq crisis showed an appalling lack of diplomacy, as evidenced by the fact that Secretary of State James Baker visited forty-five countries in 1990 in assembling the coalition for the first Iraq war while Colin Powell did not even once leave Washington. And I agree that the American doctrine of pre-emption, if it becomes permanent policy, signals the “death knell” for any rules-based internationalism. This may have been the Bush administration’s intention all along, and it is not yet clear that the mess in Iraq has caused them to think better of it. Whether it will remain American doctrine, however, appears to reside in the power of the American people’s decision in the upcoming presidential election.

Whatever the outcome this fall, the question remains which the authors address at the outset: namely, is the Bush administration *sui generis* or is it the harbinger of a fundamental change in American foreign policy toward unilateralism and away from the pillars of the postwar era, NATO, the EU, and the UN? And correspondingly, one may wonder whether the French have accomplished a “sea change” in their own view of the world shaped by their suspicions of American imperialism and attempts to forge an independent Europe in a multi-polar world. Gordon and Shapiro do not consider this, but the historian Georges-Henri Soutou, a specialist in international relations, has argued precisely that such a change has occurred, most recently at the session on Iraq at the Society for French Historical Studies meeting in Paris, 18 June 2004, and in a forthcoming study. I tend to agree with Gordon and Shapiro, and also with an excellent study of French-American relations that preceded the Iraq crisis by Michael Brenner and Guillaume Parmentier, whose title summarizes its thesis, *Reconcilable Differences*.<sup>[4]</sup> It is, alas, too early to tell. But at the least we can be sure that France and the United States will never be, as asserted in *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman’s most memorable and ridiculous column of recent years, enemies.

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## NOTES

[1] See Pierre Hassner and Justin Vaïsse, *Washington et le monde. Dilemmes d’un superpuissance* (Paris: Autremont, 2002). Vaïsse has written widely on the subject and interestingly now is in the North American division of the French Foreign Ministry. Denise Artaud focused her attention on the neo-conservatives in the recent session of Iraq at the Society for French Historical Studies session held in Paris on 18 June 2004.

[2] *The Financial Times* (London), May 26-29, 2003; *Le Monde*, March 27, 2003; Charles Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 2003), pp. 186-214; Irwin Wall, “The French-American War Over Iraq,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10/2 (Winter/Spring 2004):123-139.

[3] A pointed documented by Justin Vaïsse, see Note 1 above.

[4] Soutou has a forthcoming study entitled *Three Rifts, Two Reconciliations: Franco-American Relations During the Fifth Republic*, which he was kind enough to send to me in manuscript form and in which he argues for a “sea change” in French policy toward the U.S. Michael Brenner and Guillaume Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences: U.S.-French Relations in the New Era* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

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*H-France Review* Vol. 4 (August 2004), No. 76

ISSN 1553-9172