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## **THE GULF, THE NEAR EAST AND THE BALKANS: WHAT COMMON CONCERNS?**

*by Roberto Aliboni*

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## THE GULF, THE NEAR EAST AND THE BALKANS: WHAT COMMON CONCERNS?

Roberto Aliboni<sup>1</sup>

The 11th September events have stirred common concerns among Western allies. At the same time, the evolution of American policy since then has also caused new differences to arise and old ones to resurface. While there is agreement on combating terrorism and the rogue states that support it, there are disagreements on the way to do it as well as priorities.

When coming to the pivotal areas of the Gulf, the Near East and the Balkans - definitely an important segment in the arc of crisis surrounding the huge European periphery - this combination of common concerns and different responses deserves particular attention. Transatlantic gaps risk widening here, whereas there is a large Euro-American opinion wishing to preserve cohesion while carrying out effective policies beyond the Mediterranean Sea. It is in this perspective that this paper, first, looks at American and European concerns in the Gulf, the Near East and the Balkans, their points of agreement and disagreement and, second, tries to envisage some way to harmonize responses.

### **Concerns in the Gulf: Iraq**

As noted by President Bush, the most important danger the United States perceives after 11th September is at the “intersection” between terrorism and WMD. While terrorists can produce some kinds of WMD, such as chemical or biological weapons, they can hardly produce nuclear weapons or middle- and long-range missiles. However, almost everything can be acquired on the international market or from rogue states interested in indirectly and covertly achieving political and military objectives. Thus, the intersection that generates the most concern is between terrorists and rogue states. In this sense, the fight against rogue states is a most important aspect of the fight against terrorism.

After the defeat of the rogue coalition between Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the next target is now Iraq. Iraq has long been considered a rogue state and is now on the short list of evil states set out at the beginning of 2002 by President Bush. It is strongly suspected of supplying WMD and other support to terrorists. Why specifically Iraq?

Rogue states supporting terrorism are not found only in the Gulf. Libya and Syria were more or less strongly suspected of supporting terrorism in the past. North Korea has played a role as a rogue state in the Middle East. In the Gulf, there is no reason to believe, according to available information, that Iraq’s support to terrorists, in particular Al Qaeda, is more likely or more important than Iran’s. Both countries are committed to developing WMD - Iran with fewer hindrances than Iraq. Allegedly, there have been

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<sup>1</sup> Vice President, International Affairs Institute-IAI, Rome.

contacts between Iraqi officials and Al Qaeda's leading agents in Iraq. By the same token, terrorists from Afghanistan are allegedly hosted in Iran today<sup>2</sup>.

In principle, mainstream analyses suggest that there are good reasons to expect a more cautious and responsible - or less adventuresome - attitude from Iran than from Iraq. First of all, Iraq is on record as having used WMD on various fronts. Second, Iraq has consistently conducted a policy of aggression in the region. Third, while Iraq is a compact tyranny, Iran is an articulated regime in which there is public opposition to and criticism of the hardliners' policies aimed at "exporting" revolution<sup>3</sup>. On important occasions, such as the talks in Germany that brought Mr. Karzai to power in Afghanistan, the Iranian government has shown cooperative attitudes, restraint and a reasonable balance in pursuing its national interest. It is also clear that while Iran is pursuing national interests, Iraq is nothing but a platform from which to promote the interests and power of an extremely reduced Baathist ruling class.

However, these perceptions stem more from a European than an American background. The US government does not maintain that Iran is better than Iraq, nor does it exclude Iran from the ranks of the rogue states. If the administration is primarily targeting Iraq, for the time being, it is because it considers this country a major stumbling block on the road to stability and reform all over the region. It does not believe that this can be modified by policies attempting to influence the regime's behavior. These policies largely failed to work in the nineties and that is why the US now advocates a regime change.

Apparently, in the government and its think tanks' there are two diverse interpretations<sup>4</sup> of the role Iraq plays in the region and the consequences that would stem from a regime change and a new Iraqi regional role. One school of thought believes that the Iraqi regime is a symbolic and practical support for every kind of regional radicalism, be it religious or nationalist. Toppling the regime would weaken hardliners, rule out the myth of a principled and powerful nationalist state working for the dignity of Muslims and Arabs, relieve pressures on Israel and moderate Arab regimes alike, allow for some political reform in the region.

The other school of thought, supported by the so called "neo-cons", believes that regime change in Iraq should be accompanied by a long American occupation aimed at a complete rebuilding of the Iraqi state so as to turn it into a full-fledged democracy. As Steven Simon points out, what they have in mind is an Iraqi "MacArthur decade". The change in Iraq is expected to open the way to democratic reform all over the region. The regional countries would be enabled to get rid of present tyrannies and win structural stability.

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<sup>2</sup> There is also the case of Ansar-al-Islam, an Islamist group in Northern Iraq on the border with Iran, which seemingly raises the interest of Al-Qaeda, Iraq and Iran. See "Al-Qaeda in Northern Iraq? The Elusive Ansar al-Islam", *Strategic Comments*, IISS, Vol. 8, No 7, September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the article by Daniel Sobelman, "Hizbollah Two Years after the Withdrawal: A Compromise between Ideology, Interests, and Exigencies", *Strategic Assessment* (Tel Aviv), Vol. 5, No 2, August 2002, pp. 14-21, reporting the Iranian internal debate on Iranian Foreign Minister Kharrazi's warnings of caution to the Hizbollah in the Spring of 2002.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of American points of view, see Steven Simon, *The US and Iraq: Next Steps*, paper presented to the IISS Global Strategic Review, London, 13-15 September 2002; and Judith S. Yaphe, *America's War on Iraq: Myths and Opportunities*, paper presented to the CEPS/IISS European Security Forum "Iraq If and When", London, 9 September 2002.

What “neo-cons” have in mind is a Balkan-style protectorate with the tasks of institution- and state-building currently being carried out in Bosnia and Kosovo. The “neo-cons” are sometimes moved by an even more profound revisionist mood, to the point of planning to overthrow the leadership of Saudi Arabia - now regarded as an illiberal country inimical to the United States - with a view to bringing the Hashemites back to Mecca<sup>5</sup>. One should not overlook that this kind of revisionism is well entrenched in the administration<sup>6</sup>.

What approach prevails in the administration is not clear. The Vice President, Dick Cheney, in a speech to Veterans on August 26, 2002, said, “Regime change in Iraq would bring about a number of benefits to the region. When the gravest of threats are eliminated, the freedom loving peoples of the region will have a chance to promote the values that can bring lasting peace. As for the reaction of the Arab ‘street’, the Middle East expert Professor Fouad Ajami predicts that after liberation, the streets in Basra and Baghdad are ‘sure to erupt in joy in the same way the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans’. Extremists in the region would have to rethink their strategy of Jihad. Moderates throughout the region would take heart. And our ability to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would be enhanced, just as it was following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.”<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, however, the administration has indicated that Gen. Tommy R. Francks would do the same job in an occupied Iraq that Gen. MacArthur did in Japan<sup>8</sup>. This unveils a different expectation than the joyful democratic domino effect envisaged by the Vice President in the Middle East.

The administration will make its final decision when the time comes. In any case, however, the administration sees regime change in Iraq as a necessary condition for political change in the region, a condition for fostering the influence of liberals all over the region and for going back to the peace process in a more favorable context.

In fact, putting aside the most revisionist agendas stemming from the “neo-cons” circle, it is clear that there are two components to the American approach to Iraq: (a) the dangers it poses because of its behavior and objectives: aggressiveness, WMD, radicalism, and the lack of any inhibitions, so that the country could well constitute the intersection President Bush is afraid of; and (b) its role as primary obstacle to democratic change in the region. From what Vice President Cheney says, Iraq looks like the dam that prevents democracy and stabilization from flooding the Middle East.

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<sup>5</sup> These ideas were presented to the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board on 10 July 2002 by Laurent Murawiec, an analyst based at RAND, and were reported in the form of a PowerPoint text by *Middle East Economic Survey*, Vol. 45, No 32, 12 August 2002, pp. D4-6, with the title “Taking Saudis out of Arabia”, after the text had been published by the on-line magazine *Slate*. In the RAND website, there is a disclaimer emphasizing that Mr. Murawiec’s ideas were strictly his own.

<sup>6</sup> In 1996, Richard Perle, presently chairman of the Defense Policy Board in the Pentagon, built on the idea of supporting a Hashemite return to Baghdad in a paper written for Mr. Netanyahu’s incoming government in Israel in his capacity as leader of a study group of the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Jerusalem (which also included Douglas Feith, Undersecretary at the DoD in the present administration). See Richard Perle, *A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*, IASP Research Papers in Strategy, Jerusalem, June 1996 ([www.iasps.org.il](http://www.iasps.org.il)).

<sup>7</sup> “Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention”, Nashville, August 26, 2002, White House Release.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. has a Plan to Occupy Iraq, Officials Report”, *The New York Times*, October 11, 2002.

The final goal of the administration apparently is to have a chance to reshape the architecture of the Middle East. Toppling the Iraqi regime would be instrumental to that chance. The profound reshaping of the region, its political reform, would in the long run be the only way to undermine radicalism and terrorism in the region and in the Muslim world. Thus, what matters is regional architecture, where regime change in Iraq would only be the first step. In this sense, it is not true that the United States is providing only military responses to the crisis stirred by the 11th September attacks, as Europeans sometimes maintain. They want to use war to make political responses possible in a region where such responses otherwise seem to be ruled out by standing conditions.

The Europeans share the first part of the American position, although they may have questions and objections (e.g. on evaluating Iraq's WMD arsenals). European governments are not convinced that the Iraqi intersection with terrorists is as close as the Americans seem to believe. Many governments in Europe feel that a war on Iraq may push Baghdad precisely towards such an intersection. Broadly speaking, the majority of European states think that containment and deterrence can still be used helpfully.

Some European governments are playing the role of staunch supporters of the United States for their own specific reasons. Still, they would definitely not oppose a common EU stand - if it were finally taken - or a European convergence in the UN supporting containment and deterrence, in particular sending UN inspectors in anew, prior to waging war<sup>9</sup>.

The Euro-American gap seems more significant, however, as far as the second part is concerned. Let's focus now on the regional political architecture, considering the Gulf and the Near East together.

### **Middle Eastern Concerns: the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

In the average European view, the mother of all concerns is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its role in the region, rather than Iraq. If the Middle Eastern architecture is to be changed, the first building block is a reasonable and widely supported solution to this conflict. In the US administration's opinion, Iraq's regime must be defeated and the country democratized in order to have a chance to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The mainstream European opinion maintains that things are the other way round. Once the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is solved, the forces of democracy and moderation will be able to wake up in the region and the Iraqi regime will not need a war to fall apart.

A military victory over Iraq and its guardianship would definitely contribute - as already noted - to defusing some tensions in the region. This would not, however, bring about the structural effect the administration expects, namely the democratization of regional political regimes. While there may be a nexus between successful occupation and some stabilization, there is no logic and empirical nexus between the occupation of

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<sup>9</sup> Beyond different positionings and rhetoric, this position was shared by the Europeans in the October 2002 debate on the UNSC resolution aimed at reintroducing inspections in Iraq. A careful analysis of the European positions is carried out by Marta Dassù, *How to Deal with Iraq: the European Perceptions*, paper presented to the CEPS/IISS European Security Forum "Iraq If and When", London, 9 September 2002

Iraq and region-wide democratization. The occupation of Iraq would trigger a strong nationalist reaction everywhere. This reaction would essentially play into the hands of radicals, Islamists and nationalists alike. It would compel Arab regimes to increase repression to face the turmoil and prevent their own destabilization<sup>10</sup>. Unless the reaction comes from inside the armies, it would have to be contained by the strong repressive instruments available to regional governments<sup>11</sup>. Thus, stability might emerge, but it would be in a repressive rather than a democratic context.

All in all, this kind of evolution would create even more enemies of the West than there are today. Most of all, it would strongly diminish rather than increase the chances of politically reshaping the Near East and the Gulf towards democracy. In fact, the only thing that such an evolution could bring about would be an oppressive imperial order.

In order to start a transition towards democracy in the region, the first challenge is to make regimes less oppressive and create an alternative to the two extremes of oppressive regimes and ruthless extremism in the domestic political arenas of the regional countries. To make regimes less oppressive and provide room for moderate and democratic forces, the central problem is the Israel-Palestinian conflict. The long-standing lack of a solution to this conflict has discredited regional governments, fueled religious and nationalist radicalism, and compelled regimes to undertake suppressive action. As a result, it has prevented any moderate and democratic alternatives to the two extremes from emerging. It has brought politics to an absolute standstill in the region and has prevented the start-up of any democratic transition. This is the opinion which prevails in Europe (and democratic, moderate America as well). Consequently, the architectural reshaping of the region rests essentially upon a peaceful and stable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In sum, the Palestinian issue is definitely a concern that both the United States and European countries' governments share. Yet, because of their basic disagreement on architecture, they envisage different responses and priorities.

Meanwhile, the United States has provided a response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the Rose Garden speech by President Bush on June 24, 2002. The speech did not offer a direct solution to the conflict. It planned a transition from the present standstill to conditions that would allow the resumption of positive negotiations towards a compromise. Consistent with the US' principal assumptions on changing Iraq and the region, the Rose Garden strategy envisages a period of three years in which to take up the Israeli-Palestinian issue again. These three years will have to be used to help the

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<sup>10</sup> This point is also made by Prof. Shibley Telhami, "A Hidden Cost of War on Iraq", *The New York Times*, October 7, 2002: "One of the most appealing thoughts about a possible war with Iraq is that it could help spread democracy ... But, more likely, such a war would render the Middle East more repressive and unstable than it is today".

<sup>11</sup> Efraim Inbar, "Ousting Saddam, Instilling Stability". *The Jerusalem Post*, October 8, 2002, believes that the ousting of Mr. Hussein is so important for Israel that it is worth the price it may exact from the country in terms of terrorism and missiles. To concerns on regional destabilization, he responds: "Critics of American war plans warn against great domestic turmoil in pro-Western states such as Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia because the Arab masses pathologically identify with Saddam Hussein as a symbol of Arab resistance to Western encroachment. Yet, such an alarmist view underestimates that ability of the current regimes to suppress their opposition". In this view - that is likely to be shared by many members of the administration - the real stake of the war on Iraq is Israel's security taken as the departure point for the reshaping of the Middle East.

Palestinian National Authority democratize and build viable institutions. In Europe, as well as in moderate Arab states, this perspective was well received but is considered with some reservations.

It was well received, first of all, because the Rose Garden speech unambiguously asserted the two-state solution. Since then, the two-state perspective has been consistently maintained and has generated a number of clear American warnings concerning Israeli military occupations and re-occupations of Palestinian territories and their consequences on civilians. This can definitely be regarded as a victory of the administration's moderate wing over the radical one, which more often than not is less pro-Israeli than pro-Likud, bent on fostering only one - an Israeli state. For sure, such a course of action may have only tactical significance and could stem from the need to draw a red line the Israelis must not cross in order to allow Arab regimes to adhere to the anti-Iraqi coalition. In any case, the two-state goal establishes an important shared perspective in transatlantic relations.

The setting up of the Quartet and the Task Force on Reform are also positive developments. Yet, the role of the Task Force in a democracy- and institution-building perspective must be well understood if it is to bring about significant political results. The Task Force must be regarded not only as a tool to give Palestine viable institutions. It also has to reinforce Palestinian moderates by providing them with control over the new institutional, political and economic resources, to give them a concrete chance to establish a nucleus of democracy and prevail over radical oppositions. Americans, Europeans and Arabs should specifically agree on this point and act consequently in the field.

The reservations stem, first, from the noted transatlantic differences about priorities between Iraq and Palestine in reshaping the region. Second, the Europeans are convinced that, as linked as the chance of resuming a peace process may be to the restructuring of the Palestinian regime, that chance has to be no less linked to a clear containment of Israeli nationalism and its consequences. If, at the end of the day, an emerging democratic Palestinian leadership, ready to compromise on a two-state solution, is confronted by an Israeli government inspired by ultra-nationalist goals like the present one, no compromise will be possible and another cycle of violence may start<sup>12</sup>. The international community must be prepared to act with strong resolve with respect to such a government. Third, this point entails the more comprehensive notion that the two parties cannot be left alone in solving their differences. The international community, beginning with the United States, has to be involved in the process and prepared to enforce solutions if necessary.

In sum, it may be that the American administration is envisaging a scenario in the next three years in which an occupation of Iraq would break nationalist and religious

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<sup>12</sup> The US administration tends to understand Palestinian democratization as a factor that in itself would generate peace by descending on the Palestinian leadership like the grace of God on the Apostles. To generate peace, a positive Israeli contribution is no less necessary than the Palestinian one. A recent report by the International Crisis Group, *The Meaning of Palestinian Reform*, Middle East Briefing, Amman/Washington, November 12, 2002, very aptly points out that the majority of the Palestinians are looking at reform as something that has to deliver a national solution besides restructuring institutions in a democratic sense. See also Gareth Evans and Robert Malley, "The U.S. has a 'road map' but no vehicle for peace", *International Herald Tribune*, October 25, 2002.

opposition in the region and make it possible to impose a solution on the Palestinians, be it a democratic Bantustan-state in Cisjordanian or an equally democratic resettlement in Transjordanian areas (from which the Hashemites would be moved to Baghdad and/or Mecca). The Europeans believe that this scenario is a serious self-deception and would be a factor of further destabilization in the region. In contrast, the Rose Garden strategy could well be carried out with balance and pragmatism and plays in the hands of Palestinian moderates, bringing about a well-balanced and stable two-state solution (as well as more transatlantic cohesion).

### **Peace Processes and Regional Architecture: Concerns in the Balkans**

With respect to the Gulf and the Near East, the Balkans today, substantially stabilized after ten years of wars, may look like a minor concern. Transatlantic cooperation is working there. The problem now is to assure a smooth transition from American to European leadership, as the United States is gradually withdrawing its forces with a view to using them to combat terrorism and pursue other tasks elsewhere. However, this transition is not an operational question only. There are political aspects as well, which stem from EU institutional and political weaknesses as much as from transatlantic political differences. These issues and differences cannot be ignored; they may have an impact because of the alternation. In many respects, they mirror transatlantic concerns and differences relating to the Gulf and the Near East.

To start, it must be pointed out that, while a political solution was envisaged, planned and negotiated and, to some extent, even implemented between the parties in the Near East - albeit without success -, no political solution whatsoever has ever been envisaged between the numerous parties involved in the Balkans. Efforts geared to fostering shared activities between parties in Bosnia have substantially failed so far. Kosovo continues to think in absolutely independentist terms. Montenegro is increasingly losing interest in staying in the Yugoslav Federation. In FYROM, secessionist trends have been reined in by NATO's military presence, still the reforms introduced to increase autonomies and ethnic inclusion have not stopped divisions from growing. No answer to these problems is in sight.

Carl Bildt noted very aptly that Western countries seem to believe that peace processes have to stem almost spontaneously from the stability and democracy that is enforced<sup>13</sup>. In contrast, the regime change in Serbia (indeed more of a nationalist than democratic nature), the military protection extended to FYROM's democracy, and the guidance of the international commissioners in Bosnia and Kosovo have not generated any dynamics of peace nor compromise, i.e. any Oslo-type process in the Balkans. Nor will they, until the parties conceive of some solutions, as in the Oslo process, to the hard political conflicts separating them. However, to turn today's well-guarded military cease-fires into a durable political peace, the Balkans need to envisage solutions to their national conflicts.

For such solutions to be envisaged, the parties in the Balkans need more univocal and convincing guidelines from their protectors. The transatlantic countries have failed, however, to give consistent indications about solutions to the Balkans' national

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<sup>13</sup> Carl Bildt, "An Unreal Peace Process", *International Herald Tribune*, July 10, 2002.



questions. The United States has always been more open to revision of the Balkan map, in the same way that it now looks at redrawing the map of the Middle East. The Americans believe that strong national aspirations cannot be completely ignored and thus have to be accommodated (while offset by respect for minorities, where needed). The Europeans are more conservative: in some instances, out of the belief that the region needs a larger country - a Serbia-led Yugoslav Federation - to stabilize its tendency towards fragmentation; in others, because a modern concept of state and democracy cannot accept ethnic or religious divisions but must secure cohabitation and equality among citizens and open the way to stability throughout the region.

In exercising their leadership in the region the Americans have not imposed any agenda of architectural changes but have always acted with one in mind. This has definitely given American policy more impact than the long-term, basically rationalist policies of the EU. In the American view, the conservative and rationalist European approach cannot open the way to any peace dynamics.<sup>14</sup> Apparently, this seems to be true.

All in all, architecture is separating Europeans and Americans in the Balkans as well. So far, these differences have been trivialized and obfuscated by the current exercise of American leadership. What is going to happen with the impending transfer of leadership from the Americans to the Europeans in the Balkans?

If the United States neglects the Balkans and leaves the Europeans to manage the crisis alone, there will be no question of common concerns in the region. This seems unlikely, though, for as downgraded as the Balkans may now be on the list of American concerns, the region remains crucial for an array of soft security issues the United States can hardly neglect, such as trafficking, terrorism and organised crime. What is likely is that the United States will continue to monitor European management of the region and act with a view to shaping it. In this sense, the Balkans will continue to be included in a transatlantic perspective in which, however, common concerns risk being met by different responses. These differences in turn may prevent the Balkan countries from singling out solutions to their national conflicts and launching more effective processes of peace.

### **In a Transatlantic Perspective**

The analysis conducted in the previous sections suggests two broad conclusions: (a) there are not negligible disagreements and differences between the United States and Europe on the assessment and approach to the regions concerned, especially the Gulf and the Near East; (b) there are, however, important cooperative endeavors and areas, such as the Task Force on Reform, the Quartet and the various ongoing arrangements in the Balkans.

As concerns disagreements and differences, positions, expectations and goals tend to remain distant or grow farther apart because of the increasing imbalance in economic and military terms between the United States, on the one hand, and the small European countries, on the other.. Europe as a Union has not been able to produce a common foreign and security policy going beyond the present intergovernmental model. The

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<sup>14</sup> Morton Abramowitz and Heather Hurlburt, "Can the EU Hack the Balkans? A Proving Ground for Brussels", *Foreign Affairs* (New York), September&October 2002, pp. 2-7.

telephone number Mr. Kissinger was looking for is now there, but the number has not really solved the problem. In fact, the EU High Representative has the task of guaranteeing rather than overcoming the intergovernmental nature of CFSP. In turn, the absence of an EU foreign and security policy prevents an effective and flexible military instrument that would be at its service from emerging. Furthermore, the individual countries of the Union have in general failed to invest significantly in their defense. In fact, they have failed to match the targets established in the 1999 initiative approved by NATO in Washington D.C.

Thus, quite apart from the more or less unilateralist mood of preceding and current US presidents, the Europeans risk becoming irrelevant to the Americans with respect to policies the United States can implement without their support. In the Alliance and, more broadly speaking, in overall transatlantic relations, the Europeans either lack the authority to support their points of view or have no common EU views at all (as is now the case with Iraq). More often than not, these points of view are valuable and sensible, still this is not a good enough reason for Europe to be able to prevail or have a distinctive voice on political ground.

For these very reasons, alliance with the United States, be it multilateral or bilateral, increasingly makes up for European military and political weakness, while allowing Europe to keep a privileged international status. Therefore, the basic strategic option for the Europeans remains alignment with the United States in the Atlantic Alliance or bilaterally, even when they do not share or do not completely share the American point of view. They have considerable latitude to express their points of view, and this sometimes works. However, in the end, if their point of view is not accepted, all they can do is share American policies and support them concretely - if such support is accepted by the United States - or maintain a low profile, according to domestic factors or ideological propensities.

This situation of painful imbalance is attenuated by important factors that make the European role in transatlantic relations and decision-making more significant than objective conditions would allow. The two sides of the Atlantic are united by a strong common cultural and political background that has increased and solidified in the decades after the Second World War and is predicated essentially on the existence of similar strong civil societies based on democratic regimes and practices. This common background unites American and European bodies of opinion across the Atlantic, independently of governments. In this way, as weak and irrelevant as European views may be in intergovernmental relations, they may prove effective in terms of civil society and thus come to influence US policies.

For instance, in the present debate on Iraq, the surveys conducted by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States in the framework of their "Worldviews"<sup>15</sup> project show very clearly that a transversal Euro-American body of opinion believes that Iraq is a danger to be tackled by a war if necessary, but within the rule of international law – an opinion that does not coincide with the American administration's approach. There is no doubt that this transversal opinion across the Atlantic supports the campaign the Europeans are currently carrying out to convince the United States to try the policy of containment towards Iraq that was

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<sup>15</sup> [www.worldviews.org](http://www.worldviews.org).

practically and mistakenly abandoned in 1998 once again and more seriously, and to go to war only if it fails. This campaign has been carried forward by European governments in different ways, some more vocally and visibly in the forefront, like France, other more diplomatically or ambiguously behind the scenes, like the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain. Aside from differences due to national posturing, the fact remains that all European countries support a more articulated position. This campaign has not and will not reverse the administration's position, still it is modifying and improving it significantly in legal terms. It is the special tie that exists across the Atlantic that is allowing the Europeans to influence the American position at this difficult juncture.

In sum, when it comes to international politics, what must be discussed is not so much whether or not Europe has to align with the United States as how such alignment should take place. The issue of how to align includes not only the way a policy can be influenced and reshaped in the course of its implementation, but also the debate preliminary to its implementation. While something has already been said about the ongoing preliminary debate, it is important now to understand what should be done in the stage of policy implementation with respect to the Gulf, the Near East and the Balkans. Three policy areas seem more relevant here: the Task Force on Reform, American-European alternation in the Balkans and the role of social and economic aid to less developed countries in general and the Greater Middle East countries in particular. In these areas, the Europeans may have a major role and can contribute to, reshape or redirect transatlantic policies.

The Task Force can play a capital role in re-orienting both Palestinian policies and Western policies towards the Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On this point, it has already been noted that the opportunity regards the way reform is addressed. Reform should not be conducted as a neutral policy of state-building. Daily policies for implementing reforms must essentially be directed at giving the moderates control and weakening hardliners. The Europeans will have to carry out part of this daily work and it will have to be based upon a more uninhibited political practice than the one that has guided the Europeans in the Balkans so far. It will have to look more at the short- than at the long-term lest the democratic bottle be filled with the wrong wine .

The way reform is shaped by the Europeans will increase (or decrease) their influence in the overall reshaping of the conflict in the Near East and augment (or diminish) their authority vis-à-vis the American ally. Successful European action within the Task Force will reinforce the role of the Task Force and the Quartet. This will in turn strengthen Europe's role in the peace process. The Quartet will never be a major player in Israeli-Palestinian relations, but it could be in transatlantic relations.

As far as the Balkans are concerned, the shift in leadership from the US to Europe is another opportunity for the Europeans. This opportunity should not be taken for granted, however. If current transatlantic disagreements on key political issues and policies are not carefully considered and their effects not pre-empted by the Europeans, the opportunity could turn into a liability. As noted, there are important differences between Europeans and Americans about regional architecture, the Americans being more open than the Europeans to changes in the Balkan map that reflect national aspirations. The shift should not be interpreted by the Europeans as a license to implement their own views and disregard those of the Americans. The EU should act as

the administrator of a common transatlantic asset. In this sense, the EU must insist on setting up a common EU-American body tasked with monitoring the situation in the Balkans and working out the main policy guidelines. The responsibility for how things are managed in the area will, however, remain in European hands. Here again it must be said that a more pragmatic and direct style would be welcome.

Finally, in the ongoing European debate, the stronger effort in terms of social and economic aid planned by the US government to help defuse the roots of terrorism is going slightly unnoticed. In contrast, this kind of effort is very important in establishing the basic conditions for political reform in the regions concerned. Europe and the EU could have a special role in this endeavor.

On the basis of the findings and conclusions of the *Arab Human Development Report* published by the UNDP and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development<sup>16</sup>, Richard Haass<sup>17</sup> has recently emphasized the need to help the Arab world overcome its condition of deep social and economic underdevelopment. He says: “Ignoring internal dynamics in many of these societies only allows alienation and despair to multiply, creating a climate where support for terrorism can grow. Instead, we need to forge new, broader relationships that encourage and enable Arab regimes to gradually address the freedom deficit that has developed in their own societies. We need to gently recalibrate our policies to place greater emphasis on promoting market economies, educational reform, the participation of all citizens - men and women - in society, and the gradual strengthening of democratic institutions and procedure. Such a reorientation is not simply the ‘right thing to do’. It makes strategic sense.”

Inadvertently or not, what Undersecretary Haass is calling for is the 1995 agenda adopted in Barcelona by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The Euro-Med initiative has been weakened by objective conditions (the failure of the Middle East Peace process) but also by mistaken ambitions and European sectarianism. A Partnership more clearly predicated on socio-economic development and soft security, while more open to transatlantic influence, would be very important for the region and for enhancing transatlantic cooperation.

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<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, *Arab Human Development Report 2002. Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, United Nations, New York, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Haass, *Reflections on US Policy One Year On*, paper presented to the IISS Global Strategic Review, London, September 13-15, 2002.